Timing Is Everything

by Jpstar57

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Timing Is Everything

Chapter 1

Spoilers: Practically the whole series, as you will see.

Disclaimer 1: Except for John and his relatives, I do not own any characters from 'JAG', 'NCIS, Magnum P.I. and 'The West Wing' or from author Stephen Coonts. Those characters are the intellectual property of the respective producers and author. Also the idea for John's house came from an actual Washington DC house renovation shown on the PBS program, "This Old House".

Disclaimer 2: Those of you who have submitted your own Fanfiction will recognize parts with some of your work. So I wish to thank all of you. Since we are borrowing from the show(s), I borrowed some excerpts from your stories because I liked them and they reflected some things that happened in my life, as in the ballet/dance story, as my sister really danced ballet from kindergarten through high school. Also I needed to fill in some gaps. I did paraphrase them or edited them to fit the characters and situations I created. When you read this you will know who you are.

Summary: What if Mac & Diane were fraternal twins, separated at birth and Diane wasn't killed? This would entail introducing a new character, one John P. Marshall and those related to him. As you will see in the subsequent story; John's intervention at one key juncture in Harm's life sets off a chain reaction, thus the title.

Also due to John's presence and the timing of certain events and life choices made by Mac and Harm (to be detailed), certain episodes would not take place, (i.e. 'People V Rabb' & 'People V Mac' and especially Lifeline') while many episodes happen differently, i.e. 'Skeleton crew/Death Watch'. Also seeing as this is not a Harm and Mac pairing, the '5 Year Deal' never comes into play.

Mac was portrayed on the show as someone who was incapable of having a healthy relationship until she finally got together with Harm. That was because TPTB needed to extend the series for as long a possible by saying the regulations and other partners kept them apart. The following story will show that as long as the timing is right and there is clear communication of feelings Mac, Harm, AJ as well as Diane are capable of having normal relationships.

Being that this is a 'Magnum P.I.'-'JAG'-'NCIS'-'The West Wing' crossover, and this being an alternate universe, Josiah Bartlett was President from 1993 to 2001, not one William Jefferson Clinton. Also because September 11, 2001 will figure prominently in the appropriate chapter, George W. Bush will be / is president.

August 14, 1967

2100 Local Time

Yuma County General Hospital

Deanne Mackenzie hated washing dishes—especially at eight months pregnant with twins. And especially with the way she'd been feeling all day. But the urge to get the apartment clean had overridden the temptation to plop onto the sofa and watch I Love Lucy.

She reached across the sink to place the plate she'd just washed in the strainer. As she did so, a gush of liquid rushed down her legs.
She straightened up and then looked down at the small puddle at her feet. She was in labor! That's why she'd felt out of sorts all day. She tossed a dish towel to the floor and used her foot to move it around and sop up the water. She kicked the sodden towel into a corner and hobbled to the phone.

She called the hospital and then a cab.

Thirty minutes later, she was being wheeled into labor and delivery at Yuma County General Hospital.

"Where's your husband, honey?" asked one of the white-clad nurses. "He got you into this; he should help you through it!"

"My Joe's in Vietnam," Deanne said. She grabbed the nurse's arm. "Listen, please, I'm having twins—only Joe doesn't know. I can't keep two babies, I just can't. Do you know anyone who wants a baby?"

The nurse patted Deanne's hand and offered her a sympathetic look. "It's all right, honey. There's places that'll take your baby."

Deanne let out a loud groan as a contraction ripped through her.

"But first, let's get 'em born, shall we?"

Shortly after midnight, Deanne was the proud but sad mother of two beautiful baby girls. She wished she could keep them both, but caring for one baby was going to be difficult enough, not only financially, but physically as well. And with Joe gone and them estranged from both their families, there was no one to help her. The other women who lived close to them always looked down on her—she guessed 'cause she was young and from a poor family. But wasn't that what joining the military was all about—bettering yourself?

Yet another nurse entered her room and she sniffed back the urge to cry and wiped a hand across her face.

"Mrs. Mackenzie?" said a soft voice with a southern drawl.

"Yes?"

"My name is Ellen Schonke—word on the floor is that you want to give up one of your daughters."

As she spoke, Nurse Schonke checked Deanne's pulse and blood pressure and performed other nurse-ly duties.

Deanne sniffled. "Want—no. Have to—yes. We can barely afford us right now, and Joe's in Vietnam."

"I'm sorry. Of course, you don't want to give up one of your precious babies. How does your husband feel about all this?"

"A-actually…he doesn't know. I only found out there were two babies a couple of months ago—but he's in Vietnam. I was afraid to tell him. He'd worry about things and I just worried he might…get killed if he was thinking too much about things here at home."

"Mrs. Mackenzie…I can't have children. I work here in labor and delivery, but that only helps so much. My husband and I have looked into adoption, but it's quite expensive. I'm guessing that all you're interested in is a quiet transfer of parental rights?"
"Yes, oh, yes, Nurse Schonke, I'd be so grateful. What about the hospital?"

"Please, call me Ellen. May I call you Deanne?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"The hospital is not a problem. I'll bring you the forms in a day or two, all right? When you're released, you'll be the mother of one beautiful baby girl. Does she have a name yet?"

Deanne nodded. "I want to name her Sarah Catherine after Joe's mother and grandmother. I promised Joe I'd do that if we had a girl."

Ellen smiled. "That's a beautiful name. What do you think about Diane? I have a twin, you know… she died when we were girls. I'd like to name our daughter after my sister, Diane Elizabeth."

Tears streamed down Deanne's face as she nodded again. "Thank you," she whispered brokenly.

August 1967

Yuma, AZ

When Deanne got home with Sarah, she wrote Joe to let him know he was a father of one baby girl. She also didn't tell her families of the second girl. It wasn't until Joe came home from his tour that he first saw his daughter. Joe enjoyed his new family. He and Deanne even reconciled with their families. He stayed in the Marine Corps and went back to Vietnam for a second tour a year after Sarah was born.

After Joe came back from his second tour he was a changed man. Joe had a hot temper and he was always getting in trouble with his superior officers in the Marines. As a result he was slow to be promoted. He began drinking and was generally abusive.

Deanne for her part put up with Joe's abuse until the night of Sarah's 15th birthday. That night while Sarah was away at a friend's house for a sleep over, Joe came home from the NCO Club drunk again. He pulled a knife put it to her throat and threatened to cut her up into rabbit food. She convinced Joe to put the knife away. Even after Joe apologized for the millionth time she had had enough. That night while Joe slept and Sarah was away, Deanne O'Hara Mackenzie packed her bag and left. The family dog Ruggles followed her out.

Joe found a note the next day. Sarah came home from school that afternoon and found him crying. She asked, "Where's mom?"

Joe could not answer her. He just got up, reached for a bottle of whiskey and drank himself back to sleep. Crying, Sarah fixed her own dinner and went to bed.

For the next two years she endured emotional and verbal abuse from her father. The only nice moments Sarah had with her father were when he was sober, but they were few and far between. But by and large all she could look forward to at home was dealing with her drunken father. Before her mother left, Sarah could go into her room and shut the craziness away. Now she had to be the one to check on her father. Before she went to bed, she would make sure his smoldering cigarettes were out, the doors were locked and her father was either safely asleep in bed or in his chair. To soften the sting of the bad moments, she also started drinking on her own.

When she was 17 and in her junior year of high school she had enough of taking care of and putting up with her father so she moved out of her father's house and into her friend Eddie's house. Eddie
shared the house with his roommate Chris Ragle. She liked being there, especially with Chris. Sarah only had to take care of herself and Eddie never bothered her about her drinking and did not give her any grief or abuse. Six months after she moved in, Ragle was arrested for attempted robbery of a liquor store and went to jail for 5 years.

Sarah was glad Chris was gone two reasons. First Chris wanted to marry her, but she turned him down. She did not want to be tied down to anyone, afraid to end like her mother who was abused by her father.

Second Sarah believed that Ragle "date raped" her. She remembered one night that they were sitting around watching TV and drinking. The next thing she remembered it was the next morning when she was in her bed. She had a dull ached in her groin and there was a blood stain on her bed sheet. When she went into the shower, she was horrified to see blood running from her pubic area and blending with the water as it flowed down the drain. She knew then that she had lost her virginity. She didn't know if Chris or Eddie was her sex partner. When she got out of the shower, she asked Eddie if they had sex. Eddie told her no and that she and Chris had gotten up and went up to her room the night before. When she went to confront Chris, she couldn't find him because he wasn't there. He had participated in a robbery that morning and was gone. Two weeks later she found out he was in jail. She didn't see him again until years later.

She was afraid she may be pregnant so for the following two weeks she was waiting on pins and needles until she had her period. She did get tested, with negative results, for STDs because she knew Chris was one to sleep around.

Anyway she was glad that he was gone. She knew that like her mother did to her, she would wake one day and find that he was gone. So without anyone telling her no Sarah just kept drinking, saying she could control it.

She did control her drinking to a point. But eventually her drinking caught up to her.

June 15, 1985

0500 Zulu Time

Yuma High School

It was prom night. Sarah stood in front of the full-length mirror and examined her handiwork. It took a great amount of concentration to get her makeup on as her hand shook so badly but she'd managed to get it done. She'd cut her hair into a bob and she wore a bright red sleeveless floor length dress. The dress complimented every curve that she had and the split flashed her shapely legs with every step she took. It was also backless. If she had any doubt as to the wisdom of blowing her whole waitress paycheck on the dress Eddie's reaction was worth it.

Earlier that afternoon she had graduated high school with honors. Sarah was always a good student. Coincidentally she came into her own academically after she had moved out of her home and into Eddie's. Being that she no longer had to put up with her father's abuse, drunkenness and tirades, plus taking care of him when he fell asleep from being drunk and it was quiet where she lived, she was able to study better and do well in school.

When Eddie saw her come out of her room he exclaimed, "Wow! Oh Wow!" He gushed. "You cut your hair."

"Thank you. And yes I did. You ready?"
He nodded and that is how it was that she and Eddie went to the ball.

The planning committee did an outstanding job and the gym was transformed into a teenagers dream. The music of a generation vibrated the night.

Use it up and wear it out by Odyssey

Eye of the Tiger – Survivor

Freedom – Wham!

Nothing's Gonna Stop us Now – Starship

Were some of the songs that Sarah made her personal duty to dance to.

Sarah was feeling good. She was standing with her friends. They weren't from the pretty girl cliques that shunned her for being too nerdy looking. These were her friends from her sports teams. As well as being recognized as an honor student, Sarah lettered in softball, volleyball, basketball and track.

Sarah was speaking with her best friend, Cindy McAdams. She asked her, "So Cindy where are you going to college?"

"Well I got a basketball scholarship to the University of Arizona. They want me to be their shooting guard. What about you Sarah?" Cindy replied.

"Well I've been accepted to the University of Minnesota on an academic scholarship, but I'm thinking of waiting a year until I go. My Uncle Matt was in the Marines and he is kinda of pushing me to enlist." Sarah answered.

"Well, what does your dad think about that?" Cindy asked.

"He doesn't care what I do. I'm so disappointed that he didn't even come to my graduation." Sarah said bitterly and took a swig of her drink.

The drink was in a plastic cup and it was supposed to contain only red punch from the punch bowl, but Sarah snuck in a few 'airline' bottles of vodka and emptied one into her cup after she drank some punch to make room. Her date Eddie had also done the same thing. They started doing this as soon as they came in. Consequently they were both quite drunk.

"Anyway I'll be glad to leave this town to start a new life." Sarah added wistfully.

"Well I'm going to miss you Sarah. Please keep in touch." Cindy said as she gathered her friend into a hug.

"I'll try Cindy." Sarah said as she withdrew from her hug.

As Sarah walked away Cindy could see that Sarah was a little unsteady on her feet. She knew that her friend drank, but she didn't know the extent of her drinking. Cindy did remember though that Sarah was never drunk when she played, she only drank at the after game parties.

Sarah found Eddie and they walked out of the gym and into the parking lot. Neither was in any condition to be driving but that never occurred to either.

"You wanna drive?" Eddie swayed in the breeze.

Sarah obliviously went over to the passenger side of Eddie's Camaro. Not getting any response
Eddie got behind the wheel. Sarah did have the wherewithal to buckle her seat belt, but Eddie neglected to buckle his.

Before they pulled out Eddie bent over to share a kiss with Sarah. As they pulled away Eddie said, "I love you Sarah I hope we stay together."

"Me too Eddie," Sarah replied.

They drove out of the parking lot and onto the main town road. They turned onto the highway for the short distance to their home. Sarah put her head down and closed her eyes. The next thing she remembered was a bright light in her eyes, the sound of a collision with the breaking glass and grinding metal, a feeling of flying followed by an impact and then blackness.

When Sarah opened her eyes her face was against the car window and she could feel the breeze coming from somewhere. There were flashing lights. She stirred.

"We got a live one here!" Some one shouted and she heard sounds of an engine. Her door began to give way and finally she tumbled out. Strong hands caught her. "Easy miss." A fireman said.

"Eddie?" She queried.

"Over here miss." The fireman said.

Sarah spotted Eddie and moved towards him. The rescuer tried to guide to a spot where he could examine her.

But she refused to cooperate. He gave up and followed her.

Sarah stooped next to her friend. Eddie was the oldest friend she had. "Eddie?" She whispered. "Eddie?"

His eyes flickered open. He was covered in blood. "Hey." He managed. He swallowed and grimaced. "You Okay?"

She nodded. He on the other hand was a mess. The Emergency Medical Technicians were working frantically on him. He had broken bones; a cracked skull and blood flowed freely everywhere. "… not making it." He managed to say.

She sobbed loudly. "Help him!" She screamed at the EMTs. One of the Techs shook his head at her. She turned to look at Eddie wildly. He smiled at her and the effort made him wince. The look of death cast its shadow over him; he became calm and still and there by the side of the road Eddie died.

She buried her head in his bloodied, broken chest and cried.

June 16, 1985

1200 Zulu

Yuma, AZ

Sarah's life was turned upside down. The EMTs took Sarah to the hospital to have her checked out. She spent hours upon hours after the accident being quizzed on the events by everyone from police to paramedics. She had to spend a night in the hospital, where doctors quizzed her. Well-meaning friends, neighbors and teachers stopped by to visit. They wanted to know what had happened. She couldn't remember.
The next day Sarah called her father to come get her. Upon her release from the hospital, Sarah moved back in with her father. He didn't play the role of the concerned parent, though. Instead, he yelled at her. Asked her how she could be so stupid. Eddie was dead, he said, and it was all her fault.

She spent days in the house, not daring to venture out. But she finally had to escape her father. Not that she got much escape though. Everywhere she went she was confronted with people wanting to know how she was, if she remembered anything. She'd go home again to hide in her room. She drank. Oh, how she drank. She missed Eddie terribly. Her life was an endless hell.

And then her savior arrived in the form of her Uncle Matt. Matthew was Deanne's brother. Seeing the state she was in he packed her a few things and they left. Never again would Sarah Mackenzie see that house.

He took her to Red Rock Mesa for 2 ½ months to dry her out. The drying out was long, grueling and emotionally cleansing.

Before she left the mesa O'Hara imparted to her his wisdom on relationships. "Don't prostitute yourself to anyone. Find someone who will love and respect you and love that person back the same way. When you find that man, then that's the one you stick with." She resolved to take his advice to heart.

1985 to 1991

After her time at the mesa she was clean and sober and in September 1985 at 18 years Sarah Catherine Mackenzie left her former life in Yuma behind. She moved to Tucson and got a one-room apartment and a waitress job. The second week living there she marched into a Marine Recruiting Center to enlist. For the two months she waited to go to boot camp she supported herself waiting tables, attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and working on remaining dry. She never made any further contact with anyone from her life in Yuma.

The six weeks of Boot Camp at Parris Island was grueling. The D.I.s at Parris Island went about breaking her of her bad habits and instilling in her the Marine attitude.

When she graduated from boot camp she applied for Officers Candidate School. Because of her high grades she was approved, but because all officers have to have a Bachelor's Degree, Mac was temporarily placed in the Marine reserves to attend college for three years.

So in June of 1986 she moved to St. Paul to attend the University of Minnesota. She majored in Political Science. In May 1989 she graduated with honors. She began attending OCS shortly thereafter.

The thirteen weeks of OCS was long and grueling. As in boot camp the D.I. took her weaknesses and laid waste to them. Even though her experience at boot camp prepared her for that, there were many nights when she sobbed softly into her pillow, wanting a drink, wanting Eddie, wanting...wanting someone to love her.

When she graduated OCS in August 1989, Uncle Matt stood proudly in the audience while the bars of 2nd lieutenant were placed upon his niece's uniforms. A past life was done, and a new one begun.

Mac's first assignment after OCS was in Okinawa, Japan.

Friday, 2 August 1991

Okinawa, Japan
Sarah Mackenzie knocked on the door to her CO’s office. She was wondering what her CO, wanted to see her about.

She had been in Japan for the last eighteen months working as the Brigade Information/Public Affairs Officer and aide to her commanding officer, Colonel John Farrow. She was assigned to Japan because of her amazing gift for languages and her negotiation skills. She was fluent in five languages before coming to Japan.

It was a wonderful experience for her. She received her promotion to 1st Lieutenant. She gained experience at running a large and complicated organization. She also learned to speak Japanese and learned a lot about a new culture.

Another skill she mastered was recognizing when fellow officers had more than a professional interest in her. She knew that they just wanted her to be another notch on their bedposts. Hell many of them were married and just wanted a conjugal substitute for their wives who were back stateside. Sarah always rebutted their advances with a firm, "NO, not interested”.

She thought Colonel Farrow could be one of them, though he never made any serious advances on her. He took a personal interest in seeing that she had everything she wanted while she was there. While she appreciated the attention on one level, on another level it made her feel uneasy. She wasn't interested in being with any man she didn't love.

She was adhering to Uncle Matt's advice. She wanted to make it on her own in the military. She wanted to earn anything that came her way. She didn't want to get anything or have it appear that she received something because she was involved with her Commanding Officer.

"Enter!" She heard through the door. Sarah opened the door and walked in. "Lieutenant Mackenzie reporting as ordered Sir!" reported Sarah.

"Have a seat Sarah. I suppose you're wondering why I called you in here today." smiled Lt Colonel Farrow.

"Yes Sir." replied Sarah.

"Because of the impressive work you've done since you've been here, I have recommended you for Law School. Major Creswell, the local JAG stationed here, has agreed that you would make an excellent candidate. He was very impressed with your ability to handle difficult disagreements between military base personnel and the local population." said a smiling Farrow.

"I didn't do anything special sir. All I did was my job." replied Sarah.

"That's what I like about you Sarah, no matter how great the accomplishment, you say you were only doing your job. You never expect anything for doing your job well." smiled Farrow.

"Yes Sir." replied Sarah. "When do I leave Sir?"

"In two weeks Sarah, you're going to make a great lawyer. I'm proud of you." answered Farrow as he shook her hand and gave her a quick hug.

Sarah felt a little uncomfortable that her CO was hugging her. Being a well-endowed young woman, she knew when someone was taking advantage of her. They usually pulled her closer and tighter than necessary and held the hug longer too.

Later that night Sarah laid in her bed thinking about her life. It had changed so much since she left home and joined the marines. Back then she had very low self esteem and very little confidence
dealing with other people.

She didn't have anyone in her corner except maybe her Uncle Matt, but she didn't see him very often. Now she had confidence in her ability to succeed. First it was college where she had graduated near the top of her class.

After she joined the marines, her life was one success after another. She breezed through OCS. She was given a choice assignment to Japan.

As Farrow said, she was very successful at mediating disputes between the military and local population. Both sides usually walked away satisfied, a rare occurrence in Japan. Based on that she knew she would make a great lawyer.

September 1991 To May 1994

Mac attended law school at Duke University. After 3 strenuous years, she earned her law degree, graduating fourth in her class. Again Uncle Matt was there to watch her graduate. She passed the North Carolina Bar on the first try.

2242 ZULU
November 18, 1994

7th Battalion Marine Camp
2 miles North of Produjevo, Kosovo

Sarah was sent to Kosovo as a platoon commander. It was her first assignment after Law School because there were no legal billets open to her yet.

During one cold autumn night a lot of Marines suffered from food poisoning. Even though she was the platoon CO, Sarah had to do the night shift guard duty patrolling in front of her camp. The previous night, there were two attacks by militia groups, so Sarah was pretty cautious out there in the dark. As she patrolled along the dark path she suddenly heard something rustling in the bushes. She whirled around and pointed her flashlight at the brushes, but couldn't see anything.

"Ryker?" she called for the Private Second Class who was on duty with her that night, but didn't get a response.

As she pointed her M-16 at the bushes, she slowly approached, ready to use it if she had to. Then she heard someone cry out in the woods and started to run like hell toward the voice. Then someone opened fire in front of her. As she dove for cover behind a fallen tree, she saw muzzle flashes in the direction from which the fire was coming. She didn't know who was firing or if they were firing at her. But she did have a direction at which to return fire. She fired toward where she saw the muzzle flashes.

Another cry echoed through the woods, and the shooting stopped. Sarah heard voices screaming in a foreign language. She didn't know who was screaming. When it became silent Sarah got up and stepped over the fallen tree she took cover behind. Reaching for her radio, she realized that she lost it.

'I probably dropped it while I was running through the woods,' she thought to herself.

"Ryker!" she called again - and again didn't receive a response.

As she walked cautiously toward where she saw the muzzle flashes she suddenly fell over something
and hit the ground full length. Rising to her knees she turned back around and shone her flashlight onto what tripped her. It was the dead body of Private Second Class Michael Ryker.

1442 ZULU
November 20 1994

2 miles North of Prodiyevo, Kosovo

After sunrise two more corpses were found in the woods where Sarah had her fire fight. The two men were known for their activities in the militia group. They had two backpacks between them with half a dozen hand grenades. Autopsies performed on the two revealed that one had two bullets from Sarah's rifle in his body and, the other was killed by a shot to the heart with a bullet that came from Ryker's rifle.

The subsequent autopsy on Ryker revealed that he was shot with one of the rifles that were found near the two militia men. There were two bullets in his chest and one in his head. The investigators assumed Ryker came to Sarah's help when she called for him. As Ryker ran through the woods to Sarah, he stumbled upon the militia men and he was the first to open fire on them. The one who was shot by Ryker received a mortal wound to his chest. Apparently his comrade returned and shot Ryker. When Sarah fired at the muzzle flashes, she scored the fatal hits on the one that killed Ryker.

Sarah didn't even know Ryker was there. She thought he was still on the other side of the camp.

The JAG investigators ruled the incident as a good shoot. As a result of successfully defending the camp from the two Serbs with the hand grenades, Sarah was awarded the Bronze Star.

January 1995 to January 1997

Two months after receiving her Bronze Star she left Kosovo in January 1995 as a Captain when she received orders for her first legal billet. She was assigned as an Investigator / Lawyer, in the Naval Investigative Service (NIS) at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Her commanding officer at NIS was Captain Thomas Magnum, himself a Vietnam Veteran. In the 2 years she worked there she racked up a reputation as a tough and thorough investigator and dedicated attorney with an impressive 74% wins to loss record. Capt. Magnum saw that she was a very capable officer giving her very favorable fit-reps as he as he promoted her to major, making her one of the youngest women in the Marine Corps to attain that rank.

Eventually in January 1997 she was assigned to JAG. Her first case there was determined because of her relationship with her uncle. That first assignment at JAG also allowed her to meet someone to love her.

Diane was an avid student and achieved high marks through grammar and high school. She applied to the Naval Academy and was accepted. During her stay at Annapolis, she met a charming Midshipman named Harmon Rabb and fell immediately in love with him. It had to be those beautiful blue eyes and that knee knocking smile that got her. She and Harm graduated Annapolis in June 1989. After graduation she chose Military Intelligence and Cryptology as her specialty. Harm was going to be a naval aviator like his father. Diane was going to love being with him.

They decided to wait until they established their careers before they even would think of getting married. They did promise each other though that as soon as they both settled into a permanent land duty, they would tie the knot and start a family. That plan was drastically changed however in early February 1991.
Diane was aboard the carrier Seahawk in the Atlantic on its return to Norfolk when she heard that Harm crashed his Tomcat on a "ramp strike" on the carrier Patrick Henry. She took leave to go see him in Germany, before he was further stabilized and transferred to Bethesda.

February 10, 1991

Somewhere on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast

0545 local time

Lieutenant John P. Marshall was the leader of SEAL Team 3. They were flying along the Saudi Red Sea coast in a training exercise. There was talk from the media during the Gulf War that SEAL teams were being sent into Iraq to take recon on landing beaches for an invasion. General Schwarzkopf was doing his best squashing that rumor. Lt. Marshall just knew that his team had to be ready for anything.

John was born September 28, 1964. He grew to be 6'-3" and weighed a healthy 215 pounds. He had piercing green eyes that when he turned them on you; you felt that they were boring into your soul. He graduated Fordham University, majoring in Management and pre-law also enrolling in Naval R.O.T.C. After serving his first duty as an Ensign on a guided missile destroyer, he was accepted into SEAL Training. He excelled as a SEAL and in a short time he was given the leadership of his own team. In the three years as Team Leader, he earned the total respect of the men in his team. He was assertive without being overly aggressive and he always accomplished his missions. The Gulf War of 1991 was his second taste of real warfare. He was excited about going into action again, even though this was still just practice.

They were two hours out and approaching the landing site when the Blackhawk helicopter in which they were riding suddenly banked to port. The pilot called out that there was an unlit radio tower dead ahead. The pilot just managed to turn before crashing headlong into the tower, but in the turn the tail rotor clipped an extended tower strut.

The pilot tried to auto-rotate to a safe landing, but there was a high dark mass of rocks that scraped the belly of the chopper on. They made it past the rocky hill to a flat sandy plain where the chopper landed hard.

John and his team were ready to jump out when the chopper first banked hard to port. When they saw that the craft cleared the rocks, they braced for impact and just before the chopper touched down they managed to jump five feet to the sand and roll away from the damaged craft.

Two of the team landed hard on rocks covered by inches of sand and sustained leg injuries. John gathered his team together and took stock. He looked back to the chopper to see if the pilot and co-pilot had managed to get out of the cockpit. He saw that they were still strapped in but were moving to extricate themselves.

As John got closer to the wreck, he could smell fuel. He called the able bodied members of his team over to help get the flight crew out. The team swarmed to the cockpit doors and managed to pull them open. The men on the port side pulled the pilot out. John was on the starboard side and had just got the co-pilot's harness unbuckled. When he saw a spark and flames shoot up from the engine compartment. John yelled for the team members to get clear. He and the co-pilot were able to get out. They had just got 5 feet clear of the cockpit when the fuel exploded.

The force of the explosion lifted John and the pilot and threw them head over heels 20 feet. They landed hard, with the co-pilot landing across the middle of John's body. He protected John's front, but there were still barely buried rocks inches under the sand. John landed on a rock in such a way
that he felt instant pain in his lower back and hips. Despite his injuries, he and the co-pilot had barely escaped being burned.

The team that could walk hurried over to the pair as they lay in the sand. They rolled the co-pilot off John. Petty Officer 1st Class Matt Franklyn was the medic of the team.

Franklyn examined the co-pilot and saw that he was unconscious but breathing. There was a superficial scalp wound on his head where the helmet met the forehead.

When Franklyn went to check on him, Lt. Marshall told him, "Don't touch me. I'm not bleeding anywhere, but I have a lot pain in my lower back. Check my legs, see if I have movement." Franklyn used a pin to probe John's legs. He saw good reaction and then removed John's boots and told him to wiggle his toes. John did so with a relieved sigh. Franklyn told him, "There doesn't seem to be any paralysis, but we'll use a backboard to transport you anyway. We're not in "Indian country" and our radio survived our crash and I have Nolan calling for help.

Help came very soon. The injured and the rest of the team were evacuated to the nearest field hospital. There, John found out that he had a fractured pelvis and had compression fractures of two lower discs. He was further stabilized and prepped for transport to Ramstein Military Hospital in Germany for three weeks, then onto Bethesda for further surgery on his back and then a long recovery.

Somewhere in transit, John decided that maybe he would have to accelerate his change of designator to lawyer and go to law school sooner than he planned.

March 10, 1991

Bethesda Naval Hospital

Bethesda, MD

1230 Local

John was in Bethesda for three weeks. After his pelvis healed, he had spinal fusion surgery on his two vertebrae that stabilized his spine. The doctors told him that he would need further recovery time as an outpatient. After that he would be able to do all that he was capable of before the accident and he would live a very normal life. Now all he had to do was pass the Navy's Medical Board. The doctors told him that he should not have any problem doing that as long as he stuck to the exercises they prescribed for him.

He was coming back into his room from therapy when he saw that he had a new roommate.

"Oh good, I finally have a roommate. Now I don't have to spend all my time talking to myself or counting the ceiling tiles. The name's Lt. John Marshall," John said as he stuck his hand out

The new roommate took the offered hand and introduced himself, "Lt. Harmon Rabb. You can call me Harm".

As he went through the transfer process from wheelchair to his bed, John could see Harm's two legs encased in casts and asked, "How'd you break your legs?"

Harm explained, "I crashed my Tomcat in a ramp strike on the Patrick Henry. Besides my two broken legs I'm also recovering from injuries to my back. That's why I'm in traction."

"Wow you lucky to survive that," John added. He asked, "How did you crash?"
"I have a problem with my eyes. I couldn't see the carrier at night. That's why I crashed. The ophthalmologist who examined my eyes diagnosed the condition as sudden onset night blindness due to an infection. So my flying days and probably my Navy career are over."

John was taken aback some as he replied, "Why do you say that? There are all sorts of other things you can do in the Navy when you recover. I was in a helo crash which screwed my back up pretty good, but I'm changing my designator to law and I'm hoping to get into JAG."

Harm perked up at that, saying, "You know that's what my attorney, Commander Chegwidden said to me. It gives me a lot to think about."

John said, "Don't think about it, do it."

Harm could only nod his head.

John and Harm were hospital roommates for two days. During that time the two officers had long discussions about their respective career plans and about Harm's girlfriend Diane Schonke.

Harm explained, "She's also a Lieutenant in the Navy and her specialty is cryptology and Military Intelligence."

John offered his unsolicited advice with, "You should marry that girl as fast as possible. I mean look at your crash. You almost died. You can't wait for your careers to come into sync. The U.C.M.J. doesn't stand in your way because you're not in the same chain of command. If I were you I wouldn't wait to tell her about your feelings for her. It seems to me that from the way you're speaking about her that you're in love with her. So take my advice friend, tell her A.S.A.P."

Harm went to sleep that night thinking about what John said. He realized that John was right. Judging from his crash, he had to start rethinking his attitude toward his life and career. He spent the rest of the night thinking on how he was going to tell Diane. "I hope she goes along with what I have to tell her" was his last thought before he fell asleep.

When they woke up the next morning Harm told John what he had in mind. John was glad to see that Harm was coming around to his way of thinking and actually deciding on his future.

March 12, 1991

Bethesda Naval Hospital

Bethesda, MD

1845 Local

John was discharged from the hospital early on March 12. As his elevator closed and began to descend to the lobby, the adjacent elevator arrived at his former floor and Lt. Diane Schonke walked out and went into John's room to see his roommate, Harm.

Diane had just come off the Seahawk at Norfolk after the completion of its latest sea duty. The ship would be in port for the next two weeks as it prepared for its next sea tour. After it docked, she took a long shower and changed into her Class A's then went to see Harm in the hospital.

Just as Diane sat at Harm's bedside he began his presentation.

"I have to stop my sulking and start making plans for after my recovery. First off I have something I really need to tell you."
"Go on," Diane said with some trepidation.

Harm began with a deep breath, "Diane, you know how we spoke about getting settled in our careers before we made any commitments?

"Yeah what of it?" she said initially fearing what was coming.

"Well I want to scrap those plans. I dodged a major bullet by escaping the crash with my life. So instead of just thinking how am I going to go forward from this, I should be thinking about how are 'we' going to go forward? I don't want to do this alone. I need someone to go with me. I need you. I love you Diane. Do you think you can put up with me until I can walk again?"

Diane went into shock at the little word 'we'. Her complete undoing came when he said those other six little words before her name. Then the tears started flowing. Here was Mr. Non-Commitment asking her for her help, asking her to be with him, finally expressing his love for her.

She bolted out of her chair, maneuvered around the medical equipment, embraced him and kissed him fiercely. Harm returned the kiss and hugged her as tightly as the equipment allowed.

When they came up for air, Harm wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"It's about time you said that" she said with a sob. "I love you too." She was very encouraged by the change in him.

After she calmed she asked, "Not that I'm looking a gift horse in the mouth, but what brought about your change?"

"You just missed the reason, my roommate, John. He was discharged today. For the two days we were together we spoke a lot about our careers and a lot about you."

Diane sat back and listened.

"During the war John was in a helicopter crash and his back was just as messed up as mine. But I saw that he wasn't letting it get him down. I mean when he came into the Navy from ROTC he already had a plan in mind for his career before he was even in his crash. He started as a SEAL, knowing he eventually wanted to go into law. The crash just served to accelerate his plans. All I ever had in mind was to keep flying until they had to push me into a rocking chair."

"He convinced me that I had to stop feeling sorry for myself and started thinking about my future, or 'our' future. I was wrong to make you wait for me to commit. So if you can stand me, I'd like to have you with me for everything that I want and need to do."

Diane hugged and kissed him some more. While she was happy that Harm was ready to restore his career, she was overjoyed that John convinced him to open up to her about his feelings for her.

She thought back to when she last saw Harm in Ramstein Hospital in Germany and the change from then to now.

She was extremely frightened when she first saw him in the condition he was in, about forty eight hours after the crash, that she almost fled. But she stayed with him for the entire duration of her leave. When he finally woke Diane let him rant and yell about the crash, staying silent. She knew that he needed time to come to grips with his circumstances.

Harm did not deal with the death of his RIO very well. He felt guilty, as she knew he would. A RIO's life was his pilot's responsibility.
When he finished his rant, Diane then nagged him to stop feeling guilty. Harm had eventually stopped speaking about the crash and just changed the subject to how he was feeling physically and what the doctors were saying of his prognosis.

When Diane left Harm at the hospital she promised to see him in Bethesda. She also told him to stop feeling sorry for himself. To appease her, he made that promise to her. She went back to her ship, the Seahawk, to complete her cruise, still not quite convinced that Harm was emotionally out of the woods.

Now in Bethesda, she was marveling at the change in him. The expression of complete and utter defeat that she saw in Germany was gone. It was replaced with an expression of hope, for them both.

Diane stayed late into the day listening to his plans. When she went back to the Seahawk the next day she went with a feeling of utter joy for her and Harm's future. Now she knew that he was really going to get better.

As soon as she was able to, she requested a transfer to a land-based station. During the two weeks the Seahawk was in port she visited Harm as often as she could. She went off to sea again waiting for her request to be approved. During the fourth week of the cruise her request for transfer was approved. Her new assignment would take affect at the completion of this cruise.

While still on sea duty Diane researched her new assignment to get a leg up on what was expected of her. She was assigned to the J2 or Military Intelligence Section at the Pentagon working under Vice Admiral Jacob Grafton. She would be reporting directly to his Executive Officer a Captain Robert Tarkington. Diane's research into her new commanding officers told her that Admiral Grafton and Captain Tarkington were also aviators. Admiral Grafton was a pilot while Captain Tarkington was his RIO. She couldn't wait to tell Harm. It also looked like she would stay on this duty for a long time.

While Diane was away, Harm kept her up to date on the progress of his rehabilitation. As he promised her, he filed his request for his change in designator. While he waited for the approval, he was given three months medical leave. He went to stay with his paternal grandmother's farm in Belleville, PA. He spent those three months exercising and running to get into shape and working on refurbishing his father's Stearman. During his last two weeks there Diane took leave and stayed at the farm. They thoroughly enjoyed their time together falling more and more in love. Harm's grandmother Sarah Rabb was so happy for the two.

After they left Belleville, Diane returned to the Seahawk to finish her cruise and Harm went back to DC and rented a two-bedroom apartment in Alexandria. Harm went through the incident review board and passed the medical review tests. His change in designator to Law was approved. He then took and passed his LSATs and enrolled in Georgetown Law School.

When Diane's ship docked at Norfolk at the end of her cruise, Diane was among the first shift off the ship because she would no longer be assigned there. When she came down the gangplank, she saw Harm standing there waiting for her. She took her home to his apartment. Harm suggested that they should move in together. Diane readily agreed.

After two weeks leave she started her new job at J2 while Harm started his first year of law school. After completing that with high marks, Harm took Diane to his stepfather's cabin in the woods of Virginia. He asked her to marry him. She readily said yes and wasted no time in planning their wedding.

When Harm still had a year left in law school Diane was promoted to Lieutenant. She was promoted a year before Harm because she was continuing her career while Harm was on reserved status while
he completed law school.

Diane was so happy about the positive direction her life took. She couldn't wait to meet Lt. Marshall and thank him for giving Harm his boost.

June 15, 1994

Sea Shore Restaurant

City Island, New York

1530 Local Time

John Marshall was sitting enjoying his law school graduation celebration. He was there with his parents James & Maureen, his sister Ann Marie Matthews and her husband Peter, his two brothers Mark & Matthew and their respective wives, Christine & Leslie. They were acting very proud of John's achievement, considering that he was almost crippled during the Gulf War.

Ann Marie was the Press Secretary in the Bartlett Administration. She loved the interplay of Washington.

Ann Marie came over to John. "So hot stuff, how're you doing?

John smiled broadly and said "I'm doing great".

Ann Marie could see by his smile that he was very happy in his accomplishment. She continued, "I hope you're assigned to DC soon. That way you can move into my apartment with me. I'm getting tired of living alone. With Peter's law job keeping him up here in New York, it gets lonely waiting for his weekend visits. Besides I'm surprised that you don't have a girlfriend in every port. I know how you Navy guys are." she teased her brother.

John just shrugged. Ann Marie saw a flash of hurt creep into his smile. But he brightened up and said, "I'll know when the right one comes along."

Ann Marie just laughed and gave him a sisterly kiss on his cheek and went away wondering when John would eventually find someone and settle down. He was certainly good looking and when he wore his dress whites, his gold SEAL triton stood out proudly. It may not be gold wings, but she knew girls would throw themselves at him just by his turning his head their way.

September 1995

1000 Local time

JAG HQ

Military Office Complex
Alexandria, VA

John was working the last 15 months as a JAG lawyer. He took a break from his computer and stood up and looked out his cubicle. He smiled as he saw across the office as Lt. Harmon Rabb walked through the bullpen to report to the CO, Admiral Thomas Brovo's office.

'So, he took my advice. I bet his girlfriend had a lot to do with that. He certainly talked a lot about her. I wonder if he married her,' he thought to himself.

His thoughts were interrupted when his intercom buzzed. "Lt. Marshall?"
"Lieutenant, Admiral Brovo wants to see you," the admiral's aide, Lt. Commander Ted Lindsey ordered.

"On my way," John replied before he hung up the phone then left his cubicle.

After John entered Brovo's office and reported in the usual way, Admiral Brovo told him, "Stand at ease Lt. Marshall. This is Lt. Harmon Rabb."

Harm's face lit up as he recognized his hospital roommate.

"How's the back?" he asked John.

"Oh, you know, it's hard to bend over backwards most of the time, how about yours?" John joked.

That brought an easy smile to Harm's face. "The same as yours."

John then asked, "How's your girlfriend, what was her name, Diane, Diana?"

Harm said, "Diane, she's fine. We're engaged now and she's having fun planning our wedding. We're getting married Christmas week 1996. That's when we'll have enough leave accumulated between us to have a proper honeymoon."

Before John could congratulate him, Admiral Brovo cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, as much as I hate to break up this happy reunion, we still have an office to run. Lt. Marshall, escort Lt. Rabb around and introduce him to everybody and get him settled into that empty cubicle next to yours in the bullpen."

Turning to Rabb he said, "We only have cubicles in our temporary home here. All attorneys will each get an office when we move into our new building in Washington Navy Yard this time next year.

Until you get a little more investigative experience, you're going to be partnered with Lt. Marshall. In the time he's been here, he has cracked and tried some rather difficult cases. So you'll be in good hands. Dismissed!"

Both lieutenants popped to attention, smartly saying "Aye Sir," about faced and marched from the office.
Chapter 2

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 2

January 1996

To

December 1996

After the New Year, Admiral Brovo hit on the idea that here should be male & female investigative and trial teams. John was paired with a very smart Asian Lieutenant JG named Traci Manetti. He was charmed by the contradiction of her Asian beauty and southern drawl. Traci explained that an Army officer, who was stationed in Japan early in the Vietnam War, adopted her. Her birth parents died in a car accident and he met her in a hospital. She had no other blood relatives willing to take her, so he decided to adopt her. He was now a US Senator. He and his wife had 7 more children after they adopted her.

John liked working with her and they had no problem keeping their romantic distance from each other. It was against regulations for two officers in the same billet and of different rank to fraternize. On top of that he was her supervisor. Besides, the two were not romantically interested in each other and it wouldn't do to get involved with a US Senator's daughter if you weren't serious about going all the way to marriage anyway. They became very close, even dear friends. They both shared their aspirations in finding that special someone with which they could share their lives. In essence Traci became John's surrogate sister.

Harm on the other hand met his new partner when Admiral Brovo sent him and Lt. J.g. Caitlin "Cait" Pike out to the Seahawk for the murder investigation of a female RIO name Lt. Arutti. In the course of solving the murder, Harm was sitting as a RIO to the CAG, Captain Boone. During the flight the Tomcat sustained damage from anti-aircraft fire and Capt. Boone sustained a head injury. Harm had to battle his night blindness and land the Tomcat on the carrier. At the conclusion of the case just before he and Kate got on the COD, Lt. Arutti's husband and the rest of the Seahawk's Tomcat Squadron ceremoniously pinned Harm's wings back onto his dress whites. On the COD going to Italy for the ensuing trial, Cait commented, "You know what they say about dress whites and gold wings?" Harm just smiled and replied, "Yeah, my fiancé says the same thing."

Lt. Pike could only just smile back thinking, 'If I had only met him earlier'.

Three months after they returned from the Seahawk, Admiral Brovo was promoted to Assistant Chief of Naval Operations and he took Lt. Pike along as his aide.

Admiral Albert Jethro ~AJ~ Chegwidden was appointed as JAG.

The day after Brovo and Cate's departure Harm was out on his morning run. As he paused at a drinking fountain, President Bartlett and his entourage passed him, out on their own morning run. Besides the usual Secret Service Agents running as protection, there was a woman with a particularly familiar face. As Harm did not pay too much attention to any briefs from the White House as they appeared on TV, he did not remember her whenever she stood up before the press to give them statements on the happenings in the present Administration.

Harm realized that it wasn't that he saw her some other place and time, it was just that he thought that
she looked like someone else he knew.

Before, he could pursue that train of thought; he was interrupted by the sound of a helicopter landing on the mall. The Secret Service thought it was for the President. But Harm soon realized that it was for him when the agent who checked it out waved him over. Upon entering the chopper, Harm saw Commander Lindsey and his new partner, Lt. J.g. Meg Austin. The two went out to a submarine that was being held hostage by a techno geek who threatened to run a guided torpedo into a cruise ship if his demands were not met. Harm and Meg managed to overcome her claustrophobia and the geek to solve the crisis.

John & Harm were both promoted to Lt. Commander that year, John in January and Harm in early December. They each set about with their partners to work many cases.

In April one case in particular teamed only John & Harm. They were sent to investigate the death of USN Pilot, Lt Douglas Marion, the son of Senator Grace Marion. They were both sent because of their different experiences, John as a SEAL, Harm as a pilot. Lt. Marion was killed during a SEAL "black op" mission. At first John & Harm were stonewalled by the SEAL Team until they charged the entire team with obstruction and perjury.

Admiral Chegwidden came to Puerto Rico and brought the Senator.

John and Harm were at the airfield to meet them. Harm spoke for the both of them, "Senator my condolences on your loss."

The Senator commented, "Please spare me the condolences lieutenant. I hope you two are not here to tell me that my son died from a malfunction?"

Harm answered, "No ma'am. We still haven't figured out how he died. We've only just begun conducting our investigation."

Turning to John, Marion said, "What about you commander, are you here to cover for your brother SEALs?"

Instead of answering her directly John said, "Senator my sister found out about your loss. She wished me to pass on her condolences."

Marion was startled, "Your sister? Who is your sister?"

John answered, "Ann Marie Matthews, the President's Press Secretary ma'am."

That stole whatever anger she had. "Thank you commander, she is very nice. She always made sure I was comfortable when I visited the White House. What can you tell me about my son's death?"

"Nothing much ma'am, as Harm said, we've only just begun the investigation. We will keep you and Admiral Chegwidden apprised of our results."

"Thank you gentlemen and please forgive my bitchy attitude." Marion said sincerely.

"No problem ma'am!" both officers said.

AJ made sure the Senator was squared away in her quarters and then he joined John and Harm as they went to interview the SEAL Team.

Before they did that AJ said to John, "Nice touch there Commander mentioning your sister. It may get her to back off on her 'cover-up' talk."
John replied, "Glad to help sir."

AJ smirked indulgently at that.

The SEAL Team Leader, Lt Alexander Kellogue still lied but Chegwidden's threats got the men to tell the story. The reason they lied was because Lt. Kellogue thought General Behnke would get him out of trouble. But, the general just let them all hang.

Kellogue confessed, "The General changed the Operation at the last minute from a 30 knots/30 feet helicopter insertion into a High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) jump, 2 hrs. before the mission. Marion was to have flown back a drug lord plane.

This fact intrigued John and Harm so they went to see the jump master who was responsible for the equipment that was handed out to the team. John wanted to find out why Lt. Marion's parachute didn't open and he hit the water.

When they disassembled the oxygen mask they found that the mask was tampered with. Marion suffocated on the way down due to a sabotaged o-ring on his oxygen mask.

The chief said "He would have felt that he was sucking air through cement with his o-ring like this."

Marion's autopsy confirmed this. It showed massive injury from his fall after his parachute didn't open but also hypoxic coma.

Kellogue gave Chegwidden the pre-mission letter Marion wrote to his mother - (a SEAL tradition started many years earlier by "Ensign Chegwidden"). Harm and John found that the General was performing the mission with his own men, so Chegwidden ordered them to HALO with the SEALS and recover the plane.

On the way the team quizzed each other on famous quotes as was their tradition in order to keep their minds off anxiety. Soon the jump master signaled that it was time to go. He lowered the back ramp and the team gathered at the edge. When the light turned green, they all stepped out into the night.

Chegwidden and the senator flew in the aircraft with the SEALS insertion. She was impressed with the jump and the men and was visibly softened, saying, "I can't believe it. They just stepped out into the night without hesitation."

Seeing this Chegwidden gave her son's letter to her saying, "You're ready to read this now." The senator was especially moved by the gesture.

When the team landed and approached the airfield, they saw that the airplane they were sent to retrieve was an old R4D prop plane. Worried that they couldn't get the old plane to fly, Kellogue asked, "Who said: I will fight no more, forever"? When others couldn't answer he continued, "I don't know either, but he wasn't a SEAL"! They all set out to hijack the plane.

John and Harm surreptitiously approached and boarded the plane. When they entered the cockpit John and Harm found that it was outfitted with AWACs type black ops gear from McDill Air Force Base.

John commented, "This was why the general had to get here first. He was probably the one who sold it or let it be taken."

Harm nodded in agreement. He didn't want to reply because he was busy trying to figure out how to start the almost antiquated aircraft. John left him to his task as he joined Kellogue to help him deal with any resistance from the drug dealers. After some pyrotechnics and shooting the whole team was
able to board the plane and take off.

The general had a "spy" watching the SEALs so he was told of Chegwidden's plan. In the race to
the site the SEALs won and beat general there. After he saw the plane take off he realized the trouble
he was in and the General committed suicide by jumping out of his helicopter over the ocean.

After the mission Lt. Marion's funeral was performed with full military honors as he was buried at
Arlington Cemetery. The entire JAG Corps and Kellogue's SEAL Team were all there to pay their
respects.

During the middle of December Harm and Meg ended their partnership when Meg was transferred to
Hawaii to fill a vacant legal billet, coincidentally at NIS under Captain Magnum. She was replacing a
Marine Major who shortly after being promoted was assigned to JAG Headquarters in DC. The
major was already gone when Meg arrived there.

Harm went about planning his wedding to Diane for the day after Christmas. On December 22 while
Harm was on leave just before the wedding John & Traci were assigned to an urgent case on the
Enterprise. Subsequently they were stuck out there when Harm and Diane got married on December
26. Traci & John sent their gifts and regrets for not meeting the bride yet. Harm said that would be all
right as he would bring her around and introduce her after the Honeymoon.

Traci & John returned to JAG on December 28. Upon their return Traci went on leave for a late
holiday. John stayed in Washington as he knew the rest of his family were all scattered for the
holidays. Admiral Chegwidden already decided to make Traci & Harm partners upon Harm's return
from his honeymoon. John was to meet his new partner right after the New Year and his life would
be forever changed

Sunday, January 5, 1997

2030 Local Time

Mac's Apartment, Georgetown

Major Sarah C. Mackenzie received orders for her transfer to Washington just before Christmas. The
Marines gave her to just after the New Year to get settled. So she spent the holiday week in Hawaii
packing her belongings and getting them shipped. Captain Magnum and his wife, Margaret or
Maggie Poole-Magnum took her out for a goodbye dinner on New Year's Eve. She flew into DC on
January 2.

It took her the whole of January 3 to get over the jet lag. On the 4th she just unpacked her uniforms
and her essential clothes. She figured she would use the ensuing weekend to acclimate to the time
change and unpack everything else during the rest of the week, finishing up by the next weekend.

Sunday night the 5th she sat on the edge of the tub and looked at the image staring back. The
ceramic was cold against her legs. She leaned down and picked up the pack of cigarettes by her feet.
She shook the last one out of the pack and put it between her lips. As she slid the lighter off the
counter opposite her she noticed the chipped paint on her nails. They would have to be done before
tomorrow. She had to meet her new CO at 0800 hours tomorrow morning. She lit the cigarette and
took a long drag. Smoking slowly she filled the small bathroom with a fog of smoke. Looking at
herself through the haze she made a decision. Her waist length hair had to go as well as the
cigarettes. This was a new billet and she was going to make it a whole new start.

She stood up, put her last cigarette out in the sink and wandered into the living room. Digging
through several boxes she found what she was looking for. Straightening up she held the scissors up
in victory. Making her way back to the bathroom she knocked over an already open box. A bottle of Jack tumbled out. She bent down and picked it up. She turned it over in her hands and watched the amber liquid try to get out. Tonight would be a good night for a drink. The pressure of moving and getting ready to deal with strangers and a strange city could have easily gotten to her. This bottle was with her a long time. She took her last drink from this particular bottle. To bring it with her from Japan, she had had to chip it out of the back of the freezer.

She picked her way back across the apartment and into the kitchen. She gave the Jack one last 'slosh' before putting it in the freezer. She smiled as the memory of Uncle Matt and how he told her to remember that "Jack Daniels was made in a dry county and if an entire county could go without drinking Jack so could you". Recalling why she had left the bathroom in the first place she headed back.

She was just at the kitchen door when the doorbell rang. She didn't know anyone in the D.C. area yet. Maybe it was a neighbor coming over to introduce himself. She looked down at the T-shirt and underwear she had on. Not exactly what you meet new neighbors wearing. The bell rang again. She imagined that it was more insistent this time. She went and looked through the peephole. She saw the distorted image of an absolute stranger. She noticed he was a handsome man despite the distortion. He was wearing a dark suit with a blue shirt and a tie of the same blue. She didn't open the door.

"Who are you," she asked through the door. She saw him smile. It was a nice smile.

"Admiral A.J. Chegwidden."

She inhaled sharply. She needed pants was her first thought. Her new CO was standing outside her apartment and she was staring at him through the peephole. She opened the door and stuck her head around its edge keeping her body safely out of site.

The admiral studied the face in front of him. The major opened the door only slightly. He tried not to laugh at the fact she stuck her head out and an angle that it put it almost parallel to the floor. He noticed her big brown eyes and the long dark hair she kept trying to push out of the way.

"I'm sorry to drop by unannounced major but I needed to give you a message and I didn't know your phone number. Your file was in my car and it gave this as your new address and I thought that since I was in Georgetown I would stop by." His drawl was nearly intoxicating. She momentarily wondered if everyone at JAG HQ was this beautiful.

"No problem, Admiral. I'm sorry about not letting you in. I'm not exactly dressed for company. What did you need to tell me?"

"That's alright major. I just wanted to let you know that instead of being at the office at 0800 you needed to be at the White House by 1000."

"The White House?"

"Yes, when you give your name at the gate they'll direct you to where you need to be. Good evening Major."

"Good evening, sir."

With that he turned on his heel and disappeared down the hall. She closed the door slowly. She leaned against it. She, Maj. Sarah Mackenzie, was going to the White House tomorrow, unbelievable. She bent over to pick up the scissors where she dropped them. Her hair fell across her face. It had to go.
She went into the bathroom and pulled out a comb and an empty spray water bottle from one of the many boxes. Filling the water bottle she studied her hair and face. She knew what she was going to do. She parted her hair just right of center. She sprayed a section and combed it smooth. Without a second thought she began cutting. By the time she finished the sink was full of hair. There was probably enough for another person. She looked at the new her. She fluffed her hair with her fingers. She was happy. There was a whole new energy about her. This was going to be a good time for her she could feel it.

She took a shower to wash away the loose hair. She got out, dried herself and put her pajamas on. It was late but she was too wired to go to bed. Luckily she hooked up the TV earlier. It was still on the floor but that was better than sitting in silence. Heaven only knew where her box of books was. She shoved boxes aside and sprawled out on the floor. Also she had the foresight to unpack her make-up case. She retrieved her nail polish materials and repaired her chipped nails.

The next morning she woke suddenly. After doing her nails and making sure they were dry, she fell asleep during some silly middle-of-the-night-B-movie. Checking her internal clock she realized she had plenty of time. Getting up she set about getting ready. She knew regulations required that all military personnel that went to the White House had to wear Class 'A' uniforms. She left early because she wasn't sure how long it would take her to get to the White House by the cab. At the gate the Secret Service Uniformed Officer instructed her how to find the Rose Garden. She arrived after an awards ceremony. She didn't bother to inquire as to who won an award as she started looking for the admiral.

As Sarah waited patiently for Admiral Chegwidden, she watched in all directions, until she finally saw him. She came to attention and saluted. She could clearly see the surprise in the Admiral's eyes but he said nothing about her now missing hair.

He approached with a tall Lieutenant Commander. He introduced her to the exquisite looking young man. She saw the gold SEAL Triton and other service & meritorious ribbons on his chest. That told her this was a man with great courage and skill. She saw a look of joy that seemed to signify that his search for something was finally over. One look into this man's eyes and seeing his ready smile as it got broader she knew she was where she belonged. Swimming in the bright green pools she knew she found a man to trust always.

January 6, 1997

0945 Local Time

White House Rose Garden

The day after Harm and Diane returned from their honeymoon was an unusually warm day for January. Harm stood proudly before President Bartlett to receive his Distinguished Flying Cross for his flying skill in saving Capt. Boone during the Arutti murder investigation.

John returned for his case on the Enterprise just the Friday prior. Admiral Chegwidden instructed him to meet him at the White House at 0945. So he got up later that morning, as he only lived 10 blocks from the "Presidential Mansion," and walked over.

John just missed the ceremony and showed up just in time to watch the backs of Harm and the new Mrs. Rabb as they entered the White House for a small congratulatory meeting with the President. Before he saw anyone else, John did see his sister and they waved at each other. Before he could go over to greet her and maybe catch the Rabbs, Admiral Chegwidden came up with Lt. Bud Roberts and said, "I know she's your sister Marshall. I can see the family resemblance. But sorry, right now we haven't got time for chitchat. Come with me and meet your new partner."
John saluted and followed dutifully, a little chagrined. After all he saw his sister just this morning at the house, but he still didn't met Diane and he had no idea what she looked like. The JAG staff completed the transfer of the entire JAG Corps just a week before Christmas. Along with the other senior officers Harm was only assigned a permanent office just before his wedding and he hadn't stocked it with photos of Diane yet. Also her job kept her too busy to visit JAG and John's own house renovations occupied his free time in the evenings and weekends.

On the way the admiral introduced him to Lt. Roberts. "Mr. Roberts has just been transferred from the Seahawk. I'm assigning him to yours and Commander Rabb's section. Lt. Austen recommended him. She said he was the best legal aide she had the pleasure to work with."

John looked at him and smiled nodding his approval. Bud just beamed and said to John, "I'm really looking forward to working with you and Commander Rabb. I've heard a lot of good things about you. You two are practically legends at JAG."

"Easy on the buttering up lieutenant you'll give him a swelled head. SEALs are like aviators. They have egos as big as an admiral's." AJ said.

"Is that a one star or a two star, sir" Bud joked.

His smile vanished when A.J. glared back at him.

"Lieutenants do not joke with admirals. Joking is strictly an admiral's privilege" said A.J.

Bud looked down and said a very subdued "Yes Sir".

While Bud was looking down, A.J. looked at John and just grinned. John just smiled and shook his head, giving Bud an encouraging squeeze on the shoulder.

As they turned a corner in the path of the garden, he saw a Marine Major with the biggest, most beautiful brown eyes. They were on to the most beautiful face of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He barely had time to come out of his reverie to register her name and see her hand stretched out in greeting. Just before she pulled it away, he grabbed it in a firm handshake.

Admiral Chegwidden made the introductions, "Major Sarah Mackenzie, Lt. Commander John Marshall."

"Call me John," he said as he recovered his composure. Call me "Mac" she smiled in return

During the introductions John was totally captivated by her as he stole glances at her. He was looking at the face of a woman that he was sure he never met. He would have remembered having ever seen such captivatingly huge eyes. The woman had short dark hair, though not too short, and she was rather tall, at least 5'9". Her skin had a natural tan as if at least one of her ancestors hadn't been Caucasian and her handshake told of power and a strong will.

Mac was also stealing glances at John and she would look down or at the Admiral when he turned to look at her.

Admiral Chegwidden just grinned as he saw the unspoken exchange between them as he looked first at Mac then at John and said, "Don't get too comfortable. You're going to be working together."

"Yes sir" they both said.

They headed to the waiting limousine that would take them to JAG Headquarters in the Washington Navy Yard. On the ride John spoke up asking the admiral, "I assume that something's up involving
"A US Mail truck was attacked as it passed the Marine Air Station outside Yuma yesterday afternoon."

"By Marines?" John asked incredulously.

Mac just stared just as incredulously.

"Well that's what the FBI Agents in the Mail Truck claim." AJ answered

"I don't believe it." Mac said

"Neither does the Marine CO in Yuma. But that's not going to satisfy the President, the press or least of all me," A.J. continued.

"Well what were FBI agents doing in a mail truck?" John asked

"Guarding the Declaration of Independence" AJ answered.

Mac and John could only look at him with incredulity.

1045 Local Time

JAG Headquarters,

1322 Paterson Avenue,

Washington Navy Yard, SE,

Washington, DC

The new JAG Headquarters in the Washington Navy Yard was a handsome red brick building with gabled A-Frame roof. It was completed and opened December 1st. The Commissary and the Law Library were on the 1st floor, the Administrative Law and Legal Services Sections were on the 2nd floor, the Investigation and Trial offices and Operations Bullpen as well as the Admiral's office were on the 3rd floor with the courtrooms and the Judicial Offices on the 4th floor. In the front of the building there was a tree shaded courtyard with heavy metal tables with matching chairs for the personnel to use for their meals in good weather.

When the four officers arrived there, the TVs in the Operations Bullpen were tuned to ZNN. They were reporting that the hijacking was after nuclear weapons being transported at the Marine Base.

Clayton Webb, who's announced title was the Under Secretary of State for Domestic Affairs, was in the bullpen and he followed A.J., John, Mac & Bud into the Admiral's office.

A.J. turned his office TV onto ZNN.

Webb grinned smugly at his successful disinformation.

"Oh that makes me feel better that the public thinks nuclear weapons were stolen," retorted A.J.

In A.J.'s office John & Mac introduced themselves to Webb each holding out their hands to shaken. When Bud held out his hand, Webb made it a point to avoid him. That immediately put Webb on John's shit list. In fact even though John was meeting Webb for the first time, he knew of him.
There were stories going around the office and the intelligence community that Webb had a reputation of being a screw-up. His operations seemed to be held together by chewing gum and bailing wire. He ran them with little or no back-up and more times than not his poor planning resulted in botched missions and lost intelligence. John was at a loss to figure out, with that reputation, why he was the one providing security for the most important historical document in the country.

After they introduced themselves John asked, "Assuming the hijackers weren't marines, who could they be?"

Webb answered, "The FBI is investigating a troublesome militia group from Nevada called the Defenders, led by an ex-Marine."

A.J. asked, "Does this ex-Marine have a name?"

"Colonel Matthew O'Hara." Webb answered,

At the mention of O'Hara's name Mac looked up rather suddenly.

John couldn't help but notice that and asked, "Do you know him major?"

Mac said, "He was one of the few to come out of the Vietnam War with the Medal of Honor around his neck, instead of around his widow's."

At that moment the picture on ZNN changed.

The face that Mac saw on ZNN caused her natural tan to totally disappear. Mac's shock was more evident and before John could ask after her well-being, the man on the TV started to speak.

"My fellow countrymen. This morning, we, The Defenders, took into safekeeping the Declaration of Independence. This document declares that we have certain inalienable rights. Not the least of which is the right of the people to alter or abolish a government that ceases to meet their will. Is it the will of the people to have drugs poison our youth? To have gangs rule our streets, to live in fear in our skies, our cities and our homes? Why does the most powerful country on the face of the Earth allow these horrors to persist? It is time for that bureaucracy in Washington that calls itself a government to remember that they are empowered to serve the will of the people. To that end, we, The Defenders, pledge, as did our Founding Fathers, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

John paid half his attention to the TV. The other half he devoted to Mac, as he gauged her reaction.

When it ended Webb was incensed that the broadcast undermined all his efforts at disinformation. That was offset as he received a call on his cell phone. When he finished, he turned to Mac & John and said, "That was the State Department. It seems that your colonel isn't so altruistic after all. He called ZNN demanding 500 million dollars for the safe return of the Declaration."

John was amused to see the veins in Webb's neck pulse very rapidly.

Mac just shook her head in denial that Webb failed to notice, but John caught. "I don't think that's what he wants," she said.

"What else could he want, more air time? Hell, he just had that. Besides, how could he hijack a TV signal?"

Bud said, "All they need to do is find a way to get into the remote truck and fix the receiver to accept their TV transmission."
Webb just looked at him in disgust as he was out-thought by a junior officer. Then he said, "There is a jet waiting for the three of us at Andrews."

"Four of you, I'm also assigning Lt. Roberts to the case." A.J. said.

Bud spoke up, "Thank you sir. I won't let you down. I'll do everything that is expected of me and I won't dishonor JAG and..."

A.J. interrupted him, "I can always change my mind Lieutenant." Bud shut his mouth

Webb responded, "I have no use for this...officer.... he has no talents that I need."

A.J. spoke over him, "What he has is enthusiasm as well as knowledge of something that we did not previously know. Besides it's my Navy, he goes."

Webb just grumbled, "Alright, four of you." Before he stormed out of the office, He said, "The jet leaves Andrews in 90 minutes"

When Webb left A.J. spoke up, "So you know what you need to know. Go out to Arizona and get the Declaration back. Use whatever any means necessary. Major, since you seem to think that the Colonel can be negotiated with then negotiate for the Declaration's return. Marines stole it, near a Marine base. If we want to salvage any credibility, we need to be the ones to get it back."

The three officers nodded in agreement as Chegwidden continued.

"And let's not judge Mr. Webb too harshly. No doubt transporting the Declaration of Independence was his responsibility, and if it's not recovered he'll be spending his mornings reading the classifieds."

Mac, Bud and John all chuckled, "Yes sir" but their smiles were cut short by Chegwidden's next statement, "and so will the three of you...Dismissed"

The three snapped to attention, turned smartly about face and marched out of the office.

As Mac, Bud & John walked out to the elevators, John said, "We have to go to my house so I could get my stuff and change into my khakis. After that we'll shoot out to Andrews and we have 90 minutes to get there.

Mac spoke up, "87 minutes."

John just looked at her and asked, "How do you do that?"

Mac smiled as she said, "I have great timing."

John asked, "What about your stuff?" How long will it take you to pack? John asked.

"I'm a Marine. We always have a bag packed. You know, "first to fight" and all that" Mac retorted. "I have a bag ready in my apartment. I usually keep it in my car, but I just moved to DC and I haven't bought a new car yet."

"Where's your apartment?" John asked.

"It's in Georgetown." Mac replied

"That's on the way to my place. We'll stop there first." John said.
"Bud what about you? Do you have a bag packed?" John asked him.

"Yes sir, my apartment is also in Georgetown." Bud replied as he gave his address.

Mac spoke up, "That's only 2 blocks from me."

1109 Local Time

Mac's Apartment

Georgetown

John commandeered a staff car with a Marine corporal to drive him, Bud and Mac. It only took two minutes for Bud to grab his bag. He said, "I'll change on the plane." Then they went to Mac's apartment to get her bag.

John went with her up to her apartment.

When he saw the boxes strewn about, he commented, "You weren't kidding when you said that you just moved to Washington. This place is a wreck." Mac acknowledged with a rueful smile as she grabbed her bag and left for his place.

John's house,

1125 Local Time

Florida Avenue NW

"We have a little over an hour till takeoff. It will only take me a minute to change" John said as they pulled into his driveway.

"And we have 69 minutes till take off" Mac added with a smile.

John just looked at her and before he could speak Mac spoke, "I've always been able to do that."

John just shook his head as they got out of the car. They entered through the back door of the house. The living and dining rooms were in the front and John had them masked off for painting. They went upstairs through the back stairway from the kitchen foyer. Mac followed him down the driveway to the back door then upstairs to his bedroom.

As he changed into his khakis, he called his sister at her office, using the speakerphone on his bedside set. "Ann Marie, I'm going out of town on a case so don't wait dinner for me."

"Yeah I know the case and where you're going. I found out Admiral Chegwidden assigned you and your new partner to the case. So please be careful, "hot stuff."

"I will, love you, bye, bye," said John.

"Love you too, take care" answered Ann Marie as she broke the connection.

Mac was standing at the door and raised her eyebrows at the conversation. She came in when she saw that he changed his pants and watched him as he packed his extra uniform pants shaving kit, underwear, jeans, sneakers and a couple of khaki shirts into a duffel bag. He also had another bag set aside that was already closed and locked.

"Why two bags?" Mac asked pointing to the locked one.
"Besides being a JAG Lawyer, I also train with the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team. I'm authorized to work with them when there is a military hostage situation. So I have to take this with me and lock it up in my car whenever I go out. I take it in when I'm home. I don't like to leave it in my car in this neighborhood. This morning I walked over to the White House so I had to leave it here. I figured I could come back here after whatever we had to do there was finished. You know what a bear it is to park there, with all the tight security.

Mac nodded at his logic then asked, "How does your girlfriend know of your assignment so fast? We just got the case."

John just casually answered, "Ann Marie is President Bartlett's Press Secretary."

Mac could only whistle in amazement. John just looked up at that and smiled. "Relax Major, I've been living in DC for the better part of the last two years and she lives in the room down the hall."

"I'm surprised she has her own room," Mac said with a hint of jealousy.

"Why shouldn't she, she's my sister" 

Mac was embarrassed and said "Oh I didn't know".

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let you go on like that. I was just amused at your 'jealous' tone." John said facetiously emphasizing the "jealous" part.

Mac got her temper up. "I barely know you enough to be jealous. What did you think I was doing checking you out to see if you were seeing anyone romantically?"

John smiled and said, "Relax Mac. I'm just kidding around. Your reaction to Ann Marie's position was mild. You should have seen Admiral Brovo when he found out we were related. One day he got mad and called her a "bitchy little mouthpiece" in front of me. I let him know we were related and respectfully told him in so many words that if I ever heard him call her that again, he would be drinking his meals. He quickly apologized. Needless to say he never called her that or said anything derogatory about her again."

Mac smiled accepting his apology and his story. 'He's really protective of his family and he must really be confident of himself if he told an admiral that he would break his jaw for insulting his sister' she thought.

Then she commented on the house. "Nice place you got here, a little too sparse. At least my place has stuff in it."

"I know. I just had the house renovated. The contractors all left after the walls were primed. As you saw when we came in I'm in the process of painting the living and dining rooms. I bought the house cheap as part of a DC neighborhood rehabilitation program. The costs of the renovations are being offset by a grant from the program."

"And by the way, I am not seeing anyone romantically at the moment. Who has the time? I've spent 99% of my free time fixing this place. Ann Marie and I had to rent an apartment until the upstairs and the kitchen were done. We weren't able to live here until then."

Before Mac could reply, John asked her, "Speaking of revealing relationships, tell me about your marine".

"My Marine, what makes you think I know him?" Mac asked with caution.
"I saw the way you reacted when his name was mentioned and then you turned 10 shades paler when he came on the TV. You are either related to him or you served under him. So spill it, please. The more we know going into this case the better we're going to be"

Mac knew that she had to tell what she knew. "I didn't serve under him. He's my uncle."

John could only stare silently for a few seconds before he said, "Ookay, now I know what we're up against."

With that he grabbed his bags and they went out to the car and then onto Andrews.
After landing at the military airbase, Mac, John & Bud accompanied Webb to the crime scene. When they arrived at the scene, John saw an FBI truck with so many antennas that he immediately became suspicious. Knowing Webb's reputation for duplicity, John was fairly certain that Webb was capable of bugging their cell phones with the equipment he had in the van and he probably installed a bug or homing device in their car. John conferred with Mac about those possibilities. So they decided to switch cars at the first opportunity.

Before he left he told Bud to stay close to Webb, but to be careful of what he said in front of him much to the latter's chagrin.

Mac and John both agreed that they needed to ditch Webb so that they could better control the return of the Declaration. So they drove away under the pretense of interviewing the Yuma Station Commanding Officer.

Since Mac knew her way around, John asked her to drive. John then used his cell phone to call Bud and gave him further instructions. "Bud, I forgot to tell you to call me if Webb decides to get going anywhere so that we can better coordinate our strategy. If he gives you any trouble, just invoke 'admiral's privilege'."

Bud answered with a laugh, "Yes sir"

On their way to the base Mac explained that she thought she knew where her uncle might be. Before they got to the base they stopped at a car rental lot and rented a Ford Explorer SUV. Mac and John agreed that it was the only way to ensure that the car they drove was not bugged with a tracer. They parked their base Crown Victoria at the motor pool. They drove out of the base and headed northeast toward the "four corners area" with Mac behind the wheel. They kept their cell phones but turned them off. After an hour of driving, they stopped at a gas station on the way and changed into their civilian clothes then continued on, still with Mac driving.

After a while John glanced over at Mac. The sun was setting over her left shoulder and he stared at her in wonder.

Mac caught him staring at her. "What?" She smiled as John had the grace to be embarrassed.

"I'm sorry Major, I just like what I'm looking at. You're quite pretty you know," John told her.

"Red light, Commander" but she said it with an embarrassed smile.

"I'm not feeding you a line major. It's just that the sun was in a perfect position over your shoulder that it almost made you glow."

Mac just smiled at the elaboration of his compliment. She was just as thrilled hearing him say what he did.
John continued, "Please don't think I have a girl in every port, because I don't. I don't engage my mouth before thinking and I don't throw my compliments out freely. You'll find, and not to sound like Lucy Van Pelt, I mean what I say and I say what I mean. You'll get no ambiguity out of me."

Now Mac was amused at his little confession. Changing the subject she said "So enough about me; tell me about you."

"Not much to tell. I'm a New York boy. I graduated Fordham and Navy ROTC. I went through SEAL school after my first posting. I was on a few missions that were successful. I was in a helo crash during the Gulf War and I fractured my pelvis and ruptured two discs in my spine. After waiting for my pelvis to heal I got my back fixed. After that it took me 6 months to learn to walk again. In the two years after that, I went back to Fordham to finish Law School, passed the bar and I joined JAG a little less than 3 years ago. So here we are."

Mac was thinking that he was confident without being cocky. His line about his successful missions was delivered with humility without bragging. She also found that he was quite handsome, those green eyes of his flashed when he told his story. She realized that he was happy with himself. She also realized that she was attracted to him.

John interrupted her thoughts with, "Enough of the mutual admiration society. We can deal with that later. We have a Declaration to retrieve. So how are we going to do that, major?"

The use of her rank signaled to her that he was ready to get down to business. "We need to infiltrate my uncle's group. His men may believe I'm joining him, but not you to."

John thought of that too. He knew he had to think of a plan of action before they got to where they were going.

2015 Local Time

Red Rock Mesa

After a while they came upon a rusted sign that was incongruously pegged at the side of the road.

"Thank God it's still here," said Mac about the sign.

"I don't see any buildings?" asked John

"They were razed years ago. What was left the desert took, except for this old sign," answered Mac.

John approached the sign, "Hey, this would have been my kind of place, "Eats, Live Rattle Snakes, UFO Information" John said about the sign.

Mac smiled as his vain attempt at humor. "About a mile out there is Red Rock Mesa. That's where we used to look for em," said Mac

"What, UFOs or rattlesnakes?" John asked in amusement.

"Ichnites"

"Ich. what?"

"Ichnites, you know dinosaur tracks. It's much more fun than hunting their bones. The tracks tell their story. Were they hunting, running, playing?" said Mac.

"I guess I never thought of dinosaurs playing," said John
Mac just smiled at that.

"Isn't it a hell of a long shot, him being up there, Mac?" John asked

"No there's a huge cave. We camped out for a month and we never saw another soul" said Mac.

"A month hunting dinosaur tracks" asked John

"And drying out" said Mac.

"The colonel's an alcoholic?" said John

"No I am. I haven't had a drink since I was 19, thanks to him" Mac said in a proud but subdued manner.

John paused then asked, "So, how do we get up there?"

Mac answered, "Only two ways, by climbing or helo. We always climbed up. There is a trail at the southeast corner that is very well marked. It gets vertical about 25 feet from the top, but there are enough rocks in strategic places that practically form a ladder. Also there are no snakes nesting in any crevices or hollows on the way up."

"Ok we don't have a full moon but with the star light I should be able to see well enough to climb up. But you know they'll be watching any and all approaches. So we need a distraction to keep their eyes off anyone fool enough to climb up, namely, yours truly," said John.

"So what are we going to use for a distraction?" asked Mac

"Well the admiral gave you orders to negotiate the Declaration's return, so there's our distraction. We have to find a way for you to get there though so that their attention is totally on you. Can you trust your uncle to protect you?" John asked.

Mac said, "Yes, why?"

"I need to know that you're relatively safe with him. That way I can do my job without having to worry about you more than I need to." said John.

Mac agreed with that reasoning.

"So how do we get me up there?" asked Mac with some doubt directed to John's plan.

"We let him know you're here. Do you know Morse code?" John asked Mac.

Mac gave him an exasperated look then said, "Of course, I'm a Marine."

"OK, give me an hour, then start signaling him that you're here and need his help," instructed John.

He said this as he opened his extra bag and extracted his equipment and special clothing for his job. John changed his short-sleeved polo shirt for a tight fitting long sleeved black shirt. He already had black jeans and black hiking boots on. He pulled out a black nylon mask, rolled it up and put it on the top of his head. The mask was similar to a woman's stocking. It was specially made for covering one's head, but it allowed the wearer to breathe easily. Then he put on his web harness that had his small weapons and water bottle attached. He extracted his main weapon and he was ready.

He then gave Mac some last minute advice, "You won't know if I'm up there, so if things start popping, hit the deck. If your uncle is anywhere near you, take him down with you and try to keep
him out of the way."

Mac nodded.

He said good luck then he walked off into the dark desert toward the mesa.

Mac looked at him and wondered what kind of courage made him able to do that.

2330 Local Time

Red Rock Mesa

On the top of the Mesa, one of the "Defenders" named Riske alerted O'Hara of the activity.

"Colonel, there's lights blinking in the desert"

"O'Hara's 2nd in command told him, "It's Morse Code."

O'Hara said the letters as they were spelled out. "S O S, H, help-Sarah, What the hell"

Mac was signaling the same code for about 15 minutes when she heard the sound of an approaching helo. She stopped signaling and waited. She didn't wait long as it landed on a clear spot just off the road. Mac smiled as O'Hara came out to her and hugged her. He then led her back into the helo. 'I hope John gets to where he needs to be' she hoped silently.

January 7 1997

0230 Local time

Red Rock Mesa

John was breathing hard, but he wasn't tired or overly sweating. The cold desert night air had kept him cool as he climbed. He was grateful for that. As he thought, the starlight was bright enough to illuminate his climb. The lack of moonlight and his black clothing also served to keep him invisible in the shadows. He was about three quarters of the way up when he heard the helo leave. He was almost at the top when it returned. While the "Defenders were focused on the helo landing, John climbed up the rest of the way and took cover behind a large boulder.

After the helo landed John peeked around the boulder to take stock of his situation. He saw that besides O'Hara, there were three more 'defenders'. All the 'defenders' went into the cave. While they were in there, John moved and sought better cover away from the edge.

After landing, the four men listened to Mac's explanation for being there. O'Hara convinced them to bed down for the night. Three of the 'defenders' stayed in the cave for the rest of the night. O'Hara posted the other guard, named Garrett, to patrol the mesa. He was lazy though. He was so confident that no one could climb up in the dark he walked right by John's hiding place.

John waited until Garrett was on the other side of the mesa and he stole into the cave and hid himself under the camouflage netting that covered some stacked ammo crates just inside the entrance. He saw that the cots the 'defenders used were well inside the cave behind a canvas screen.

He was ready for anything as his weapons consisted of a suppressed Colt M-16A2 automatic rifle along its two extra 20 round clips, a 9mm Berretta in a shoulder holster, a bag of 5 flash-bang grenades, 5 shrunkens or throwing stars. He hoped he did not have to use them.

John knew that his position would not be very secure when the sun came up. He was bound to be
discovered if they started unloading. As he hunkered down and waited for first light he hoped Mac made some headway with her uncle.

0630 Local time

Red Rock Mesa

At first light, Riske came out to relieve Garrett. He didn't even look at the crates among which John was hiding. He stood with Garrett discussing Mac and O'Hara. "Garrett, do you think she really came here to join her long lost uncle?"

Garrett could only shrug his shoulders asking, "Do you think she was negotiating how we'll get the money?"

"I hope so. For 500 million I could buy God, or at least the Pope" Riske said contumulously.

Garrett could only shake his head at Riske's blasphemy.

Mac and her uncle woke up and were sitting in the cave, out of earshot of Riske & Garrett. She was in deed making headway. Earlier that night, she convinced her uncle and the other "defenders" that she was thinking of joining them. They left her alone with O'Hara as they bedded down.

"Uncle Matt, why did you take the Declaration of Independence? What did you think you could accomplish?" she asked.

"I saw the torch lying there and I felt it had to be picked up. The government must listen to what I have to say" replied O'Hara.

"You and I know the government will not listen or negotiate with you. We have to give it back. The only position they will take is that you give it back first then they'll listen to you, and only during a trial. Besides, how did you know where the Declaration was going to be?"

We kept seeing postings on our website saying that it was being sent to California for restoration. We were following it since Denver. We rightly figured that it had to be in the mail truck. Every night the mail truck would turn off from the convoy. We saw our chance outside of Yuma and took it."

Mac thought long and hard on this. How could Webb allow word about its transportation to leak.

"Then let me represent you. If I can trace who sent those postings, I can prove that you were entrapped to take the Declaration. It was probably from the FBI or even the State Department. You've been a thorn in their side for months. I'm sure I can get my office to help. But first we have to get the Declaration back," Mac said insistently.

O'Hara just sighed as he realized he was in over his head and Mac was offering him his lifeline. He got up, walked out of the cave and summoned his men together at the helicopter.

"Captain Cahill, start packing the gear. We have to leave here, our position has been compromised" O'Hara instructed his men.

Riske didn't buy it for a minute. As he stood in at the helo, he asked, "What about the 500 million dollars?"

"There is not going to be any 500 million dollars. We'll drop off the Declaration and then call the FBI and tell them where to find it."
Riske was incensed. He repositioned himself so that he was blocking access to the helo. The captain shouted, "Stand aside soldier. We follow the colonel's orders."

Without thinking about it, Riske shot him in the gut. As the captain fell the other defender came up beside Riske. "Are you with me Garrett?" Riske asked him.

"For a quarter billion, you bet I am."

O'Hara and Mac bent down to check on Cahill. O'Hara said, "I won't fly you out of here."

Riske pointed his rifle at Mac. "If you don't fly us out of here, I'll shoot your niece"

That made O'Hara pause. Mac stayed down with O'Hara. She kept her eyes on Riske the whole time.

"It's okay Uncle Matt" she said.

Before she and O'Hara could stand up she saw Riske's head whip back violently and a red stain suddenly appear on the copter's fuselage as the back of Riske's skull exploded. Mac dove and landed on top of her uncle to get them out of the line of fire.

Garrett looked at the falling Riske. Before he could react, two dots appeared on his chest that rapidly expanded into crimson stains. He fell first onto his knees then face down in the dirt. He was dead before he hit the ground.

Back in the cave after O'Hara and Mac left to gather the 'defenders' together at the helo, John moved from his cover under the netting to get a better line of fire at the helo. He was still in shadow so his black clothing kept him from being exposed. His plan at first was to fire into the helo's engine compartment to disable it if they attempted to take off. After Riske shot the captain, he knew the situation was getting out of hand. He saw that he had to prevent Mac and the 'defenders' from boarding the helo. When Mac and her uncle bent down to check on Cahill he had a clear shot at Riske's head. As he heard Riske threaten to shoot Mac and point the weapon at her he took the shot. Before he saw that his first round hit he already traversed his sights to Garrett and fired two rounds into his chest. When he saw that the threat was gone, he got up and walked out of the shadows to Mac and O'Hara.

Mac got up and looked toward the cave as John walked out of the shadow of the cave holding his rifle aloft in the safe position.

He got to where Mac & O'Hara were on the ground. "Are you alright Mac?" John asked as he held out his free hand and helped her up.

Mac assured him that she was as she brushed the dust from her skirt.

She helped O'Hara to his feet.

O'Hara could only stare at John wondering where he came from.

John saw his bewilderment and said, "Lt. Commander John P. Marshall US Navy SEALs/JAG Corps at your service colonel" he said and smartly saluted.

O'Hara returned the salute. His puzzlement was evident as he asked, "Mac, where did you find this sailor?"

Mac smiled and said, "In a Rose Garden, Uncle Matt, in a Rose Garden."
0930 Local time

Red Rock Mesa

After wrapping up the bodies of the dead defenders and burying them under cairns of rocks on top of the mesa, they packed the Declaration into the helo and O'Hara flew them down to where they left the Explorer. After securing the Declaration in the back, Mac drove them south. John asked O'Hara to sit up front as he sat in the back seat behind him. O'Hara understood John's precautions and got into the front passenger seat.

John knew O'Hara wouldn't try anything. After the helo landed at the Explorer, John also pulled O'Hara aside for a thorough search for weapons. During the search John asked him, "Do you love your niece?" O'Hara just nodded in confusion. "Good, then please don't try anything stupid, because I will shoot you. I have to work with Sarah and I would rather not have your death come between us. Do we have an understanding?" O'Hara shook his hand saying, "Yes commander, we do."

John repacked his rifle and other weapons, but he kept his shoulder holster with the Berretta ready. On the way, he turned on his cell phone and called Admiral Chegwidden.

"Admiral, Lt. Commander Marshall here sir, Major Mackenzie & I have the missing item and we are now driving back to Yuma. We also have Colonel O'Hara as our guest." O'Hara smiled at the word "guest". "I expect Webb will be taking Prozac as we accomplished our mission without him." John continued with a smile.

"Good work Commander. I'll let the President know" A.J. said. "Do you want me to let your sister know too?" A.J. asked.

"No need sir. She probably has not left the White House since this began. So when you call the President, she'll find out at the same time. Thank you just the same sir" John said sincerely.

"Ok, Commander, get to Yuma in one piece, secure that item and file your report from there" A.J. instructed.

"Aye, Aye Sir" John said as he closed the call.

1230 Local time

Yuma Marine Air Base

Three hours after leaving Red Rock Mesa they pulled into the Marine base to see a smiling Lt. Roberts, alongside a very peeved looking Webb waiting for them at the brig.

Earlier Bud was standing outside the communications truck when Webb overheard John's conversation from the road with the Admiral. Webb bolted out of the truck and sprinted to the FBI helo.

Bud asked, "Where are you going sir?"

"After Marshall & Mackenzie, they called the admiral from the road. They went rogue in this operation. When I catch them, I'm going to have them court martialed" Webb answered.

Bud asked, "How do you know they called the admiral?" Webb just looked at him.

Bud went after him and tried to get into the helo. Webb tried to keep Bud from entering the helo saying "Sorry, Admiral's privilege".
Then Bud said, "You bugged our communications. I'm going with you. If I don't go, then Admiral Chegwidden is going to hear about you eavesdropping on our calls. How would you have known about Admiral's privilege?" He cited the rules that prohibited military personnel communications from being bugged.

Webb realizing that he was found out relented and allowed Bud into the helo. Besides he had a second thought, he did hear Marshall mention that his sister was with the President. He didn't know what her position was. He would find out later. He didn't like not knowing all about the people he was dealing with. He thought it made him look weak.

After they handed over the Declaration to Webb, John turned to leave. He stopped when he felt a hand grab his arm. He turned and faced Webb with a look of distaste. Still holding his arm, Webb began to speak, "You weren't supposed to go rogue. Your orders were to work with me…"

John stopped him saying, "First of all Webb my orders were to retrieve the 'Declaration' by any means necessary. Second of all if you don't remove your hand I'll break it."

Webb saw the determined look on his face and removed his hand. He didn't speak another word as John turned and walked away from him.

Mac and John accompanied O'Hara to the brig. They left as he was being processed. They reported to the base Commanding Officer. From there they called Chegwidden again and gave him the full report. Bud was there and he was taking notes in preparation to help typing it up.

Upon finishing his recount of the events on the mesa he advised the admiral, "Sir, the Navy's forensic team needs to go up to Red Rock Mesa to retrieve the three bodies of the defenders we had to bury up there. Also sir, the helo Colonel O'Hara used is still in the desert beside the road. We had to leave it there. There wasn't enough fuel to fly it all the way back to Yuma."

"I'll make the calls Commander. Again good job, to you and the Major" said A.J.

"Thank you sir," said John as he hung up the phone.

John then asked the C.O., "Where can I find a Catholic Chaplain?"

After the C.O. gave him directions, he walked out with Mac.

"Why do you need to see a chaplain?" Mac asked.

"Because I had to kill two men to accomplish our mission and I need to deal with the consequences of that. One thing they taught me in SEAL School was that we needed to relieve any guilt or anxiety from those types of actions so that we didn't suffer from post-traumatic stress. Some people go to a psychiatrist or a psychologist. I prefer to go see a priest. I'm very Catholic that way."

He saw something akin to bewilderment on Mac's face and asked, "Why, do you seem so confused?"

Mac shook her head and said, "I'm not confused. I'm Catholic too. I just didn't put the two parts of you together. I saw the determined SEAL do what he had to do without hesitation. Then I saw the man who needs to go to confession to assuage his sins for killing two people in the line of duty. It gives me a good glimpse into your character, and I like what I'm "looking at" she said with a smile.

John saw that she had turned his own compliment of her around on him and he smiled back.

She added, "I haven't been to church in a long time. Maybe it's time I went back."
John said, "Maybe you're right. Look we can deal with that later. Why don't you go see your uncle and after I'm done with the Chaplain, I'll get us checked into the VOQ".

Mac agreed to the plan.

Bud for his part didn't miss the exchange. He spoke up, "Sir, ma'am, I'll get us checked in the VOQ."

Mac turned and said, "Thanks Lieutenant."

As Bud walked away he thought to himself, 'I'm going to like working with these people. It'll also be interesting to see how the relationship between John and Mac turns out.'

After John left to find the chaplain, Mac went to see her uncle in the brig. As O'Hara designated her as his attorney, she was allowed to stay for a while to speak with him. She outlined her preliminary defensive strategy for his upcoming trial that she and John would plan.

After she was done she went to the VOQ. Bud booked her room next to John's. There she was informed that John had her room key. She found John's room. He had left the door ajar, anticipating her arrival and he left her key on the dresser. Upon entering she found him lying on his bed fast asleep. She saw her room key. There was a note taped to it. The note said, "Get some sleep, we'll talk tonight, John".

Mac just smiled at his consideration and left for her room. She was indeed tired from the long night and day. She got dressed for bed and slid under the covers. She was asleep in no time.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 4

Monday, February 3, 1997

0815 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

When John got out of his 1995 Z-28 Camaro, he saw Mac pull into the JAG parking lot in her rental car.

Colonel O'Hara's trial was completed the previous Friday at the Marine Barracks at 8th and I, where O'Hara was also being held. Because it was in Washington, it attracted a lot of press attention. John sat first chair and helped guide Mac through the press' crush on her and O'Hara. Unfortunately O'Hara was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison at Leavenworth.

"Are we still on for going car shopping this weekend?" John asked with a smile.

"I sure am. The weekly payments for this rental are killing me. Before I left Hawaii, I sold my car. There was no way I could afford to ship it from there to DC," Mac said.

John asked, "After working out of our temporary office at 8th & I, how do you feel coming in on your first day reporting to work at your real posting. I hear they have an office ready for you."

Mac just smiled, "I'm looking forward to getting into a routine. By the way, thanks for helping me unpack a couple of weeks ago Friday. I couldn't have gotten everything away so soon without your help."

John said, "You're welcome".

They returned to DC from Arizona very late on Wednesday, January 8th. On Thursday, January 9th John debriefed Admiral Chegwidden and Mac set up temporary shop at 8th & I. On Friday he caught up with his own work that was left behind because of the mission.

Before he left work that evening, John called Mac at the barracks. When she picked the call up John asked, "Want me to come over to begin strategizing on your uncle's case? I can bring pizza."

O'Hara's trial was to begin the subsequent Monday at the Marine Barracks.

Mac readily agreed saying, "Make it a meat lovers' pizza and it's a deal."

Mac liked that he liked the meat lovers' pizza himself. After the strategizing and unpacking, they shared a long conversation. They talked about their lives and military careers trading funny stories that occurred in their lives in and out of the military in a "Can You Top This" type of verbal competition.

During the conversation Mac felt that since she told him out in the desert that she was an alcoholic she felt she needed to be tell him the whole story. At first she didn't want to, but she sucked up her
courage and opened up about her life growing up in Yuma before she joined the Marines.

"I was ashamed of my life during that time. And I feel that if we're going to be working together, there should not be any reasons for distrust. So you need to know everything about me. Besides, you told me your whole story on the way to Red Rock so I owe you my story" Mac began.

John sat quietly and listened as she told him, about her abusive father, her alcoholism and that her mother had left her the night before her 15th birthday as she was away at a friend's house for a sleep over. She told him about when she moved out at 17 to get away from her father. How she only avoided marriage when Ragle was arrested and put in jail.

Sarah didn't tell John that she thought Ragle date raped her, taking advantage of her drunken state and having sex with her. She was somewhat ashamed at that and didn't want to show herself to John as damaged goods.

She ended her story when she told him about the accident that killed Eddie and her uncle's rescue of her.

John saw that she shed a few tears and he gently reached up to cup her cheek in his palm and wiped them away with his thumb. She thanked him with a watery smile.

After a long silent interlude, John asked, "What was your father like after your mother left? Did he physically abuse you or anything?"

"I don't know how he treated my mother but he never laid a hand on me. I tried to lock myself in my room to avoid getting in the middle of their arguments. I guess he knew, even drunk that you pick on someone your own size. He was one of those angry tired drunks. Whenever he was sober though, he was kind of nice. I just got tired of waiting for the shoe to drop every night so I started drinking myself to dull the impact," Sarah said.

"I'm sorry you had such a tough time growing up. But that just makes me more impressed with what you are today."

"You're impressed with me?" she smiled. "It's more like I should be impressed with you. I mean the injury you had was so severe. That you were able to walk after that was extraordinary.

"Yeah there's that. But my injury was an accident. What you went through was not. You've worked a lot harder than I have to get where you are."

"Maybe, but I think we've both worked hard. It makes me determined to ensure that I never want to see any child, mine or others go through what I did," Sarah said.

"You'll be a great influence to any one that you encounter. Have you ever thought of teaching or mentoring someone? Not that I think you're not a good attorney. Actually I don't know if you are or not, I've yet to see you sit first chair and try a case."

Mac threw a couch pillow at him good-naturedly. "Just wait till we oppose each other, you'll see how good I am."

"I can't wait. I know it would be interesting." John conceded.

She smiled as she replied, "Thank you for that. Like I said, as I look back now, I think, my God why didn't someone notice, anyone-a teacher, a neighbor, anyone. Of course I blame myself some too."

"You're not serious. Why in God's name would you?"
"Because I knew it was wrong. I looked at my friends and knew they came from nice normal families where drinking and screaming and swearing didn't happen. I should have reported it; well actually I did try once. There was a student teacher that took a special interest in me. She tutored me one Fall in math and finally one day I was in tears and told her it was so bad at home that I couldn't study half the time, couldn't concentrate on something like fractions because of the turmoil. About a week later a Social Worker came but the stupid woman called first. So when she got there. . ." she stopped and laughed. "This is so ludicrous now it's actually funny. So by the time she arrived for her appointment, the house was cleaned up of the liquor bottles, the slip covers were washed, and get this, my mom bought a frozen apple pie and put it in the oven so the house smelled of that instead of. . .well you get the idea."

"So she didn't help?"

"The Social Worker, hell no, my mom and dad deserved an Emmy for that night. Not only did it not help, but Ms. Dix got in trouble for making a false report and had to leave our school."

"I'm sorry," John whispered. "The Social Worker, hell no, my mom and dad deserved an Emmy for that night. Not only did it not help, but Ms. Dix got in trouble for making a false report and had to leave our school." "I'm sorry," John whispered.

"No I'm sorry," she returned, sniffing down a small sob. "I barely know you and no way should I bring this entire thing up."

"Well I bet you've never really talked to anyone about all that. My sister tells me I'm a good listener you know." He gave her hand a tender squeeze. "Any time you feel like talking about this or anything else, I want you to call me."

"Thanks for that. You really love your sister, don't you? Why does she live with you?" Mac asked. "Yeah, she really is a peach. Her husband Pete is an environmental attorney. He can't leave his job in New York yet. He's too junior. I bought the house right after I was assigned to JAG Headquarters, like I told you. Ann Marie was only renting an apartment as she knows that she's only going to be living in DC until the Bartlett Administration is over so she put me up in her apartment until the house was livable. So after I could live in it, I returned the favor. She helps with the utility and food expenses and so forth and I like having her there. When Pete comes down for the weekends, they either go to a hotel for their privacy or in the case if I'm out of town on JAG business, they stay at home. A couple of times I came home early from some of those cases and I could hear them in their bedroom. I just turn around and go back out to a movie or dinner until it's late enough to determine that they are asleep."

"That's very nice. I wish I had a brother or sister that loved me that much." Sarah said wistfully.

They talked some more in fact for so long, they totally lost track of time that before they knew it, it was 0200.

"Thanks for listening" Mac said as John got up to leave. "Anytime, you have my home number, just call. It doesn't matter what time."

Mac gave him a hug and a kiss on his cheek as he left.

Mac closed the door with a smile. 'I think I could get to like this man' she thought happily.

That night she lay thinking of John as she fell asleep.

At JAG, Mac came out of her reverie as they entered the building. John fell in step with her. They took the elevator up to the 3rd floor. Just as they came through the double doors of the bullpen, Harm
John asked, "Hey buddy, you look like you've seen a ghost. What's the matter?"

Harm had recovered his composure and said, "I don't see a ghost, I see a twin."

Harm held out his hand to Mac. Mac grasped it as John introduced them "Major Sarah Mackenzie, the man with his jaw on the ground is Lt. Commander Harmon Rabb."

Harm grinned sarcastically back at him.

Mac smiled, but she was still mystified by Harm's statement. "What do you mean a twin?" she asked.

Harm just said, "Come into my office & I'll show you." When they got to his office Harm picked up his wedding photo from his desk and handed it to Mac. John and Mac's jaws dropped just like Harm's did. "Who is this?" she asked.

"That's my wife Diane Rabb, formerly Schonke. She's in the Navy and works at the Pentagon in the J2 Military Intelligence section. You're almost her exact double. Her hair is longer but you two could pass for twins if not sisters."

Mac just stared in wonder at the picture of Diane. Seeing her face reflected in the photo touched a chord in her. She couldn't identify it, but it felt like a sense of something clicking into place.

She looked at Harm and said, "I want to meet her."

John and Harm just stared at her startled at her abruptness, wondering why she didn't ask, 'can I meet her?'

Harm was the first to recover. "Ah sure, I was going to invite John over for dinner tonight anyway. He's been bugging me to meet her himself. You're welcome to come. Let me call her."

Mac asked John, "Why haven't you met Diane yet?"

Harm answered for him, "He was on assignment when we got married and her job keeps her from visiting here during office hours. Also John is notorious for keeping his evenings and weekends to himself."

In his defense John said, "I had a house to renovate. It took up all my spare time."

Mac said coyly, "That wasn't true my first weekend in DC."

John had the good sense to be embarrassed.

Harm just looked at her and said, "You mean you got him out of his house?"

Before Mac could respond John said, "Well we had to work on Colonel O'Hara's case and Mac needed my help unpacking."

Mac rolled her eyes good-naturedly at him. She knew John just wanted to be with her, but she wasn't going to admit that to Harm. Besides, she still wanted to find out if John felt as strongly about her as she did about him.

Harm dialed Diane at her office in the Pentagon. As he was waiting for her to pick-up, Mac added, "Please don't tell her about our resemblance yet. I didn't mean to be abrupt. I feel that I need to meet
and talk to her as if I need to know something but I don't know what. Seeing her picture, it reminded me of something my mother used to say. I think she can help me fill in a few gaps."

As she half listened to Harm's call, Mac quietly thought back to when she was growing up. She vaguely remembered hearing her mother saying more than one time, "I'm glad that there wasn't an extra baby in the house. I couldn't handle two of you and your father". Mac never understood what she had meant by that until now.

When Diane picked up, John and Mac only heard his side of the phone call as Harm asked, "Hey honey would you mind if John Marshall comes over for dinner tonight?"

After her reply he added, "Can John bring a guest? That way he doesn't feel that we're ganging up on him."

"No it's not his sister."

Harm looked at John's exasperated face and smiled.

"Who is it? She's his new partner, Major Sarah Mackenzie"

"Ok I'll ask them. John, Sarah 1900?"

John nodded then turned to Mac who also nodded yes.

"1900 is good for them"

"Ok honey, I love you too."

Harm turned to Mac & John, "She can't wait to meet the two of you. Diane also said don't bring anything but yourselves. This will be a real interesting evening."

Smiling John & Mac left Harm's office. They went to their respective offices to put their stuff away. Mac liked her office. It was nestled in a corner of the bullpen. She couldn't wait to add her own personal touches to make it her own.

John stopped by and asked, "Want to get a cup of coffee? I'll show you the break room."

Mac agreed and stepped out of her office to join John. Before they got very far, they heard "Attention on Deck," then Admiral Chegwidden's voice saying, "As you were".

He spotted Mac & John and walked over to them. "Mackenzie, Marshall, welcome back. I read your reports of the trial. I'm sorry Major that the verdict wasn't in your uncle's favor."

Mac responded, "That's alright sir. It wasn't a total loss. Even though Uncle Matt was found guilty, he got his hearing and we got an apology from 'state' (Mac held her fingers up in quotes) for Mr. Webb's actions. I hear he is getting a lot of flak from his superiors there."

A.J. just chuckled. "I'd have liked to be a fly on that wall. I'll see you both at staff call at 0900."

"Aye, Aye sir" they said as the both came to attention.

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC
At the staff call, A.J. took the opportunity to formerly welcome Mac. She smiled at everyone’s greetings.

After handing out the days new cases to the staff AJ turned back to Mac & John and saying to Mac, "I know you are looking forward to some routine cases Major. Before you do, I want you and Commander Marshall to make yourselves available to the JAG investigators from Norfolk."

John and Mac looked surprised wondering what they had done to merit a JAG/Man investigation, especially officers from another JAG Office.

Chegwidden continued, "It seems that the Secretary of the Navy is referring you two for the Legion of Merit for you actions in retrieving the Declaration of Independence. He read your reports and forwarded them to the President and he seems to agree. We need to dot the 'I's and cross the 'T's. That's where the people from Norfolk come in. They'll be able to render their findings objectively."

John could only sit in shock. He felt he did only what he needed to do. When he got over his surprise he asked, "Admiral, does my sister know about this?

"No, the President and the SECNAV felt that she didn't need to know as she could unduly influence the investigation. Do you agree?"

"Yes Sir! Besides, she can't keep good news a secret. I mean she is the President's Press Secretary and can keep state secrets, secret, but if you tell her to keep a nice surprise a secret, you just sit back and make a betting pool as to how soon she'll let it slip."

Everyone chuckled at his familial declaration.

AJ smiled and said, "Good, make your selves available to them. I want to wrap this up quickly".


When the meeting broke up, Mac and John accepted congratulating handshakes from the other officers as they walked out of the room. When they were alone in the room she gave him a tight hug and whispered in his ear, "You deserve it."

John just smiled and hugged her back, "So do you".

1900 Local Time

Rabb residence,

Alexandria, VA

John picked Mac up on his way to the Rabbs. Earlier that day he sat in his office and endured a full two hours being interviewed by investigators as he recounted the story of his actions at Red Rock Mesa and the reasons he took the actions he did. They gave him a hard time about leaving Mac alone in the desert while he climbed the mesa. John held his temper in check as he surmised that Mac was safe as long as her uncle was still in charge of the 'defenders'. They did not say if they agreed or not. They just wrote his response down. They also asked him why he broke off from Webb to retrieve the Declaration on his own.

John explained, "Webb's ego got in the way of accomplishing the mission. He had his own agenda besides getting the Declaration back. I believed that he deliberately allowed the Declaration to be stolen in the first place. If it was me, I would've loaded the Declaration onto a Federal Marshals jet, under heavy guard, and gotten it out to California as soon as possible. Webb used it as bait to
apprehend the 'defenders' and I felt that he could not be trusted".

John took the process in stride. He was glad that it would be over in one day.

As he drove to Alexandria, he occasionally glanced over at Mac. He saw that she was apprehensive about meeting Diane. She was worried about how Diane would react to being surprised.

When they arrived at the Rabbs, he saw that she shouldn't have worried in the first place. Harm did not tell Diane about her similarity to Mac, but after being introduced to her, Diane's expression immediately shifted from one of apprehension mixed with curiosity to one of absolute joy. She immediately embraced Mac warmly. She also gave John the same kind of hug.

"Thanks for helping Harm out when he was in Bethesda. The advice you gave him meant a lot and kicked his ass."

John was embarrassed again. "I didn't do anything but tell him what options he had. I was in the same boat, as you recall." He said the last part looking at Harm.

As they walked into the apartment Diane took hold of Mac's hand and led her to the living room sofa saying, "When Harm said your name was Sarah Mackenzie, I felt like a bolt of lightning went through me. You see my parents adopted me, as they couldn't have children themselves. My mom, Ellen Schonke, was a nurse at the Yuma County General Hospital, where I was born. Growing up I didn't know that I was the second fraternal twin born and that the mother kept the older twin and given me up for adoption. So I didn't know I had a sister out there until after my mother and father passed away two years ago. Mom had pancreatic cancer and Dad died of a heart attack about 4 months after Mom died."

Mac interrupted, "I'm so sorry to hear that."

"That's alright, at least they got to meet Harm" Diane replied as she looked lovingly at her husband.

"Anyway when I read about the 'Declaration' retrieval in the paper, I hoped against hope that you and Uncle Matt were related to me. But your pictures weren't in the paper and there are so many other Mackenzie families, I didn't want to get my hopes up. But as soon as I saw you Mac, I knew instantly that you were the sister I was hoping to find."

Mac smiled at that.

Diane continued, "Mom and dad left documents in a safe deposit box that they only wanted me to see upon their death. The documents included this letter from my mother to me that she wrote when she found out she was going to die. I couldn't wait to meet you so I could see you for the first time and I could show it to you."

Diane held the letter out to Mac for her to read:

Dearest Diane;

As you are reading this, it means that your father and I have gone to heaven.

As you know, your father and I adopted you. You also know you were born in the Yuma County General Hospital.

What you did not know is that you have a sister out there. When you two were born, your biological father was a Marine in Vietnam. Also your birth mother never told her husband that she was pregnant with twins. She knew she could not properly take care of two babies alone. So your birth
mother decided to put your father's and my name on your birth certificate and assign parental rights to us.

She confided in me when she was in the hospital that he wasn't the steadiest individual, getting drunk a lot, being insubordinate to his higher ranking officers. She felt that he would welcome at least one baby into the family, but not two.

We moved away from Yuma and brought you home to Baltimore and raised you as our own. We didn't keep track of your birth parents. When you were away at the Naval Academy we were on the road to our vacation in California when we stopped at the Marine Air Station in Yuma. We found out that your birth father was discharged from the Marines and they did not leave a forwarding address with the base registry.

I don't have any more information to give you about your sister except that your birth parents' names were Joseph & Deanne Mackenzie and your sister's name is Sarah Catherine.

I hope you find your sister. When you do find her, please welcome her into your family and love her as we loved you.

All my love

Mama.

As Mac read the letter she was shedding tears. When she had finished reading she was a total wreck. Diane immediately went and took her into a very tight embrace.

Diane was crying herself as she said, "I know honey. Just let it out."

After Mac calmed down Diane said, "When I read of you I didn't even tell Harm that you may be my sister and he never knew about mom's letter. I knew that you would be assigned to JAG Headquarters so I waited until Colonel O'Hara's trial was over. If Harm hadn't already said that you were coming to dinner, I would have gone to JAG to meet you."

Sarah smiled at that as she calmed down enough to tell Diane what their mother used to say growing up.

Diane just nodded, "I know that Deanne thought she was doing the best for us. I gather she was not a strong woman. How are she and your father doing?"

Mac tensed up saying, "She left my father and me when I was 15. I haven't seen her since. And I'm estranged from my father. I lost track of where he is at the moment."

Then Mac went onto tell Diane the same story she told John. That set off another round of tears from Diane.

During the telling Sarah's emotions ranged from anger to sadness.

"I'm so sorry that you had to go through that," Diane said with love.

Mac replied, "I hope you don't think I'm angry at or jealous of you of how you grew up. It seems from this letter that your adoptive parents loved you very much, while mine made my life a living hell."

"Oh no sweetie, I'm just so happy to have found you. You seem to have come out of that very well. I mean, look at yourself Mac, you're a Marine and a lawyer for God's sake."
Mac could only smile saying to Diane. "Since we're now officially sisters would you please do me a favor?"

Diane nodded.

"Call me Sarah please. Now that I'm part of a family I don't want to go by Mac anymore. Mac is the name I use to appear friendly, but keep people at a distance to protect myself from them. I can be Mac the rest of the time, to other people, but when it's just us, I want you to call me Sarah."

Diane nodded and gave Sarah another hug.

Sarah turned to John & Harm. "You Harm are not allowed to ever call me Mac, we're in-laws now. That goes for you to John."

Harm just smiled at said, "Ok Sarah".

Sarah and Diane just giggled at him.

John for his part just felt a little out of place. While he was happy for Mac or Sarah now, he was a little startled that she would include him in her name calling rules. Sarah saw his consternation. She got up from Diane and pulled John into the kitchen.

"John, you may be an outsider here, but I feel that I have come to know you as a decent guy. I would like to get to know you more, if you're willing."

John could only smile and cup her cheek, "If that's what you want, that's ok with me. Besides I really want to get to know you too. But let's just be careful around the office." Then John leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"What was that for?" Sarah asked, half knowing the answer.

"I've wanted to do that since I met you but I was afraid to do it until now. I didn't know if you would slap me or report me for 'conduct unbecoming'," John said.

"Well I have been waiting for you to do that," Sarah told him, kissing his cheek back.

Diane and Harm were looking on the exchange surreptitiously. They both smiled and silently agreed to keep the exchange their secret. He and Diane were glad that John had found someone he could love.

When Sarah and John walked back to the living room, Diane spoke up, "Now that we've gotten the family reunion out of the way, let's eat. Sarah, since you don't drink what can I get you?"

Sarah answered, "Any soda or juice you have will be fine"

Diane nodded and then added, "For the future let me know what you like and I'll make sure my husband stocks up for you."

Harm just rolled his eyes, turning to John, "I hope you're taking notes. You'll need them to figure out how to keep the Mackenzie sisters happy."

Diane and Sarah could only laugh. Diane didn't mind being called a Mackenzie and Sarah was just thrilled to have a sister.

Diane turned to John, "By the way, do you like steak or do you eat rabbit food like my husband?"
John smiled and said; "I love a good steak, medium well."

Sarah piped up, "Make mine medium well too. Leave it a little pink inside."

Diane had to smile. "You really are my sister. I really enjoy a good steak." Turning to Harm she said, "Sorry, honey, I guess you're out numbered in this family."

Sarah, John and Diane just laughed. Harm just shook his head in exasperation as everyone settled in for what was turning out to be a very pleasant evening.
Chapter 5

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 5

Tuesday, February 4, 1997

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

The next day Harm and Sarah went in and told the Admiral they were in laws, A.J. was very happy for them. "So what does that make you major, N.B.M or Navy by Marriage?"

Sarah laughed and said, "I prefer that Harm be M.B.M. or Marine by Marriage."

A.J. smiled and continued, "I don't recall the U.C.M.J. stating that in-laws could not work together. At least I know you'll be civil to each other."

Harm & Sarah had smiled at that.

Harm spoke up, "Sir I have to ask, you were at our wedding. When you met Sarah what did you think?"

AJ explained, "Well I was as startled as you were Commander. But I also knew it wasn't my place to say anything. I figured everything would come out eventually. Major, when I went to your apartment the night before the White House, I didn't get a good look at your face because you only showed me from the neck up as you were bent sideways and you were trying to keep your hair out of your face. But when I saw you at the Rose Garden, I was surprised by first your resemblance to Diane and then your shorter hair."

Sarah chuckled at that, "Right after you left my apartment I decided to cut it short. One reason was a way to start over in a new billet and the second was it became too much of a hassle to put it up every day for work."

A.J. nodded his head at that then he said with a smile, "So unless there's anything else, carry on."

Shortly after that meeting the JAG Staff began to call Sarah, Harm & John the "three musketeers" as they saw that whenever they were at JAG Headquarters they unconsciously began spending a lot of time together, taking lunch together also leaving work around the same time together. Since Sarah & Diane found out they were sisters and they were now related, Harm had become especially close to Sarah.

Also despite his orders about 'not getting comfortable' Admiral Chegwidden was amused when he saw Sarah & John light up when they caught sight of each other. It all made for a very relaxed atmosphere in the office, for which the he was grateful.

Wednesday, February 26, 1997

1200 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
It was lunchtime and Sarah was hungry. So since John and Harm were not in the office because they were in Norfolk working together on a case, Sarah decided to ask Traci Manetti to join her. Besides she wanted to ask her a few things.

After securing her computer, Sarah got up and went to Traci's office. After knocking politely she entered after hearing the "Come in."

She waved Traci down as she got up to snap to attention, "At ease lieutenant. You know I don't like to eat lunch alone, would you like to join me?"

"Certainly ma'am, I was thinking of going myself." Just then Traci's stomach growled as if in agreement.

The two women laughed at that as Sarah said, "Then we better get going before any more grumblings are heard."

Smiling Traci secured her computer and got up, put her cover and overcoat on and grabbed her purse. After stopping at Sarah's office so she could get her own overcoat, cover and purse, they went downstairs to the parking lot. Sarah suggested they go in her new car, which she so enjoyed driving.

The reunion at the Rabbs ended when Sarah and Diane made plans to spend the next Saturday together so they could get to know each other. So John and Sarah decided to go car shopping the next weekend. Sarah went straight to the nearest Chevy dealer and got a cherry red Corvette with a stick. "I had one like this in Hawaii when I worked for N.I.S. with Captain Magnum. You should see the Ferrari that he drove. We were always kidding around that we should drag race."

"What shall we get diner food or pizza?" Sarah asked as they pulled out of the lot.

"I have a craving for Geno's Pizza," Tracy replied.

"Geno's it is," Sarah said as they drove out the Navy Yard gate to the pizzeria.

They walked into the pizzeria and saw that there were some other military men & women eating. They got their food and found a secluded table so that they could eat and speak in relative privacy.

After they ate for a while in companionable silence, Sarah began, "Lieutenant, you were partnered with Lt. Commander Marshall for over a year. What can you tell me about him?

"What would you like to know ma'am?" Traci asked.

Sarah elaborated further asking, "You know what kind of officer or worker he is. Is he thorough or is he lazy? Does he do his own work or make the junior officers do it? Does he value your opinions or ideas on a case?"

"Well ma'am I can tell you that he is definitely not lazy. He is a very dedicated attorney and thorough investigator. All the junior officers enjoy working with him. He never pulls rank with any of us by giving us the scut work to do. He always asks us for our opinion and goes through great pains to ensure that our opinions and recommendations are prominently noted in the case reports. In fact he types all his own case reports. He has got to be the fastest typist I have ever seen outside of a yeoman."

Sarah laughed at that and then asked, "What can you tell me about him as a person?"
Traci saw how Sarah blushed slightly at the question as she replied, "John is nothing short of a total gentleman. I really enjoy working with him. He always finds time to relax and have some fun. To relieve the boredom of staying in a strange town for a long period of time, we would go out to dinner a lot to places where there was dancing and he would pull me onto the dance floor. He really loves to dance and it shows. He's pretty good. We had some good times together but we both understood though that there was nothing romantic between us. John and I have become such dear friends that he and I are like siblings."

Traci saw that Sarah brightened when Traci said that there were no romantic feelings between her and John. So she said, "I can see ma'am that you're sweet on him."

Sarah blushed and said, "It's that obvious?"

Traci replied, "Yes it is ma'am. But don't worry it will be our secret. If you want major I can nudge John in your direction?" Traci finished hopefully.

Sarah smiled shyly at that as she leaned in closer and said softly, "Just don't make it look too obvious and keep this to ourselves."

Traci smiled and said, "Yes ma'am you can count on my discretion." She and Sarah shared a quiet laugh and then they shook hands at their romantic agreement.

When she returned to her office from lunch Sarah placed a call. She was very happy with the response she got.

Saturday, March 1, 1997
1650 Local Time
St. Thomas, Apostle R.C. Church
2665 Woodley Road, NW
Washington DC

John was sitting back relaxed with his eyes closed, the last 2 minutes waiting for 5:00 Mass to start when someone entered the pew and sat next to him so uncomfortably close that without opening his eyes John just started to scoot over to give that person room. He stopped when he felt a hand through his elbow, pulling him back. He opened his eyes and turned to look at who might be his pew mate. He smiled when he saw it was Sarah.

"What are you doing here?" he asked delightedly.

"I said I was Catholic. I figured now was a good time to go back to church. So I decided to start going with you" Mac smiled back at him.

"How did you know which church I went to?" John asked, still not extracting his arm from her grasp.

"I figured you went to one close to your house, so I called your sister to ask her which one and what mass you usually attend. She told me, so here I am" Sarah said.

"Well I'm glad to see you. By the way how far along did your parents put you through your Catholic education? John asked.
"All the way to Confirmation, I remember those were the happier times for me growing up" Sarah answered.

"What Saint's name did you pick?" John asked.

"Elizabeth, what's yours?" Sarah answered.

"Christopher?" John replied as he squeezed her hand.

They sat with their arms hooked into each other and settled in for the mass. At the kiss of peace, Sarah gave him a very chaste but heartfelt kiss on the lips.

As they left mass, John told her, "Your hair looks different than yesterday." Sarah had it cut shorter with subtle highlights.

"Do you like it? Diane and I went together this morning to get our hair done. Now we have the same haircut," she answered with a broad smile.

John groaned good-naturedly. "Well Harm & I will only be able to tell you apart when you wear your uniforms."

Sarah just giggled, "That was the idea silly."

Then he thought of something else. "Have you told your Uncle Matt about Diane?"

"Yes, Diane and I called him the weekend after our reunion. He doesn't have visiting privileges at Leavenworth until he's been there a year. We promised we would come and see him at our first opportunity. Until then Diane is going to write him a long letter telling him all about her also asking him about that side of our family."

"So how does Diane feel about Uncle Matt?" asked John.

"She was grateful that he was there to take care of me when I needed it."

The church parking lot was small. As John walked Sarah to her car he asked, "Want to come over for dinner?"

"Sure, I'll follow you?"

John smiled for joy as he got into his Camaro.

When they arrived, John pulled his car into his driveway far enough behind the driveway gate so that Sarah could park her car off the street.

They entered the house through the kitchen. The town house was the corner unit of the row of the other town houses on the block making it semi attached. Being on the corner, it had its own private driveway that ran alongside the house to the garage that was set beyond the back of the house. It had room for four cars to be parked off the street, plus one in the garage. The third car in the driveway was Ann Marie's. The garage housed John's winter car, a full sized Caprice Classic. He only drove the Camaro when it was warm enough to pull the top down.

John said, "This is the first time since our first case that you've been back here. I finished painting this week so why don't I give you the nickel tour."

Sarah readily complied.
They started in the basement. It was sectioned off in two parts. The bigger section was a playroom or social room. John picked out the furnishings for this room as he thought it to be his Man-Cave. Tucked into one corner with room to use cue sticks was an 8' pool table complete with an old fashioned hanging light over the table. There was the obligatory scoring string and rack on the wall holding the cue sticks.

The table was old fashioned with leather nets for pockets, not the regular pockets with inside rails that delivered the pool balls to one end of the table. John found it at an estate sale and had it refinished and the green threadbare felt replaced with a maroon colored felt.

In the corner opposite the pool table was a wet bar with bar stools. Adjacent to that was a seating area that was centered on a wall unit entertainment center that held a 30-inch TV and a DVD Recorder and 5 CD player and vinyl turntable stereo system. The sectional was set up in a corner configuration. It was covered with micro-fiber cloth. There were carpet remnants and a coffee table placed inside the elbow of the sectional. Underneath the carpet and over the whole basement floor was commercial grade vinyl tile.

In the back end of the man-cave room was the entrance to the boiler and laundry room. It was also his workshop where he kept his tools.

They went back upstairs to the 1st floor. They entered the empty dining and living rooms. John said, "You've already seen the 2nd floor. Ann Marie wouldn't go shopping with me to pick out the furniture for these two rooms. She said I should go 'pick out that stuff with your girlfriend, fiancé or wife who ever she may be.' Maybe you can come with me to pick out what should go into these rooms."

Sarah was taken aback, "You want my input on how to furnish these rooms. Are we boyfriend & girlfriend now?" she asked smiling coyly.

"That is only if you really want to be. Look I know that we only just met a month ago, but I feel that we have something nice here and I want to explore it" John asked hopefully.

Sarah put her finger on her chin and said, "Let me think about it." Then one second later she smiled and went to embrace him. "I had enough time to think about it. Yes! But only on one condition, I want you to promise me you'll take me out on dates, lots and lots of dates."

John laughed, at the excitement in her voice. "What Marine? You don't mind being seen out in public with a Squid?"

Sarah sobered saying, "When I was a teenager you know I drank and I didn't have a steady boyfriend. So I feel that I missed out on the whole dating thing. I mean I went out with whom ever wanted to go out with me. Mostly it was so I could get to drink away from home. When I was living with Eddie and Chris, it wasn't because of love it was because I just wanted to get out of my father's house because of the abuse I told you about. After the crash and during the process of getting and staying sober, Uncle Matt asked me what I wanted out of life. I said that all I want out of life is a great career, a good man and lots of comfortable shoes."

John just laughed at that.

"Anyway after missing out on the whole boyfriend/girlfriend thing, I really would like to experience it so that I can really enjoy it for the first time."

John said, "I want the same thing, but change mine to a good woman. My teen years weren't like yours. I went out with some girls. During college I had a steady girlfriend. We went out for a while
after college. But, she was always trying to convince me to not go into or leave the Navy after my first hitch. So we broke up. I've been looking for someone who also understands that I want the Navy and a relationship. With you I feel that we're on the same wavelength. I felt we both want the same things, a good career, love and maybe what comes after that. I like the whole idea of us being together and spending time together.

Sarah smiled back and hugged him tighter. "I'm so glad that we got that out of the way." Sarah then got serious for a second; "We need to be careful in the office though, what with the U.C.M.J. and everything."

"I agree. We're both professionals and we have the same rank and we're not each other's supervisor. We now know what we want from each other so I don't think we'll have a problem. This is going to be an interesting and hopefully happy courtship".

"Is that what we're calling it now?" said Sarah seductively and she put her arms around his neck.

"Yeah, that's what we're calling it." He pulled her into deep kiss.

They stopped when they heard someone loudly clearing her throat. They looked and saw Ann Marie standing in the arch between the kitchen and the dining room wearing a watery smile, with happy tears sliding down her cheeks.

She and Peter both saw Sarah's car in the driveway as she and Peter pulled up in his car. So they tried to be as quiet as they could when they entered the house. She heard the conversation from the part when John said, "I've been looking for someone".

"Well it's about time he found you Sarah," Ann Marie declared.

Sarah for her part smiled embarrassingly.

Ann Marie remedied that when she walked over and pulled her into a sisterly hug that seemed to last an eternity.

"Welcome to the family" Ann Marie lovingly whispered during the embrace.

Sarah hugged back gratefully, "That's two times this week someone told me that. First my long lost sister and now you."

Ann Marie nodded in understanding, "I know, John told me. In fact all John ever talks about is you. All I hear over dinner is Sarah, this, Mac that. The only ones he hasn't told about you are our parents."

Sarah looked lovingly at John who just threw up his hands in mock embarrassment.

"I invited Sarah over for dinner so what do you say we settle down and eat. Don't we have a steak that's been marinating. Peter and I will go outside in the cold and light the grill while you girls make the salad."

Sarah and Ann Marie agreed as they all began to prepare dinner and have a very pleasant evening as they all opened up about themselves as Sarah told them about the rest of her family.

"I already told Diane this same story. Our maternal grandmother was Persian from Iran. Her name was Maryam Hassan. Her parents moved from Tehran to London when she was a teenager. Because of the Great Depression they moved to America and became American citizens shortly before the start of the 2nd World War."
After the war in 1946 the family returned to London to visit family that was still there. Maryam met her husband James O'Hara, who was an American citizen working as a banker in London. In 1947 James came back to America. He and Grandma wrote to each other when the family came back from their trip. So when he returned to this country, he called on Maryam and they got married in January 1948. My mother was born 9 months later and my uncle Matt a year after that.

Grandma Maryam was a good practicing Muslim and she taught me the Koran and how to read and speak Farsi, Arabic and Hebrew. Grandma explained that those were the languages spoken in the Middle East when she was growing up and if she ever wanted to visit there, it was good to know all three. They lived in Yuma until they were killed in car accident when I was 14 years old. A lot of Grandma Maryam's family still lives in the area around Yuma in Arizona and south eastern California. I have to tell you eating like this is very different from when I was growing up. At Grandmother Maryam's house the concept of 'Western Manners' was totally left at the door. Everyone spoke at the same time and meals were a competition of trying to get to the food first with a lot of reaching in front of you and across the table. I remember it was a lot of fun to be there and it was the one of the few places where my parents were nice to each other."

Sarah said wistfully.

Ann Marie, Pete and John nodded in understanding.

"Daddy was born in Oklahoma and his family moved to Yuma also during the Great Depression when the "Dust Bowl" or "Black Blizzard" made it unbearable to live in Oklahoma. Daddy's parents were of Cherokee & Mexican descent. Granddad Samuel was Cherokee and Grandma Maria Catherine was a native Texican or someone of white & Mexican parents. My Great Grandparents were Cherokee. My great grandmother, my father's grandmother, was named Sarah.

"So you're named after your great grandmother's first name and grandmother's middle name?" Ann Marie asked.

"Yes that's right. Anyway Great Grandfather was a Cherokee Chief whose parents were in the "Trail of Tears", the US Government's forced removal of 17,000 Cherokees, in defiance of Supreme Court decision in 1838-1839. He and his wife were very lucky that they weren't part of the more than 4,000 to die from exposure and disease along the way." 

"Daddy made sure that I knew about that part of my family. It was my father who was insistent that I be raised a Catholic. He still let me attend Muslim services with my mom and Grandmother when I was growing up. Ramadan was a lot of fun for me. It coincided with Lent a lot of times. We'd fast all day then we would have these feasts at night. It's amazing that I didn't get fat when I was a kid."

Sarah said.

They all shared a good laugh at that.

John and Ann Marie went through their Catholic upbringing in New York.

John said, "Christmas was a lot of fun. We'd see our fathers' side of the family at our paternal Grandparents house in the Bronx then we'd see mom's side on Christmas Day. One Christmas Eve our paternal grandparents said that they would give out cash instead of presents. But when my grandfather walked around their apartment two days before Christmas Eve he said, 'This place looks like a tomb.' So he gave my grandmother money and sent her shopping at Fordham Road to buy everyone presents. When we got older and we could all drive, we'd go up in separate cars. After Grandpa died and Grandma moved to City Island we'd all go up there early Christmas Eve and then we'd stop at our maternal cousins in Woodmere on our way home to Far Rockaway. One year we just arrived there without knocking and scared the crap out of everyone there, including the older relatives from our cousins' side."
Peter went on to tell Sarah that he worked with Robert Kennedy Jr. in his work as an Environmental Attorney on the River Project that sought to clean up the Hudson River.

The end of the evening came after dessert Sarah and John shared a kiss in the driveway and Sarah got into her car and drove home. She did call John when she got home. They talked on the phone for two hours.
Sarah was working at her desk preparing for her next case. She was on defense. The prosecutor for the case was John. They had been dating for a little over a month. They were both comfortable with the way things were going as they went on the "lots of dates" they promised each other they’d go on.

The case wasn’t that complicated. Her client was Chief Petty Officer Lionel Sharkey. Sharkey was the supervisor in the Navy's Construction Battalion warehouse in Jacksonville NAS. An unannounced audit by the Navy's accounting office showed that there were more supplies signed out than were distributed to the Navy. The auditors put NCIS onto the case. When they went to Sharkey's home to interview him, they found it furnished and renovated with the missing Navy supplies.

Sarah knew she would have a difficult time winning as John had all the evidence on his side. She knew John never went to trial until he had all his evidentiary ducks in a row. What made it difficult was that the CPO was not taking a plea bargain and was stubbornly and idiotically pushing for a trial.

Sarah was pondering the defense when she heard a knock on her closed door. She looked up and smiled as she saw the object of her affections standing at her door. She waved him to come in.

John walked over to the front of her desk and sat down. They both looked at each other in that way that said, 'I want to kiss the daylights out you now, but we have to be careful at the office.'

As he presented Sarah the folder he was carrying John cleared his throat to say, "Your client just had another nail driven into his coffin. NCIS just gave me some new evidence."

Sarah opened the folder and read the information. John watched amused as her eyebrows went right up under her bangs as she almost shouted, "Oh that's just great, he's a bigamist! He used the stolen supplies to furnish and renovate two houses. That rat bastard is a real hustler!"

John laughed at her language. He loved that when she wanted to, Sarah could cuss with the best of any drill sergeant.

"I think you should strongly urge him to make a deal, Sarah," John suggested gently.

Sarah sighed as she replied, "I'll do my best. Can I let you know in the morning? I need time to confer with Sharkey."

"That's fine, now that I got that out of the way I have a request," John said sweetly.
"After giving me the one thing that will make my case more difficult, practically unwinnable, now you have a request," Sarah said half annoyed. She knew that John could turn it on and off from work to personal very swiftly. He was like the comedian George Carlin, no transitional material between his subjects.

"Well first of all is your Evening Dress Uniform ready to wear?" John asked.

"Yes it is. I just got it from the dry cleaners last Saturday," Sarah answered intrigued.

"Well I have an invitation, plus one, to the State Dinner at the White House to honor the Japanese Prime Minister this Thursday. I was wondering if you'd like to be my 'plus one'," John asked sweetly.

Sarah smiled at that. Inwardly she was thrilled to accept, but she wanted to play it cool for the fun of it.

"Well let's see. Would this be one of the "lots of dates" you promised to take me on?" Sarah asked mischievously.

"Why yes it would," John replied with a smile.

"And are you showing me off to your sister and her colleagues at the White House?" Sarah asked again.

"Of course I am," John said cheekily.

"Then who am I to spoil your fun, because I want to show you off as well," Sarah said with great affection.

"Okay, it starts at 2000 as I said this Thursday. The invitation states that they require the guests to start arriving at about 1900. So can I pick you up between 1800 and 1830?" John asked.

"Yes that would be fine. My apartment is only ten minutes from the White House so that gives me plenty of time after work to get ready," Sarah said.

"Great I can't wait till I see you then," John said as he got up to leave.

Sarah looked on dismayed as she asked, "Aren't we still on for dinner tonight and tomorrow?"

"Of course we always are. Besides it's your turn to cook tonight," John reassured her. Then he leaned closer to her desk and said in a low tone, "If the blinds weren't open I'd lean over and kiss you to death."

Sarah propped herself on her elbows and leaning still closer said, "Then I guess I'll have to leave them closed from now on."

John smiled and then looked over his shoulder. He didn't see anyone in the windows so he leaned back and gave Sarah a quick peck on her lips. As he pulled away he saw that Sarah had a dazzling smile. She told him, "I'm glad you did that. Now get out of here before I totally lose control and ravage you here and now."

"Ma'am, yes ma'am," John replied as he turned to leave.

As John left the office he didn't see Harm looking at him with a smile. Harm saw them share their quick kiss and surreptitiously moved to block anyone else from viewing. He was privy to Sarah and
John's affection toward each other as Sarah always told Diane about all the dates she and John went on.

Harm looked into Sarah's office and saw his sister-in-law with her head bent over concentrating on the work on her desk. As he looked closer he could see the ghost of a smile. He knew she was smiling because she was in love. He happily turned and made his way into his own office, two doors down from hers.

Thursday, April 10, 1997

1545 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah was lucky today. Her client, CPO Sharkey, went to court for his Article 32 hearing. After being confronted with John's evidence and witnesses he bent over to Sarah and said, "Make a deal."

"What kind of deal Sharkey?" Sarah asked, knowing the answer.

"A DEAL, deal," Sharkey whispered urgently.

Sarah refrained from smiling as she stood and said, "Your honor after being shown the evidence, my client wishes to change his plea to guilty on all charges."

The judge, Rear Admiral Anne Scotchel said, "Very well, this court is adjourned so that the defense and prosecution can work out a sentencing deal." She banged the gavel to close the proceedings.

Sarah and John wasted no time in sitting down in the conference room and worked out the deal over lunch they had brought in. Sarah only went across the Navy Yard parade ground to the brig and informed her client of his sentence. She returned to her office to finish signing off on the paperwork for that and other cases she had to close out.

She put her last case in her 'Out' box and began to secure her office. As she was doing so, Admiral Chegwidden stopped in her doorway. When Sarah saw him she snapped to attention.

"At ease major. I understand you're going to the state dinner for the Japanese Prime Minister tonight at the White House," AJ said in a knowing smirk.

"Ah yes sir I'm going with John. I'm really looking forward to going. I can practice my Japanese," Sarah said proudly. Then she thought again and asked, "Ah sir, how did you..?" Sarah began to ask.

AJ interrupted her to say, "When an invitee notifies the White House Social Staff who his 'plus one' coming with him is, they notify the Secret Service, who do a background check. They called me this morning. I waited till you and Mr. Marshall were done with your case before I came over to tell you the same thing I just told him."

"What's that sir?" Sarah asked.

"Have a good time and do us proud major," AJ said with a warm smile.

"Thank you sir we will," Sarah said with a relieved smile.

"Go on get out of here, I'm sure there is a lot you need to do," AJ said as he stood aside to let Sarah precede him out the door.

"Good night sir," Sarah said as she passed him on her way out.
Sarah watched the bubbles build up in her tub. When the water and the bubbles reached their desired level, she slipped off her robe and sighing with pleasure, sank into the silky perfumed water. Twenty minutes later, the water cooled and she rose from the tub. It was ages since she'd last enjoyed a long hot soak, and she promised herself to indulge more often.

During the last few weeks she'd thought over how much closer she and John were getting. She'd begun looking forward more and more to seeing him at the office and spending the evenings and weekends with him.

After she smoothed on her favorite body lotion she started getting dressed.

With a shiver of anticipation, Sarah slid into her lingerie, which consisted of a white silk corset with a full lacey cup bra with shoulder straps, matching panties and silk hose held up by garters attached to the bottom of the corset.

She pulled her Evening Dress Uniform out of its protective plastic bag and spread the different parts out on her bed. Sitting at her vanity in her lingerie she carefully applied her makeup and used a curling iron to add a few attractive waves to her hair, still keeping it to regulation. She wondered about John's reaction.

After she had her blouse and skirt and gleaming dress pumps on, she took the waist uniform coat, white gloves, her white cover and purse out to the living room and laid them on her couch.

As she smoothed her blouse and skirt and took one last look in the full length mirror on her hall closet door, the doorbell rang, right at 1815. With a deep breath, she went and opened the door.

Her heart raced at the sight of the man before her. John's own Evening Dress Uniform fit his physique to perfection. His SEAL Triton gleamed above his row of ribbons set nicely against the white of the waist coat. He had white gloves on with his cover under his arm.

"Hi," they both said at the same time and then laughed.

John pulled a dozen white long-stemmed roses from behind his back.

Sarah's eyes widened. "They're lovely. Thank you."

"You're welcome," he said and watched a blissful look grace her face as she buried her face in the creamy blooms. "You look great."

She flushed with pleasure. "Thanks. You look fantastic yourself. Let me get my coat, purse and cover."

John assisted Sarah into her uniform jacket. He stood back as she put on her gloves, looked in the mirror by her door and adjusted her cover on her head just right. After she locked her door, she linked her hand in his elbow as they made their way down to the street.

When they got down to the front of her building Sarah's jaw hit the floor. "You didn't!" she gasped at the sight of the gleaming black limo at the curb and the Secret Service agent dressed in a tuxedo standing by the open back door. He smiled as he said, "Good evening Major Mackenzie."
John smiled as he explained, "Well, I can't promise such transportation every time I might escort you somewhere, but Ann Marie said to show you the best. So she arranged for the Secret Service to help me out. At least you know the car is safe. Shall we?"

She nodded and slid into the limo, John right behind her. He kept a respectable distance from her, almost as if he were afraid to get too close.

"You didn't have to go to all this trouble," Sarah said.

"I know I didn't have to, but I wanted to, so please, just enjoy it," John replied with a smile.

"All right," Sarah said as she returned his smile with a brilliant one of her own.

As the limo pulled smoothly away from the curb, John reached across the seat and grasped Sarah's hand. Her smile lit up the dim interior of the car.

1830 Local Time
White House
Guest Entrance Queue

After Sarah and John went through the metal detector, they were met by President Bartlett's Social Secretary Joanne Montgomery.

"Major Mackenzie, Lt. Commander Marshall please follow me. The President has requested you join him in the residence," Joanne said primly.

Sarah kept her face neutral but her internal reaction was one of total fear. As they walked to the elevator she whispered to John, "I didn't know we would be going up to privately meet the President."

John shrugged as he whispered back, "Either did I."

Little did they know that Joanne overheard their whispered conversation. This was always the reaction to guests being unexpectedly asked to meet the President.

When they got off the elevator on the residence level, Joanne gave a high sign to President Bartlett. He and his wife Abby Bartlett were standing in a group that included Ann Marie and her husband Peter Mathews.

President Bartlett excused himself as saying, "There are my press secretary's brother and his date. Let me say hello privately and get them to calm down a little. They look a little awestruck."

The rest of the group chuckled as the Bartletts and Mathews separated themselves from the group and walked over to the threesome for a private greeting.

Joanne handled the introductions with, "Mr. President, Mrs. Bartlett may I introduce, Major Sarah Mackenzie and you already know Lt. Commander John Marshall."

Joanne smoothly walked away as President Bartlett held out his hand to firmly grasp Sarah's saying, "Major, I'm very pleased to meet you. Ann Marie has been telling Abby and I all about you."

"All good I hope, Mr. President," Sarah said in embarrassment.

"Well Ann Marie did say since John's met you she hasn't seen him stop smiling. I can see why, you
look lovely," Bartlett said.

Sarah smiled shyly as she blushed crimson at the compliment. She looked at Ann Marie who had the good grace to duck her head in her own embarrassment. She went to Sarah and gave her a kiss, "It's good to see you again Sarah."

Ann Marie's gown was a strapless silk sheath had fit her like a dream. The aquamarine color set her deep blue eyes off very nicely. The split on the right side ended just above her knee and the strappy sandals almost put her eye to eye with her brother.

When she turned to John she waved her hand dismissively at him and said, "I saw you this morning." She still gave him a sisterly kiss on his cheek. Peter leaned over and gave Sarah a kiss on her cheek, then shook John's hand.

Sarah managed to get out, "Thank you sir."

Bartlett shook John's hand saying, "John good to see you again."

"You to Mr. President," John replied.

Turning to Sarah he explained, "John worked on my campaign in 92 while he was waiting to see if he passed his physical review after his accident."

"Really, you never told me that," Sarah said.

"I don't usually bring it up in conversation," John said.

"Well he's just being modest. He wrote a few of my speeches when I spoke at some colleges. He has a gift for it. I suggested he should run for office," Bartlett proudly said.

Sarah turned to John totally surprised and asked, "What did you say to that?"

"I said I'd think about it after the Navy gets tired of me," John said.

"See just like a politician," Bartlett said with a laugh.

Bartlett led them back to the group and introduced Sarah and John to them.

On the way over Sarah whispered to him, "Do what I do." John knew what she meant and nodded in agreement.

The President started with, "Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, and Mrs. Kumiko Hashimoto, may I present Major Sarah Mackenzie, United States Marines and Lt. Commander John Marshall, United States Navy."

Sarah put her hands down on her side and bowed deeply in front of the Hashimotos. John followed suit.

"Konbanwa Hashimoto sans, Commander Marshall and I are much honored to meet you," Sarah said in perfect Japanese.

Mr. & Mrs. Hashimoto smiled as they bowed back and said in perfect English, "Good evening Major Mackenzie and Commander Marshall. The honor is ours."

Their smiles showed that they were delighted at Sarah's fluency in their language. They put their hands out which Sarah and John politely grasped.
"Major when did you learn our language," Mrs. Hashimoto asked.

"My first posting after I received my commission was in Okinawa. I was there for two years. I learned Japanese at a local school. Since leaving there I rarely get to use it, ma'am," Sarah said.

"Major Mackenzie has a gift for languages. I know of about four more she speaks fluently," John proudly offered.

"I hope you are sitting at our table. I believe we will have a wonderful conversation as I will let you indulge yourself," Mrs. Hashimoto said with a twinkle.

Sarah smiled in gratitude at that.

"As a matter of fact they are sitting at our table. I'll just have the place cards arranged so that you and the major can sit together," Bartlett said. He beckoned Joanne over and gave her those instructions.

After he did that Bartlett said, "Let us not forget our other guests. Major, Commander, you know two of your bosses, Secretary of the Navy Alexander Nelson and Mrs. Barbara Nelson," Bartlett said indicating a middle aged couple.

Secretary Nelson was of medium height with a pleasantly weathered face and a full head of dark hair shot through with gray. Mrs. Nelson was as tall as her husband. She had on a blue dress styled just right for a woman her age. She had a pretty face that looked like she laughed a lot.

"Major, Commander," Mr. & Mrs. Nelson said pleasantly shaking their hands.

"Good evening Mr. Secretary, Mrs. Nelson." Sarah and John said as they each shook his hand.

"You also know Admiral Percy Fitzwallace Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his wife Susan," President Bartlett said.

"Admiral, Mrs. Fitzwallace," Sarah and John each said shaking their hands.

Fitzwallace and his wife were African –American. He was as tall as John's 6'-3". He cut an imposing figure in his own Evening Dress Uniform with its decorations filling his chest. Mrs. Fitzwallace was a bit shorter than her husband. She wore a cream colored dress that was kept up on one shoulder.

"Admiral Jacob Grafton and Mrs. Callie Grafton," Bartlett went on.

Jake Grafton was a tall lean man with graying thinning hair combed straight back. His face was handsome with a square jaw, gray eyes and a nose that was a bit large. His Evening Dress Uniform was as impressive as Fitzwallace' was. Callie was not as tall as her husband with blonde hair. She wore a lime green halter gown that clung very well to her nice figure.

"Major, Commander," Mrs. Grafton said as John and Sarah shook hers and Admiral Grafton's hands.

"I'm pleased to meet you sir, ma'am," Sarah said shaking his hand and then Mrs. Grafton's.

"Please to meet you admiral, Mrs. Grafton," John said.

Grafton smiled as he said, "It's good to finally meet you Sarah. Your sister Diane will not stop talking about you. I'll never forget the smile on her face the day after your reunion."

"That was a very happy and surprising day for me as well sir," Sarah said smiling at the so far happiest day of her life.
"Yes I remember Ann Marie telling me about that," President Bartlett said.

Seeing the interested expressions on the faces of the others in the group, Sarah went on to explain, "Diane is my twin sister. We were separated at birth and reunited last month. Due to circumstances in my family, my mother realized she couldn't care for two of us so she gave Diane up for adoption. It was only after her adopted parents died that Diane was told about that in a letter that her adopted mother left for her. On my first day at JAG I met her husband, who also works there. The look on his face when he first saw me was priceless. Diane and I met for the first time that night."

"What a touching and happy story," Mrs. Fitzwallace said. She then asked, "Do you and John work together?"

"Yes ma'am we're partners stationed in the Navy Yard Office," Sarah replied.

Seeing the way John and Sarah were glancing at each other, Mrs. Grafton smiled as she commented, "It must be interesting when you find yourselves opposing each other."

John stepped in to answer that saying, "Yes ma'am it is. I have to add that when I oppose Sarah, I have to do that little bit of extra studying."

"Why's that commander?" Mrs. Hashimoto asked.

"Well ma'am Sarah is the best attorney we have. She knows the law better than anyone else I've known. She keeps me sharp as I have to make sure I have all my stuff squared away before I go into court," John offered sincerely.

If it was possible Sarah seemed to blush a deeper red than before. She did have enough of her composure to say, "Well Mrs. Grafton, Mrs. Hashimoto, don't let Mr. Marshall's false modesty fool you. That's just his way at keeping you off guard. I will say that John is the best I've come up against. He's got a better sense of organization than I do. You can land a Tomcat on his desk whereas mine looks like who did it and ran. Besides since I've known him, even when we are working together on the same side, he's always had his stuff squared away before he goes into court."

The rest of the group smiled at Sarah and John's mutual admiration of each other.

"How long have you known each?" Grafton asked them.

Ann Marie, Peter, Fitzwallace and even Nelsons smiled at the question.

Bartlett furnished the answer saying, "They were the two who retrieved the Declaration of Independence last January."

"Ah yes I remember now," Grafton said. He then asked, "Major when did you get your Bronze Star?"

"In Kosovo in 1994 sir," Sarah replied and then briefly explained the circumstances.

"Well with being in combat and retrieving the Declaration, no one can say you didn't earn your props," Grafton said in admiration.

Even Prime Minister and Mrs. Hashimoto were suitably impressed.

"Thank you sir," Sarah said gratefully.
They chatted for a while as Bartlett left them to speak with the others who were there before it was time for the dinner to begin.

Upon being reminded Sarah and John went back downstairs and were shown where their table was. As they were seated they found that besides President & Mrs. Bartlett and Prime Minister and Mrs. Hashimoto they were seated with Ann Marie and Pete, President Bartlett's Chief of Staff C.J. Cregg and her date and Admiral and Mrs. Fitzwallace.

After President Bartlett & Prime Minister Hashimoto did the ceremonial entrance and the toast, the dinner was under way.

Sarah was sitting on Mrs. Hashimoto's left with John on her left. They engaged in a lively conversation.

"So major what made you want to join the Marines?" Mrs. Hashimoto asked to break the ice.

"It's a family tradition. My father and Uncle Matt were Marines in Vietnam. I came up through OCS," Sarah replied. She knew that Japanese culture revered the father and Sarah was wise to mention her own father, even though he was a drunk who verbally abused her and generally regarded her as his 'no good tramp daughter' when she was a teenager.

"And you John what made you become a sailor?" Prime Minister Hashimoto asked.

"Well sir, growing up near the beach in New York, I always liked being out on the water and I wanted to serve my country. So the Navy seemed like a good choice for me," John explained.

"Do you have any family in the Navy John?" Mrs. Hashimoto asked.

"No ma'am, but my dad was in the Army in Germany during Korea," John replied.

The conversations continued until the entrees were served and consumed. Pretty soon the band switched from soft dining music to romantic dance music.

As he planned President Bartlett got up and said, "Mrs. Hashimoto would you like to have the first dance?"

"Yes Mr. President I would," Mrs. Hashimoto said as Bartlett pulled her chair out for her.

As they went out onto the dance floor, the Prime Minister asked and escorted Mrs. Bartlett out onto the dance floor as well.

Ann Marie nudged John and looked at Sarah before she too got up with Peter and walked out onto the dance floor.

Not being slow on the uptake, John smiled widely, turned to Sarah and asked," Major would you care to dance?"

"Why yes commander, that would be lovely," Sarah said smiling widely herself. The dance floor soon filled with other dancers.

As John held her close he whispered in her ear, "You know you're the prettiest lady here."

Sarah smiled, laid her head on John's chest, squeezed him a little tighter and sighed.

At that John became a little worried as he softly asked, "What's the matter?"
When Sarah picked her head up and looked John in the eye, he saw that her eyes were shimmering with unshed tears. Still smiling she told him, "That's the first time anyone has ever called me a lady."

John pulled her in a little tighter. Not caring who saw he bent and kissed her cheek saying, "Well someone should have done so sooner."

Sarah smiled at that as John happily twirled her around the dance floor.

When John kissed Sarah, they didn't know that Ann Marie as well as the President and Mrs. Hashimoto saw it. Bartlett and Ann Marie exchanged knowing smiles. They danced closer to each other and then switched partners.

As they danced around the floor Bartlett told Ann Marie, "I told Mrs. Hashimoto about the pool for your brother and the major. She wants in for $50.00."

"I'll put her in the book," Ann Marie said smartly. By the end of the night, Admirals Fitzwallace and Grafton along with their wives as well as Mr. & Mrs. Nelson added their own $50.00 bets into Ann Marie's little black book. They too saw the sweet exchange between Sarah and John.

The first song ended and the guests applauded. The band leader started a beat and then the very familiar first notes of Glen Miller's "In the Mood" were played.

At that Ann Marie ran all the way across the dance floor to where John was standing with Sarah. When she reached her brother, she grabbed his hand saying to Sarah, "Can I borrow him? Thanks!"

Before Sarah could reply Ann Marie pulled John out to middle of the dance floor. There they commenced to perform a swing dance so expertly that the other dancers on the floor gave them room. John twirled, flipped and dipped Ann Marie like they had done it so many times before.

During the song President Bartlett sidled up to Sarah. He looked at her and saw how she was smiling, enjoying the show. He said to her, "She does that with him at every party they attend together. I saw them do that her wedding and then at my first inaugural ball."

"I'm glad she took him out there. He was about to ask me and I didn't have the heart to tell him I didn't know how to dance like that," Sarah said happily.

The song ended with its classical crescendo and the guests erupted into applause at the band and the dancing exposition Ann Marie and John had put on.

The band stayed with Glen Miller and went right into "Moonlight Serenade". President Bartlett put his hand out to Sarah and asked, "Major would you mind?"

"Of course Mr. President, after you sir," Sarah replied as she graciously took his hand as he led her out to the dance floor.

Bartlett said to her, "So everything with John is going good?"

"Yes sir we work well together," Sarah said.

"I'm not talking about work Sarah," Bartlett said with a twinkle. He added "And don't worry about any fraternization charges being brought. Everyone in my office knows how his former girlfriend hurt him. Abby and I saw it happen. We are just as thrilled for you and John as Ann Marie is."

Sarah blushed at that and said, "Well sir now that the cat is out of the bag, at least with you, I will say that I think he's kind of special and I'm enjoying what we have and that we're going at a pace we're
That's good to hear Sarah," Bartlett said as they continued dancing.

At the same John was paired with Mrs. Hashimoto. She told him, "You and Sarah make a nice couple."

"Thank you ma'am, I think she's really special," John replied sincerely knowing he didn't have to hide anything with her.

"I'm glad for the two of you. It's always nice to see young love at the beginning," Mrs. Hashimoto said smiling.

"Thank you ma'am," John said.

The band segued into "As Time Goes By".

At the change of the song President Bartlett thanked Sarah. Before he could turn away, C.J. Cregg came up to him and whispered in his ear. Then he and C.J. walked quickly out of the room.

2115 Local Time

White House Situation Room

When President Bartlett entered the room he saw that SECNAV Nelson, Admirals Fitzwallace and Grafton were already there.

"What's going on ladies and gentlemen?" Bartlett asked as he moved to his chair at the head of the conference table.

Admiral Grafton took up the narrative, "Mr. President this evening Marines from the John Stennis were able to rescue Lt. Burnett, the pilot of the F-18 Hornet the Serbs shot down two days ago. Burnett's RIO, Lt. Stackhouse was not rescued because he was unable to walk away from his landing because of a badly injured leg, sustained in the ejection. Burnett told Admiral Reigart that Stackhouse, was killed by the Serbian army unit that shot them down, when they came upon him. Burnett was on a ridge overlooking where he left Stackhouse. He witnessed Stackhouse's murder."

Bartlett sighed in regret at the news.

Grafton continued, "While evading capture Burnett was able to get back to his chair and retrieve the CD with the photos that the plane's camera took on its reconnaissance run. Sir during his run Burnett stumbled onto a mass grave site. The location of the grave site is on the CD. It's evident Mr. President that the Serbs are engaging in ethnic cleansing again."

Bartlett sat back as he thought of what needed to be done next. He asked, "Are we good on the position we should take and what action we can ask NATO to initiate?"

"Sir we're on the phone with Admiral Chegwidden now. He will give you the legalese on how to proceed," Admiral Fitzwallace said.

Fitzwallace pressed the speaker button on the phone in front of him, "Admiral Chegwidden you're on the line with the President."

"AJ how do you think we need to proceed in Serbia?" Bartlett asked.

"Mr. President we should proceed with all possible haste to stave off any more killings," AJ said.
"I agree. Do you have our position in writing?" Bartlett asked.

"Not yet sir, I have not yet consulted with the officers who are going to write it," AJ said a little too cheekily Bartlett thought.

The light went on in his head as Bartlett asked, "Are those officers here in the White House as we speak?"

"Yes sir, Major Mackenzie and Lt. Commander Marshall are at your service whenever you need to get them," AJ said.

"Very well I'll send for them. I'll call you as soon as they enter the room," Bartlett said.

"I'll stand by for your call Mr. President," AJ confirmed as the line was disconnected.

Turning to the officer on duty, an Air Force Lieutenant, Bartlett said, "Lieutenant?"

"Denison sir." The Air Force Lieutenant answered.

"Lieutenant Denison, have Joanne Montgomery go into the dinner and ask Major Mackenzie and Lt. Commander Marshall to meet you to escort them down to here."

"Yes Mr. President," The lieutenant said before he left the room.

2140 Local Time

White House Situation Room

When Denison escorted Sarah and John into the room, President Bartlett said to them, "Major Commander, I'm sorry to pull you out of the party but we have a job for you. I have Admiral Chegwidden on the line so he can give you instructions." Bartlett pressed the button.

It was Sarah who answered, "Admiral Chegwidden Mr. Marshall and I are here sir."

Major, commander you both know of the Hornet that was shot down over Serbia two days ago?" AJ asked.

"Yes sir we do," John answered.

"Well while the pilot was evading capture from the Serbs, he stumbled onto a mass grave site. He was able to get back to his chair and retrieve the photographic proof. The Serbs also murdered his RIO. We need a position paper written that the President can take to Congress spelling out the legal reasons for pursuing the Serbs who, a-shot down the Hornet, b-murdered Lt. Stackhouse the RIO and c-perpetrated the mass executions. I want all the rules of engagement spelled out and the justification for any other related action the President deems necessary. You got all that?" AJ asked in conclusion.

It was Sarah, who was taking notes, who answered, "Yes sir, John and I understand what needs to be done. We'll get right on it."

Sarah looked at John sitting next to her. John nodded his understanding. He asked, "Sir how soon do you need this?"

"Let's say the next twenty minutes," AJ said with a challenging tone. He added with humor, "That should give you time to get back to the party."
"That long huh," John said accepting the challenge. Sarah poked her elbow in his side to remind to add the requisite "sir."

"Very well carry on," AJ said as he disconnected the call.

Sarah and John stood up. Sarah addressed President Bartlett, "Sir we need a computer so that we can write this paper."

"Lieutenant, show the major and the lt. commander where they can work!" Bartlett ordered Denison.

"Yes sir," Denison said as he led Sarah and John to a work station.

Soon Sarah and John were seated at a terminal with an adjacent printer. Sarah went to type as she was the fastest.

As Sarah started to compose the legalities, John was looking over her shoulder, adding his thoughts to her process. Denison stood by to get them whatever they needed. He was amused to hear as they worked they would voice the same thought at the same time.

Every now and then Sarah would pause long enough for her and John to audit what she wrote. John would offer his comments and opinions and Sarah would type them. Sometimes John would say, "Take that paragraph and put it ahead of this paragraph."

Soon they had a finished product. They printed it and walked back to the Situation Room.

They presented the 5 page paper to Admiral Grafton who gave it right to President Bartlett. After Bartlett read it over he said, "I'm surprised you got this much done in 20 minutes," he complimented them.

"Well Mr. President, we are used to this as we have to write some motions on the fly to meet short deadlines," Sarah said in reply.

"You realize this is a very thorough and cogent argument for going to war." Bartlett said.

"Yes sir we do," John replied for him and Sarah.

The President added, "While this details very well the reasons for taking the actions we need NATO to take, when you get back to JAG tomorrow, I will need you two to work some more on this. I need a little more meat to add to these bare bones so that I can present this to the congressional leadership."

"Understood sir, it will be the first thing we do early tomorrow morning," Sarah said for her and John.

"That's good to hear. Thank you for your time and a job well done. Now go on back upstairs, the party is still in full swing. If you're lucky you'll catch the staff doing the 'Electric Slide','" Bartlett said with a smile.

"Aye, aye sir!" Sarah and John said in unison before they turned and walked out.

2210 Local Time

White House Dining Room

As promised the party was still in full swing. The Hashimotos were still there. The Prime minister asked Sarah for a dance, while John just wanted to stand and watch his date have a good time.
While John was standing watching Sarah dance, C.J. Cregg came up to John and said, "The President said you and Sarah did a good job on the Serbian incident."

"Thank you, nothing like a quick deadline to get the creative juices flowing," John said wryly.

Yeah we get that a lot here," C.J. replied. Then as the next song began she asked, "How about a dance?"

"Don't mind if I do," John graciously replied taking her hand and leading her onto the dance floor. Sarah accepted a dance from Josh Lyman.

Eventually the band leader signaled, "Ladies and gentlemen, this next number will be the last song of the evening."

There were the usual groans of good natured protest as the band leader struck "Save the Last Dance" in a salsa style.

John and Sarah found each other and they danced and swayed to the Latin beat. As the song ended Ann Marie found them saying, "After the President and we say goodbye to all the guests I'll meet you in my office and we'll go home together."

"No problem," John said as he and Sarah went to get their covers and her purse. Just as the last official guest was put into their limo, the head waiter turned on the CD player. The first notes of 'Electric Slide' came over the speakers.

John and Sarah were just outside the dining room retrieving their covers from the table and when Ann Marie's assistant Carol Fitzpatrick pulled them back inside and onto the dance floor with the West Wing and the dinner staff in their celebratory signal of the end of the party. John and Sarah's smiles were bright as they performed the line dance. Eventually Ann Marie and Peter joined them.

Everything came to an end when the music stopped. The two couples walked to Ann Marie's office. While Ann Marie did some housekeeping, John, Peter and Sarah chatted outside in the bullpen with Carol.

Eventually Ann Marie came out and said, "Let's go hot stuff. It's been a long day and I'm beat."

"You won't get an argument from me," John said as he hooked Sarah's arm into his and walked out to their limousine.

2315 Local Time

Sarah's Apartment

Georgetown, NW

They arrived at Sarah's apartment first. While Ann Marie and Pete waited in the limousine John walked Sarah to her door.

After Sarah unlocked the door she turned to John and said, "I had a great time, even though we had to do some work."

"I was glad that I was with you," John replied taking her hand, brought it up to his lips and kissed the back.

"I'll see you tomorrow at 0800 so we can work on our assignment," Sarah said as she brought her
hand to caress John's cheek.

Before either of them said another word John cupped Sarah's face in his hands and brought his lips down to hers. They shared a long, intimate kiss goodnight.

When they broke apart John said, "Goodnight Sarah. I'll see you tomorrow." Then he turned and walked to the stairs.

At the top of the stair he turned and looked back. He was glad when he saw Sarah still standing in her doorway looking down the hall at him. They blew each other a kiss before Sarah went inside and locked her door and John went down the stairs.

Inside her apartment Sarah leaned back against the door and sighed happily. She gathered herself up and took off her pumps and carried them into her bedroom. After she took off her Evening Dress uniform and hung it up she went into the bathroom and washed her make-up off and brushed her teeth. She slipped on her bed clothes which consisted of a tee shirt and silk boxers. She got under covers and before she turned out the light she picked up her phone and dialed a familiar number. It rang a couple of times before it was answered.

"Hello Diane, I just had the most wonderful evening," Sarah said excitedly. Then Sarah proceeded to tell her sister all about it.
Sarah's and John's Legion of Merit approval came through. Ann Marie was so proud of him when she was told of the award. President Bartlett decided to give out the awards on Memorial Day. It was a great weekend. The President was very generous in offering to put up John's parents as guests in the White House, while his two brothers and their wives stayed in the Hilton.

Harm nervously played with his fingers as he watched the President walk up to the microphone to give his usual speech about why certain medals were awarded to someone standing on the stage behind him. Diane and Ann Marie, who were sitting on either side of him in the front row, each gave him a quick look to tell him that he was making everyone nervous by cracking his knuckles.

As Harm quickly apologized to them, Diane turned back to the stage and glanced at Sarah and John. Sarah was broadly smiling at her before the President started with his speech and she and John came to stand at full attention.


While Major Mackenzie agreed to allow herself to be taken in by Col. O'Hara's group in an attempt to peaceably negotiate the return of the Declaration, Lt. Commander Marshall did traverse 1 mile of desert, climb a mesa 300 feet in darkness in order to accomplish his part of the mission.

Lt. Commander Marshall did succeed in concealing himself from the militia group while Major Mackenzie continued her negotiations. While Major Mackenzie did indeed succeed in convincing her uncle to return the Declaration, he faced rebellion from inside his ranks.

After he saw that Major Mackenzie became a hostage, Lt. Commander Marshall did use his weapon to secure the safety & freedom of Major Mackenzie and Colonel O'Hara.

This mission was undertaken by the both of these officers and accomplished with total disregard for their personal safety and thus is in keeping with the highest tradition of the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps."

Diane's eyes sparkled with pride as she saw President Bartlett turn away from the microphone and took the medal he was handed out of the box.

Sarah's eyes were also sparkling as she removed her cover from her head and bowed in front of the President as he placed the medal around her neck. John's family was equally proud when the president did the same to John.

"Major Mackenzie, Lt. Commander Marshall, a grateful nation awards this honor for retrieving its
most treasured document and my personal thanks for a job well done go along with that."

"Thank you Sir" they both said.

The President had a light smile on his face as he shook hands with them both.

Sarah and John snapped off sharp salutes and noticed out of the corner of their eyes that Harm, Diane and the Admiral in the front row were saluting as well to their honor. The audience applauded. Ann Marie stuck her two fingers in her lips and unabashedly gave a whistle cheer. The President dismissed them with a sharp salute, and they returned to their seats.

The broad smile she gave Diane earlier was playing across her face again when she returned to her seat at the side of the stage. Like Harm, Sarah nervously started to play with her fingers, eager to get off stage as fast as she could.

After the ceremony was over and they finally walked off stage with the four other officers who were awarded medals, Diane immediately pulled Sarah into a hug while Ann Marie did the same for John. They endured more hugs and congratulations from their families.

After that John turned to Sarah and pulled her into a tight embrace. "The traditional kiss will have to wait till we're in private" he whispered into her ear, and Sarah chuckled slightly in return.

"Congratulations, Major, Commander," AJ uttered firmly and shook hands with her and John. "On behalf of the whole JAG Corps I must say that we are very proud of you both."

"Thank you, sir." They chorused.

"Mr. Marshall, where is the traditional kiss the Major deserves?"

John smiled at the Admiral before he turned to Sarah and lowered his head towards hers, waiting for the Admiral's usual 'gently, Officer' - which he didn't hear.

"To hell with it." he whispered shortly before his lips touched with Sarah's.

They both closed their eyes, and for the few seconds their kiss lasted, they didn't care about all the officers, families or anyone else standing around them and watching. Finally, John pulled back and rested his forehead against hers.

"I am so damn proud of you, Marine," he whispered, bringing a wide smile on her face.

"I'm proud of you too, sailor," whispered back.

During the kiss, the President joined the small group of JAG officers watching John and Sarah.

"Admiral, you have two fine officers there." he said and shook hands with AJ.

The rest of the day went by in a blur, with receptions in the White House and a party for the two back at JAG.

Right after the weekend Admiral Chegwidden assigned the "three musketeers" to separate cases, John to Pensacola to prosecute a murder case with Traci Manetti. Then Harm, Bud & Sarah went first out to California and the jinxed squadron then to the Seahawk on a sexual harassment case. Sarah and John didn't see each other for over a month.

Independence Day, 1997
2100 Local Time
Colonial Beach, Virginia

The sky was just about dark enough for the fireworks display to begin. Harm and Diane were snuggled up together on the next blanket while Sarah and John were sitting on the other.

"I'm so excited, Harm. I've heard that they put on one of the best shows here." Diane looked over at John and Sarah then she whispered in Harm's ear. "Of course, nothing can compare to the fireworks at our house," she said as she stroked the small swell of her baby. Diane was 6 months pregnant with her and Harm's first child. They suspected that it was a honeymoon baby as the timing was just right, for which they were proud and happy.

"You're right, Honey," as he placed a firm kiss on her lips. Harm placed his hand over hers and they rubbed her belly together.

John caught Sarah's tender expression as she watched her sister and brother in law and kissed her temple. They shared a grin that said, 'They're so cute together.' Just then, the first burst of color exploded in the sky, followed by the collective "ooh" of the spectators.

For the next forty-five minutes, John and Sarah sat quietly side by side and watched the brilliant display of light. All around them the crowds continued to ooh and ah as well as clap and cheer.

John watched Sarah watch the fireworks. She was content and relaxed, more relaxed than he'd seen her since his return from Florida. He was glad he could share in her enjoyment of what he found out was one of her favorite holidays.

During the last barrage of fireworks, hidden speakers began to play the Star Spangled Banner. As the anthem wound to a close, people all around them started gathering up their belongings for the trek to their cars and the drive home.

"Why don't we wait a while for the crowd to thin out," suggested Harm.

"We shouldn't wait too long, Harm. You know how tired I get about this time," Diane said as she continued to pack up the leftover food into the cooler.

After a while Diane looked over at Sarah and John and asked, "Are you guys ready?"

"Actually, I was thinking of staying for a while longer. That is if your sister doesn't object," said John.

She'd been quiet for the whole week before the holiday weekend and he wondered what was bothering her. He came to know when she was stressed about a case, whether they were working it together or not. Since she seemed so content tonight, he hoped to make it last just a little longer. He looked over at her in anticipation of her response.

"That's fine, John," she said with a nod.

"Oh, okay then. We'll see you guys Sunday at dinner," Diane said as she picked up the blanket and folded it while Harm grabbed the cooler.

Sarah got up and embraced Diane. "You bet we will"

Harm gave Sarah a peck on her cheek and John did the same with Diane. Harm & John shook hands. "Bye, Sarah, John," said Harm as he and Diane walked away toward the parking lot leaving John and Sarah alone on the beach.
Sarah sat back down next to John.

"So," John bumped Sarah's shoulder with his. "How have you been, Sarah? I haven't seen you in a month what with me down in Pensacola with Traci on that murder case for that whole time and you and Harm were out to California and then out at sea with for two cases in a row. How did they go?" He studied her as she gazed out over the water.

Sarah sighed and responded, "They were frustrating. I thought we were going to lose my brother-in-law both times. First out in California it was a jinxed squadron that had all those accidents. Harm got to fly, but a refueling boom smashed through his canopy causing broken Plexiglas to hit his eye. He's lucky he wasn't rendered blind.

And then that 'Crossing the Line' incident on the Seahawk really scared the crap out of me. Lt. Isaacs, who originally filed the sexual harassment allegation, was a total screw-up as a pilot. What were the initials Captain Boone put on her record? Oh yeah, D.N.K.H. for "Damn Near Killed Herself" and then Congresswoman DeLong shows up. What a total bitch. Isaacs should have never been allowed back into a cockpit. But because of DeLong, she was and it got her killed on a ramp strike. Harm was with the L.S.O.s and he leaped from the catwalk to catch Isaacs' RIO, Lt Hawks’ parachute before it fell into the ship's wake.

The only good thing that came from that trip was seeing Bud meet a pretty Ensign. They were so cute together. What was her name, Harriet Sims, I hope it blossoms into something.

What have you heard from Ann Marie? I know you told me she took leave from the White House." Sarah said changing the subject.

"Oh, she's fine. She's in New York. She's seeing a fertility specialist. Her and Peter are having trouble getting pregnant. She may want to try in vitro fertilization. The President was really generous giving her a leave so that she doesn't have to deal with the stress of answering the press' stupid questions about her.

Good luck to her and Peter," Sarah said quietly. "I didn't know she was having problems trying to have a baby. She never told me."

"Well you know she's the only girl among my two brothers and I and she was enjoying talking to another girl, she wanted to keep it happy and not burden you with her problems. Let her get to know you a little more and she'll open up."

"I like when we have our little talks. She tells me all about you" Sarah said with a smile.

"I could just imagine" John said as he settled Sarah into the V of his legs and embraced her close. He buried his nose in her hair. He loved the smell of the shampoo she used. Sarah clasped her arms above his and settled into him.

They were alone now. The waves broke softly along the shore. The darkness surrounded them. The stars twinkled in the inky expanse above them.

Sarah raised her face to the sky, closed her eyes, and inhaled the moist air. "I just love the beach."

After a short while, she slipped off her white sneakers and jumped up. "Come on, John, let's walk in the water." She held out her hand to him.

He couldn't see her face since there was little light. He grabbed her hand and she tugged him to a standing position. He slid his shoes off as well and they headed to the shore hand in hand.
"It's been awhile. I've missed you, John." Sarah said affectionately.

They walked in silence. No words were needed. They were a courting couple getting to know each other as they fell closer to love.

After they were walking for about twenty minutes they stopped for a minute and John pulled Sarah into a close embrace as they shared a kiss.

When they came up for air John whispered. "Maybe we should head back, it's getting late."

Sarah nodded and they turned and retraced their steps back down the beach to where they began. John grabbed the blanket while Sarah gathered up their shoes and they walked to the car.

John pulled up in front of Sarah's apartment building and she put a soft hand on his arm. "Thanks, John." She leaned over and placed a feather light kiss on his lips. "I needed this."

She unbuckled her seatbelt and was out of the car and up the front steps before he could say, "Anytime, Sarah, anytime."

He waited for the light to come on in her living room, assuring him of her safe entrance, before heading home.

He knew that if he had gone up, they would do something that they did not need to do now. They both agreed that they would wait until the timing was right before they made love for the first time. He did call her when he got home, just to hear her voice and to say goodnight. He swore he wouldn't wait very much longer to tell Sarah the true depths of his feelings.

August 1, 1997

1845 Local Time

John's house,

Florida Avenue, NW

After being apart for so long before the 4th of July, Sarah and John jumped right back into going on their dates. They were mostly on the weekends, usually Friday and Saturdays evenings. As was their practice, John would drop Sarah off at her apartment each night at the end of the date, where they would share a kiss at the door. When John got home, he would call Sarah and they'd spend another hour on the phone, making romantic plans.

During this week John sat second chair to Sarah as they defended Chief Petty Officer Connors in his murder trial. Connors was accused of shooting his fellow SEAL, Petty Officer First Class Mark Harridan during an operation on a freighter carrying illegal weapons off the coast of Libya. Harm was prosecuting as Bud sat as his second chair.

John enjoyed watching Sarah as she tried the case. He fondly remembered another case when they were on the same side as she was questioning a witness. Sarah rose slowly from her seat, John watching her every movement. He never got tired of watching her. She was so beautiful and the way she moved reminded him of a cat. Sarah started her line of questioning and John soon figured where she was heading and was once more amazed. He knew she was smart but she never failed to stun him.

She was standing in front of the witness stand, arms crossed and her deadly Marine glare on her face. She was tearing the witness apart and that SOB didn't deserve any better. He'd been lying all along
and Sarah was making it seem even worse with what she did to him. He saw the same thing as she progressed in this trial. It was during this time that he enjoyed sitting second chair to her.

During the trial John was standing in the hall with Sarah during a court recess when Harm mentioned the possibility of a ricocheting bullet striking Harridan. John told Sarah not to fall for that, telling her that it wasn't possible as the bullets the SEALs used were armor piercing, powerful enough to go through steel plate as well as the armored vest Harridan was wearing.

On the other hand he was not quick enough to prevent Harm from firing rounds into the ceiling. Harm was trying to ascertain whether or not Connors' weapon jammed maybe causing him to fire by accident. John sensed what Harm was trying to do and he stood up to object. But before he could get the words out, Harm cocked and fired the weapon into the ceiling. All the other persons in the courtroom ducked for cover, except John. He just stood there glaring at Harm. Admiral Morris called both sets of counselors into his chambers and ripped Harm a new one.

The trial came to an abrupt end when Connors revealed that Harridan intentionally jumped in front of Connors while he was shooting a terrorist.

Connors revealed in closed court that Harridan was HIV Positive and that he committed suicide when he stepped in front of Connors. They were able to keep Harridan's HIV status quiet in order for him to receive the Navy Cross for his actions that saved the rest of the SEAL Team and to give it posthumously his family.

It wasn't until John and Sarah finally confronted Chief Connors that he admitted the truth. They brought their finding to Admiral Morris and he agreed to the conclusion of the case and to drop the murder charges.

With the case being over, John invited her back to the house for a dinner of pizza.

As they were entering his now furnished living room, John said, "You know Sarah I would have liked to be a fly on the wall at the Rabbs when Diane laced into Harm. She must have flipped when she heard about his weapons demonstration."

Sarah could only chuckle as they hung their uniform jackets on the coat tree in the entrance foyer.

"Yeah she was really pissed. She called me at the office the next morning to give me a blow by blow. You know she's more pissed off knowing that he is going to lose money for the repairs. Let's face it, you do not need to rile up a woman who is a little over seven months pregnant."

She sat on the couch she helped pick out. John went to the phone and hit the speed dial to order their pizza. After he hung up a minute later, he poured them both some soda from his refrigerator. He carried them in to the living room and sat down on the couch, sliding her glass over in front of her on the coffee table. She sipped some then as she sank down on the cushions she slipped her pumps off, rubbing her aching toes.

"Put your feet up here," John offered, patting his leg as he moved a little closer to her.

"I'm okay – really. It just feels good to get…"

She broke off when he bent over and grasped her ankles, lifting her feet into his lap.

"John, you don't have to rub my feet. I'll be fine," she protested, pushing against the throw pillows behind her to stay upright, but still not pulling her feet away as John began his gentle massage.

As she settled back against the mound of throw pillows behind her. John shifted, pulling her feet
more fully into his lap. Sarah sighed deeply, feeling the tension of the day slide away from her. Several minutes later, she moved and did something that surprised John more than anything else could have. Sitting up suddenly, she swung her legs around to the floor and changed positions, laying her head on the hard muscles of his thigh.

Stunned, John remained where he was for the space of several heartbeats, his hands suspended in the air. Then slowly he lowered them. He took her left hand in his left and with his right he began to tenderly smooth his palm over her silky hair. She didn't say a word but shifted slightly to get more comfortable. The new position gave John an open chance to study her without her seeing him and he looked his fill. From the gentle flare of her hips, the nip of her waist, the length of leg she had curled up on the couch – a move which hiked her skirt up to mid-thigh.

John raised the hand he was holding to his lips and tenderly kissed the back. "Sarah, I need to tell you something."

Sarah opened her eyes, "Yes what is it?"

John continued stroking her hair, "I've fallen in love with you."

Sarah turned in his lap so that she was facing up at him. Smiling she said, "Really?"

"Yes really. I love you, Sarah. I don't want to sound like I'm giving you a lame line from a movie, and I want you to know that it's true; but I loved you from the first moment I saw you in the Rose Garden. I fell in love with you, Sarah, faster than I ever thought possible. That first case, in Arizona, it changed my life forever. You managed to break down every single wall I ever built around myself, and that didn't happen overnight."

As Sarah stared up at him, John continued, "Sarah, this is no joke. It took me this whole seven months of waiting to tell you because I wanted things to be right before I did tell you. I've really enjoyed this courtship and our dating, everything. Since I met you, I really look forward going to work every day knowing I'm going to see you, talk with you, be with you. That month I spent alone in Pensacola while you were with Harm was excruciating. Even though we e-mailed each other and talked on the phone the fact that I couldn't see your smiling face, hear your voice in person was hard on me. Hell even Traci saw that I was miserable. She was totally sweet, telling me every night to not forget to call you."

Sarah had to smile at that remembering her conversation with Traci in March.

She came out of her reverie as John continued, "When we go out on our dates, I feel like the luckiest guy in the world, knowing you're with me that you chose to be with me. I want the whole package with you Sarah, marriage, kids, grandkids, everything and it starts right now"

"Right now?" she whispered as a tear rolled down her face.

"Yes, Sarah, right now."

"Oh, John..." she couldn't say anything else as a sob escaped the confines of her throat and she pulled herself closer into his arms once again, pressing her cheek against his chest while her arms encircled his neck.

After she cried some happy tears Sarah pulled herself up to sit fully onto his lap and reached up with her right hand to caress his cheek and said happily, "I love you too, also since the Rose Garden." John was taken aback. She went on, "When you rounded the corner and first saw me, I saw the look on your face. It seemed to say 'At last!' right?"
"Yes you're right.

That brought more tears to her eyes. She buried her head in his shoulder as she sobbed some more.

"Shhh. Don't cry, honey, I hate to see you cry."

"John, these are happy tears," she said in between sobs

"I'm glad, Sarah. I am," he said softly as hugged her close.

He tenderly rubbed her back and neck. Several minutes later, she had regained her composure. Pulling away from him, she looked him in the eyes, with a serious expression on her face.

"I am really excited about us being together now"

Sensing something was coming he started, "but..."

"No, buts" she shook her head in disagreement. "Just that I'll have to get used to the fact that my boyfriend is not just a hot shot lawyer in the courtroom, but a SEAL and a Legion of Merit winner"

He opened his mouth to speak and she quickly declared to him "I'm very proud of you, you know? I think you're one of the bravest sailors in the Navy and possibly the best lawyer around. I mean that award shows that you're courageous. Do you know how much courage it took for you to just walk out into an unknown desert and climb a cliff that you never saw before and in the dark, just on my word. I mean you didn't know me from Eve, yet you put all your trust in me, based solely on what I told you. Also when I caught you staring at me while we drove there, I was thrilled when you said I was very pretty. No man ever said that to me without some hidden agenda or been that honest. I knew then that we could have something nice going for us."

The sincerity of her words brought tears to his eyes. She saw them and wiped away a few that escaped his eyes. She knew she needed him to understand. Before tonight her own pride kept her from showing him exactly what she thought of him before, but not anymore. He already opened his heart to her.

Sarah continued, "I still want lot of dates. I still want to show you off! John, do you have any idea how awesome this feels? To know I have the most amazing man on the planet all to myself?"

Sarah beamed and kissed him soundly. The need for air broke their connection and he smiled at her, hugging her tighter to him.

The significance of her statement was clear to him. She was proud of him. She didn't want him because he'd make her look good, like some women he knew growing up. She didn't want him because he was handsome. Actually, she didn't even know if he was good in bed yet, but she was still attracted to him. She wanted to get to know him, his virtues as well as his faults, and still she wanted to fall in love with him. He had a whole new reason to pray now, gratitude.

John laughed saying, "I want to show you off to. Don't forget you won the same medal. I always thought that the woman I fell in love with should be as smart as she is beautiful. Hell, I wouldn't even mind if she was smarter than me. Look at the languages you can speak and understand; Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Farsi, Arabic and even Hebrew. I know I would still be the luckiest man in the world to have her and to have her want me."

Sarah blushed. She always appreciated that John always went out of his way to say how pretty or beautiful or smart and capable she was whether they were alone, in public or in the office. Every time he did that, she fell deeper and deeper in love with him.
They shared another kiss. When they broke for air Sarah asked a question. "Well then now that we have had this talk, would you do one more thing?

"What's that?" John answered

"Make love with me?"

John was stunned, "There is nothing I want more than that. But I don't have any condoms. Unlike the legend, this sailor was not ready for that eventuality. I don't want an unplanned pregnancy to complicate things."

Sarah just laughed, "Don't worry about that. I'm on the pill."

John just smiled, "In that case, what are we waiting for?"

As if in answer, the doorbell rang with their pizza delivery.

Sarah disengaged herself from his lap. "Just put the Pizza on the table. I'll meet you in your room."

Sarah got her shoes and their jackets and went upstairs.

John paid and tipped the delivery boy and hurriedly put the pizza box in the kitchen. He took the time to wrap some foil and place some hand towels on top of the box to keep the pie warm. That done he went up the back stairs two at a time.

When he got to his room, he was greeted by the site of Sarah standing seductively at the foot of his turned down bed. She was clad in one of his white dress shirts. Her uniform skirt, blouse and stockings were in a pile on the dressing chair; topped by her black lace bra and panties. The shirt she wore was obviously way too large for her and it covered her to down below her hips. She looked incredibly sexy wearing it. She closed only the bottom two buttons closed across her hips, just barely covering that area. Buttoned that way he only had a small glimpse of her attributes. He loved the way that the shirt was only opened enough to cover her nipples, allowing him to admire her ample cleavage and her navel ring.

Her eyes closed half way as she seductively said, "One of us is over dressed. Strip down sailor, NOW."

John lost no time in complying with her command as he stripped down to his boxer briefs.

He embraced and thoroughly kissed her. She in turn pulled him closer. As she raked her nails down his back, he sucked in a sharp breath. Gradually she became aware of the growing hardness pressing against her stomach, and she smiled against his lips. "I always wondered if I could do that to you," she murmured, and he smiled back.

"Sarah, you have no idea." John breathed into her ear.

He turned her around to stand behind her and positioned her facing the mirror that hung over the low dresser. She closed her eyes, and wrapped her arms backwards around them both. She could still feel his arousal against her back as he held her in close contact with one arm around her waist. He slid his other hand up, stroking one breast under the fabric of her shirt. She shivered as she felt her nipple harden in her own arousal.

He watched her face in the mirror as she came undone under his ministrations. He loved the look on her face as she held her head back and he nuzzled her neck and nipped at her ear lobe and whispered, "Go easy on me, Marine. It's been a lot longer than I like to admit."
"You and me both, sailor – ohh…” The dresser came to her rescue as she placed her palms flat on top as the hand around her waist snaked down her belly to find the soft curls below. "Damn, you're sneaky."

"Well, I – " Whatever response he might have made was lost in a low groan as she reached behind her and between them to stroke him with long, precise motions. "God, Mac…"

"Oh, I'm Mac now, am I?"

He didn't reply but turned her around so that she was up against the dresser and flicking open the closed buttons of the shirt and went to work on her. As he proceeded to give her pleasure, her vision faded to gray, but she managed to gather enough brain function to shove the briefs down enough so that he could wiggle them down to the floor and step out of them.

'Oh my God, he really is gorgeous from head to toe. I must be dreaming this.'

As he continued his oral examination of her she leaned back onto the dresser with her arms stiff, holding her up and her head thrown back in ecstasy. She shivered as he, cupped the heavy weight of one breast in his palm, pushing it gently up and kissed it on its underside. He repeated the process on the other breast. He then kissed down her cleavage and settled at her navel ring. He took it in his mouth and gently sucked on it, feeling her quiver beneath his fingers, it occurred to him that there was nothing more stunningly beautiful and arousing than hearing those little gasps in the back of her throat. He looked up and saw her looking down at him with smoky eyes and flushed cheeks and a small grin.

Kneeling down in front of her, as she stood braced against the dresser he buried his head between the warmth of her thighs. He loved the taste of her, the smell of her. It was overwhelming him, and he wanted to make it last as long as possible. He could feel as she came close to climax. He backed off and kissed up her belly as she shook her head no. He resisted her as she tried to push his head back to where she wanted it. When she settled down again, he went back where she wanted him and worked on her until she was close again and then he backed off.

Sarah finally realized what he was doing and stopped trying to force him back whenever he stopped to let her catch her breath. But she reached her limit on the 5th time around. She managed to gasp, "Bed, now," as she pulled him there. She flopped onto the bed with her legs dangling over the side as she lay down crossways.

John resumed his ministrations of her. Sarah gasped loudly, sliding her hands down to his head and entangling her fingers in his hair. Soon he was rewarded with a sharp cry as he found her most sensitive spot. Her own willpower crumbled in the face of the fire coursing through her blood. "Oh God," she called out, bucking her hips up against him. He felt her hands slide away from his head and he lifted his gaze up long enough to see her reach out and clutch at the sheets with her fists, clenching and unclenching as she writhed and moaned in pleasure.

At that moment he wanted nothing in the world more than to see her come apart under his touch. With that in mind, he redoubled his efforts. He put her legs over his shoulders so that her knees draped down his back. He then took hold of her and lifted her off the bed, and brought his mouth back to her.

He began to give her pleasure more energetically. It only took a minute for him to feel the rhythmic clenching of her thighs around his head, as she pushed herself into his face. Not letting up for a minute, he continued to bring her to her climax.

At that moment she called out his name, "Oh John!" Her entire body started to shiver, her back
arched in spasms, her legs crossed at his back and her knees pounded his shoulders as the force of her orgasm hit then washed over her. He stayed between her legs wanting to prolong her climax for as long as he could. It wasn't until her body relaxed and the tremors eased that he pulled away completely, moving up to lie beside her.

"You are so beautiful," John whispered reverently as he reached out and gently brushed a lock of sweat-dampened hair from her forehead.

She smiled softly, her eyes still hazy with passion. Lifting her arms up, she locked them around his neck and pulled him down and kissed him. Sliding her arms down to grip his shoulders, she began trailing kisses along his jaw line. She made her way to his earlobe and began to nibble gently, before placing her lips against his ear.

"My turn," Sarah murmured, in what he determined was the sexiest voice he had ever heard.

Before he could think of a response, she flipped them over so that they repositioned themselves fully on the bed with him underneath her and she was straddling his waist. Flashing a wicked little grin, Sarah began an exploration of her own.

John fought desperately for control. He wanted to remember everything about their first time together, every touch, every smell, and every taste. But as soon as he felt Sarah's lips gliding over his chest, he knew that it was a hopeless battle; the sensations she was creating in him were so powerful that he was helpless to do anything but let them sweep him away. Her lips latched onto his nipples, lavishing them with the same attention he gave hers, while she raked her nails gently across his abdomen. She was everywhere, invading his senses completely. All that mattered was that he was there, and he was hers, in every way.

Her caresses of his body stopped abruptly, and his eyes shot open in dismay as he watched her lift herself off of him. He opened his mouth to protest, but all he could get out was a strangled moan as he felt her place delicate kisses on each patch of skin. Each patch, that is, except the one that he most wanted to feel her mouth on. That particular area was deliberately avoided as she made her way down his legs. She pressed a small kiss onto each one of his toes, John's body was on fire and he was ready to explode. It took all his strength to keep from flipping her over and entering her until he found his release. He wanted to give her equal time to play. Still, he thought as he watched her peruse his body with a predatory gaze, if she didn't do something more than look soon, he wasn't going to be responsible for his actions.

"Sarah," he groaned, drawing her gaze to his face. ""Sarah," he begged, his voice nearly hoarse, "Please."

Sarah looked at him with an expression that was a curious mixture of tenderness and lust. She crawled her way back up his body and smiled.

"Well, since you asked so nicely," she said, just before she wrapped her mouth around him.

Any last coherent thoughts he might have been clinging to, fled from his mind as Sarah began her ministrations. And although a part of him wanted to let her finish this, the larger part wanted the first time he came to be inside her. With that in mind, he slid his hands down and gently pushed at her shoulders.

Sensing the question in his eyes, she smiled up at him, and Sarah understood what he was trying to do immediately, and pulled her mouth away with an audible pop. Licking her lips slowly, she moved up his body once again. She brought her face to his, engaging him in a long, sensual kiss as she slowly eased herself down onto him. He was inside her with a kind of ease that surprised them both.
She took her time, letting her body adjust to the invasion, moaning when she finally felt the entire length of him fill her. Leaning up, she braced her hands against his chest and began to rock slowly back and forth. John let her set the pace at first, wanting to make sure she was comfortable, but his own need soon took over. Sliding his hands to her hips, he squeezed hard and thrust his hips up to meet hers. Sarah groaned low in her throat, pushing off of his chest.

There would be a time for slow, languishing, tantalizing love later. Right now, this wasn't it. This was an urgent need, a desperate affirmation of something that was burning for months. The waiting had made it very intense.

As she rocked harder and harder against him, nearing her release, she held her head back in pleasure and picked up the pace as she moved fast and hard, her breasts bouncing with each thrust. Feeling his climax coiling inside him, he slipped one hand off of her hip and began to stroke on her hypersensitive clitoris, wanting to take her with him when he came.

She gasped loudly the moment his fingers made contact, "Ohh, God, John, oh, please…” A brilliant, searing oblivion flooded through her, and the strangled sound that escaped her couldn't even be recognized. Falling forward on her hands and knees as she slammed her lower body against his she let out a small shriek as she came again.

The first sensation of her muscles contracting tightly around him sent him tumbling over the edge as well as he felt his own climax overtake him. Letting out a harsh groan, he pressed her down onto him as he came along with her. She all but collapsed on top of him against his chest as every last drop of energy drained out of their bodies in that instant. They lay there together for a measureless time, the workings of her internal clock too much for her overloaded brain to process.

"Wow, I didn't know it could feel so good," she said finally, breaking the silence and rolling off to lie beside him. John echoed her feeling as he let his gaze run up and down her lithe body.

"Yeah, I almost don't believe we just did that." He pushed himself up onto one side, a sheen of sweat still visible on his skin. "Do you regret it?"

"Are you kidding, no way."

"Me either."

He pushed himself up on an elbow so that he could gaze down her body some more. She did not take off the shirt during their lovemaking and he said,

"You know, I'll never be able to wear that shirt again."

Sarah just laughed. "It looked like an old one” as she moved to take it off.

John stopped her, "Leave it on. You just look so damn sexy in it." She snuggled up against him, leaned up and gave him a long sweet kiss.

They broke apart and he flashed a grin, but soon he was serious. He positioned himself so that they were once again eye-to-eye before he said, "You know when I said before that it was a long time for me, I really meant it. You are only the second woman I have ever made love to. The first one was my girlfriend that I knew from college, the one I told you about before who didn't like that I was in the Navy. I'm very glad that I waited for you."

She smiled as she tenderly cupped his cheek and replied, "I glad I waited for you to. I haven't been with another guy since my first and only time when I was 16. I don't remember much because I was drunk at the time. I only remember waking up alone with a pain in my groin and blood on the sheet.
According to Eddie it was Chris Ragle. I'm glad he went away and got arrested. I just shutter at having any kind of relationship with him if he made me pregnant. After that I started taking birth control pills. They also helped to regulate my period."

"I'm sorry your first time making love was so bad for you," John said as he wrapped his arms around her.

"My first time wasn't bad at all," Sarah said impishly.

John looked down at her with a cocked eyebrow and commented, "But you just said you were drunk and..." 

Sarah silenced him with a finger to his lips. "You are the first man with whom I made love. When I lost my virginity, it was just sex. You are a great lover. You were very generous and tender, letting me be comfortable and satisfied. You made me feel like a real woman."

John smiled and took her deeper into his arms and laid a deep kiss on her. When they came up for air, they settled into a comfortable embrace. They lay still for a while, enjoying each other's contact.

John felt the need to speak up, "You know if we're going to make this work, we're going to have to make some decisions, about JAG and stuff," he added.

"I guess we do." She lifted an eyebrow and asked, "What you said before about 'the whole package, marriage to grandkids' was that a proposal?"

"Not yet. I really want to enjoy this next phase of our relationship before we take that step. Please don't get me wrong, I am no commitment phoebe."

Sarah smiled at that.

"But because of the UCMJ we need to be very careful. First we need to tell the admiral how we feel about each other, just so we don't get accused of anything improper. That is if he hasn't already figured it out yet. I mean we owe it to him, don't you think?"

"I agree that we should. That ought to be fun. I guess we've got the whole weekend to determine a plan of attack. We do need to do this right. That way we don't have anything between us."

"Let's let the admiral know, together on Monday. He might turn around and say, 'I don't see a ring'. I mean, we've been working and dating for quite some time. It never affected our work, even when we opposed each other in court."

Sarah smiled as she remembered their legal sparring times.

"Also you know as well as I do that the military is fickle. It wants us to do well where we are and then when it sees how well we're doing, it uproots us to do well elsewhere. I promise you that wherever we get sent, I'll always love you Sarah. Knowing now that you love me it makes it easier to deal with the admiral and what his reaction could be. Do you agree?"

"I agree and I also want you to know that whenever the Navy or Marines separates us, duty wise, I will always love you to. As long as I know that, it will make it easier when we are apart."

Sarah then gave him a meaningful glare and seductively said, "Until then we have all weekend. Let's see if you're up for more fun?"

He gasped as she reached for him.
Moving closer to his ear she whispered, "I can feel that you are. Lie back and let me take over".

Sarah then gave him another searing kiss. He had no idea how long they stayed in that position, their lips locked together, her hand wrapped around his erection with their bodies pressed as close as possible. Sarah probably knew, but he wasn't about to ask, she just kept moving her hand, gently stroking him as he got hard again. After they broke their kiss she pushed him back to lie against the pillows.

"Now I'll show you how good I can be," Sarah said provocatively.

At that he readily gave himself over to her. John watched her eyes as she perused his bare chest with an appreciative eye as he stayed perfectly still, wanting to see what her next move would be. He wasn't disappointed. Sarah began kissing her way down his chest, letting her hands roam again over his chest and abdomen. When she reached his nipples, she tried a different technique than before as she ran her tongue across one while raking her nails lightly over the other. The sudden burst of pleasure took him by surprise, and he bucked his hips uncontrollably. He groaned as he let her continue.

Sarah flashed him a wicked little grin as she leaned up, still running her nails lightly over his chest. Slowly, she began to crawl backwards until she was straddling his knees. She ran her fingers idly across the skin of his abdomen, no other part of her body touching his. He was totally at her disposal, enjoying everything she was doing. Even so he knew what she was doing and wanted her to get to what she had in mind.

"Sarah, I can't take it anymore, please," he groaned.

She raised an eyebrow at him, and he thought he was going to have to start doing some serious begging, when she took pity on him. John moaned when she licked her lips hungrily and fixed her gaze at where he wanted her most. Before he could prepare himself, he felt her warm wet mouth engulfing him again.

'Ooh man, she is good at this,' he thought as she again swirled her tongue around caressing him, the sensations were so overwhelming. It took all of his self-control not to wrap his fingers in her hair to control her. He wanted to leave her in complete control. He reached up and grabbed hold of the head board. He let what she was doing to him completely take over his consciousness. He wanted to hold his climax off to make what she was doing to him last as long as possible.

"Oh Sarah, this feels so good, don't stop." John managed to gasp out.

Sarah looked up at him with smiling eyes as she continued. She loved how he just put his head back to enjoy what she was doing to him. It wasn't long before she felt that he was getting very close. She closed her eyes in exquisite pleasure as she took him over the edge. His eyes closed as he breathlessly called out her name. She gladly accepted and swallowed all the reward for herself. She released him and got up and to use the bathroom. She came back to find John lying almost insensate.

Sarah lay down next to him.

It took him a moment to come back down to earth, and when he did, he saw that Sarah was lying next to him with her head propped on her elbow smiling down at him affectionately. Summoning up what little strength he had left, he reached up and pulled her to him, settling her at his side. She pulled the bed covers with her and immediately curled up against him under them, draping an arm across his chest.

They lay there for an indeterminate amount of time, quietly enjoying the feel of their embrace. Sarah moved first when she went to move off of him. But John stopped her as he wrapped his arms tightly
around her and pressed her against his chest.

"Don't go," he murmured a hint of pleading in his voice. Lifting her head, she smiled at him with tear-filled eyes. Pressing a kiss to his lips, and then to his chest, she lay her head back down and snuggled further into his warm embrace.

"I'm not going anywhere, 'hot stuff," she answered firmly, using his sister's nickname for him, and he could hear the joy and contentment in her voice. "Not without you."

"You can call me that any time you want. I like the way you say it better," he told her. There was another long kiss as their hands explored each other.

As they broke the kiss Sarah sniffled and rubbed her face against his chest, causing him to laugh lightly, but still concerned enough to ask, "Are you okay?"

"John, I..." she began, pressing her head to his chest and locking her arms even more tightly around him, digging her fingertips into the skin of his side.

John waited.

"I feel, very," she continued. "Very warm, very cherished, very protected and very..." She paused and buried her head more deeply in his chest.

"What?" asked John.

"Loved," she mumbled her voice almost inaudible.

"Excuse me?"

"Loved," she almost shouted. "Okay, happy now?"

"Very," he grinned. A sense of peace and contentment washed over him at her words. For the first time in his life, he was truly and completely happy. And it was all because of the amazing woman in his arms. He was glad she had her head turned to the side so that she couldn't see the big, dopey grin he was helpless to wipe from his face.

Giving her a quick tight squeeze, he whispered sincerely, "I'm not going anywhere either, Sarah. Not ever. I promise."

"So I guess we're stuck with each other," she responded sleepily. He laughed.

"I guess so."

"Good," she murmured happily, and promptly fell asleep. John reached out and grabbed the edge of the comforter pulling it further up to cover them both. Bending his head, he pressed his lips to her hair.

"Better than good, perfect," he whispered, before leaning his head back down. He closed his eyes and let sleep overtake him, secure in the knowledge that when he woke up, she would be there waiting.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 8

Monday, August 4, 1997

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After Friday night's initial festivities they slept until about 11:00 PM. Then they got up and showered together without making love, they didn't have the energy. They dressed only in bathrobes as they reheated the pizza and had a late dinner. Thankfully Ann Marie didn't come home that night as she was on a campaign trip with the president that weekend.

Then they went back to bed and slept in till 0900 Saturday morning. They made love again before they got out of bed to face the rest of the weekend. They decided that they would keep some personal items at each other's homes and they spent Saturday morning and early afternoon doing that.

After going to church at 5:00 Mass at St. Thomas, Apostle, they had a nice dinner at Sarah's apartment. They spent the night there as Ann Marie came home late Saturday afternoon and wanted to spend that night with her husband at the townhouse.

They spent the whole of Sunday morning and early afternoon in bed as they made love numerous times.

They only parted to go home after they laid out a plan as to how to tell the admiral of their romance when they met him the next day.

Upon arriving at headquarters, they met in Sarah's office. Then they marched across the bullpen. They correctly resisted the urge to hold hands. They stopped outside the admiral's office and asked Tiner if the admiral could see them. When the admiral asked them to come in, they stood at attention in front of his desk.

They agreed that Sarah would start. "Sir, Lt. Commander Marshall and I have something that we need to notify you about."

"What is the nature of this notification?"

John took up the verbal baton, "It's of a personal nature sir."

AJ could only guess as he smirked at them. "At ease and have a seat."

They both sat down.

John continued, "Sir, Major Mackenzie and I have begun seeing each other romantically and we felt we need to inform you of this change in our relationship. We discussed this over the weekend and we felt that this would not affect any part of our working relationship.

Sarah continued, "At the moment sir, we have no plans to get married. We would like to enjoy our careers and our courtship. We both understand that the Navy and Marines may have different plans for us down the road and we would ask that when or if our assignments do change, could you please
tells us together?"

AJ just smiled, "As your commanding officer, I appreciate your coming forward to tell me this. I've been watching the two of you as you worked. You two are both very capable attorneys and investigators. I have received very favorable comments from various people of your job performances. I have seen that in the office and in court you both interact appropriately with each other and your work performance has not suffered. In fact I have never seen a pair of officers more respectful of each other as you two. Even in light of this new wrinkle in your relationship, I'm very proud to have the two of you on my staff. Since you are both the same rank, not each other's supervisors and not on board the same ship, the regulations don't apply to how you spend your private time. So as your boss I have no problem with the two of you continuing to stay as partners, as long as you two don't end up at each other's throats – "

"Definitely not, sir." Sarah & John chorused.

"– and you keep it the hell out of the office"

"Yes Sir," they chorused again.

"-I do not need to know any more about it. For the time being we'll keep this between us until it becomes impossible to hide, like when a diamond appears on her finger. I only ask Commander," as he looked at John, "that you first inform me of that eventuality."

John stuck his tongue firmly in his cheek as he said, "Then that would make Sarah the third to know, -sir."

Sarah couldn't stop from snorting a laugh. AJ just grinned at that. John was relieved that the admiral saw the humor in his statement.

He got up and went around his desk to shake their hands. "As your friend I am very happy for you. This is not the first time two people who work together have fallen in love with each other. I will always be available to help you deal with anything else, personally and professionally, as it comes along, so good luck. Dismissed"

"Aye Sir and thank you sir." They both exited AJ's office with a sigh of relief.

AJ for his part sat back down behind his desk and pulled out their SRBs (Service Record Books). Before today he was looking into advancing their careers. He already had an inkling of their romance before they notified him. He saw how they reacted to each other when they first met in the Rose Garden and then their kiss in that same Rose Garden when they both received the Legion of Merit. Also every now and then as he was out and about on his personal time he would run into them or see them from a distance as they walked together. He was amused that they were holding hands not knowing that he saw them. Whenever he saw them from a distance, he didn't feel he needed to disturb them. It was only when they couldn't avoid meeting him that they greeted each other. Despite that he could also see that they went out of their way to keep things professional at the office, even when they opposed each other in court. He was grateful as well for that. At the same time he was happy for them. He figured that sooner or later he would have to break them up professionally if they decided to get married, but he would cross that bridge when he got to it. Until then he would let things between them develop on their own and he would keep his plans for them in the back of his mind.

Friday, August 8, 1997

1430 Local Time
Heathrow Airport

John and Sarah were sitting in the British Airways first class lounge along with Lt. Linda Nevins, USN. She was holding her baby boy, Jimmy. Lt. Nevins was reciting an Irish poem to him. John recognized it as the Irish freedom song "A Nation Once Again". He thought back on the case they just concluded.

Just two days after John and Sarah 'notified' the admiral of their courtship, he sent them to Belfast, Northern Ireland, to negotiate the release of Lt. Nevins' baby, which was - according to her - kidnapped by Lorcan Barnes, the baby's father and a known IRA terrorist.

After dealing with the overly hostile Insp. Hutchinson of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, John left Sarah behind as a liaison with the R.U.C., to set out on his own to find Barnes. When he eventually met Barnes he found out that he wasn't the culprit at all. It all came out that Hutchinson kidnapped the baby himself to use him as well as Sarah & John to capture Barnes.

Sarah for her part was receiving secret messages from I.R.A. operatives in the R.U.C. She set out on her own to a known IRA Pub and was given information on how she could contact Barnes. She also managed to shake her R.U.C. followers and rendezvous with John & Barnes.

Only by working with Barnes' IRA Unit and a spectacular bluff on the streets of Belfast saved them as they rescued Jimmy from the rogue R.U.C. contingent just before they were about to kill the baby. They just barely beat Hutchinson to the US Consulate in Belfast and handed Jimmy over to Lt. Nevins.

John phoned Admiral Chegwidden from the consulate to let him know of the happy conclusion. AJ told him that he heard that the State Department was having a field day roasting the R.U.C. over the coals.

In the lounge Sarah turned and looked at John. He had a goofy tender look on his face. "Half penny for your thoughts guv,nor" Sarah said in a very bad Cockney accent.

John turned and looked aghast at her, "Eliza Doolittle you're not" he said with a smile.

She answered after she stuck her tongue at him. "I just was wondering what was running through that brain of yours."

"I'm just imagining you holding our baby like that," he said quietly.

Sarah was struck by his tenderness. She was thinking the same thing. "Don't worry, our time will come" she whispered just as tenderly in his ear and kissed his temple.

He took her hand in his and raised it to his lips and gave it a tender kiss.

Lt. Nevins smiled. She heard some of their exchange. From where she sat she could see that they were in love.

Monday, August 11, 1997

To

Friday, August 15, 1997

Earlier in the day on Monday, John was sent to the White House for a week in the ongoing rotation of Navy Officers working on the Situation Room Staff. President Bartlett specifically requested John
as he was a known quantity to him and he could be trusted to give a dispassionate briefing when asked.

Being that John was stuck in the White House, AJ sent Sarah and Harm down to Columbia to investigate why an operation to capture a Colombian Drug Lord failed. The affair was made complicated by mistrust on Clayton Webb's part and his failure to capture the drug lord, Carlos Estruga, got a marine, Sgt. Jesus Silva killed, as they seemed to walk into a trap. Webb was blaming the failure of the operation on a Marine Corporal Cordoba who failed to fire his weapon. Webb was demanding the court martial of the corporal.

Estruga even fooled Webb, when Harm & Sarah planned an operation to rescue Sgt. Silva. Harm & Bud went to meet Estruga at an appointed rendezvous. But Estruga wasn't there, only the body of Silva and a videotaped message. It also resulted in Webb going off the ranch as he left the embassy and got himself captured by Estruga.

Harm and Sarah mounted another operation that resulted in not only rescuing Webb and capturing Estruga, but uncovering traitors in Ambassador Witherspoon's secretary Marisol and Columbian Police Inspector Rincon.

Estruga wanted to trade Webb for his jailed brother Norberto. During the operation Harm was captured (in his plan) and taken to Estruga. While he and Harm played the game of "go" Harm claimed that Rincon turned "triple agent."

Sarah, with others including Cordoba, followed Rincon to Webb. They ran out of gas due to a failure to check the gauge and had to run the remaining miles. Estruga believed Harm's ruse and flew to where Webb was being held. Just as Rincon was convincing Estruga that Harm lied, Sarah arrived with her troops. Estruga took off with Harm in the helicopter. But Harm kicked Estruga out of the helicopter and Cordoba shot several terrorists from all around the petrified Webb without hitting him. Harm and Sarah captured Estruga and Rincon after they ran into a cane field.

Webb said he was relieved that they decided to trade Norberto for him.

Harm couldn't resist getting in a dig and told him, "You weren't being traded. Norberto is still in prison. State said you weren't worth it."

Before the rescue operation a funny encounter occurred between Sarah and Harm. As they were preparing to rescue Webb, she entered Harm's room as he was putting his dress whites on. She stopped to chat about their plans for the operation. He said the usual comment of, "You know what they say about gold wings on dress whites?"

Sarah had smiled and gone over to him, cupped both his cheeks and said, "I prefer a gold SEAL's Triton on dress whites myself. Save the gold wings for my sister."

Saturday, August 16, 1997

1130 Local time

Over the Appalachian Mountains

Harm promised that he would take Sarah and Diane flying in his Stearman to celebrate their birthday on the following Saturday. John & Sarah met at the Rabbs in Alexandria. The four of them, with a loaded picnic basket, set off in John's Caprice for the Blacksburg Municipal Airport in Blacksburg, VA where Harm rented hanger space to store the Stearman. John let Harm drive, as it was easier than giving directions. When they got to the airport Harm first took John up for 30 minutes while
Sarah & Diane prepared lunch at a picnic table outside the hanger.

When Harm & John landed it was Diane's turn. Harm did some aerobatic maneuvers with John, but since Diane was 7 &½ months pregnant, he took it easy on her for the 30 minute flight. He knew this would be the last time he took her flying until after she had their baby. Their flight was more of the sightseeing of the beautiful mountains.

When he landed, it was finally Sarah's turn. They went up and followed the same flight plan as when he flew with John. Harm did some aerobatic maneuvers for Sarah and even let her take the stick and do a roll. Harm let the Stearman dive a little and then took the stick.

About 15 minutes into the flight, the engine began to sputter.

"What's wrong?" asked Sarah in distress.

"I don't know.",

"Can we make it back to the field?"

"No, we have to set her down."

They flew over one small field and Sarah asked, "What about there?"

"Too small."

As they topped another ridge, Harm saw a suitable field.

"Come on Sarah!" said Harm as they glided in for a landing

He was able to land safely. When he went to examine the engine, he found that a fuel line was ruptured. Harm knew it could not be repaired but replaced.

As they climbed from the plane, Sarah turned to Harm and asked, "You really must have been scared. Why did you call out my name?"

"I wasn't calling you. I was talking to the plane. I named it Sarah."

Sarah looked a little confused but then asked, "Do you have binoculars?"

"In the Emergency Kit" answered Harm.

Sarah retrieved the kit, took the binoculars out and looked around.

"I saw that we flew over a cabin on the other side of that ridge to the north. We can see if there's a phone there," said Sarah.

She slung the kit over one shoulder and started to walk.

Harm called out to her, "First rule of survival is stay at the crash site."

Sarah answered, "Are you afraid to lose your precious plane. It's not going anywhere."

Harm said, "I'm not worried about her. It's just that we don't know this area, we have about five hours of daylight left and we could get lost wandering around.

Sarah persisted in her argument, "We should be about 10 miles from a road that can take us out of
here or there could be a phone at that cabin. You can stay with Sarah if you want. I'm going to look for help."

She began to walk in the direction of the ridge with the cabin.

Harm realized that his arguments of staying with the plane were falling on deaf ears and he called out to her, "Alright, wait up."

As he caught up with Sarah, he took the kit from her. She asked him, "Why do you feel that way toward the plane?"

"It was my father's."

Sarah finally understood.

Then she asked him. "So who is this Sarah you named the plane after and does Diane know about her?"

Harm smiled, "Sarah is a lady I'm just crazy about and Diane does know her and she loves her as much as I do."

Sarah looked at him with a raised eyebrow waiting for the punchline.

"Sarah is my paternal grandmother."

Sarah just smiled and then punched his arm and said in friendly exasperation, "What is with you and John? You two have the same sense of humor. When we first met he let me go on about his sister before he told me who she really was and you just did the same thing with your grandmother."

Harm just smirked and said, "It's a Navy thing."

Sarah punched his arm again.

Before Harm could reply in kind they heard two rifle shots. He said, "We better be careful. I don't know if it's hunting season, but let's not be mistaken for deer."

Sarah agreed wholeheartedly as she added, "Yeah, let's not make my sister a widow yet, okay?"

Harm grimly agreed with her.

After a short time they topped a hill and Harm saw a cabin in the small valley below. He also saw a Forest Ranger's vehicle. When they got to it, they saw it was locked. Sarah went and knocked on the cabin's door with negative results.

They went around to the rear of the cabin and off in the distance of about 50 yards they saw a trio of men and walked over to speak with them. When they reached the men, they introduced themselves.

"I'm Harmon Rabb US Navy and this is Sarah Mackenzie, US Marines. We were in flying when our plane developed a mechanical problem."

The biggest of the three, "Oh you're the yellow biplane."

"We saw the ranger's truck and we were wondering if we could use the radio to call for help." Harm said.

The big one said, "That's my car. I bought it off of auction. I haven't had time to have it repainted."
Harm immediately became suspicious. "They also sell you the radio to you too?"

Before the big one could answer Sarah called out, "Harm look out."

During Harm's conversation with the big one, Sarah saw beyond the hunter one of the other two inching to his right. Sarah looked that way and she saw there was a rifle leaning against a tree.

At Sarah's shout, the hunter fired. Sarah dove for Harm and knocked him down just in time to get him out of the line of fire. They got up and ran back to the cabin.

At the cabin, Harm smashed in the driver's window of the ranger's truck, opened the door and reached under the dashboard. He pulled the ignition starter out and tried to hot wire the car. During the process, the three poachers came from around the cabin and started to open fire at them.

Sarah dug into the kit and brought out the flare gun and started to load it.

Harms asked her "What are you doing?"

Sarah answered, "Returning fire."

She then fired off a flare at the poachers. They dove for cover. When they came up from cover the poachers resumed firing at the truck. They scored enough hits and Harm caught the odor of leaking gas. He was still trying to start the truck.

"This isn't working" he called out to Sarah.

Sarah reloaded the flare gun and went around the rear of the truck and set herself up to fire another flare. Before she could though, one of the poachers scored as a shot struck her right mid thigh.

Harm saw her go down and reached for her. He dragged her behind the truck. Knowing he could not fire back adequately enough to survive, he opened the hood, reached in and pulled out the fuel line and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he slung the emergency kit onto one shoulder and Sarah in a fireman's carry over the other. Keeping the truck between him and the poachers he started running away. The poachers saw that he started to run and they got up to advance toward the truck. Harm planned for this and he turned and fired a flare into the gas pooling out from under the truck. The truck exploded in a spectacular ball of fire. The poachers were thrown back. This gave Harm enough time to make his retreat into the woods.

1330 Local Time

Blacksburg Municipal Airport

John and Diane were waiting for Harm & Sarah to land before they started eating. Harm's flight plans kept him within sight of the airfield. So during the flight, John was watching the Stearman as it flew around. He saw it go over a ridge till it was out of sight. He went back to sit with Diane. But John kept glancing back toward the ridge. After waiting about 45 minutes more he and Diane became worried. John went to the field manager, Buddy to report that Harm's plane was over due to land.

"I last saw the plane as it flew over that ridge" John said point to the south west of the field.

Buddy said, "Let's take the chopper and have a look."

John said, "Ok, let me tell Diane." He went over to the picnic table. Diane was visibly worried.
John gave her a hug to reassure her. "Don't worry Di', I'm sure that they're alright. Harm probably had a problem and set it down safely. I'm gonna go with Buddy in the chopper to have a look."

Diane stared up at him. John was again captured by how closely she resembled Sarah. The only difference that he now saw was while Sarah's eyes were a liquid brown Diane's were a light hazel, sprinkled with flecks of green. John wiped a tear that ran down her cheek.

"Find them John. I just got my sister back and Harm needs to see his baby," Diane implored.

"I will" John said as he kissed her forehead.

Before he got on the chopper with Buddy, he retrieved his weapons bag from trunk. He wasn't expecting trouble, but he knew one couldn't be sure. Buddy mentioned that there were reports of poachers in the surrounding woods in the last few weeks.

Buddy flew off to the southwest high enough to see as much of the ground as possible and over the ridge where Harm was last seen. They only had to fly about 10 minutes and about 15 miles from the airfield until they saw the Stearman parked safely on a field. Buddy set it down close by the plane. Buddy stayed in the helo as John got out and looked around.

John saw that the plane was relatively intact. The wings, fuselage, wheels and struts were undamaged. But he was immediately concerned as he did not see Harm or Sarah anywhere around the aircraft. He knew from his days as a teenager in the Civil Air Patrol, one needed to stay by the downed aircraft to make it easier for searchers to find them.

As he was looking around, he heard the sound of rifle fire and then the sound of an explosion. Looking toward where the sound came from, John saw a black plume of smoke rising above the ridge to the north they just flew over. John and Buddy immediately took off in the helo and flew toward that ridge. On the way, Buddy radioed the local authorities for police and possibly medical aid.

On the way John extracted his rifle and shoulder holster. They found a small clearing close by the site of the cabin. Buddy did a great job of landing the Cayuse in a classic dust-off maneuver. John stepped out as soon as the treads touched the ground. The helo took off again before John took three steps. John immediately advanced cautiously toward the burning truck.

John examined the area around the truck. It was still burning and the ground around the truck was charred. He began searching in circles around the truck expanding out as he went around in a spiraling search pattern. He spotted blood drops and many foot prints going off in one direction into the woods. He set out to track who ever made them.

He went about 100 yards when he saw movement in the woods in front of him. He immediately ducked behind a tree and lowered himself to a prone position at its base. He peered around the trunk and saw two men with rifles approaching him in a hurry.

As the poachers heard the helo landing by the cabin as they were running after Harm & Sarah, they stopped. The big poacher sent one of his companions after Harm & Sarah. He and the third one turned back toward the cabin.

John surmised that they heard the chopper and were coming back to check it out. They apparently did not see him in their haste to check out the chopper. They stopped when they heard a shot from behind them. Then they heard another shot.

The third poacher turned to the big one. "You think Jake got them Buck?"
"I don't know Jamesy," answered Buck. Let's go back and make sure. I don't see anybody coming from where we heard the chopper."

John waited until they were out of sight down the trail until he got up and went after them.

"Now I know who the bad guys are," said John to himself.

He took the precaution of circling around to his left as he followed them. He was able to keep them in sight as he advanced from tree to tree.

Harm for his part was running with Sarah slung over his back and he was getting tired. He found a small group of boulders and set Sarah down behind it. While keeping an eye out for the poachers, he took out the first-aid kit. Harm looked down and saw that his leather jacket was stained with her blood. He ripped open her pants leg and examined the wound. It had initially bled profusely after the shot. Right now as he examined it, the blood was just oozing. He looked for an exit wound and he did not find one.

"You're lucky. It's not pumping so it missed the artery," he told Sarah.

Sarah for her part just winced as he set about bandaging the wound. Just as he finished, a shot chipped off rock above his head. It had just missed him as he bent over to help Sarah into a more comfortable position. Harm reached for the flare gun and loaded it.

"I heard a helo flying by. I bet John came after us" he told Sarah.

"I hope he came with his 'bag of tricks," said Sarah resolutely.

He took his ball cap off and held it up above the rocks with a stick he found at his feet. One shot took it off the stick to fly off beyond him.

"Come on out Navy boy, let's get this over with" shouted Jake.

Harm ducked back down and peered at him through a thin space between two boulders. Jake was standing up as he shouted. Harm saw his chance and suddenly stood up. He had the flare gun up in front of him and he fired off a quick shot. He saw the fire trail out behind the flare and saw it score a hit in the middle of Jake's chest.

Jake screamed and tore at his clothing as the flare embedded in deep. He died watching the flame bloom out from his chest.

Buck and Jamesy came upon Jake in his death throes. Buck swore out loud, "That's it sailor. You and your girlfriend are dead."

Before Harm could react he heard off to his right, "She's not his girlfriend, she's mine. Drop the guns, now!"

Harm looked around the rock and saw John standing by a thick tree. He was pointing his rifle at Buck & Jamesy.

Buck brought up his rifle up to fire at John. But John was already prepared to fire, and he got his shot off first. A bullet caught Buck in his right shoulder and he was flung back. Jamesy also tried to shoot John and managed to get a shot off that went high & wide. But while he had to re-cock his Winchester, John's weapon was semi-automatic. John fired two shots. One caught Jamesy in the chest and the other also in his shoulder and he fell back next to Buck.
John advanced to the space between Harm & Sarah's boulders and the poachers. He took his Berretta and tossed it to Harm.

"How's Sarah?" John asked.

"I'm fine except for being shot in the leg." Sarah called out. Through his relief he could still hear the pain in her voice.

"We'll have you out of here in no time" John answered.

He and Harm went over to check the poachers. Buck was holding his shoulder as it bled profusely. Jamesy was dying as he sustained a sucking chest wound. They were too far from medical aid to help him.

Just then they heard the sound of helicopters. They saw Buddy's Cayuse fly overhead. Right behind it was the local sheriff's copter.

1430 Local Time
Appalachian Mountains near Blacksburg, VA

John lit a smoke flair that Buddy gave him to show where they were waiting for help. Then he had Harm give bandages to Buck to hold on his shoulder and waited for the deputies to come and give him more complete treatment. He kept Buck covered while Harm treated Sarah's injury. John would have gone to Sarah first, but being Harm was still keyed up, John couldn't risk him further complicating things if he was to hurt and possibly murder Buck. The deputies arrived about 10 minutes later. They searched Buck and the two dead poachers and removed all the other weapons before they gave Buck further aid.

After Buck was occupied with the deputies, John went to check on Sarah. Harm re-bandaged her wound more thoroughly. They took their coats and two long tree branches and rigged a stretcher for Sarah. They carried her back to the clearing near the cabin where Buddy landed the copter. John & Harm helped Sarah climb into the copter.

Buddy told them, "I called for an ambulance to be waiting at the airfield."

John went back to the airfield with Sarah. There he put her in the ambulance and sent her off to the nearest hospital with Diane. He then had Buddy fly him back to the cabin.

He met back up with Harm. "Diane went with Sarah to the hospital. Can you fly the Stearman out of there?" said John pointing his thumb over his shoulder.

Harm took out the fuel line that he extracted from the ranger's truck before he blew it up.

"With this I can" he said. After we give our statements to the sheriff, we can get out of here" answered Harm.

They found the sheriff at the cabin. Buck was taken into custody and the paramedics that flew in on a third Medi-Vac copter took him back out.

Jake & Jamesy's bodies were zipped up in body bags at the cabin. A third body bag contained the body of the Forest Ranger the poachers killed. Harm showed them where he found the poachers digging. The deputies uncovered the ranger's body.

The sheriff took Harm's and John's statements and let them go. Knowing they were Navy Lawyers,
he knew where he could find them when he needed them later.

John retrieved his bag from Buddy's copter. He and Harm walked back to the plane, repaired the fuel line and took off and landed at the field without further incident. Immediately after securing the plane in the hangar, they drove to the hospital.

1815 Local Time
Blacksburg Community Hospital
Blacksburg, VA

They found Diane waiting for them at the emergency room entrance. She told them, "Sarah is in the O.R. The bullet wound was pretty deep and they had to operate to get it out. I'm still waiting for the doctor to come out"

Just then they saw a doctor approach them. "Are you all Sarah Mackenzie's family?"

Diane spoke up, "I'm her sister, Diane."

"Well Diane, Sarah is going to be fine. We were able to use an epidural as we operated on her leg. We extracted the bullet and cleaned the wound out. There was some tissue and muscle damage, which we repaired. Right now we have a drain tube in the wound and she needs to stay here overnight because of that and for the epidural to wear off. Tomorrow after she has the night to rest, we'll take the tube out and fit her for some crutches so she can go home. She has to stay off that leg for the next two weeks though. Is there anyone who can stay with her while she recuperates? The wound needs to be cleaned and the bandage changed once a day."

"Between the three of us we can take care of her doctor," Diane said.

The doctor just smiled and said, "Well that's one more problem out of the way. You can go see her now. We just moved her out of the O.R. Go up to the 2nd floor and the nurse there will tell you what room she's in. Don't be frightened by the IV she has, it's antibiotics to ward off any infection. She may be a little groggy. We gave her a mild sedative to relax her during the procedure. We see a lot of gunshot wounds here, being we're in the midst of hunting country. She's very lucky. Another inch to the inside, the femoral artery would have been hit. If that happened, being you were so far out, you may not have gotten her here in time."

The trio thanked him and went to find Sarah's room.

On the way they discussed how they were going to give Sarah care. Diane said to Harm. "She can stay in the guest room with us." Harm readily agreed, but added, "Maybe John can ask her if she wants to stay with him."

John nodded his agreement as they stopped at the nursing unit desk. "I have the third bedroom. Either way between the three of us, we'll be able to cope with a crabby Marine. And she will be crabby."

Harm & Diane just laughed.

They found her in her room just like the doctor said, a little groggy.

Smiling tiredly at their entrance she chirped out, "Hi guys. When can I get out of here?"

John answered, "The doctor says that your wound needs to drain overnight. Tomorrow we can take
you home. You have to stay off your leg for two weeks and you have to use crutches. The doctor won't release you until he knows that someone will be around to help you out. So you can either stay at Harm & Diane's in their guest room or you can stay with me in my guest room. So what's it gonna be?"

Looking at John with a mixture of love & defiance, she gave them her answer, "I'll stay with you John. No offense Diane, what with the baby, you don't need the extra burden of my being a bigger baby. Besides Harm, didn't you hear? I'm his girlfriend."
Chapter 9

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 9

Friday, August 22, 1997

1800 Local Time

John house,

Florida Avenue, NW

Sarah was recovering from her leg wound for a week. A prescription of pain pills kept her relatively comfortable. She followed the instructions religiously as she knew how addictive they could be.

Also, she did not sleep in the guest room, but with John. John was right about her being a crabby marine. She loved how John carried her up to his room and how he brought their meals up to the bedroom where she sat in bed with her leg propped up on a pillow and he ate from a foldable table. At first she was not ready to negotiate the stairs. But by the third day Sarah was having cabin fever and she quickly learned how to hop up and down the stairs in John's house.

Ann Marie was very accommodating in having Sarah as a houseguest. Sarah was really enjoying their growing friendship.

On the fourth night as John was staying late at the office finishing a case, Ann Marie asked Sarah how she really felt about John.

"When you saw John and me that Saturday we just agreed that we both wanted to have a serious relationship, and he gave me a lot of room to make up my mind. I appreciate that he never crowded me or pressured me. We were both content in letting things take their own course."

"Sarah I like you, I really do. Your one of the few honest people I have met since I've been working in Washington. I can see that you really like John and like being with him. I first realized that when you called my office asking which church he attended. I was hoping so hard that you were the one John was looking for. That's why I didn't hesitate telling you. The only thing I really need to ask is please don't hurt him."

Sarah was about to respond to that when Ann Marie stopped her and asked. "Did he tell you about his girlfriend from college who didn't like that he wanted to join the Navy?" Sarah nodded. "Well what he didn't tell you was that she really hurt him."

Sarah sat silently and let Ann Marie continue. "Her name also happened to Anne Marie; she just spelled Ann with the extra 'e'. He was going to ask her to marry him. He even bought a ring. The breakup happened after John's accident. She didn't come to see him in the hospital and he couldn't understand why. He tried to call her, but her parents said she didn't want to talk to him. So he wrote her a letter asking what was up. She wrote back. She said some pretty nasty things about his career choice, how he wanted the Navy over her etc. and how she didn't want to be afraid that every time he was deployed she'd be on pins and needles waiting to hear that he died. He couldn't return the ring, so he sold it to our older brother, Matt, to give to his wife Leslie. We both made Matt swear that he wouldn't tell her where he bought it. John figured it might as well give someone else some happiness. That's why he accelerated his change of designation and went to law school. He wanted
to move on with his life and forget about her.

When he got his approval for the change and even after he attended law school, he was still hurting. He immersed himself totally into his work. After he was assigned to DC he bought this house as an investment and as a way of occupying his time so that he could get over the hurt. You'll find that when something is bothering him, he'll dive right into a project. It keeps him from losing his temper and lashing out at the person nearest him. He didn't want to go into the dating scene. He even made me promise him that I wouldn't try to fix him up with someone. He wasn't even interested in the young women working at the White House. They would swoon over him whenever he was sent over on JAG business and stop in to visit my office. He just figured there was a woman out there who shared the same things he did and that he would know as soon as he met her.

So when he finally came home after your first mission together, I knew he found that someone because he was so happy. For weeks after that I'd see the joy in his face every time he came home from work. When I asked him why he was so happy he'd simply say, 'I saw Sarah today'. Then he would give me details on what you two did that day. He wouldn't stop talking about you. He never did that with any other woman he was working with or seeing, not even with Annie. You got through to him like nobody else had ever done before. John doesn't have to tell me when you're out of town on a case. I know. He would just come home not saying much, telling me everything at the office was fine and so on.

So please, I'm begging you, don't hurt him. I love him so much and I couldn't bear to see him like that again."

Sarah was shedding some quiet tears as Ann Marie told her about John's story of hurt. "I love him very much to. When he told me he was in love with me, a thrill went through me like you would not believe. I have never felt this cherished and cared for before in my life, not even from my uncle. I'm very anxious to see where we're going and we're both enjoying the ride. He's so lucky to have a sister like you to love him. I can see that you've been his rock. I'm only now just beginning to understand what that feels like with Diane. So don't worry, I'll look after him."

Ann Marie went over and embraced Sarah and they both had a good bout of sniffing.

They just barely calmed themselves and dried their tears when John pulled into the driveway.

When he came through the door he saw them just sitting there and staring at him with goofy smiles on their faces. He asked, "What's up with you two?"

Sarah answered for her and Ann Marie, "Just some girl talk. What are we doing about dinner?"

"Always the hungry Marine."

Sarah stuck her tongue out at him then bent her head to receive his kiss. "I figured I'd treat my two best girls to some steak at Bobby Van's"

"Sounds good to me," said Sarah reaching for her crutches and Ann Marie getting her and Sarah's purses.

Saturday, August 30, 1997

1900 Local Time

John house,

Florida Avenue, NW
Sarah and John abstained from sex for the first week of Sarah's recuperation, as John wanted to give her the rest she needed for her wound to heal. When they slept, John spooned behind her as she lay on her left side. But Sarah was growing more & more frustrated at that. Lying next to John added to that frustration. Every time she moved a certain way, she felt the twinge of pain from the wound. Some nights she didn't get much sleep at all. During those times she lay in bed just looking at John as he slept, feeling very lucky that they were in love. She was secretly thrilled that he came to hers and Harm's rescue in the mountains. Even through the pain of the wound, she felt a thrill as he said out loud that she was HIS girlfriend when he corrected the poacher when he said he would 'kill Harm & your girlfriend'. After the week of John caring for her she now felt more and more cherished and loved than ever before. They made up for the first week's abstention from sex during the second week. Sarah found different positions that offered her pleasure while not hurting her wound.

The day after the session they had about John and his old girlfriend, Ann Marie opened up about her problems conceiving a baby. Sarah listened as Annie told her about how her doctor, Cheryl Warner her OB/GYN Doctor from George Washington Medical center discovered some scar tissue from yeast infections in her cervix and uterus. She sent her up to New York for the laser procedure that removed the offending tissue. That was 2 months ago. Shortly after she was deemed healed from the procedure, her and Pete tried to conceive.

Now Sarah was sitting sharing tea with Diane & Ann Marie. Her crutches were leaning against the wall behind her. She was anxious to see her doctor Monday so she could ditch the crutches or at least go to work with them. John, Harm & Peter were in the basement shooting pool. They all shared a very pleasant evening at dinner and the ladies were sitting around the kitchen table relaxing, indulging in 'girl talk'.

Sarah and Diane were laughing out loud as Ann Marie regaled them with stories of her time in New York and Peter's continued attempts at romantic nights, some successful, some not so successful. Some days when she knew she was ovulating, she would call Peter at work and they would dash home and jump into bed.

Diane sat back and listened contently rubbing her belly. She was just about to say something, when the phone rang. Ann Marie picked it up. "Hello"

Diane and Sarah only heard her side of the conversation.

"Yes this is Ann Marie"

"Yes I'll hold"

"Hello Dr. Warner" Her pulse rate jumped a thousand fold.

"You got my test results back"

"I am? Oh that's wonderful, thank you so much. I'll see you Tuesday. Goodbye"

Ann Marie was shaking as she hung up the phone. She paused with her hands on the counter to compose herself before she turned to face Sarah & Diane. They became very anxious to hear the news.

Sarah was the one to break the silence, "Well, what did she say?"

Ann Marie turned to them and with a watery smile announced, "I'm pregnant!"

Sarah forgot about her wounded leg and jumped up and enveloped her in a smothering hug. Diane got up and joined the embrace.
The three women stood still for a few seconds then they all let out a scream of joy.

This brought the men running up from the basement.

Peter was the first one up. "What's the matter?"

Ann Marie told him the news. "That's wonderful sweetie." He said as he picked her up in a bear hug followed by John and Harm with more gentle hugs.
John was sitting at his usual spot at the conference table next Sarah. It was Sarah's first day back from her medical leave. Even though she was back, she was placed on light duty because she was still instructed by her doctor to stay off her injured right leg. She still had to use the crutches that were now propped against the back of her chair. John drove her into work that morning.

During Sarah's convalescence John and Harm did not give out any details, other than to the admiral, about the adventure in the mountains. Now that Sarah was back she was telling the other officers of the adventure.

Bud Roberts spoke up saying, "It's a good thing that Commander Marshall showed up when he did."

"Yes it was Bud," Sarah acknowledged with a smile. She took hold of John's hand and looked at him lovingly.

John looked back at the love of his life with an affectionate smile.

Right at the moment Admiral Chegwidden walked into the conference room.

Harm called, "Attention on Deck." At that all the officers except for Sarah went to stand at attention.

AJ responded with the usual, "As you were. Major Mackenzie Welcome back, how's the leg?"

"It's fine sir. The doctor says the wound healed up nicely but I still have some pain if I put weight on it so I still have to use the crutches. Otherwise my duties will not be affected," Sarah responded.

"That's good to hear. Still I asked Admiral Morris to have the other judges cut you some slack if you're still using the crutches in court." AJ said.

"Thank you very much sir," Sarah said with a shy smile. She didn't ask AJ to do that so she was touched by his thoughtfulness.

"Since you can't go out on investigations major, Lt. Manetti you will go with Lt. Commander Marshall when the need arises." AJ said turning to Lieutenant Traci Manetti.

"No problem sir," Traci acknowledged, smiling at John and Sarah.

"So let's get down to other business," AJ began as he started to assign cases.
As he went through them he called out the names of the defendants and what they were charged with. "This next case involves a Peter Tierney and..."

At the mention of the name John's head shot up. He politely interrupted AJ saying, "Excuse me sir. Is that Senior Chief Petty Officer Peter Tierney?"

AJ looked at the face page of the report again and said, "Why yes it is. Do you know him?"

"Yes sir I do. What is he charged with sir?" John asked.

AJ answered, "Him and a Petty Office Jackson Limon have been charged with theft of prescription drugs and narcotics from the Portsmouth Naval Hospital Pharmacy with intent to sell and grand theft of a Humvee. There are also assault and attempted murder charges. Two Virginia State troopers are in the hospital because PO Limon, who was driving, crashed into their Humvee at a road block on I-264. Senior Chief Tierney was charged as an accessory to the assault and attempted murder charges."

"May I please see the report sir?" John asked in a professional tone as he could.

AJ passed it down to him. As John read the charge sheet and the accompanying incident report his eyebrows went right up into his hairline. Sarah was reading over his shoulder and she had the same reaction.

AJ and the rest of the others waited while John read the report. He didn't make them wait long as he said, "Sir I will need to defend on this case."

AJ said, "I thought you might. Lt. Manetti you will assist the defense and Commander Mattoni you will prosecute. Take Lt. Roberts as your assistant. He needs some courtroom time." He slid the duplicate folder to Alan Mattoni.

Mattoni and Bud both said, "Aye, aye sir."

John asked another question, "Sir when this comes to court, I would like Major Mackenzie to also assist me."

"Why is that commander?" AJ asked.

"Because sir it's like a doctor being prohibited from treating family." John answered.

"Family commander, how is the Senior Chief related to you?" AJ asked.

"Sir Tierney is my mom's maiden name. Peter is my cousin," John explained.

AJ nodded his understanding saying to Sarah, "Will that be a problem major?"

"No sir I will be happy to assist in any way I can," Sarah said.

Mattoni spoke up saying, "That will make it four attorneys against two sir. It says here that a Gail Grayson was his attorney at his bail hearing."

John looked through the report and said "I figured he'd call Goofy." So that only Sarah heard.

Sarah smiled both in humor and in bewilderment. Shortly after that the next cases were assigned and AJ closed the meeting.

0940 Local Time
Sarah's Office

Sarah, Traci and John trooped into Sarah's office to strategize on the case. After the door was closed Sarah was the first to ask, "So who is Gail Grayson? And why doesn't she just defend the Senior Chief?"

"Gail is Peter's sister. Grayson is her married name. Peter is a year younger than me. He joined the Navy right out of high school. After boot camp he trained as a medical corpsman. He was in Panama when we went after Noriega. He was actually assigned to my SEAL Team when our regular corpsman became ill. We didn't tell anyone except our team leader, Lt. Comdr. Hutchinson, that we were related until after we did what we did."

Gail is my age. We graduated Fordham Law together. She married Jack Grayson after she met him at a mixer at Fordham. Jack went into Entertainment Law and she followed as his partner. They represent some of the biggest names in show business. You would be surprised what kind of deviant behavior their clients get themselves into."

Sarah said, "First it's your sister as President Bartlett's Press Secretary then it's your cousin as a show biz attorney."

"What can I say?" was all John said in response shrugging and waving his hands in front of him.

"I tell you if it weren't for her, I would have never passed law school. Gail was my rock. She saw me through the breakup with my girlfriend at the time and kept me on the straight and narrow. We made a great debating team. We always won the Moot Court competitions."

Sarah and Traci smiled at his remembrances.

John continued, "Traci you go to Portsmouth and interview the principal people in the affair. The file says that Peter is confined in the Navy Yard Brig, so I'll go there and see him."

"Aye, aye sir," Traci said.

"Traci how many times have I told you when it's just us, leave the sirs out? If it weren't for your help, Sarah and I would not be together," John said

Sarah and Traci just smiled at that as Traci was Sarah's confidant on all things John.

"Okay John," Traci said in a tone that sounded like that of a chastised child. The three officers shared a laugh at that.

Just then there was a knock on Sarah's door. When she shouted the usual "Enter", the admiral's yeoman PO First Class Jason Tiner came in and handed a message slip to John saying, "Excuse me please sir ma'am but Commander Marshall I left this message on your desk and I saw that you weren't in your office and I wanted to make sure you got it. The woman who called said that it was of the most extreme urgency."

John scanned the slip, smiled and asked, "She actually said this Tiner?"

"Yes sir she said "write it word for word"." Tiner said.

John showed the slip to Traci and Sarah. They both smiled when they saw it. Tiner wrote, 'See me or else, your office 10:00AM'. Tiner had also checked the box that had 'No name given' printed next to it.
John said, "It's from Gail. I imagine she'll be here at 1000."

John looked at his watch. Before he could say anything Sarah spoke up and said, "It's 0957." Tiner, Traci and John just looked at her. It was the usual reaction to her uncanny ability to know the time without looking at her watch.

John said, "Thank you Tiner. That will be all." Tiner beat a hasty retreat to his office.

John stood up to go to his office. Just before he could put his hand on his office door to open it, he heard a loud female voice say, "Johnny Marshall if you don't come over here and give me a big kiss I will tell everyone here all the nasty things you did as a kid."

As John crossed the bullpen he said just as loudly, but in Marty Feldman's British accent, "Too late. The Navy requires full disclosure."

When he got to the woman he picked her up in a big bear hug and laid a wet and noisy kiss on her cheek anyway saying, "Hiya Goofy!"
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 11

Tuesday, September 2, 1997

JAG Headquarters

Everyone in the bullpen was astounded at John's display. They all surmised that the woman was some kind of good friend or relative.

As he put her down, Gail said, "Oh you're just like your father except he always pinched my cheek till it was blue."

Still holding her hand they both walked to Sarah's office as John said, "Come on get in here before we embarrass ourselves further." When they entered, John closed the door and said, "Major Sarah Mackenzie and Lt. Traci Manetti, my I present my cousin Gail Grayson."

After shaking hands with each of them Sarah asked Gail, "So why does he call you Goofy?"

Gail smacked his arms as she said, "He's the only one who calls me that."

John spoke up saying, "Ever since I've known her she's had this goofy laugh. She would use it more times with me than anyone else." He changed the subject saying, "Well how did Peter get himself into this mess?"

Gail sat down to tell her story saying, "Well he was trying to help a petty officer in his command named Limon who he suspected was pillering drugs. Pete found a case of morphine bottles in Limon's locker. So instead of reporting everything to NCIS Peter confronted him. Limon said that loan sharks were into him for thousands of dollars and they said they wanted morphine to sell on the black market.

Well Pete, ever the white knight, offered to help him out. They went and signed a Humvee out of the motor pool and went to meet the loan shark and his friends in Norfolk. It seems that the loan shark was associated with a local biker gang.

Well the deal went sour and there was some shooting. Limon and Pete got out of there with Limon driving. As they tried to get away, the Humvee was shot up. They apparently passed a Norfolk cop that was responding to the gunshots. He put out a BOLO on the Humvee. The Virginia troopers set up a road block on the I-264 bridge from Norfolk to Portsmouth. Limon tried to crash it but he was stopped. As a result two troopers were struck by the Humvee and thrown down the road. They both had severe head injuries."

"Ouch, I bet the Virginia troopers were reluctant to release them to the Navy," Traci said.

"Yeah they were. It took all my vast powers of persuasion to get him released to the Marine guards who showed up to take custody. I don't know the UCMJ like John or any of you here do, that's why I was so set on getting Pete into Navy custody. I knew he'd get a fairer shake than in any civilian court," Gail responded.

"We'll do what we can for him. Just so you know when we go into court for the Article 32 hearing,
Sarah will be his first chair defender and Traci and I will assist, you will only be able to sit in the audience," John reminded.

"How come you won't sit first chair? I've never know you to pass on responsibility," Gail said.

"Well it's like I said before in our Staff Meeting, it would be like a doctor treating his own family. Don't worry Sarah is the best attorney we have," John said.

"Wow that's some admission coming from him. He must be in love with you," Gail said facetiously to Sarah.

The three officers each ducked their heads half in embarrassment and half in humor at Gail's joke.

She saw it immediately exclaiming, "He really is?"

John was the one who nodded, saying, "Yeah I really am."

Sarah jerked her head up at his declaration while Traci smiled brightly.

"Well it's about time." Gail said.

Only the fact they were sitting in an office with the blinds open to the full view of those in bullpen kept Gail from jumping up and hugging her cousin. Instead she grasped his hand and looking to Sarah with a big smile said, "I am so happy to hear that."

"Has everyone in the Marshall family been rooting for John to fall in love?" Sarah happily asked.

Gail just smirked happily and nodded her head saying, "Yeah pretty much."

The four attorneys just laughed at that.

John was the first to speak saying, "Alright Traci you can get to Portsmouth by the late afternoon if you leave now. Start in the pharmacy and go from there. Since it's such a long ride you may as well stay overnight and come back tomorrow. Keep me informed all the way," John instructed.

Traci got up saying, "I thought of that too. I have an overnight bag already in my car. I'll call when I know something." Before she left she said, "Gail it was a pleasure meeting you. It will be nice working with you."

Gail got up to shake hands saying, "Likewise."

After Traci left, Gail gave into her curiosity asking, "How did she get that drawl?"

John told Gail Traci's story of adoption ending with, "Her dad is Senator George Manetti from Virginia."

Gail just whistled saying, "Jeez I thought Ann Marie was connected, but Senator Manetti is the ranking member of the Senate's Appropriations Committee."

Both John and Sarah said together, "Yeah we know." John added, "Not a lot of people here at JAG know so keep it on the low down."

"Hey my lips are sealed,' Gail said mimicking turning a key at her closed lips.

"Okay Sarah, after Gail and I finish interviewing Pete, why don't we meet for lunch?" John suggested.
"Since I'm going to be first chair, let's have him brought over here. That way I can get a feel as to how to defend him. Then we'll go to lunch," Sarah said picking up the phone and calling the brig.

Gail and John nodded at that. Gail had to smile as she said, "Sarah really takes charge. Do you two ever argue about that?"

Gail just burst out laughing when both John and Sarah emphatically said, "NO!"

1130 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Conference Room

Peter was brought over to JAG in his uniform. He was fit and medium built standing about 5'9" with close cropped brown hair. He wore glasses. He sat straight in his chair as he waited for Sarah, Gail and John to come in.

A marine guard stood at 'parade rest' at the door of the room. When the door opened and Gail came in with the two officers, Sarah on her crutches, Peter sprang up at attention. The marine guard went to take up his guard station outside the room to give the group their privacy.

It was John who said, "As you were Pete." John went over to shake his hand and give him a quick embrace. Then he introduced Sarah saying, "Senior Chief Peter Tierney, meet your attorney Major Sarah Mackenzie."

"Ma'am, pleased to meet you" Peter said taking her hand to help her into the chair at the head of the table next to him.

"Thank you Senior Chief. Your pleasure at meeting me remains to be seen." Sarah replied, going into her attorney in charge mode.

"Yes ma'am," Peter said contritely.

He looked to John and Gail as they sat on the opposite side of the table. He was about to voice his question as to why John wasn't the attorney in charge when John said, "I'll explain later. Right now the major is in charge."

Peter nodded his head and waited for Sarah to start.

Sarah opened the case file and went right to business, "Senior Chief I'm going to be your lead counsel. I have some requirements from those I defend; one, do not lie to me and two outside our privileged conversations keep your mouth shut and three, do what I tell you. Are we clear on that?"

"Yes ma'am," Peter immediately said.

"Now tell me how this mess got started," Sarah asked.

Peter sighed as he said, "Well I am the Assistant Director in the Pharmacy at Portsmouth Naval Hospital. Petty Officer Limon is one of the medical corps man assigned to work there. One day, as I was double checking the inventory I saw a discrepancy in the count for the prescriptions and the narcotics, such as the morphine."

"How much of a discrepancy was there?" Sarah asked.

"Well over the course of two months, I noticed that there was a case of morphine and a few bottles of
"Oxy Contin' missing."

"How much is in a case of morphine?" Sarah asked.

"Twelve vials ma'am," Peter answered.

"Morphine is a strictly controlled narcotic. How can a whole case go missing without being immediately discovered?" Sarah asked incredulously.

"Well when you give out morphine to the floors, you have to account for every vial in a master log. Apparently Limon was falsifying the log. I only discovered the discrepancy when one of the nurses on the floor called to say she needed some. Before we give it out, we check to see when the last time that unit got some and how much against the log. Well the nurse said she received four vials, I immediately knew something was wrong. Because the log said five vials went up to that unit at that time."

"What did you do then Chief?" Sarah asked.

Peter went on to explain, "At first I thought that it was a simple error. But when I went back in the log and checked it against the nursing station records, I saw that the same discrepancy occurred more than a dozen times over the past two months. I also saw that the count of OxyContin was off as well. That is almost on the same level as morphine."

"Who did you tell about this?" Sarah asked.

"I went and asked PO Limon why there was a discrepancy." Peter answered.

"What did he say?" Sarah asked.

"Well I wanted to speak with him out of the office so I went looking for him. I found him in the locker room. When I found him at his locker he at first didn't see me. As I was behind him I saw him put a vial of morphine into a case with some other vials. I thought he had a habit or was addicted. So I asked him what was with all the morphine," Peter explained.

"What did he say?" Sarah asked.

"That's when he told me about the loan shark he owed and the gang associated with him. Limon said that if he gave drugs from the hospital to the gang to sell, the loan would be wiped clean. Well Limon agreed and he was pilfering for the same time as it was indicated in the logs," Peter said.

"Why did you agree to go with him to see the loan shark?" Sarah asked.

"I thought I could get the loan shark and the gang to back off seeing as the debt should have been paid. Limon is a good kid I just wanted to help him," Peter said.

"Didn't it occur to you that stealing narcotics was a federal offense? Also you could have been charged with obstruction," Sarah scolded him.

"No ma'am I didn't think that far ahead. I just thought of helping PO Limon out of a jam."

"Okay what happened when you met the loan shark?" Sarah asked.

"Well we were supposed to meet in a parking lot across town from the hospital. When we got there he wasn't there. The gang members were there. They were a local biker gang named the Sons of Fire. I tried to convince the gang leader to back off but he wanted Limon to keep the 'pipeline open'."
I told them we'd think about it. I just wanted to get us out of there and I told Limon to get back in the Hummer.

He got behind the wheel and in his panic he put the car in reverse instead of forward. He ran down one of the gang’s bikes. That's when they pulled their guns out and started shooting. We peeled out of there and almost hit a patrol car that was just pulling into the parking lot. The officers must have heard the gunshots. We didn't know they called for help until we got to the bridge to Norfolk. That's where Limon panicked again. I tried to tell him to stop, but he was too scared and he tried to ram his way through the roadblock. That's where we got arrested."

"So your contention is that you failed to report the theft in order to do your own investigation. When your investigation showed that Limon was in trouble, you tried to help him out it by trying to convince the loan shark and the gang to back off. Am I right so far?" Sarah asked.

"Yes ma'am that sounds about right," Peter agreed.

"Okay we can admit to the failure to report missing narcotics, but based on what you told me I think we can make a deal. We still need to do an Article 32 hearing to get this story on the record. Would you be interested in turning state's witness against PO Limon, the loan shark and the gang?" Sarah asked.

"At this point ma'am I will do whatever you need me to do to get this mess cleared up with little damage to my career as possible. I still have a family to support." Peter agreed.

"Well you're going to have to accept some punishment but we'll see what the convening authority thinks. I read your record. It's been spotless until now with a Bronze Star and so forth. Where did you earn the 'Star'?" Sarah asked.

"In Panama ma'am when...," Peter began to explain but John coughed loudly. Everyone looked at him expectantly.

John told the story from there. "He won it by taking me out of the line of fire. When we were in Panama our SEAL Team was assigned to root out some of Noriega's loyalists who were hiding in the jungle. When we encountered them there was a fire fight. During the fight, I stepped into a hole and twisted my ankle. Before I could gather myself and take cover Peter came from his cover and pulled me behind a rock. He was firing into the trees as he pulled me back. When everything calmed down there were four dead loyalists. My sprained ankle was the only injury on our side. Lt. Comdr. Hutchinson our team leader put Peter up for the medal. The other members of the team corroborated the events and so forth."

Sarah and Gail just looked between Peter and John. Gail asked John, "I know he won the Bronze Star, but I didn't know he got it for saving you. Why didn't you tell us when you two came home from that?"

"The incident was mentioned at his awards ceremony, but you were unable to be there. Only Pete's wife and kids and I were in Norfolk when he received the medal. You being his only other family, after Aunt Pat and Uncle Billy passed away, were busy being a cop in New York and trying to get into law school that you couldn't get away. After that the subject never came up when we met for the holidays and so forth." John explained for him and Peter.

Sarah piped up saying, "That explains that." Then she added with a twinkle, "What I find amazing is that you were so clumsy."

John was about to respond but then he saw her smile at him. He just said, "Just wait till your leg gets
better and we work out in the gym I'll show you how clumsy I really am."

Sarah was about to say something about not waiting that long, but to show her tonight, but she remembered that she was at work. So she coughed loudly to calm down her erotic thoughts of how clumsy John wasn't.

John filled the verbal gap by asking Peter, "Do you think that the pilfering is bigger than what Limon was doing?"

Peter answered, "It might be. There were reports of some drug shipments going missing before they reached the hospital. You know the usual reports of 'stuff falling off the truck' and so forth. From what I heard NCIS was investigating."

"I think that while Lt. Manetti is down there, she should look into that, do you agree major?" John asked Sarah.

"I agree. Have her look into the drug logs and see who else was making bad entries. Whatever she finds, she'll give to NCIS for them to investigate further."

"Okay when we get back to my office I'll call her. She should be on her way by now." John said.

They all got up to leave. As Peter was being led away to the brig, Gail went to embrace him saying, "Don't worry Pete, we'll get through this."

1415 Local Time

Portsmouth Naval Hospital

Portsmouth, VA

When John returned to his office he called Traci's cell phone and let her know her new avenue of investigation. With midday traffic being light, she arrived at the hospital just two and a half hours after she left JAG.

Traci began to interview the hospital administrator, Commander Paul Wells. Wells said that he was astounded at hearing about Limon and Peter being arrested. He stated. : I didn't know anymore than what I already told the NCIS agents who already interviewed me".

When Traci left Wells she went to interview the Director of the Pharmacy, Lt Commander Roger Tate. The Pharmacy was down in the basement of the hospital among some other storage and mechanical equipment rooms.

Traci began her interview by asking about Peter. Tate had nothing but good things to say about Peter. Then she asked, "Lt. Commander did you know that there was some discrepancy between the pharmacy logs and the nursing unit logs?"

"No lieutenant I did not. When I conducted my monthly audit for July during the first week of August, I didn't see any discrepancies. We are still in the middle of August's audit. I'll wait to see what I see."

Traci continued, "Sir my associates at JAG told me that a local gang was involved in the incident with the senior chief and petty officer. Do you have any knowledge of any of their activities at or near the hospital?"

"No I do not know of any involvement with the Sons of Fire," Tate answered.
Traci resisted the urge to raise an eyebrow. One of the first rules of interviewing subjects who may be suspects was to not show any reaction to untruths or revelations that were uttered. John had told her of Peter saying the biker gang was the Sons of Fire. She knew she didn't mention the name of the gang to Tate. She figured he must be lying about something. So she decided to conclude her interview.

"Thank you Lt. Commander. I think I got all that I need from you. I'm going to find some character witnesses for Senior Chief Tierney that may be willing to speak up for him." She got up quickly and left the office.

When the door to the pharmacy clicked closed behind her she wasted no time in phoning John with her suspicions. Being that it was the end of the business day the hall was deserted. When she got John on the phone she said, "John I think that the Director of Pharmacy may be involved. When I asked him if he knew of a local gang, he came out with the name of the biker gang without any prompting from me. Can we get a background check on Lt. Commander Roger Tate?"

"Sure Traci, I'll pull his file," John said.

She was too engrossed in listening to John she didn't hear when someone came up from behind her. She heard John caution her, "Be careful there lieutenant."

"Don't worry sir I will," Traci assured her partner.

Before she could disconnect the call she felt an arm grab her around her waist from behind and another hand with a rag cover her mouth and nose. She dropped her phone and managed to get one loud cry out before the rest were muffled by the rag. She smelled a strong chemical odor. As the chloroform started to take effect and she saw darkness creeping around from the edges she struggled to break free, but the arms holding her were too strong. She continued to struggle for a short time before she finally collapsed into unconsciousness.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 12

September 2, 1997

1440 PM

JAG Headquarters

John went into SEAL mode. He was totally focused on what he needed to do. He heard Traci cry out before she disconnected her call. After her initial cry, he heard muffled sounds of her struggle. Then he heard the phone disconnect.

Sarah, Gail and he were in his office when he took the call. As he hung up the phone he told Sarah, "Traci's in trouble. I heard sounds of someone attacking her, then her struggle. I have to get down there. Damnit, I never should have sent her alone."

"Don't do that to yourself. You would have done the same with me. How many times have we and you and Traci split up and investigated a case from different angles," Sarah admonished him.

John smiled at her saying, "I knew I loved you for a reason. Thanks sweetheart."

He got up from his desk and looking out the window to ensure no one saw he bent and kissed her. He said, "I'm going in to see the admiral. Will you please call the NCIS office at Portsmouth to get them on the case?"

"Sure I will." As he left Sarah called out, "Take someone with you to Portsmouth."

John waved at her acknowledging her suggestion.

When he went before the admiral he said, "Sir I need to get to Portsmouth ASAP. Lt. Manetti is in trouble."

AJ asked, "What kind of trouble?"

"Sir she was investigating my cousin's case from there. She called me to notify me of a suspicion she had about the Pharmacy Director. While she was on the phone with me I heard her being attacked. Major Mackenzie is calling NCIS out there. I need to get there to help find her."

"Okay, get going. Take Rabb with you and John." AJ said as John turned to go.

"Yes sir?" John replied.

"Get her back son." AJ said.

"I will sir. She's my best friend the other sister I didn't have." John said.

When he came out of the admiral's office he went right into Harm's and said, "Harm lets go Traci's in trouble in Portsmouth."

To his credit Harm didn't hesitate. He just got up and pulled his hat on and grabbed his car keys.
"We'll take my car, it's faster."

John agreed then he said, "Let me get my ready bag."

While John went to his Z-28 Camaro to get his weapons bag, Gail came out to him. She said, "I'm coming with you."

"No way, you're a civilian. If anything should happen to you my mom won't let me hear the end of it." John said.

"Since when have you given a shit what Aunt Maureen says? You just go and do what you want anyway."

John knew he wasn't going to win the argument so he said, "Okay get into my car." He then called over to Harm who was parked two spaces over, "Harm, Gail is coming with us we'll take my car."

Harm acquiesced but as he walked over to John's car, John gave him the keys saying, "You'd better drive."

Harm agreed. When they were on their way John introduced them.

Harm said, "Mrs. Grayson, I suggest you stay out of the way. This could get dangerous."

Gail scoffed saying, "Look commander, I was a beat cop for three years in Washington Heights, upper Manhattan, before I got my law degree. I can handle myself. Besides I'm obligated to go, my brother got the lieutenant into this mess."

Harm smiled at her story then he asked, "Do you have a weapon?"

Gail pulled out a Smith & Wesson .38 automatic. She said, "I still have the carry permit for this. I had to retrieve this from the Marine guard who confiscated this before I went into headquarters."

Harm was very impressed, John less so. He and Gail engaged in some serious shooting competitions at the NYPD range at Rodman's Neck, the Bronx when they were in law school together. So he knew what Gail was capable of.

Soon they drove onto the beltway on their way out of DC.

1342 Local Time

Portsmouth Naval Hospital

As Traci slowly awoke she felt that she had the worst headache. As she came more awake she realized that she couldn't see. She felt that a cloth was tied over her eyes and knotted at the back of her head. She tried to move to get up but she was unable to. Her hands were tied at her wrists behind her back and her ankles were tied together with thin cotton cords. A rag was stuffed into her mouth. She could taste it. She hoped she wouldn't choke on it. Another cloth held it in place as it was tied between her teeth and knotted at the nape of her neck.

She also felt that she was wrapped in a sheet. She could smell the chlorine bleach used to clean it. She also felt that there were other sheets piled on top of her. Though she could not see it, she believed that she was in some sort of linen cart. As she lay on her side in a fetal position, she couldn't straighten her legs due to the confines of the linen cart. As she kicked out, the toes of her shoes came in contact with the hard side of the cart.
'Okay so it wasn't a canvas cart.' She thought to herself. She started to kick at the side.

Unfortunately the cart was in the basement linen storage room against the back wall with five more rows of carts between her and the outside world. What she didn't know was that her assailant placed her in that cart that deep in the room so that he could have the time to get as far away from his crime as he could.

She began to remember what had happened to her. She was on her cellphone with John. Before she could disconnect her call though she was grabbed from behind and a cloth was clamped onto her face. She hated the smell of chloroform ever since she was six and her tonsils were removed. She twisted her head to escape the smothering aroma but her efforts were in vain. As dizziness over took her she noticed that her cellphone was on the floor. The last thing she remembered seeing before she completely blacked out was that it was lit up as her call to John was not disconnected. She began to hope that John heard her attack.

She tried to listen for any sounds, but she was unable to hear anything beyond the pile of sheets she was under. Still she kept banging her feet against the side of the cart.

Eventually though she became exhausted and out of breath. The closeness of the sheet wrapped around her, the gag stuffed in her mouth and the pile of linen on top of her did not allow for a very good exchange of air. Underneath her blindfold she began to weep hoping John had heard her attack and was now coming to her rescue.

1650 Local Time

On the drive out to Portsmouth John was on the phone with NCIS. Their NCIS lab technician had put a trace on Traci's cellphone. Fortunately it was still on so its location came up still in the hospital. They were twenty minutes away from the hospital as Harm drove directly there. They met the NCIS agent named Chris Pocchi and his partner, Michele Weatherly. John introduced Gail and her reference to the case.

Pocchi was on the phone with his lab technician, Abby Sciutto. She was directing them to the basement of the hospital. John tried calling it to see if he could hear the ringer, but it kept going immediately to voice mail. Eventually Abby told them that they were in the area, within a few feet of the phone. They were in a hallway with linen carts lined up against each wall. Harm, John and the two agents started to move the carts around looking for the phone. They opened the door to the linen storage room and moved a cart that was immediately inside the door.

Gail was the first to see it and said, "Here it is."

As Gail bent to pick it up, she heard a soft thumping. She shushed the others as they started to speak. The thumping continued.

Then John called out, "Traci?!

He was rewarded with a renewed sound of thumping.

"She's in one of the carts!" Harm said. Then he shouted, "Keep banging Traci, we'll find you."

The five searchers started to move carts out of the room. As they got closer to the back of the room, they could hear the thumping getting louder until they eventually got to the cart where Traci was lying. John knocked off whatever linen was on top until he got to Traci's sheet wrapped body. He pulled the sheet off her and then sat her up. As he pulled the blindfold up over her head Traci blinked against the sudden onslaught of light. Then as she beheld John's anxious expression, she began to cry.
in earnest. John gently bent her forward and untied the cleave gag and pulled the wet rag from her mouth. Traci sucked in huge gulps of air. Harm reached in and helped John lift their colleague out of the cart and sat her on the pile of towels and sheets they was thrown on the floor. When they untied the cords from around her wrists Traci reached out her arms and circled John's neck. John held her close and let her sob into his shoulder. While John comforted Traci, Gail untied the cords from her ankles.

Eventually Traci calmed down enough to stand. Gail looked into the cart that held Traci and found her purse and Navy hat. She dropped Traci's phone in the purse.

John held her until she assured him that she was alright to walk, but when he let her go Traci became dizzy and almost fell down.

John said, "Let's get you to the ER and have you checked out."

Traci tried to protest saying, "I'm fine really. I was just a little dizzy that's all."

But John said, "That's an order lieutenant!"

Traci acquiesced. As they walked to the elevators, Harm and John were on either side of her to ensure that could catch her if she fell. Gail followed carrying Traci's purse and cover.

As they got into the elevator Traci said, "I wasn't able to see who attacked me, but it was right after I was speaking to the pharmacy director, Lt. Commander Tate."

Pocchi said, "We'll put a BOLO (be on the lookout) out for him. Let me go to the HR office to see if he has a car registered to park here."

John and Harm agreed. After they got Traci settled in the ER, John called JAG Headquarters to notify the admiral and Mac that Traci was found in good shape. Then the three men went back down to the basement and the pharmacy. They weren't surprised to find that it was dark and that Tate wasn't in his office.

"Now what's next?" Harm asked more to hear the question said aloud than in bewilderment.

"Now let me call Sarah and have her go interview Limon. I pulled his part of the file and I saw that Carolyn Imes was his attorney. Maybe he can give us a lead as to who is really behind this whole mess." John said pulling out his cellphone.

John continued resolutely, "After that we go talk to the Sons of Fire."
Chapter 13

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 13

Tuesday, September 2, 1997

2215 Local Time

Portsmouth Holiday Inn

It was very late in the evening when Traci was released from the emergency room. Seeing how late it was she, Gail, Harm and John decided to stay the night in Portsmouth.

So being that Gail was the only civilian and was not eligible to stay at the VOQ at Norfolk, they checked into the local Holiday Inn where they managed to get adjoining rooms. Naturally the guys and gals got separate rooms.

While they waited in the hospital Harm called Diane to let her know of their plans.

While Harm had his wife on the phone John asked to speak with her to ask, "Hey Di can you please pick Sarah up and bring her home? She still can't drive with her leg yet."

"Sarah and I already planned to do that. She called me earlier when she figured that you all would stay the night being it was so late. I mean that's what a sister is for anyway," Diane sweetly said.

John laughed and said, "Thanks Di. Tell Sarah I love her and I'll see her tomorrow."

"Tell her yourself John, she's sitting right here," Diane said.

Sarah got on the phone and asked, "How's Traci?"

"She's fine. She's staying in the same room as Gail," John told her.

"Good don't worry about me, I'm fine. Diane and I will stay at my apartment tonight. It will be our first girly night ever. It'll be fun."

John laughed again saying, "Well in that case I'll leave you two to have your 'girly night'. I love you Sarah."

"I love you to John. I'll see you tomorrow." Sarah replied lovingly.

They hung up on each other.

John told Harm, "They'll stay at Sarah's in Georgetown. Sarah said something about it being their first 'girly night' together."

Harm shared a laugh with John then he asked him, "You should make Sarah an honest woman and marry her. Don't wait."

John looked at him sideways. Harm was giving John his own advice back at him. John answered with a simple, "We'll see."
Harm smirked at him.

In Gail and Traci’s room just before they turned out the lights Traci felt the need to express her gratitude, "Mrs. Grayson I."

"Please lieutenant, call me Gail. Mrs. Grayson is my mother in law. Every time I hear Mrs. Grayson I turn around looking for her," Gail said.

Traci smiled as she replied, "Okay Gail and it's Traci. Anyway I just wanted to say thank you for coming with John and Commander Rabb to find me. I really appreciate it."

"Oh Traci it was the least I could do," Gail said as she smiled indulgently.

The two shared a quick hug and then they got into their separate beds.

Traci asked, "I see you carry a weapon. Why?"

"Well I used to be a cop in Washington Heights, New York. That's upper Manhattan. I still have the carry permit. When I drive around Los Angelis I like to have it near me. A lot of carjackings happen out there. I feel safer," Gail explained.

"Have you ever had to use it?" Traci asked.

Gail told her story, "Yeah one night in my third year on the job I did. A guy robbed a liquor store on upper Broadway. The owner set off a silent alarm. The perpetrator came out of the store waving a machete. When my partner and I rolled up we had our weapons drawn as soon as we saw the machete. We told him to drop it, but he came at us. He was on my side of the car coming right at me. I guess he thought me being a girl I wouldn't have the guts to fire. Well I put two in his chest. It turns out that his post mortem drug screen showed high levels of PCP. It was ruled good shoot."

"It must have been really tough to deal with that," Traci commented.

"Yeah it was. After that I was snapping at everyone, my partner, my family. I was hell to be with. I found out later I was dealing with Post Traumatic Stress. That's when I decided to go into law school. I just didn't want to have that kind of responsibility any more.

It was just a coincidence that John and I started Fordham Law the same year. Everyone thought we were attached at the hip. We had the same class schedule."

Traci laughed at that then she asked, "What was John like in law school?"

"As you know he can become very intense. (Traci nodded at that.) Well back then he was more than intense, he was in a foul mood. He just broke up with his girlfriend and he was fighting with his mom over his career choice. So seeing he didn't want to live at home and I needed someone to study with I told him to stay with me at our Aunt Margaret's house in City Island, 15 minutes down the road from Fordham. Her children are a little older than us and they were married with their own families. So she had some extra rooms and she was glad to put us up. She liked having young people in the house again. There were times when she came down in the morning and found us asleep at the dining room table drooling on our legal pads."

Traci laughed at that to.

Gail continued, "So anyway because he was dealing with his family situation and I was dealing with my PTSD we really needed each other. As we progressed in law school we started to have a lot of fun, going to mixers, fraternity parties. I met my husband at one of the mixers. There were times we
went to the police range and shot a lot of targets up. It helped to get a lot of aggression out."

Traci smiled at that and said, "That was a nice story." Switching tracks she asked, "So where do we go with this investigation now?"

"Well John wants to shake the Sons of Fire tree to see what comes out. We might find someone to say Peter wasn't involved in their pipeline."

"That should be interesting to see,' Traci said.

"Yeah me to, I'd like to be there to see how he works," Gail agreed.

They switched off the lights and went to sleep.

Wednesday, September 3, 1997

0800 Local Time

Norfolk NCIS Office

Norfolk, VA

When they decided to stay the night in Portsmouth, Gail went out to get a change of clothes and underwear at the local shopping mall, while the three officers had their overnight bags already prepared.

When they left the hotel the officers all had their navy uniforms on while Gail was wearing what she purchased, a pair of jeans, a white man styled button down shirt and a red camisole. She wore the same shoes from the day before, power executive stiletto pumps.

After breakfast they met with Pocchi and Weatherly at the local NCIS office on the Norfolk Naval Base.

John asked, "Are you familiar with the motorcycle gang the Sons of Fire?"

It was Weatherly who answered, "Yeah they're a real pain in the ass. We get a lot of reports of them harassing the Navy personnel. They are all ex-military or Hell's Angels wannabes. They are always trying to weasel their way onto the base, showing fake or expired identification cards, following supply trucks and trying to catch anything (she held up both her hands with two fingers each forming quotes) falling off. They hang out at a bar in the seedier side of Norfolk called the Drinking Lamp."

"What they don't have their own clubhouse?" Harm asked factitiously.

"No they don't. They're locals without jobs and they just started hanging out together. They don't even have jackets with logos. Like I said before they're Hells Angels wannabes. The name 'Sons of Fire' was as close as they could get without the real Hell's Angels coming down on them." Pocchi said.

"Is there any chance that Commander Tate is letting things fall off a truck for them?" Traci asked.

"Well given that he may be the one that attacked you and he's not in today, I would say he is a strong suspect," Michele replied.

"The BOLO on his car came up negative because it's still parked in the employee lot at the hospital. Michele and I are going to his residence next," Pocchi told them.
"Well while you do that, we'll go the Drinking Lamp and speak to the Sons of Fire." John added. He looked at his cousin and asked, "Any chance that outfit can be sexed up a bit?"

Gail said, "Turn around boys."

After Harm, Chris and John dutifully complied Gail took off her shirt and camisole. The she put the shirt back on, but instead of buttoning it back up she took the front tails and tied them in front just under her ample breasts. She pushed up on her breasts, adjusted her bra so that she could show more cleavage. When she turned around she undid her pony tail and fluffed her hair out some.

"Six months of undercover work in the NYPD Vice Squad," she said to unasked questions in Harm's and the others' stares. John just smiled.

1300 Local Time
Drinking Lamp Bar
Norfolk, VA

John wore a denim jacket over his white tee shirt, jeans and scuffed work shoes. He had his Berretta in a holster at the small of his back under his outfit. He had his sunglasses on as he and Gail got out of his Camaro outside the Drinking Lamp. They walked past the line of motorcycles parked outside the bar. Gail was really working her role of his girlfriend. She had the gum snapping and the nasally city girl accent going. (Think Marisa Tomei in 'My Cousin Vinny.) As they walked into the dimly lit bar they had to remove their sunglasses. They went up to the bar and ordered drinks. John said, "Give me a beer."

Gail said, "I'll have a Manhattan." The Manhattan came out nasal sounding like Miinhainttan.

The bartender told her, "We only serve beer or straight liquor. We don't do any fru-fru mixed drinks."

"Okay, then give me two fingers of 'Jack'," Gail said putting her hand on the bar. She held her pinky and index finger out with her ring and middle fingers close between them to indicate the level of 'Jack Daniels' she wanted.

The bartender filled up a tumbler glass for her. She gulped it own in one shot. John just sipped his beer in an effort to hide his smile. He knew Gail could hold her liquor.

Gail gravitated to the pool table in the rear of the room. She and John saw a group of men in denim jackets gathered around there. They both figured that the gang would make up the majority of the bar patrons at this time of day.

Gail saw that there was no money on the rim of the table to indicate who was playing next. So she went over and slapped a $5.00 dollar bill on the rim saying, "I play winner."

One guy who was shooting stopped, looked up at her and said, "Hell darlin' I'll play ya now."

"Rack em up sport," Gail said snapping her gum.

"The name's not sport, it's Rock."

"Okay 'Rock," Gail said. She then asked, "What are we playing?"

"Eight ball, we'll lag to see who breaks."
"That's okay sport, you can break," Gail conceded.

Rock grimaced at the use of "sport" again but he racked the balls. He asked, "What are we playing for?"

"How we play for $5.00 a ball?" Gail asked.

"Fine by me," Rock answered and then took his shot. While he broke the rack well enough, no balls were sunk.

"Nothin'" Gail said.

As Gail walked around the table and examined her options she was humming a tune. John recognized it as 'Fools Rush In'. Again he took a sip of his beer to hide his smile. She finally settled herself and called her shot, "15 Ball in the corner pocket."

She took the shot. The cue ball smacked loudly against the 15, which rolled true to the corner pocket. She proceeded to run the table never giving Rock another shot. When she sunk the 8 ball she held out her hand, that's 8 balls times $5.00 a ball that makes it $40.00 you owe me."

Rock was incensed. "No fair lady, you didn't even give me a chance to take my shot."

"Well sport you had your shot at the break. It's not my fault you didn't sink anything sport," Gail said.

It was the last 'sport' that set Rock off. He advanced on Gail. Gail still had her cue stick in her hands. As Rock got close enough she swung the fat end across his head. As the stick broke in two on Rock's head, he staggered. Gail advanced on him. She hauled off and punched his nose, hard. His nose collapsed and blood began to flow and Rock went down. Gail stood over him balancing on the balls of her feet in a fighting stance waiting for him to get up.

As John watched the game he sipped his beer some more. When the game was over and Rock approached Gail ready to assault her, he put his beer down to watch the coming fight waiting to see if he needed to intercede. As Rock advanced on Gail he said softly to the bartender in a sing song voice, "Big mistake."

The bartender replied, "That little girl of yours is in a lot of trouble."

"No I'd worry about your friend there," John countered.

The bartender looked at him skeptically, but he settled in to watch the spectacle.

John winced when Gail snapped the cue stick across Rock's head. He winced again when Gail punched Rock's nose and he went down. He saw the group of men go over to Rock, looking like they were ready to join the fight. John took his Berretta out and loudly called, "Uh, uh, stay out of it boys. It's still fair fight."

They all backed up knowing he got the drop on them. Rock looked over at John as he held the gun at the gang. He decided to stay down.

Gail was the next to speak as she said, "Look Rock I'll forgive the debt if you give me some information. What do you say?"

Rock wiped at his nose, he asked, "What are you a cop?" Rock asked.
"No I'm a lawyer. I need information."

"What kind of information?"

"Do you know Peter Tierney?"

"Who's he?"

"He was the guy the other day that tried to get the Sons of Fire to back off his friend. He tried to pay his friend's debt to them. Well the Sons said no because they didn't want to give up their drug pipeline." Gail explained.

"I don't know about any drug pipeline. He didn't owe us any money and there was nothing to give up. The only thing I know of a pipeline is when this guy named Limon came to us a couple of weeks ago. He said that his bookie sent him to set up a pipeline of stuff we could sell. I didn't know what he was talking about so I told him to come back when he had something to sell. I thought he was going to get some truck or machine parts, you know cast offs from the base. They're always throwing good stuff out. We just take whatever they don't want and try to resell it. Limon said he could get us real good stuff to sell. He didn't deliver anything to us. The next time I saw him was when he and your friend came and ran over our bikes," Rock said.

"Do you know the name of Limon's bookie?" Gail asked.

"Limon said his name was Tate," Rock said.
Chapter 14

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 14

Wednesday, September 3, 1997

Norfolk, VA

To

Washington Navy yard, SE

Hearing that Tate was Limon's bookie, Gail and John realized that Limon was lying about his involvement in the whole affair. They knew they had to speak with Limon.

After leaving the Drinking Lamp, John called Traci on his cell phone, "Traci, is there any news on the BOLO for Tate?"

"No sir, Commander Rabb and I are with Special Agent Pocchi at Tate's residence now. It looks like he packed in a real hurry and left. He hasn't even returned to work since before my attack. It seems he went into hiding." Traci answered.

"Well if that's the case we don't need to stay in Norfolk anymore. We have to get back to DC and speak with Limon. He's been lying to us and everyone else involved with the case." He told Traci about what Rock told them.

"Okay since we're all checked out of the hotel, we can go directly there. Commander Rabb and I will head back to DC with my car. We can meet you and Gail at JAG headquarters later this afternoon."

"That sounds good Traci. I'll call when Gail and I arrive in DC. I'll see you soon." John said.

Traci acknowledged him before they hung up. Turning to Gail he asked her, "By the way where do you plan to stay while you're in DC?"

Gail smiled sweetly before she said, "At your place. My stuff is already there."

All John could say was "Huh?" Then he recovered his wits as he asked, "How did you get into the house? I have an alarm and everything."

Gail let him off the hook as she said, "I shouldn't tease you so much, you get so literal. I should have said my rental car is in your driveway and my suitcase is in the trunk. When I first got here after Peter called me and after I got him into Navy custody, his wife Valerie put me up at their house in Portsmouth. I called your mom to get your phone number and address from her. I told her that I needed to get your help with Peter's case, so she gave them to me. I drove into DC from Portsmouth very early yesterday morning, parked my car in your driveway and took a cab from your place to the Navy Yard. I called from the cab and left that message you got."

John just shook his head then he had another thought. He picked up his cell phone and called, "Traci change of plans. After you drop Harm off pick up Sarah and come to my place. Gail and I are going to the Navy Brig to speak with Limon. After we do that, we'll meet at my place and based on what Gail and I get from Limon, we'll plan what our next move is."
"Aye, aye sir," Traci acknowledged.

1630 Local Time

Navy Brig

Washington Navy Yard, DC, SE

As he thought, it was late in the day when John parked at the Navy Yard Brig. He and Gail stopped at his house so that he could change back into his uniform. Gail changed into one of her power business suits.

They called Lt. Carolyn Imes to inform her that they wanted to speak with her client. When they got there Imes said, "Petty Officer Limon has agreed to speak with you. The only condition he has is that he will only give you information if you can help him get a better deal with the convening authority."

John replied, "Based on what he tells us I'll speak with Mattoni and make my recommendations accordingly."

Imes agreed. John started off with, "Mrs. Grayson and I spoke to a guy named Rock. He is with the Sons of Fire. He told us that you offered to sell him and his gang some material or as he said it, 'set up a pipeline'. Can you verify anything he said?"

Limon was going to answer but Imes shook her head no and he remained silent. So John pressed on, "Does Senior Chief Tierney have anything to do with the theft of the drugs from the hospital?"

Imes nodded for him to answer as he said, "No he didn't."

He wanted to say more but Imes stopped him saying, "Only answer the questions that are asked."

"When Tierney found out you pilfered the drugs, what did you tell him?" John asked.

"I told him I owed a lot of money to my bookie from losing at gambling on baseball and the horses. I just needed to make a big score to pay it off." Limon answered.

"Who was your bookie?" Gail asked.

"Commander Tate." Limon answered.

"Did Tate tell you to pilfer the drugs?" John asked.

"Yeah he said that we could make some money and I could pay him off. He said he would doctor the books to make sure no one missed anything. Tate controlled all the record keeping. He didn't think Tierney would find out," Limon answered.

"When Tierney caught you pilfering the drugs, why did you two go to meet the Sons of Fire?" John asked.

"He insisted on going with me after I told him that I wanted to sell them surplus stuff just to make money to pay my bookie off. He didn't believe me. He thought that I was selling drugs. He said he would try and get the gang to back off me. When we got to the parking lot, Tierney told the 'Sons' that they weren't going to get any drugs from the hospital. I saw that the Sons had no idea what he was talking about and they were starting to get ticked off. I told Tierney we had to leave and I pulled him to the Humvee. When we got into the car I panicked and tried to get out of the lot to fast and I tried to go while the car was still in reverse. I ran over some of their bikes. That's when they started
shooting at us.

We saw the police car when we left the parking lot, but they didn't follow us. Tierney was yelling at me to stop the car. I just ignored him. Then when we saw the road block on the interstate, I panicked again. I only tried to get around them. That stupid cop had to move his car onto the shoulder to block me. I couldn't avoid hitting him. I wasn't trying to kill anyone and I wasn't going to sell any drugs," Limon whined.

"No you weren't. You were going to use them."

The statement didn't come from John but from Gail. All during the interview she was observing Limon. She saw that he was agitated, looking at the clock on the wall, sweating, wringing his hands, bouncing in his chair. She knew the signs of addiction as she saw them all during her time on the NYPD.

"How long have you been using the Oxy?" Gail asked.

Limon knew he was found out. "I've been using Oxy since I hurt my back a year ago. The pain just won't go away."

"So you thought you could try morphine," John asked. He was so proud of Gail for picking up on Limon's addiction.

Limon nodded yes.

"So you started stealing some. Did Tate help you steal it?" John asked.

"Yeah he did. He did it to keep me under his thumb. I already owed him a lot of money from the gambling. He figured I could sell some of the morphine and that would help me pay off my gambling debt. He said it wasn't costing him anything to get the morphine so it was a win-win for him," Limon said.

"So not only was Tate your bookie, he was your supplier," John asked him.

"Yeah he was," Limon admitted.

"Would you be willing to write your statement down detailing all that as well as Senior Chief Tierney had nothing to do with your activities and him being your passenger when you tried to run the roadblock?" John asked.

"Yes he would in exchange for dropping the charges of intending to sell the drugs and he gets recommended for treatment," Imes asked.

"Yeah I can suggest that Mattoni and Roberts do that, but as for the attempted murder and assault charges for running the roadblock, you're on your own Carolyn," John told her.

Carolyn nodded saying, "Thanks John."

At that John and Gail left the interview room.

1845 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Avenue, DC, NW
Back at John's house Sarah, Traci and Ann Marie were talking at the kitchen table. Traci and Sarah were already changed out of their uniforms and into casual clothes. The two stopped at Traci's apartment in Columbia Heights, not five minutes away from John’s house on Florida Avenue, so she could change.

They were laughing along with Ann Marie. Ann Marie was recounting how Sam Seaborn and Josh Lyman were responding to a blog. "No matter what they posted, the blogger had a response. Pretty soon the press corps picked up on it. After I tapped danced through that mine field, I found the two of them in Sam's office. They were still blogging. So I pulled on Josh's ear and then I signed off from the blogger's site for them. I said if I ever caught them blogging again, I'd crucify them on the south lawn."

Traci and Sarah shared a laugh at that. Just as Ann Marie ended the story John threw the door open and shouted, "Hey Annie, guess who I brought home for supper!"

When Gail entered the kitchen Ann Marie squealed when she saw her cousin. She got up and embraced her enthusiastically.

John gave Sarah a nice kiss on the lips and Ann Marie on her cheek. He took Traci's hand and gallantly kissed the back.

Traci just batted her eyes and deepening her southern drawl said, "Why thank you suh."

Everyone shared a laugh. As John went upstairs to change into his casual clothes, Sarah, Gail, Ann Marie and Traci set to prepare dinner. Traci and Sarah stopped at the market to get the groceries on the way home. They were making linguini with an Alfredo clam sauce. Because of her leg, Sarah was sitting on a stool as she prepared the salad at the counter. As the sauce was being cooked, Ann Marie would dip the stirring spoon and bring a sample over for Sarah to taste.

As the women worked, there were the usual requests for ingredients, for tasting and generally much goodwill and laughter. This is what John heard as he came down the stairs. He stood on the landing between the kitchen and the living room listening to the happy sounds coming from his kitchen. He heard his sister, his cousin, his beloved and his colleague/adopted sister enjoying each other's company and he was immensely happy. He had to wipe at his eyes to keep from spilling the joyful tears that were welling up.

Taking a breath to calm himself, he stepped down into the kitchen and asked, "How are you doing ladies. Do you need me to do anything?"

He was totally taken aback as they all chorused as one, "NO!"

Ann Marie reached into the fridge and got a beer. Handing it to him, she said, "There are enough cooks in here already. Just go inside and relax for a few minutes. We'll call you when you need to set the table."

John shrugged in compliance and walked into the living room.

After the dinner dishes were cleared and the dishwasher was loaded Ann Marie excused herself saying, "I know you need to talk about the case. So I'll say good night. Gail, John folded out the sofa bed in the den and I'll leave you some fresh towels, sheets and blankets. I'll see you in the morning."

She went over to Traci and gave her brief hug saying, "Goodnight Traci. Thank you for coming. It was nice having you here."

Traci returned the hug and the sentiment with a simple, "You're welcome. It was my pleasure being
As soon as Ann Marie went upstairs, the four attorneys set to work on Peter's case.

"So here is what we can prove from Limon's statements. Because of his back pain he was stealing Oxy from the pharmacy for almost a year. When the Oxy became ineffective he graduated to morphine. Limon was also into his bookie, Commander Tate, the Pharmacy Director, for beau coup bucks from gambling with him. When Tate caught Limon stealing morphine, Tate thought he could sink his hook in deeper.

But Peter found the discrepancy in the morphine bookkeeping and confronted Limon. At which point Limon started telling lies about being in debt to a loan shark in the Sons of Fire. Peter thought that he could help Limon out by trying to get the Sons' to back off. But when Peter and Limon confronted the Sons', they had no idea what Peter was talking about. Limon panicked and ran over the motorcycles and shooting ensued. The police responded and set up a roadblock for the Humvee, which Limon crashed into seriously injuring two police officers.

Peter's only legal violation was a failure to properly report the discrepancy to his higher up, which was oddly enough Tate, who was aiding and abetting Limon's thefts," John summarized.

"Carolyn called me while you were on your way home. She told me that Limon would testify to everything at Peter's Article 32 hearing," Sarah said.

"So that should do it. What kind of penalty will Pete be facing?" Gail asked.

"He'll probably have to pay a fine in the low thousand dollars or a reduction in rank, but no brig time. Valerie will not be happy with that," John added.

"You're not kidding," Gail replied.

"Alright we'll see them in court tomorrow," Sarah said.

"Okay that wraps that up. Though it would be helpful if we could find Tate, he is as culpable as Limon."

"We'll see what Weatherly and Pocchi come up with their BOLO," John said.

They all agreed with that as John said, "Traci I'll see you tomorrow."

As Traci got up and collected her things she said, "Good night John, Sarah."

She shook hands with Sarah and she gave John a hug saying in his ear, "Thank you for coming after me John. I'll never forget it."

John said, "You're welcome Traci."

John walked her to her car and watched her drive away.

Thursday, September 4, 1997

1300 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC, SE
Peter Tierney's Article 32 hearing went just as his attorneys had said it would. Peter was ordered to pay a fine of $8,000.00 to be garnered from his pay and no brig time.

Peter was very appreciative. He, Gail, John and Sarah were walking out into the court yard with their lunch. John was carrying his and Sarah's lunch on his tray while Sarah moved along on her crutches. They sat down at a table and commenced to eating. Peter said, "I can't thank you all enough. I can handle the fine and Val is happy that I can come home tonight."

"Well Pete just think before you become the white knight for everyone next time," John said.

"Yes sir," Peter replied.

They all finished their meal, got up and emptied their trays at the trash. Before they could walk back into the building there was a commotion at the entrance to the courtyard. People started to scatter as a man ran into the courtyard waving a gun.

It was Tate. After Traci interviewed him, he knew that he would eventually be found out and arrested. He was the one who attacked her. He did not intend to kill, merely slow her down enough to give him time to get away. Being that he was in the pharmacy, he had access to chloroform. After he knocked Traci out, he tied her up, gagged and blindfolded her and laid her in the linen cart under the sheets and towels. Then he had fled the hospital.

Thinking that it would be easier for anyone to find him if he had his car, he decided to leave it in the hospital parking lot. He only went and sat in it to retrieve some of his merchandise, namely the drugs he intended to sell as well as the cash he stashed away there. As he walked out of the parking lot he told the guard at the security booth that his car would not start and that he would grab a cab home. He was living in a cheap motel for the past two days.

As he sat in the hotel room, he thought of what he would lose his job, his pension and his freedom. He became so angry at Peter for finding the drug count discrepancy. That was the one loose thread that unraveled his whole operation. He wanted Peter and anyone with him to suffer as he did.

That day Tate got up and cleaned himself up. He dressed in his white uniform and set out for the Navy Yard. With is uniform and Navy Identification, he had no problem getting through the Main Gate. He arrived just before 1100. He parked his car, which he rented that morning for cash, so that he could easily look into the courtyard. If anyone came to the car they would find him reading the paper. He would say that he was waiting for his wife to come out from JAG for a lunch together. He was really waiting for an opportunity to kill Peter and then he would take his own life.

He saw Peter and Traci with a civilian female and two other officers, a male Navy Commander and a female Marine Major leaving the JAG building together carrying lunch trays. The marine was walking on crutches as the commander was carrying her food and his on his tray. They all sat at the same table to eat their meal. Tate waited and watched them eat.

Tate got up as he saw that they were finished eating. He walked into the courtyard with his hand in his pocket. As he got closer to Peter and the others he pulled his gun out and shouted, "Tierney, You ruined my life! Come join me in hell you bastard."

As he raised his gun to fire, two shots rang out, but they weren't from Tate's gun. Two spots appeared on his chest and blood spurted out as Tate fell dead onto the pavement.

Everyone turned to see who shot at Tate and saw Gail standing in a combat stance, smoke coming from her .38 automatic.
Despite her years practicing law in the entertainment industry, Gail still had not lost any bit of her police training, especially her eye for something amiss. As she and the others came out with their lunch, she saw a man in a car reading a newspaper. When her party got to the first empty table, Gail sat so that she could watch the car as she ate. She glanced toward the car now and then. She couldn’t see the driver's face, but she did see him peak at them over the top of the newspaper, he was supposedly reading, a few times as they ate their lunch. Her time doing stakeouts in New York told her that he was waiting for someone. She saw immediately that when she and her friends got up, he got out of his car. She reached into her handbag and put her hand on her weapon. As Tate came closer, she saw him take his hand out of this pocket holding a gun.

Gail's police shooting training took over. As Tate was shouting she pulled her gun out and in a split second she aimed for the center mass of Tate's body and squeezed off two shots.

As she put her gun down she said to everyone, "Well I couldn't let him shoot us now could I?"

Her friends sighed in relief and amusement as Marine Guards came over and took over the situation.
Sarah was concentrating on the needle and thread she had in her hand as she sat on her sofa. She just threaded the needle, when she heard the doorbell ring. She knew who it was, but she still looked out her peephole just in case. She opened the door and let John in. They shared a deep and lingering kiss at the door.

John headed for the sofa. He picked something off the seat so he could sit down. Belatedly, Sarah realized that it was the toe shoe she was repairing. "Watch out for the-"

"Ouch!"

"-needle" she finished.

"What are you doing?" John asked rubbing his thigh after he extracted the needle. John suddenly realized what he was holding. "Toe shoes? I didn't know you danced ballet. You should talk to Ann Marie. She took ballet from kindergarten till she graduated high school" said John.

"I know. The two weeks I spent at your place we spoke a lot. She told me that she used to dance. She played Peter Pan in the production her teacher put on in her last year. I told her I liked to dance and was looking for a place in DC to enroll. She said she thought of taking up dancing again, but she got busy with work and trying to get pregnant and she didn't have anyone to go with her. Now she's been looking to find an exercise program to keep in shape during her pregnancy so she checked with Dr. Warner. Dr. Warner said low impact dancing was good for her. So we enrolled together to in a class at a studio near your house. Besides it's a good way to rehabilitate from the bullet wound in my leg."

"So who else knows you dance?" asked John

She held out her hand for the toe shoe. "No one else" she answered reluctantly, "and I'd prefer to keep it that way."

"Why?" he asked, genuinely puzzled.

"Come on, John. Can't you just hear all the cracks about the 'dancing marine'?"

"People who make remarks like that are morons."

"True, but they're usually loud morons. Just drop it please?" she asked, trying to distract him.

"So how come you didn't dance when you were a kid? Can I hear the story?" John was interested in the story and the opportunity to learn something new about his girlfriend.

Sarah was reluctant because she didn't want to drag up bad memories. "Are you sure you want to
"Yes, I do," said John.

She took a deep breath, "I didn't tell your sister this part. So promise to keep it to yourself or let me tell her when I feel more comfortable?"

"OK, if that's the way you want it." he said

She readjusted herself on the couch. "As I told you before when I was a kid, there weren't many nice or pretty things in my life. Every once in a while, I'd see a poster, or an ad, for the ballet and I just thought it was so beautiful." She paused a moment.

"Your Dad wouldn't take you to the theater?" John guessed.

"Hell, no. I knew better than to even ask."

Her tone was slightly bitter with old pain, then brightened at her next memory.

"Uncle Matt took me to my first ballet. When I was 13 I stayed with him for one vacation out West, he asked me about things I'd like to see or do. I finally got up the nerve to mention that I'd like to go to the ballet. So the next year when I was out there for my 14th birthday he took me to see Sleeping Beauty."

Her eyes shone with the happy recollection.

"It was the most wonderful, magical thing I'd ever seen. I'm not so sure Uncle Matt enjoyed it, though," she laughed.

"He enjoyed seeing you happy."

"I suppose he did."

"So, when did you start taking lessons?"

"Well, a couple of years ago in Hawaii. I signed up for lessons at a local community college."

"You really love it, don't you?" John asked.

"Yes, I do. It's very challenging, to do something so physically demanding, and make it look effortless. I haven't quite got that part down yet.

"But you keep trying. You don't give up."

He smiled, anticipating her next words.

"I'm a Marine, John. Marines don't give up," she added with a grin.

John grinned and then he decided to help her. "I see you just started. Give me the other shoe and show me how you want the ribbons sewn and I'll sew the other."

Sarah was thrilled for the help and set up her other shoe for him to sew.

As John sewed a thought came to him, 'I know it's early but this could work' as he thought about what to give her for Christmas.
Sarah looked up and saw the look on his face. She came to know that he got that look when he was thinking of ways to pleasantly surprise her with something romantic. At first she was anxious to find out what he was thinking, but she came to love the surprises that came from that look. Still she couldn't wait to see what was coming. She missed him the last three days and two nights.

John wasn't at JAG for those three days because of an out of office assignment and Sarah was staying at JAG late to catch up on her backlog of cases that piled up as she recovered from her leg wound. Also the couple had not spent those evenings with each other as Sarah was going to her first two dance lessons. She discovered that she had aches in muscles she did not know she still had and not used as a dancer in such a long time so she was just too wiped out to have any company. Now she was looking forward to spending some uninterrupted time with him for the weekend. Her thoughts immediately went to the bedroom as she thought of how she wanted them to spend her time.

Sarah cast those pleasant thoughts aside and asked him about his out of office assignment, "How was your three days escorting Romanian Princess Alexandra around Washington?"

John rolled his eyes and told her. "We were given an itinerary set out for her by the State Department. We were fine as long as she followed it. The first night we went to dinner at the embassy where she proceeded to ditch the party. Her protection detail and I found her at a nightclub. She wouldn't leave the nightclub so I had to pick her up and carry her out. And just my luck, there were paparazzi outside the club snapping photos."

"I thought that was you. The princess looked very comfortable in your arms," said Sarah coyly. She ducked as John good-naturedly threw a couch pillow at her.

John continued, "The next day we went to Norfolk and toured the Kitty Hawk. The rest of the day was fine until later that night. Ann Marie had just come from 'your' dance session and as we were sitting down to dinner, the doorbell rings; who should be there, but, Alexandra. She ditched her State Department Protection detail again, this time from the embassy. She had decided she wanted to see DC at night, but not the touristy DC. It was all Ann Marie & I could do to convince her that was a bad idea. As we were speaking with her Webb came pounding at the door. Ann Marie & I knew we would be in deep trouble if he found her there and we hid her in the bathroom. After Webb left, I got us a cab and I brought her back to the embassy. I told Webb that she came by after he left and I got her back to the embassy as fast as I could. Needless to say everyone was glad to have her back unscathed. Today we stuck to the itinerary and we ended 90 minutes ago. I tell you Sarah, that girl needs to grow up and get her head straight. It's like she doesn't remember that an assassin was tracking and threatening her."

John stopped his rant turned to Sarah and asked her, "How were your three days?"

Sarah smiled, "Terrible, I didn't get to see you."

John smiled affectionately at that.

Sarah continued, "But it was really funny at work. You missed the cutest exchange. You met Ensign Sims three days ago, just before the admiral assigned you to escort duty right?" John nodded. "Well I didn't get to remind you that she was the Ensign that Bud met when we were on the Seahawk during that crossing the line incident with Lt. Isaacs."

"Oh yeah that's right. You mentioned her last July 4th."

"Right, well, Bud asked Harriet out the night before last and he had a flat tire with no spare and stood her up. She met Lieutenant Ken Knox who asked her to go to the N.A.T.O. Ball, tomorrow."
When Bud arrived at the office the next day, he was so downtrodden that we all took pity on him. So Ensign Eileen Nestor and I hatched a plan to get Harriet and Bud together. She asked Bud to go to the ball with her. Bud agreed. Maybe we can get them talking with each other. Bud is so goofy at times especially when he tries talking to Harriet. He needs all the help he can get."

John laughed at the story and added, "I know, when awkwardness goes to $40 a barrel, I want the drilling rights to Bud's head. What time do you want me to pick you up tomorrow?"

"Pick me up about six o'clock, but not here. Meet me at Harm & Diane's place. I'm taking my dress and the rest of my stuff there early tomorrow. Then Diane and I are going to be very busy getting our hair done and everything else we need to do to get ready for the ball. As pregnant as she is, she needs a little extra feminine help. You should see the dress Diane got. It looks beautiful on her even though she's over eight months pregnant. Harm took her out last Sunday to get it. It took them all day to find one that was just right for her. Harm was exhausted when he came in Monday."

John smiled as he remembered his Saturday of shopping for a dress with Sarah.

Flashback

Saturday, September 6, 1997

1800 Local time

Random Dress Shop

Washington, D.C.

John sighed for what felt like the millionth time since this whole charade had started. He and Sarah got out that morning at 0900 sharp. Things started out fine. They'd grabbed some breakfast at a small cafe outside central DC, before heading to the closest mall. Now, nearly eight hours later, she still hadn't found a dress, and his feet and back were killing him. Lord knew, he enjoyed seeing Sarah in the many different array of gowns she tried on...many with no back, high slits and low neck lines, but a guy could only take so much of this all day shopping deal. He'd been in more dress shops than he could count, been ogled by more women then he cared to try and count, and been pestered by more salespeople than he knew existed...how many people had to offer help to one poor guy, standing in a dress shop with his girlfriend, who by the by, took no pity on his predicament.

On top of that John still couldn't believe that she was still going despite her using crutches because she still had to stay off her wounded leg. Sarah knew that she could walk short distances without pain, but staying on it for too long made it rather uncomfortable so she used the crutches for long distances. She only walked without them for the four to five steps from dressing room to mirror.

Sarah was once again in the fitting room, having grabbed three dresses to try on and model for John. The first two, like all the others, he insisted she looked great in. She however, turned around to look at herself in the mirror, hands on her hips, saying, "I don't know..."

He mentally prepared himself for another session of indecision as the dressing room door opened once again and she emerged. This time however, before he could utter, 'beautiful Sarah, I think you should get that one', his jaw dropped, as he fully took in the vision standing before him. In all the other gowns, she, as always, looked drop dead gorgeous...in John's opinion she could wear a paper bag and still look gorgeous, and it had nothing to do with how little the bag would cover. This gown however, left him breathless. It was like something out of a fairy tale. The color was a shimmering aquamarine, that set of her olive toned skin and dark features. The top was tight, flattering her full breasts and slim waist. With split sleeves, the material loose around the neckline, just resting on the
tips of her slim shoulders, the front and back drooping down in the loose material fashion. The skirt was long, hugging the lush curve of her hips, then flowing out gracefully, to the floor.

Like a princess, she was exquisite. Glorious. Breathtaking. He could think of a million different adjectives, none fully doing her justice. All he came up with aloud was, "wow!"

Sarah blushed at his blatant response, and his obvious approval as his eyes ran up and down her figure. Feeling a little self-conscious, she crossed her arms over her chest, and asked meekly, "it looks okay?"

"Okay? Are you kidding me? Geez Sarah, you look...wow!"

Sarah smiled shyly. "You said that already," she said softly, rubbing her bare arms.

John smiled at her sudden timidity. This Marine would never cease to amaze him. She turned from him to look at herself in the mirror, running her hands down her sides, smoothing imaginary wrinkles. Standing, he came up behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Seriously Sarah, I'm not saying this cause I'm so sick of shopping I think I'll hire someone to do my groceries for the next year."

Sarah laughed softly, quieting as John continued in a voice soft and sincere. "It's perfect Sarah, definitely the one to get. And since we're going together, I think I should have a say in what you wear."

Sarah turned and looked him right in his eye then kissed him soundly. "Thanks sweetie. That was just the response I was looking for."

End of Flashback

As he finished sewing both ribbons on 'his' toe shoe John said to her, "I can't wait to see you in your new dress and we have our first dance at the ball tomorrow night."

"Aren't you supposed to stay with the princess? Sarah asked coyly.

John just gave her an exasperated look and said, "Are you kidding? I don't have to escort her in and dance the first dance. It's not like a wedding. My obligation to her is over. I want to dance with the most beautiful woman there. By the way, how's your leg? Will you be able to take me up on that dance?"

Sarah smiled at his compliment. She knew that he really wanted to go with her and she was just teasing him. "I've been walking without a limp for a week now and the ballet exercises have helped tremendously in strengthening the muscles. We don't have to jitterbug or swing dance, but I can waltz you out the door squid."

John could only smile, "We'll see about that jarhead.

Sarah laughed and changed the subject. "You know as busy as we're going to be tomorrow, I won't be alone with you until after the ball. What do you propose to do about that?"

John smiled looked at her seductively and said, "We've still got tonight."

Sarah was also finished with her sewing of the ribbons and she quickly put her sewing supplies away, took his hand and led him into the bedroom.

They didn't get much sleep that night.
Diane did look as beautiful as Sarah said she was. She had on a flowing dark maroon sleeveless dress that hung from her shoulders by straps across her collarbone with a ruffle down each shoulder. The bodice was cut low enough to show the top half of her breasts, lifting them up beautifully showing her cleavage and flowing down from the line under her breasts. She beamed as she walked in on Harm's arm. John & Sarah followed closely behind.

Harriet and Lt. Knox arrived earlier and were in the foyer at the setting card table. They just found the card noting their table when they turned and saw the Rabb & Marshall couples walk in.

Harriet's jaw dropped as she saw how closely Sarah & Diane resembled each other. If it weren't for Diane's advanced state of pregnancy and the different dresses, one would not have been able to tell them apart.


Harriet said to Sarah and Diane, "Oh my god, you two could be twins."

Diane smiled at that, "Harriet, we are fraternal twins, not quite identical, but close enough."

"That's a lovely gown. When are you due?" asked Harriet.

"Thank you. About the end of the month, Harm can't wait. He's hoping for a boy, but I'm sure he'll be just as happy with a daughter that can wrap him around her finger."

"That's so great Mrs. Rabb," gushed Harriet.

"Harriet, just call me Diane. Mrs. Rabb sounds so formal right now."

Diane then saw Sarah give her a high sign behind Harriet's back.

"Why don't you and Lt. Knox go in and have a dance. The music is lovely."

"Okay. We'll see you inside then," Harriet said as she and Lt. Knox walked into the ballroom.

They did not see Bud walk in with Eileen Nestor.


Diane shook Eileen's hand. Eileen had already heard the story of Diane & Sarah's reunion so she did not gush about the similarity.

The three couples walked into the ballroom and found their tables.

John & Sarah and Harm & Diane got up to dance. At the next song, they switched partners.

As he danced with Sarah, Harm looked around distractedly. "Harm, I know I'm your sister in law, but please dance like you're enjoying yourself."
Harm replied sheepishly, "I'm sorry Sarah. I was looking for Bud. We better kick your game plan into gear. When the king & princess arrive, we need to be alert."

"There's security all over the place."

"Well it never hurts to have more eyes."

After the song ended and before the next one began, they split up and went to perform their roles in their plan.

Harriet and Lt. Knox arrived at the Marshall and Rabb's table and just started speaking with Diane as Sarah arrived. John went to get Diane some ginger ale and him some champagne.

"Harriet, Lt. Knox are you enjoying yourselves?" asked Sarah.

"Yes we are ma'am. I didn't have a chance to say so before but I am very pleased to meet you Major," said Knox.

"Very pleased, how nice" said Sarah coyly.

"Yes ma'am, I'm a great admirer of your legal prowess," said Knox gallantly.

"Well any admirer of my legal prowess, I have to dance with. That is if Harriet doesn't mind," asked Sarah, looking expectantly at Harriet.

Knox spoke up, "I'm sure she doesn't. Do you Harriet?"

"No of course not" said Harriet.

As Knox escorted Sarah to the dance floor, Harriet turned to Diane, "Forgive my surprised look as I first saw you. I was just shocked by how closely you and Major Mackenzie resemble each other or that you two were sisters."

Diane smiled warmly and said, "I've been getting that a lot since we found each other last spring."

Harriet paid rapt attention as Diane told her the story of hers & Sarah's reunion.

"That's so romantic. I can see that the two of you are very happy about that. You have to tell me how you and Commander Rabb met."

"We were midshipmen together at Annapolis." Diane answered.

"You're in the Navy too. Where are you stationed?" Harriet asked.

"I'm a Lt. Commander, the same as my husband, in J2 at the Pentagon. I really enjoy my work, but I'm looking forward to taking maternity leave just so I can get some rest. This pregnancy thing is becoming very tiresome," said Diane rubbing her belly.

"Oh ma'am I didn't mean to be so forward," said Harriet almost standing at attention.

"Relax Harriet, we're at a party, enjoy yourself. Why don't you get some champagne? When you see Commander Marshall remind him that I'm here waiting. He went to get some champagne for himself and a ginger ale for me."

Harriet complied, "Of course ma'am, I'll be right back. She walked to the champagne table.

She just missed John as he returned with the beverages for him & Diane. "How's it going?" he asked
looking at Harriet's retreating form.

"So far, so good" said Diane with a smile as she sipped her ginger ale. "Let's sit back and watch the show.

Harm for his part went up to Bud & Eileen. Good evening Bud, Ensign Nestor. Having a good time?

"Oh yes sir" replied Eileen.

"Where's the champagne?" asked Harm.

"Champagne?" said Bud bewildered.

"Why thank you lieutenant. That would be lovely," replied Eileen.

As Bud walked off to get the champagne, Harm asked, "Dance?"

"That would be even lovelier," replied Eileen as Harm twirled her onto the dance floor.

Bud walked out and met Harriet on his way to the champagne table.

"Harriet! How's your life in Norfolk?"

"Do you really care sir?"

"Of course I care Harriet."

"Then why are you here with Ensign Nestor?"

"That was an accident."

"You can't ask me out on purpose, but you can ask her out by accident."

"You were mad at me and she laughed at one of my jokes. At least I think it was a joke."

"You know what worries me Bud. I'm starting to understand what you're saying."

"Oh, Harriet, I'm really, really glad you're here in Washington. When I saw you at JAG it felt like when you're eating Mexican food. You know how your heart gets all tingly and you can't catch your breath because your body feels like it's all fire."

Harriet smiled and breathed a sigh of relief, "I've been waiting for you to say that. Dance?"

Bud looked strange, "No" Harriet was startled for a second before Bud continued, "But I'd sure like to try"

Harriet happily allowed him to escort her to the dance floor.

As Harm danced with Eileen he looked on happily as Bud twirled Harriet.

Harm & Eileen walked cross the dance floor to where Sarah was waiting with Lt. Knox.

Sarah made the introductions, "Do you know Ensign Nestor?"

"No, but I'd like to."

"Would you like to dance?" asked Eileen in reply.
"I'd love to" replied Knox as he took her hand and guided her to the dance floor.

"How did you know he'd go for it?" asked Harm.

"I didn't, but I knew he'd go for the dress," replied Sarah with a smile.

As they returned to their table, John & Diane greeted them with smiles and silent mock applause. John & Harm picked up their champagne glasses and Sarah & Diane picked up their ginger ale glasses and toasted, "Here's to a successful conspiracy," said John in an Irish brogue.

The four officers clinked their glasses together and drank.

At that point Webb came over to the foursome.

"We're in good spirits," he said as he joined the group.

Harm sobered up and asked Webb, "Any word on the assassin?"

"There is no assassin. That was just Kepiche's way of keeping the king from announcing his intentions with N.A.T.O."

"Will he do it?" asked Sarah.

"I hope so. It will be a big night for the United States," replied Webb.

"And you" replied Sarah with raised eyebrows.

"That goes without saying major," replied Webb testily.

Before anyone could reply, the band struck up an introduction and King Josif and Princess Alexandra walked in arm-in-arm to the podium.

The king began, "We are forever grateful for the warm welcome the United States has given us. It has taken 50 years for Romania to move out of the shadow of domination into the light as a free nation. We welcome the aid of free nations everywhere."

The crowd was quiet with some subdued applause as the king turned to the princess. "I will not risk losing you Alexie."

The princess for her part straightened her shoulders and stepped to the microphone. "You'll have to forgive me as I am nervous as I am still new at speaking in public. It is a task I intend to master, starting now. It is with great pleasure that tomorrow the king will petition for Romanian membership into N.A.T.O."

At that the crowd erupted in sustained applause. Webb just breathed triumphantly "YES".

John and Harm were scanning the crowd and balconies for any sign of guns. Harm was the first to see the gun barrel sticking out from between the curtains of one balcony. He shouted, "Gun!"

Instantly the protection swarmed onto the stage and knocked the king and princess down, covering them with their bodies.

One shot hit an agent and he rolled away in pain. Mac sprang up onto the stage to cover the princess in his place. Diane for her part smartly took cover under the table.

John and Harm sprang into action, running toward the balcony. Harm got there first as he jumped
onto a table and climbed up to the balcony. Another shot went right by his shoulder as he ducked down and barreled into the curtain. He felt resistance as he knocked the assassin over. As they fell back the assassin pushed a curtain over his head. Before he could stand the assassin got up with her back to the balcony rail and pointed the rifle at him. Harm saw that the assassin was a blonde woman in a chambermaid's uniform.

John climbed up after Harm. As he reached the top of the rail, he saw that the assassin got up and not seen him. He reached for her collar and yanked her backwards over the rail. Her gun went flying as she fell and landed onto the edge of a ballroom table then onto the floor as the table tipped over spilling the setting onto her. The woman tried to get up from under the pile of napkins, plates, glasses, silverware and flowers. Secret Service agents immediately surrounded the table with their guns drawn. They picked her up and took her into custody.

John and Harm looked down at the scene. Harm then looked out over the crowd and saw Diane waving at him. She gave him a thumbs-up sign telling him she was all right. John saw Sarah do the same.

John climbed over the rail and said, "Let's go down the conventional way. There's too much of a mess for us to jump down to."

Harm just grinned at him as they exited the balcony.

Sunday, September 14, 1997

1300 Local

JAG Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The uniform of the day was dress white. A reception that was being held to honor the heroics of the previous night.

John & Harm were to receive Romanian medals of valor from King Josif. They stood at attention in the bullpen as King Josif presented them with the medals.

"Commander Marshall, do you remember what I said to you when you first came to escort Alexie?" asked King Josif.

"Yes sir I do. You said that you would have liked someone older, immune to the princess' charms," replied John.

"It seems that I was wrong in that assessment. The princess has found herself and taken her rightful place. I have you and Commander Rabb here to thank that she was able to do so" King Josif acknowledged.

Harm & John replied in unison. "Thank you your majesty."

Sarah & Diane watched proudly as the king pinned a medal on each their man's dress white tunic.

As the reception moved to the buffet and chatting phase, Webb spoke up. "It will make a very impressive sight when a US Warship sails up the Danube."

AJ said in rebuke, "Let's make it a supply ship Mr. Webb. They're less threatening."
Webb nodded his chagrin.

The festivities went on for a little while longer. Alexie approached Sarah & Diane. She first congratulated Diane on her pending motherhood then she asked where the two commanders went.

Sarah spoke up, "I suspect they are out on the balcony smoking cigars. Diane doesn't allow them at home because of the baby, so Harm saw the opportunity to indulge himself here. I think he corrupted John in his vice on the way."

The princess did indeed find them out on the balcony, indulging themselves in cigars. As she approached them she overheard their conversation. "You know Harm, I can count on one hand the times I've smoked one of these Cubanas. Whenever my fraternity had a party, a guy named Richie used to bring them. I've never had the patience to seek them out." John said as he puffed appreciatively.

Alexie came up to them and said, "Commander Rabb, Commander Marshall. The trade talks between our countries will start next month. I took the liberty of requesting that the two of you take part. I'm sure that your infinite wisdom will be needed."

John replied, "Well speaking for myself and Commander Rabb, it will be an honor and a pleasure to open negotiations with you."

Alexie replied, "I thought you would say that. I can't wait to have you there."

As she turned to go she gave John a departing smack on his butt. Harm just looked at him and grinned at John's astonishment.

He said to John as the princess walked out the door. "Don't look at me pal. I'm a married man."
Chapter 16

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 16

Friday, September 19, 1997

1845 Local Time

John's house,

Florida Avenue, NW

When John came in from the office, he hung his jacket and hat on the coat tree and went into the kitchen to get himself a beer. Just as he popped the top, he recognized the high performance roar of an engine as he heard Sarah's Corvette pull into the driveway. He heard it go till it was outside the back door and as it shut down. Ten seconds later, Sarah walked in carrying her uniform coat. She draped the coat over one of the kitchen chairs and plopped down into that same chair.

Without saying a word, John opened a can of ginger ale, poured it into a glass and placed it in front of her on the table. She smiled up at John when he gave her the drink and bent her head up to receive a kiss. She took a good swallow of the soda. "Thanks I needed that" she sighed at him.

"You're welcome" he smiled at her.

Then she sat for a while without saying a word. John sat down across from her and finished his beer. He didn't say a word or offer any conversation. He knew Sarah long enough to know that she would say something when she was ready. He just had to wait her out.

She drove all afternoon from Norfolk after trying a particularly difficult murder case. The case took the whole week. She was assigned it Sunday just after the medal ceremony ended. It found Harm and Sarah as courtroom adversaries again. Sarah was assigned to defend an admitted wife abuser whom Harm was prosecuting for the murder of his wife's boyfriend. During the case Sarah found herself detesting the man whom she was supposed to be defending - a man who reminded her all too well of her abusive father. In a misguided attempt to care for his sister in law, Harm advised Sarah that she was letting her personal feelings get in the way of her professional duties. The advice enraged Sarah, so she took out her anger on Harm as well as her client.

On top of that her client lied to her. At first he said that he wasn't at the beach where the murder took place. But the proof of the lie was revealed to Sarah as Bud, who was sitting second chair to Sarah, came upon the idea of checking Russian satellites that were publicly known to periodically orbit over the Norfolk base. A photo from one of those satellites showed clearly that the CPO's car was indeed at the scene of the murder, thereby proving his guilt. Sarah was under no ethical obligation to show the photo to the prosecution so she ordered Bud to shred the photo.

Inadvertently Harriet, who was assisting on Harm's side of the case, came upon the knowledge of the photo. She happened to be near Bud as he shredded the photo. Bud had commented, "Sometimes it stinks being a lawyer". She did not see the photo and had walked away bewildered into Harm's office, mentioning Bud's comment.

Harm asked her, "What brought that about?"
Harriet had replied, "I don't know sir. I saw Bud shredding some satellite photo when he said it."

Harm had immediately caught on and got a copy of the same photo from the same source and presented it in court, thus proving the CPO's guilt.

At first Sarah blamed Bud for revealing the knowledge of the photo, but Harm cleared him of that by explaining that Harriet inadvertently saw him shred the photo.

Sarah was glad that the son of a bitch was found guilty, but it still irritated her that she had to deal with him and that he lied to her. It brought up too many memories of her father.

She desperately missed John, as she had not seen him for the entire time of the case. She stayed in the V.O.Q. at Norfolk the whole week, calling John every night telling him how difficult the case was, again keeping to her ethics of not revealing details.

She called John earlier that afternoon as she was leaving Norfolk, telling him that the case was over and asking him where they wanted to meet, her place or his. John told her it was all right for her to come directly to his house. John knew that his sister Ann Marie and her husband Peter Matthews were going to a cozy country inn in Manassas, VA for an impromptu romantic weekend.

Sarah desperately wanted to feel again what it was like to be loved by someone who didn't think he had to dominate or possess her. She knew John was that someone. She wanted to receive his love and affection in the tender, but still passionate way that she loved so much.

John for his part was just as miserable not seeing her. He was stuck in the office the whole time, picking up the slack of the cases that piled up while she and Harm were stuck in Norfolk. He too was looking forward to some R&R with Sarah.

Getting over her sulking, Sarah asked coyly "What time is Ann Marie due home?"

"She's not coming home tonight. She called me earlier and told me that she and Peter were taking a romantic weekend in Manassas. So we have a lot of private time."

Without waiting to finish her soda, Sarah got up and grabbed John's hand. "Let's go 'hot stuff'. I know just what to do with that private time."

Then they marched right up to his bedroom.

2000 Local Time

John's house,

Florida Avenue, NW

Sarah and John lay in each other's arms dozing after completing a very intense session of lovemaking.

When they entered the bedroom earlier she kicked off her pumps and dropped her skirt and panties. He asked her to leave the stockings on. She wore the kind that had extra wide elastic at the top that held them up on her thighs and John thought she looked so sexy wearing only them. John divested himself of his clothing save for his shorts. Just as Sarah dropped her skirt & panties he gently eased her onto the bed. He started kissing up her thighs and spent some time at her apex, gently enough to get her ready. As he moved up her torso, he unbuttoned her blouse one button at a time, lingered at her navel ring and undid the bra's front clasp, pulling the cups from her breasts. He gave her breasts ample attention. Sarah shimmied under him until she was fully on the bed and John followed her.
When he moved into position she pulled his shorts down and guided him into her quickly. They had made love in a torrid urgent way that said that they were too long without each other. They climaxed simultaneously. After fully spending himself, he rolled off her still panting. After they caught their collective breath she sat up and took off her uniform blouse and bra and added them to the pile of her uniform jacket and skirt.

As she lay back down on the bed, John told her, "Turn over and relax."

He got some skin lotion and gave her a good back rub. She moaned appreciatively as he gently massaged her tension away, he laid kisses at strategic points down her back as he finished massaging her. He slowly removed her stockings, kissing down each calf. He went back up to her right hipbone and kissed her there and down the thigh. When he got to behind her knee he thought he would stop and play there. He blew a hot breath over the patch of skin as though it were a windowpane that he wanted to fog up and write on. He nuzzled it with his nose once, twice, and planted a light kiss in the center. Then, after a long, delicate lick along the seam, he sucked gently, barely deep enough to nibble the fragile skin.

Her response was completely unexpected. She stiffened up like a board. Her hands gripped the sheet on either side of her shoulders as she lifted her head and arched her back and curled her toes convulsively into the sheet. John heard his name escape in a strangled cry before she went completely slack and collapsed fully back on the bed.

John thought to himself, 'If I didn't know better I could swear she just came.' Surprised and a little wary, he pulled back and looked down on her prone form; all the tell-tale signs were there—the part of her face he could see was flushed, her eyes wide and hazy, her back was rising and falling rapidly.

"What was that, Marine?"

"Ah, nothing. You just surprised me, that's all" she said breathlessly.

"Oh, that's all, huh?"

John rolled her over onto her back and lay alongside her. As he kissed her neck & shoulders, he reached for her. Sure enough, he felt the tremors of her subsiding orgasm pulsing under his palm. The feel of her had him too amazed and aroused to think clearly, but even though his focus was primarily on the question in his mind, he figured since he was in there anyway he might as well make himself useful. She whimpered as he absent-mindedly withdrew his hand.

Moving his mouth close to her ear he whispered "You're soaking wet." in his roughest, most seductive voice. He knew from experience the effect it will have on her, only on her. Right on cue she slowly pumped her hips to try and get his finger where she wanted it.

"Did you really like that Sarah?"

The question came out casually. He didn't want her to see that he was straining to hold himself back, desperate for an answer. Hoping it's the one he wanted to hear. He rubbed his hand strategically and her eyes crossed, but apparently this wasn't enough to drive out all her inhibitions.

"Has . . . mmmm . . . what did you ask?" she asked breathlessly, with deliberate confusion.

"Saraaaah?" he asked in a sing-song voice, his hand stilling in retaliation. They were both well aware that she knew what he meant. Then he explained anyway, just to push her higher and asked again. "Did you really like how I played behind your knee like that?"

She bit her lip and shifted so that his fingers hit just the right spot. He pulled his hand back his other
hand cradling her head. "Answer the question marine."

"Yeah, John I did. I don't know what you did, but—oh, God."

He distracted her by replacing his hand back and rubbing his thumb on against her moist apex, expertly stroking her clitoris. He received the answer he needed and the raw waves of arousal crashed through him. His mouth cleaved to hers as her hand found him. She stroked him as he redoubled his massage of her, fusing cries and moans of pleasure. After a few slides of her cool hand down his length, he decided she’d teased him long enough. He shifted himself to mount and get back inside her as soon as humanly possible. He slid his hand from her. Before she could finish her groan of protest, he wrapped his arms around her, holding her back off the bed against his chest as he took complete control of her as he slowly but insistently sank down into her. She shook her head side to side and screamed his name as she climaxed again. Her nails dug into his shoulders, her legs clamped around his waist.

John was only good for about three more seconds as he called her name before he to shattered, collapsing onto her fully.

Several minutes later when they at last recaptured coherent thought, Sarah was resting comfortably under him, sighing with contentment and softly stroking his hair and back. She loved that John was still able to stay intimately connected.

"That sure was something, Navy," she purred, wry and sated.

John rolled from on top of her to lie beside. He gave her a gentle, deep, lingering kiss, rubbing his hand sensuously down the length of her body. When he broke the kiss, he cupped her cheek with one hand and looked her right in the eye and said, "I love you Sarah Mackenzie. There's nothing I wouldn't do to make you feel safe, secure and happy."

With those words, the last of Sarah’s emotional walls shattered. She was so overwhelmed by his declaration and tenderness that she just burst out crying. She wound her arms tightly around his neck, rolled him onto his back and buried her face in his shoulder, the tears soaking his skin almost immediately. She sobbed, eerily silent except for the occasional gasp for air as she cried out all her angst and troubles. Gradually, the trembling in her body slowed and then stopped, as did her tears. She let out one last breathless sob into his shoulder as she finished crying and slid her arms from around his neck. Still John held her tighter, silently offering her his strength and his love.

She didn't say another word as she snuggled up next to him and settled her head onto his chest. She draped an arm across his chest and a leg across his thighs. He settled his arm around her shoulders and the other under his pillow behind his head. They fell into a restful nap.

After 90 minutes of sleep Sarah awoke first. Without waking John, she got up from under his arm and went to her dresser. She took over the low dresser when he bought a matching high chest of drawers for himself. That way she could leave a duplicate set of wardrobe essentials, including fresh underwear at his place. She took a fresh pair of panties, silk shorts and a tank top and went into the ensuite bathroom to take a shower. She stayed under the warm spray for a good long time. It was her way of washing the dirt of the trial from her body.

As she stood under the spray, she thought of her love making session with John. She thought of what was said since she walked into the house. Except for his answer to the question about Ann Marie and his questions about how his playing with her knee affected her, he had not said a word. He made love with her in a very tender, giving and fulfilling way. She knew that he took her to the place that allowed her passion to be spent. Her cathartic crying after he declared his love, opened the dam and let out all the anger and corruption of the case. He seemed to realize that Sarah had needed to reassert
control of her life and cast off the ugliness of the vile man she defended.

The experience was so unlike anything she was brought up to believe of the way men acted toward women. Most men were just interested in getting to their own climax. His love making technique was generous and tender. She loved that he found new ways to bring her alone to climax or along with him; but when he did that to her knee, oh boy that was something. Oh she liked it when he got hyped up and couldn't control himself, as he became a wild man in her arms. After those sessions she had pleasant aches in her groin not because he was brutal, but because she was using her own muscles in response to his lovemaking. Their lovemaking wasn't a competition, but a mutual exercise session.

She now came to the realization that John was a very unique and giving man. He was confident enough to let her take control of a situation without losing himself in the process. She started to cry again with the happiness of this revelation when she felt a hand gently reach for her shoulder from behind.

John was awakened by the sound of the shower. He went into the bathroom and joined Sarah there. At first she was startled, but welcomed his advances. He stood behind her under the warm spray and rubbed his hands up and down the front of her body. He played with her nipples, rolling them between his thumbs and forefingers. He then draped his hand over her apex stroking and probing into her. She sighed in satisfaction of his caress. Sarah then had him drop his hands to his side. She turned around and gave him a long kiss then she knelt in front of him. She took hold of and lightly licked his tip. She then proceeded to use her whole tongue to lick him from the base the tip. John leaned against the shower wall as he thoroughly enjoyed Sarah's ministrations. He totally lost all sense of reality as Sarah's hot mouth completely engulfed him.

"Oh God Mac," he moaned.

Sarah smiled to herself as she continued her work. Her mouth giving him more pleasure than ever before. It wasn't long that she felt him tighten under her pressures. She deliberately prolonging the experience until he said, "Sarah, you're torturing me. Sarah increased her movements to bring forth his release.

"Mac please, I'm ready, take me all the way."

At that his head flew back and she felt him swell and pump into her mouth. After she felt that he was completely spent Sarah finally removed her mouth and raised her head to meet his eyes. His face was flushed as he recovered from his pleasure. She smiled as she studied his beautiful face.

"That was...wow," was all John could say.

"You're very welcome," she replied as she licked her lips slowly. She got up and leaned in slowly, not knowing whether or not he would mind being kissed after oral sex. He placed his hand on the back of her head and pulled her in for a passionate kiss. After several passion filled moments, John broke their kiss and looked into her eyes.

"If you don't mind me saying, you have the most amazing mouth," he whispered.

"Well I'm glad you approve," she smiled in reply. They kissed again, and tightly embraced each other under the warm spray.

When they exited the shower, they dried each other off, got dressed comfortably and ordered Italian food for dinner.
As they were waiting for dinner to arrive they sat on the couch. Just before John could pick up the TV remote, she went over to him, sat on his lap and took hold of him with a hand on each side of his face and looked HIM straight in the eye and asked, "Do you know how much I love you?"

John replied giving her the 'duh' look, "I think I just got a pretty good idea"

"No not like that." Sarah replied playfully. "I mean in the way you haven't asked me for anything since I walked in the door. You have no idea how that man I defended affected me. He only used his wife as his punching bag or his possession. He reminded me so much of my father that I was almost sick being in the same room alone with him. Then I come home to you and you just turned yourself completely over to me as if it was the most natural thing in the world for you to do. You just seemed to know what I wanted from you and you gave it freely without question."

John replied, "Also I had a forewarning of the storm. Diane told me this morning when we left for work. She mentioned that when you two talked last night you told her what Harm said to you and how upset you were. She asked me to make sure you were okay. She also said that she would talk to Harm and have him apologize for his insensitivity. I knew that you needed some sort of release of the things that were bothering you. If it's making love, fine. If it's just to talk it out that's fine too. Sarah, everything that I am, everything I have is yours and yours alone. You are the one I want to give myself to. You never have to ask."

Sarah gave him one of her watery smiles and kissed him deeply. She had another reason for gratitude. She had a sister who was ready to look after her; not only in the big sister, little sister girl way of things as youngsters, but also in the mature 'family came first' way. She finally understood the loving sibling dynamic that John & Ann Marie had and she had now obtained with Diane.

They broke their kiss before it went too far. As they were waiting for dinner to arrive, Sarah gave a quick call to Diane.

"Thanks for telling John about how the trial affected me. You have no idea how good it feels to have a family looking after me, making sure I'm all right. I don't remember mom doing that for me before she left."

"Oh Sarah sweetie, it's the least I can do. You have to remember that having a sister is new to me to. I wish we grew up together, but I feel I'm making up for that now. Besides, you're the big sister remember?"

Sarah was touched by her concern. Diane wanted to have a sister to care for, the same as Sarah did.

Diane continued, "Well when it's my turn to warn Harm about you, I'll be ready. Also tell John and Ann Marie thanks for having me over there every night while you and Harm were in Norfolk. It was a great comfort to Harm knowing someone was watching over the baby and me. I loved the company. It was also fun just staying in the guest room comparing pregnancy stories with Ann Marie. Also I don't know if you heard some of the stories Ann Marie told about John, but the stories she told me were hysterical. Also I beat John a couple of times at pool.

"He'll never let you play him again. Or maybe we can play boys against the girls the next time we're over here together. Also I think I heard most of the stories when I stayed here after my leg was shot; but you're right, they are hysterical. So enough about me, how are you doing 'sis'?" Sarah said happily emphasizing the 'sis' part.

"I'm fine, you'll get to know how it is when you're pregnant and carrying a basketball in your stomach. I just finished my last day at the office before maternity leave. It's just as well, the regulations limited me to only 8-hour days and I wasn't getting much work done anyway. Being it's
this close to my due date Admiral Chegwidden promised us that Harm would not get any long out of town."

"Well I hope Harm's out of town assignments are as short as possible," replied Sarah. She heard the doorbell and told Diane, "Our dinner is here, I'll see you tomorrow 'sis'. I love you".

"I love you too Sarah, take care."

Monday, September 22, 1997

0900 Local time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm, Sarah, Bud & John sat in AJ's office being briefed on their next assignment.

"It seems that the body of a Navy pilot was found aboard the decommissioned aircraft carrier, Hornet. The body was uncovered as salvagers were cutting into the void between the outer and inner hulls. The salvagers said they were checking for rust. The City of Alameda wants to turn the ship into a museum. But if they don't have the money, it will be sold for salvage."

The admiral assigned John in case Harm had to leave in the eventuality Diane went into labor. Harm was assigned because AJ knew he could offer insight into the aircraft carrier, as it was his father's first assigned ship. John was designated as the senior officer because he was promoted before Harm and the admiral wanted a dispassionate view to the case anyway.

Sarah asked, "If it's decommissioned, why do we need to investigate?"

"The Navy still owns the 'pink slip' so it's our jurisdiction" replied AJ

"How does a body get left in between the outer & inner hulls?" asked Sarah incredulously.

"It happened to the Great Eastern," replied Bud.

AJ smiled as he folded his arms and replied, "Please elaborate Mr. Roberts."

"A worker fell asleep in between the hulls without anyone knowing and he was riveted in. It was said that he was shouting for years to be let out. At least his ghost was. When the ship was cut up for salvage, they found his body."

AJ held up a photo for all to see and said, "The dead airman was found with this patch in his hand."

"That's a Skoshi Tiger patch. They were a squadron that of South Vietnamese airmen that flew "F-4s" out of Bien Hul in 1968. My father could have been in that squadron" Harm exclaimed.

"Well you have an incentive to investigate. Let's get to it people, dismissed" said the admiral in his usual gruff manner.

As they walked out into the bullpen, Sarah & Bud were speaking excitedly with each other alternatively.

"Alameda is just across the bay from San Francisco" Sarah began happily.

"Just a cork's throw from Napa Valley".
"Fisherman's Wharf"

"Chinatown"

"B&Bs" ended Bud as Harm spoke up.

"We're going to a murder investigation, not a vacation," said Harm sternly.

John spoke up, "He's right guys. I'm sure our father-to-be wants to wrap this up and get home ASAP. If we have the time after we're done and Harm gets back to Diane we'll go sightseeing."

Harm smiled his appreciation for the back-up and turned to Bud. "Besides Bud I need you to stay behind and do research on everything on the Hornet."

"But sir, I have a laptop computer and I can research with that." Bud said.

"That's good. You can E-Mail the Major whatever you find," said Harm.

Sarah turned to Bud and silently mouthed "Sorry Bud" as she, Harm & John walked out of the bullpen.

Bud turned away obviously disappointed on not going, muttering, "Ours is not to reason why. Ours is to do research".

September 23, 1997

1548 Local time

Alameda, CA Naval Base

Aboard the USS Hornet (mothballed)

They arrived at the dock and were waiting at their Navy Crown Victoria for the salvage manager Sibby Lonegro, who was overseeing the hull cutting when the body was uncovered, to meet them.

Sarah with her usual sense of time said, "He's 18 minutes late. Harm & John still looked at her whenever she did that. Sarah for her part just smirked at them, indulging herself in their wonder.

They just shook their heads. Sarah just stuck her tongue out at them.

It wasn't long before John's impatience got the best of him and he had a second thought and voiced it to Sarah & Harm. "Listen, no sense the three of us looking at the same thing; I'll go see the police and get a look at the report. Harm you know the ship better. You and Sarah have a look around. I'll have the MP at the gate get me a cab. We'll compare notes tonight at dinner"

Sarah and Harm agreed as John walked away. At the gate John got a cab very quickly and went to the precinct that caught the original complaint. He met a lieutenant who let him read the report. John decided that it was too late in the day to see the coroner. So he decided that he would go there with Sarah & Harm tomorrow.

Back at the Hornet, Sarah and Harm had also grown impatient waiting for Lonegro. They decided to go into the ship by themselves. Sarah saw the wistful look on her brother-in-law's face.

"What's that all about flyboy?" she asked.

"I'm just remembering the last time I was on this ship. I was 5 years old and I was with my dad. I
remember that I kept tripping over the knee knockers" Harm replied.

Sarah just smiled and gave his hand a sisterly squeeze as they walked up the gangplank stairs. Walking across the flight deck, Harm asked, "What was the number of the bulkhead near where the body was found?"

"Zulu, Delta-42-Zulu-8-Victor, hike" Sarah said.

"Very funny" Harm replied sarcastically.

"I'm a funny lady, just ask John" Sarah retorted with a giggle.

As they made their way to the crime scene, they heard groans come from the hull. "The steel is contracting as it cools with the sun going down." Harm informed Sarah as he saw she was looking around.

When they arrived at the hole, they saw that the crime scene barrier tape was broken. As they started to examine the hull, they heard footsteps coming toward them.

Harm doused his light and told Sarah to do the same.

The person passed through the hole in the inner hull and shown his light around, he came upon Harm & Sarah huddling in the dark.

"Commander, Major do you always look around in the dark with your lights off?" he inquired.

"We didn't know who you were and we were just being cautious," replied Harm. "Besides, who are you?"

"Lt. Marc Falcon, Alameda Police Department" he replied showing his badge.

"Major Sarah Mackenzie and Lt. Commander Harmon Rabb" Harm said introducing themselves.

"I thought the police handed over the case to the Navy?" asked Sarah.

"They did. I just like a good mystery. I came back on my own to do some checking," replied Falcon. Harm & Sarah were satisfied with that explanation.

The three went up to the flight deck without discovering anything new. Marc turned to Sarah and asked, "Can I interest you in dinner Sarah? I know a great place that serves the best steak."

Sarah gently declined and informed him, "I'm sorry Marc, Commander Rabb and I are meeting a colleague for dinner. Maybe we can go together and compare notes"

"That's alright Sarah. I'll meet you here tomorrow then" Falcon said as he walked away.

Sarah and Harm agreed to the rendezvous.

After Falcon drove off and as they got into their car Harm asked incredulously, "Why is it that when we work together, you get offered dinner while I'm ignored? I get just as hungry as you, you know."

"I don't know. It doesn't happen when John and I are working together or when we're out. Maybe men automatically know that you and I are not together romantically" Sarah replied coyly.

"Or maybe John exudes an attitude that says 'I'll slit your throat if you hit on my girl' whenever
"You're out together, working or not" Harm bantered back.

"John is not jealous." Sarah retorted.

But she knew that wasn't entirely true as she thought about what John had told her one time when she asked him if he ever became jealous. 'I think it's rude and crass if a man asks you out with me standing there. I wouldn't do that to another man. So I don't like it or allow it to go unnoticed when men hit on you when we're out working together. On the other hand I understand that when you're alone it would be easy for any man to ask you out. I mean, look at you. You're beautiful! Also know that I trust you completely.' she remembered wistfully adding another reason to why she was in love with him.

The three officers had dinner that night and went over what they had found out, which was pretty darned little. They knew that they still had to wait on Bud's research to pan out. So they agreed that the next day's first stop was to the coroner's office.

September 24, 1997

0816 Local time

Alameda Naval Air Station, BOQ

Sarah and John were waiting at their car for Harm to come out. When he finally emerged Sarah said playfully, "You're 16 minutes late".

"Come on I'm only 15 minutes late" replied Harm trying not to react to her sense of time.

"You dropped a minute when you reset your watch," corrected Sarah. She slid a package across the roof to him. "Also, this came for you UPS Overnight from La Jolla?"

"The tapes, I haven't heard these since I was a kid," Harm said reverently as he got in the car in the back as John got in the front passenger seat.

As Sarah got in to drive she asked playfully, "What are they, Billy Joel, Criss Cross?"

"These are letter tapes my father sent from his time on the Hornet during his first tour. He came back from that one. I called my mother yesterday and she sent them to me. She had them recorded onto cassettes a while back. I thought they could offer some insight to what was going on at the time of the murder." Harm replied.

He put one in the hand held player. He, Sarah & John heard Harmon Rabb, Sr. come over clear as day as he described what was going on around him.

"Trish Tom Boone and I just flew a mission visiting 'Uncle Ho' and speaking of the devil here he is. Trish, dump this guy. I'm the man you should have married. Trish let me get rid of this interloper so I can finish this letter without anymore interruption.'

"Captain Boone, the CAG of the Seahawk?" asked Sarah.

"Yeah, he flew as my Dad's wingman during the two tours."

They all listened to some more of the tape as they drove to the coroner's office.

September 24, 1997

0915 Local time
Alameda County Coroner's Office

Sarah, Harm & John stood as the doctor went on about his findings.

"This was found clutched in his right hand." The doctor held up the patch that had the emblem of the Skoshi Tigers.

"Clutched?" asked Sarah.

"Yes said the doctor. As the flesh deteriorated the bones stayed in their death grip," explained the coroner.

"The patch was velcroed onto their uniforms. Is it possible that during a struggle, the victim grabbed for the patch as he fell and the assailant didn't know the patch was missing?" asked Harm.

"It's possible," said the doctor.

"Were there any other forms of identification on the body?" asked Sarah.

"None, only this was wrapped around the left radius and ulna," the doctor said as he handed Sarah a watch.

Harm looked over her shoulder. "It's a 'go to hell' watch."

"'Go to hell' watch?" asked Sarah.

"It's a watch you wear when you go out on a mission. That way if you're caught or killed, there would be nothing to identify you. I always wore one when I went out on SEAL missions. Check the serial number," offered John.

"D-3684-Lot# 458771-19237. Let's get this to Bud. He can search the Navy records to see who this was issued to," said John.

"You keep records that far back?" gushed the doctor.

"This is the Navy Doc. We still have Popeye's enlistment papers on file" explained Harm.

September 24, 1997

1230 Local time

Alameda, CA Naval Base

USS Hornet (mothballed)

They went to breakfast and were on the phone to Bud relaying to him the information to check. After they finished breakfast they drove back out to the Hornet. There, Sarah had received an E-Mail from Bud. "That serial number came back with a hit. It was issued to a Lt. Brian Tate. He was listed as missing on April 30, 1975."

"That's the day Saigon fell," said John. "That still doesn't tell us how he came to be buried in the void."

"Sarah, ask Bud to check and see if the Hornet had hull damage. That would explain how he came to be in the void. The void would have had to be opened to repair the damage," said Harm.
"Harm, Bud has been at this for 32 hours & 24 minutes. He needs a break" said Sarah.

"How do you do that?" asked Harm.

"My mother was Swiss," replied Sarah.

"Yeah right." said Harm sarcastically.

"He still needs rest Harm," she said warningly.

"Well tell him to get this last bit and take a break and get three hours of sleep" said Harm. "In the mean time I gonna take a walk with my dad" he said as he took the player in hand and walked onto the ship.

John was silent during this whole exchange. He shook his head mirroring Sarah's exasperation. As he watched Harm go up on deck, he commented, "I tell you, he's like a puppy. I have been working with him for a few years now. When he gets a hold of something he just doesn't let go."

"I know. That's Diane's big complaint when he starts a project at home. He'll stay up all night till he gets it done," said Sarah in exasperation.

At that moment Marc Falcon pulled up. "How are you Sarah? And this is?" Falcon asked extending his hand toward John.


John shook his hand keeping his tone and face neutral. "Pleased to meet you"

"Where's Harm?" Falcon asked.

John piped up, "Taking a walk with his father" Falcon just looked confused.

The three went up the gangplank to find Harm.

For his part Harm got to the island. Just when he got to the hatch, it opened in front of him, almost taking his nose off.

"Who are you?" asked Harm.

"Siby Lonegro, I the one looking to turn this rust bucket into razor blades," said the salvager.

"Well the old girl still has some life in her" said Harm.

"I have no sentimentality for this. I served on flattops. The only thing I remember is hot bunking and dog watches and the stink of jet fuel," retorted Lonegro.

"I can still smell the jet fuel and it smells pretty good to me," replied Harm.

"Oh you got it bad. Just as well commander it's not too safe down there. Don't go beyond the chains. Passed them the decks aren't safe"

"Thanks, I'll be careful" said Harm as he went down to the hanger deck.

He was listening to his father as he walked. "Trish, I remember when Harm was here on visitors' day. He kept tripping over those knee knockers. But he kept getting up and moving on. That shows fortitude. That's gonna take him a long way. Well here we are at my quarters 03 lima 124 papa."
At just that instant Harm fell through a rusted section of deck through to the deck below. He lay there unconscious.
Chapter 17

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 17

September 24, 1997

1250 Local time

USS Hornet

Sarah, John & Falcon came upon Harm as he lay unconscious. His tape player was still running and Sarah shut it off. As he regained some sense Sarah helped him up. Harm saw someone standing on the deck above. His face was in shadow and he seemed to be directing Harm in a certain direction. As he started to say something, he heard Lonegro from the stairs he just fell through.

"Commander I told you that you had to watch for the chains." He held up a chain that was hanging from one side. "It looks like you blew right through this one"

"There was no chain there I didn't see one" yelled Harm.

"Shock can play tricks on your mind. I'd still watch myself" he said as he walked away.

Sarah shined her flashlight in his eyes. "Gee thanks Mac. I could see alright before you shined that in my eyes."

"He must be in shock, he called you Mac" said John.

"His pupils are responsive but slow. I think he has a concussion. We have to get him to a doctor." Sarah said.

Sarah tried her cell phone but couldn't get a signal out. "I can't get a signal."

Falcon said, "There's too much steel blocking the signal. I'll go topside."

Harm tried to get up but fell down again. This time John made sure he stayed down and sat him against a bulkhead. "Come on ace, we're getting you out of here. Diane will kill me if you don't come back in one piece. I for one do not want to get on the bad side of either of the Mackenzie sisters."

Sarah punched him in his arm good-naturedly. She still helped John get Harm to his feet and walk him up the stairs and outside.

They met Falcon out there and they got Harm down to the dock as an ambulance arrived. Technicians took care of Harm and they determined that he should go to the emergency room. He went reluctantly. There he only stayed long enough to have a doctor take care of the various scratches and x-ray his head and shoulder and give him a neurological exam.

"You bumped your head pretty hard and have a mild concussion. You also bruised your shoulder, but the x-rays don't show any damage. Everything else seems to be all right. A good night's sleep and a mild analgesic should do you some good," the doctor told him.

Sarah was there and she told the doctor that she would ensure he took that rest. "He's married to my
sister so I'll take care of him for her." The doctor went along with that and released Harm.

John was outside the E.R. entrance. While he was inside Bud called. When Harm and Sarah came out John told them the information Bud had relayed. "Bud did confirm that there was hull damage to the Hornet. So that explains how Tate ended up in the void. Also, Webb paid Bud a visit just a little while ago. He told him that the KGB was taking an interest in our investigation. Lt. Tate was bunking with a Colonel Nguyen of the Skoshi Tigers while on the Hornet. Shortly after Tate was reported missing Nguyen was on a flight to Guam that did an 'Amelia Earhart'."

"What's this got to do with the KGB?" asked Harm getting annoyed.

"It seems that Nguyen was in possession of a list of US Airmen POWs that were transferred from North Vietnam to Russia. He was looking to trade the list for the good life in Paris."

"Nguyen has to be the killer. He hid the list and Tate either knew where or saw him hide it," exclaimed Harm. "We have to get back to the carrier and look for it"

John spoke up, "Are you sure you're up to it Ace?"

"I think so. Let's go," said Harm resolutely.

John and Sarah followed reluctantly. Harm was about to get behind the wheel when Sarah stopped him. "No way you're driving flyboy, not with your concussion."

Harm relented and got into the back seat as Sarah got behind the wheel.

September 24, 1997

1430 Local Time

USS Hornet

They arrived at the Hornet surprised to find Falcon's car there. They all thought that it was strange that he returned to the carrier as he drove away when the ambulance came to get Harm. John became immediately suspicious. "I knew it," he muttered under his breath. John pulled out his cell phone and made a short call.

Sarah saw him make the call, but didn't hear what he said. She asked, "What?"

"Go with me on this. I don't have time to explain right now, but trust me," John told her.

Sarah didn't know what set him off, but she did trust him as she saw that look in his eye before and went along with him. Harm was so zoned in on getting on board that he missed their exchange.

"Give me the tape player. Maybe I can hear something that can help us out," Harm said.

John passed the player over. They walked onto the ship and down to the hanger deck. As John & Sarah shone their flashlights about to ensure that they didn't fall through any chains, Harm was looking around. He stopped when he saw the same person he saw when he had first woke up after the fall. He beckoned Harm to a certain direction.

"Come on this way said Harm. He followed the specter with Sarah & John in hot pursuit. They went down to the crew quarters near where Harm had fallen. Harm saw the ghost enter a crew's quarters and hurried in after him. He immediately became dizzy and sat down on the bunk. John and Sarah came in right behind him and found him there.
"Are you alright Harm" asked Sarah, concern in her voice.

"I'm just a little dizzy. I pushed it a little too much, that's all" replied Harm. "I saw my father. That's what I was following. He led me right to these quarters." He turned on the player and rewound it to where he was listening when he fell. He heard his father's voice again, 'Well here we are at my quarters 03 lima 124 papa'.

Harm asked, "What number are we in?"

"226 Papa" said Falcon as he entered the room. "I thought I may need to come and arrest Lonegro for negligence. That chain wasn't there when Harm fell. I saw him attach it when he arrived after us."

Sarah and Harm seemed to buy that, John was less sure.

Sarah spoke up, "This has to be Tate's and Nguyen's quarters."

Harm played more of the tape. 'Trish whenever Tom Boone and I come back from a mission, it's a reason to celebrate. We keep a bottle of bourbon stashed in a compartment behind our rack'. Harm shut off the tape and looked around the bunk. He spotted a panel in the wall. He took his Swiss knife and unscrewed it and opened it. He reached in and searched around. He stopped and withdrew his hand. He was holding a small yellow diary. He opened it slowly and started to read it. "It's in Vietnamese except for the names." He leafed through it some more and stopped. He looked up at Sarah & John with tears in his eyes. "My dad's name is in here," he said showing them the page.

Falcon said, "Let me see commander". Harm handed it over for his perusal, but John watched him warily.

"Why don't we get out of here? We found what we were looking for." John suggested.

When they came out of the compartment they saw that the ship was on fire. They retreated back in the other direction but saw that the fire was there to.

"Lonegro must have set it. Down," Harm yelled. "Heat rises, we have to go down." As they all went down a hatchway, they faced a strong wind.

"The fire's sucking the air out, we have to close this hatch," Sarah yelled.

John and Falcon sprang to her aid. Between the three of them, they managed to close the hatch. Sarah unbuttoned her uniform jacket and loosened her tie & top button. But before they could take a breath, another hatchway exploded in from the fire.

As they desperately looked for a way out, Harm saw his specter. The ghost was beckoning him to an escape route.

"Come on, this way!" yelled Harm as he took off. The other three followed him. Eventually they arrived safely onto the flight deck.

As they clambered down the gangplank onto the dock, the first fire trucks were pulling up. The four stopped and took stock of themselves. Sarah checked Harm. It seemed that he was not doing so well. His concussion was aggravating him and he was coughing hard. He must have inhaled some smoke. While Sarah stayed with him John went over to Falcon.

"Are you alright? John asked him.

"I'm fine commander. How about you? Falcon replied."
"Just peachy," John said. Then John hauled off and belted him on his chin with a right cross that Falcon never saw coming.

While Falcon lay stunned, John turned him over and using 'Falcon's' own cuffs secured his hands behind him. After he relieved him of any weapons and other 'police' paraphernalia, including his handcuff key, John then reached into Falcon's inner jacket pocket and retrieved the POW List Book and put it in his pocket.

Sarah and Harm just looked at him in astonishment. John saw the questions in their faces.

"He's not Lt. Falcon. I met the real Lt. Falcon yesterday when I went to read the police report. I think he's KGB."

John then spoke in Russian, "How about it comrade, want to tell me I'm wrong"

Falcon replied in Russian. "Your Russian is good. Where did you learn it?"

"At Fort Ord when the SEALs sent me to language school," John said. He then slipped back into English, "It's always a good idea to learn the language of your enemies."

Before Falcon could respond an unmarked Alameda Police car pulled up and the real Lt. Falcon got out. This Falcon was an African American of lanky build and medium height with receding hair. He approached the group and took the false Falcon into custody.

September 24, 1997

1800 Local Time

Alameda Police Department

Harm was taken back to the hospital again in Alameda. This time he was forced to stay two days. He was suffering post concussion syndrome as well as smoke inhalation. Diane was on the phone with him all during his stay. Sarah stayed by his side for most of his hospital stay.

Right after John had filed his report to Admiral Chegwidden, he went to the precinct to interview 'Falcon'. He was surprised to see Webb there. Webb told him that Falcon started the fire as a way to try and destroy the list. Webb then asked him where the list was. John pulled it out of his pocket and showed him where Harmon Rabb Senior's name was. Then John replaced it in his pocket. "Clay, before we travel with this, we need to make Xerox copies. You take the copies with you and I'll take the book back with me."

Webb agreed. "We need to tread delicately with this. Let the professional diplomats handle this."

"That's not going to be easy. Harm is ready to fly to Moscow now," John told Webb.

"Just remind him that he has a wife with their new baby to look forward to, that ought to calm him down," Webb suggested.

John agreed with him as they shook hands. "You know Webb, I didn't like you at first, and I still don't but you came through for us this time."

Web thanked him and said, "Come on. Let's find a copier."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 18

Sunday, September 28, 1997

1900 Local Time

Mc Murphy's Tavern

Even though it was Sunday, it was also John's Birthday and the office was celebrating. Even the young new comers were stopping by, having one drink and sincerely wishing him well. They all liked him as he always made time for them whenever they were first assigned. Admiral Chegwidden unofficially appointed him as Office Orientation Officer as a way to get the new officers up to speed on the routine of the office and what was expected of them as appointees to JAG.

Sarah was by his side the whole time since they arrived at the tavern. She loved the way everyone came up to him to either shake his hand as with the male officers and staff or give him a hug and a quick peck on his cheek as with the female officers and staff. In all the time she knew him, she admired how he instantly gained a sense of camaraderie with all those young people. She knew that they would crash through a wall if he asked them to. She knew it was one more reason that she loved him.

They were speaking with Bud and Harriet. John thanked them for the work they did researching the Hornet case.

"I couldn't believe it when Mr. Webb showed up at JAG with anchovies on a pizza. I asked him how he knew I liked them. He said that it was his business to know things."

"Yeah, that's Webb for you," said Sarah.

They heard the door open and Harm walked in with a very pregnant Diane on his arm. Peter Matthews with a slightly less pregnant Ann Marie followed them.

After greeting the Rabbs, John greeted his sister, "Geez Ann Marie, pregnancy agrees with you. You look great."

Ann Marie gave him an even bigger kiss. "Happy birthday 'Hot Stuff'."

"Hey ace, how're you doing?" asked John turning to Harm.

Even though Harm showed no ill effects from his concussion, his doctor told him to take it easy for the weekend and the rest of the week.

"I'm fine. You're pretty happy today," said Harm.

"Why shouldn't I be? My team won today," said John.

Sarah just rolled her eyes as Diane and Ann Marie gave her the same look, football. "I had to watch him yell and scream at the TV. It's a good thing the Giants won. Otherwise he'd be unbearable," said Sarah.
"You're lucky. I used to hear it 4 times louder from him, our two brothers and our father when we were growing up. It got to a point that in order to keep my sanity, I'd better join them," replied Ann Marie.

Changing the subject John asked Harm. "What have you heard from Webb since we got home?"

"Webb told me that he thinks that the new regime in Russia may be a bit more cooperative as they want to cast off the policies of the communists. So I'm very hopeful."

"Have you heard from your mother?" asked Sarah.

"Yeah, Diane and I called her this morning and we had a long discussion and we agreed that we need to know so we can have closure. Either way I'm not looking to go anywhere until after Diane has the baby. After that we'll only go after the diplomatic niceties have been figured out."

"What's the admiral have to say about all this?" asked John.

"He told me that the SECNAV is ordering me to keep things very quiet and let the diplomats handle things. It's a good thing that Admiral Chegwidden locked the book up in his safe and Webb made lots of copies that he circulated to the powers that be," said Harm.

"That sounds like good advice. Either way let's enjoy the evening," said John

Before they could do that, Diane let out a cry grabbing her belly and saying, "Whoa! That was a good one."

Harm & John immediately got her into a chair. After she caught her breath she said, "Harm honey, I think its time, let's get to the hospital, NOW!" She yelled as another contraction hit.

"Sarah go and get my car please," John said giving her his keys.

Sarah ran out the door. After another contraction passed, John and Harm picked Diane up and carried her out the door. Sarah pulled up with John's Caprice just as they came out of the tavern. They lay Diane down in the back seat with Harm. Sarah scooted across the front seat as John drove to Bethesda.

1945 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Hospital,

Maternity Ward

John got them to Bethesda just in time. Just as Diane reached the emergency room door her water broke. Sarah went up with Diane to the maternity ward while Harm went to register her for admission.

After he finished the admissions process Harm went and relieved Sarah in the labor room. Sarah came out and found John in the waiting area. "The doctor examined her. She's fully dilated and it should be soon," Sarah explained before John voiced the question. They settled in for the wait.

Soon enough Ann Marie and Peter arrived followed by Bud and Harriet.

"So hot stuff, how do you feel if Diane has the baby on your birthday?" asked Ann Marie.

"It was a good day for me," said John smugly.
"Hot stuff?" asked Harriet arching an eyebrow. She didn't know John & Ann Marie were siblings.

"I'm sorry Harriet you haven't met my sister Ann Marie and her husband Peter Matthews. Ann Marie, Peter, this is Ensign Harriet Simms. I was going to introduce you at the tavern before the little Rabb insisted on arriving. Ann Marie is President Bartlett's Press Secretary," said John

"I thought you looked familiar. Very pleased to meet you" said Harriet shaking hands. "When are you due, ma'am?"

"Harriet, please I'm not in the Navy. You don't have to ma'am me. And I'm due some time at the end of April beginning of May," said Ann Marie pleasantly.

Just then Harm came out looking a little shocked. "I'm a father and it's a girl," he said.

"Congratulations," said Sarah giving him a hug and a kiss. "But why were you so shocked. It's not like you didn't know this was going to happen?"

"It's not that. Diane told me that she was in labor, having contractions since 0800 this morning. She thought they were Braxton-hicks contractions. The contraction at the tavern was the first big one. She was really looking forward to going to your birthday party. I think the walk out was just the ticket to bring the baby along."

"Wow she must have some high threshold of pain to deal with that," said Harriet.

"Anyway, mom and baby are doing real good they're cleaning them up now. It will be another 20 minutes before you can see them. While I'm out here I have a special favor to ask you and John" Harm finished turning to Sarah.

"Anything Harm you know that," said Sarah.

Diane and I discussed this after your reunion. We decided that if we had a girl, we wanted to name her after you. Do you think you can stand to have another Sarah Catherine in the world?"

Sarah just dissolved into tears and wrapped her arms around Harm's neck. "Of course I can stand it you big lug," she sobbed happily kissing his cheek.

After she had calmed down, Harm asked her one more thing and turned to include John. "Would you two consent to being godparents? Especially you John, if it weren't for you kicking my ass, we wouldn't be here now talking. Diane & I would be very happy if you accepted" asked Harm.

"Of course we will!" said John shaking his hand. Sarah just hugged him tighter and gave him another kiss.

Just then another couple entered the waiting room. The woman was about 60 plus years, tall, slim and well-coiffed and well dressed. The man was also over 60, about 6'2" tall and slim but showing the slight bulge of age. Harm saw them and exclaimed, "Mom, Frank how did you get here so fast? I only just called your cell phone." Mom was his mother Trish Burnett and Frank was his stepfather Frank Burnett.

Trish spoke up as she went to give him a hug, "Oh darling, Diane told us when we were talking this morning that she thought she was in labor and that we should hurry on out. So Frank got the company to fly us out in the Lear." Frank was the chairman of Chrysler Corporation.

Frank went to shake Harm's hand and give him a manly hug. "So how are you doing Dad and who are your friends?"
Harm started with Sarah, "As you can probably see this is Diane's sister Sarah Mackenzie." Trish embraced her warmly. "I'm so pleased to meet you."

Sarah smiled back and returned the embrace with a kiss.

Turning to John, Harm said, "Lt. Commander John Marshall".

Surprising everyone, Trish gave him a warm hug and kiss, also and whispered in his ear. "I am very pleased to finally meet you. Harm has told me about you. Diane has told me the rest. Thank you for kicking my stubborn son's rear end."

Embarrassed, John could only hug her back and return her kiss on her cheek and say, "You're welcome".

Clearing his throat, John took over the introductions. "This is my sister Ann Marie and her husband Peter Matthews and Lt Jg. Bud Roberts and Ensign Harriet Sims." Trish and Frank exchanged handshakes and kisses with them.

Trish stood back and holding Ann Marie's hands said, "You look wonderful dear. When are you due?"

Ann Marie told her adding, "Now I know where Harm gets his manners from," as she warmly embraced Trish.

Frank gave Ann Marie a long look and asked, "Aren't you…"

"The President's Press Secretary" everybody including Trish chorused, at which everyone shared a good laugh.

"Darling, you apparently weren't listening when I told you that Harm was hanging out in important circles" Trish playfully explained. She got a good laugh from everyone on that to, as Frank looked dutifully chagrined.

Just then a nurse came by. "Mr. Rabb, your wife and daughter are ready to see you," she said with a wide smile. "Father first and the rest of you two at a time," the nurse instructed.

Harm entered Diane's room. She found her with Sarah Cate in her arms. "Hey dad, come meet your daughter. What were Sarah's and John answers?"

"They both said yes," said Harm as Trish & Frank walked in. "Mom, dad you made it," exclaimed Diane.

"We got here as fast as we could dear," said Trish as she leaned over and gave Diane a kiss. "Can I hold my granddaughter?"

"Of course," Diane said as she handed Sarah out to her waiting arms.

Trish held her close then back so that she could look into her face. She made the usual Grandma noises, and then handed her back to Diane. John and Sarah were in next

"Thank you for agreeing to the name and for being godparents. You made Harm and I so happy," said Diane with a watery smile.

Sarah was holding Sarah Cate then gave her over to John as she went to hug Diane. They both had a good bout of happy tears.
After Ann Marie & Peter and Bud & Harriet saw and held the baby, Diane was saying that she was getting tired.

They all left the maternity ward. Harm followed close behind. John spoke up.

"Mr. & Mrs. Burnett, do you have a place to stay yet?" John asked.

Frank spoke up, "Not yet. When we left this morning I hadn't made reservations anywhere yet. I know Harm doesn't have room, so I thought we would stay at the Hilton in Alexandria."

John turned to Ann Marie who gave him a nod. "Why don't you stay at my place? I have a guest room with a queen bed. It wouldn't be any trouble and you wouldn't be putting Ann Marie or me out."

Harm shrugged and told his mother that that was a good idea. Trish turned to John and gave him another hug. "We'd be delighted to stay. I feel you're like family anyway."

"Great, Harm can pick you up in the morning to take you back here." Addressing the Burnetts, "In the mean time I bet you haven't had dinner since you left California. We now have two birthdays to celebrate and I'm buying. I believe there is still a cake for me to cut. We'll add Sarah Cate's name to it." Everyone but Harm, trooped back to McMurphy's to finish the party that was started earlier.

September 29, 1997

0030 Local Time

McMurphy's Tavern

It was after midnight when they left McMurphy's. Ann Marie took the opportunity to further embarrass John on his birthday as she regaled the Burnetts and Bud & Harriet and some of the staff that were still there with her stories of John. After everyone's sides ached from the laughter they decided to call it a night. The Burnetts and Sarah got into John's Caprice. "I'll drop Sarah off at her place and then we'll go to mine."

When they got to Sarah's apartment, John walked her up. John grasped her hand thinking they were out of sight of the car, but the Burnetts saw it. Frank and Trish smiled to each other as they saw them holding hands. "Ah young Love," sighed Trish.

When they arrived at her apartment door Sarah said, "That was very nice of you offering the Burnetts your guest room. I'm so proud of you. I know you made Harm very happy." She gave him a long luxurious kiss. "I am going to miss you though you know. I was planning to continue your birthday celebration," she said as she nibbled on his ear. Then she flashed him what she was wearing under her blouse. It was a very sexy looking pink merry widow camisole that clung to her beautiful figure. She heard him groan as she kissed him sweetly.

"Sometimes I'm too chivalrous for my own good," John complained good-naturedly.

"I know, that's why I love you" said Sarah as she kissed him again. "Call me when you get home, we can talk each other to sleep."

After ensuring that the Burnetts were comfortably settled, John locked himself in his room and did just that, although they didn't go to sleep until 0300.

Sunday, October 12, 1997
It was a beautiful autumn afternoon on the day Harm & Diane chose for Baby Sarah's Christening. Sarah and John stood as godparents with the proud parents as baby Sarah was baptized. The baby wore the same antique lace Christening Gown that Harm wore when he was baptized. Trish & Frank Burnett were there beaming proudly. Ann Marie and Peter along with Bud and Harriet were also sitting in the congregation.

Admiral Chegwidden was also there with his new girlfriend, named Dr. Sydney Walden. She was a pretty, dark haired woman the same age as AJ. She wore a simple pale blue dress. Sydney was an internist whom AJ consulted in regards to the effects Viagra had on vision. At first Sydney thought AJ was asking her about the Viagra for himself. But he quickly dissuaded her of that notion when he asked her out. She called him 'Admiral Vigorous'.

After the church ceremony the whole retinue went to a new restaurant in Falls Church named Benzingers for the lunch party. As they sat in Benzingers, Harm, proudly holding Baby Sarah, Peter and John were checking out the football game that was on the TV at the bar until Diane, Sarah and Ann Marie pulled them back to the guests.

Sometime during the party, John found himself sitting between the two Mackenzie sisters. Harm sat across the table speaking with his mom and Frank.

He was holding a sleeping Baby Sarah on his right shoulder with Diane resting her head on the same shoulder looking at her beautiful baby. Sarah had her hands clasped around his free left elbow and was resting her head on that shoulder. She looked up at him affectionately. John bent to kiss the top of her head and saw the wistful look in her eyes.

"What's the matter sweetie?" he asked her.

I miss Uncle Matt. I love him so much John. He used to love this type of event. He would have been so thrilled to see that at least one person from his family was happy, even if he didn't see her growing up."

"What do you mean ONE person? Aren't you happy?" John asked her in a tone to draw her out of her doldrums. Diane just smiled at that.

Sarah smiled, put her finger on his chin to turn his head and gave him a kiss. "Yes I am my love. You have made me very happy. You are the first man that has never asked anything from me except my love." She kissed him tenderly.

"Speaking of Uncle Matt, how is he doing?" John asked both sisters.

Sarah answered John. "After we called him, Diane and I sat down the first weekend after our reunion to write him a long letter telling him everything about Diane; that she was very happily married and was expecting a baby. We asked him if he knew that mom was having twins and any other things she may have hid from us.

Diane picked up the story, "He wrote back that mom never informed him about the fact she was carrying twins and thus had no knowledge of me. Also he didn't know of any other secrets mom had. He did say that he was happy to hear he had another niece to write to. I wrote back to tell him to never stop writing and that even though he was in Leavenworth, we still loved him. We both wrote
him telling him about baby Sarah Cate right after she was born. We promised that we would visit him when Sarah Cate was big enough to travel comfortably. He wrote again saying not to worry about visiting, just send lots of pictures."

John spoke up, "Maybe we four can take a trip next summer to visit him. I know a prison isn’t a very nice place to plan a vacation, but I know he’d love to meet you Diane."

"I'd love that John," replied Diane. "Me to," said Sarah, kissing his cheek.

The party and rest of the day and evening went by without anyone having more sad thoughts.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 19

Tuesday, October 14, 1997

To

Thursday, October 30, 1997

As per Princess Alexi's request John and Harm spent 3 weeks in Romania as guests of King Josef & Princess Alexi. They were the lawyers the diplomats consulted with during the trade negotiations. The negotiations ended on a high note for the two as Diane and Sarah flew over to attend the concluding reception. Harm's mother went to the Rabbs to stay with Baby Sarah for the week.

Upon their return from Romania, Harm and John were given different assignments with different partners.

First John and Traci Manetti, now a Lt. Commander, were assigned to the USS Reprisal, an aircraft carrier in the Sea of Japan to investigate the accidental shooting down of a North Korean civilian airline by Navy jets.

While negligence on the part of the Navy fliers was indicated, John and Traci uncovered evidence of a spy aboard the carrier. Meanwhile, the threat of war became real when a U.S. salvage vessel was sent to the site to help with the investigation and two North Korean warships threatened to sink it if both U.S. ships don't leave the area immediately.

During the investigation, Traci and John found that the missile fired before it left the launch rail and that it was caused by a radar sweep, which was also unexplained. Traci, working with PO Sullivan, found that there was an unaccounted for burst transmission the day before the test. It was decoded, and found to be from a spy notifying of the test. It was during the time a galley Seaman named Alice Tuppany left the galley for the CIC room so Traci called back to JAG and asked Admiral Chegwidden for a background information check. The photo she received was different so she and John got the Reprisal's Master at Arms and confronted Tuppany. Seeing that she was cornered she confessed.

Shortly after Tuppanny's revelation as an imposter and spy, the salvage ship 'Sea Star' found that the downed plane was actually an unmanned North Korean spy plane. It swept the missile with radar launching it; and caused its own demise.

While John & Traci were out in the Pacific off Korea, Harm, Sarah and Bud were ordered to run a routine background check on a Navy SEAL who is a candidate for the Medal of Honor. During the course of their investigation they uncovered unsavory information that almost made him unworthy.

Lt. Curtis Rivers is up for a medal after he single-handedly rescues the undersecretary of state from fundamentalist terrorists. In their investigation Harm and Sarah found Rivers, an African-American, to be a very tough, complex and uncommunicative individual who is totally devoted to his country and his duty. But his men painted a different picture of him as a gung-ho loner who didn't care about the safety of his team and, in fact, botched the mission by leaving one of his men behind. Rivers finally agreed to open up to Harm - but only if Harm could withstand the arduous SEAL training for one day - including the brutal manhandling required of the 'hostage interrogation.'
Eventually all the stories were straightened out and Rivers received his Medal of Honor in a ceremony at Arlington Cemetery.

Immediately after the ceremony, Harm and Bud were sent back out to California to investigate the downing of a marine helicopter by another mysterious aircraft. It was during this affair that Harm crossed paths with Clark Palmer and the Defense Security Division. It was only after Harm's infiltrating the secret facility owned by Bradenhurst Corporation, the creators of the mysterious craft, and his rescue by the Marines at 29 Palms resolved the issue.

During those affairs Sarah was experiencing something other than routine. Just before she went with Harm to interview Lt. Rivers, a prestigious Washington law firm, Lowell, Hanson and Lowne aggressively began to recruit her. They offered her lot of money. While Harm and Bud were out in California on their mishap investigation, she and John attended a Washington reception where a senator and the firm's partners practically grilled her, asking her opinions on one case or another. Shortly after that she accepted the offer. John totally supported her. They flew to New York with partner Dalton Lowne to celebrate.

The next day after she returned to JAG Sarah resigned on very short notice. She asked John not to go into AJ's office with her when she did it, as she didn't want him to be caught in fall out from the admiral's anger. Sarah's assessment of the degree of Chegwidden's anger was right on. He was indeed angry.

AJ told her, "Major you ambushed me. Your leaving has left me short."

In order to try and mollify his anger she told him, "But sir this is a great opportunity for me. I have a chance to argue cases before the Supreme Court. This is a chance for me to spread my wings."

She had one more reason for leaving JAG, but she knew this wasn't the place to reveal it. AJ had no other choice but to accept her letter of resignation and let her go. As she walked out with John that afternoon they ran into Harm.

"Leaving without saying goodbye counselor?" Harm said.

Sarah said, "Harm please don't make this harder. After all I'm still your sister in law. We won't be strangers."

Harm smiled his fly-boy smile; "Well in that case you and John come over for dinner tonight. Instead of commiserating our loss we'll celebrate your opportunity."

Sarah smiled and gave him a hug saying, "Since you put it that way I accept. John and I will be there at 1900."

Harm smiled and said, "Don't you mean 7:00 o'clock. You're a civilian now."

Sarah smacked his arm good-naturedly and walked to her car with John.

The following Monday Sarah went to work on her first day in a very enthusiastic mood. However after a brief two weeks she quit. She realized that she wouldn't be trying cases before any court much less the Supreme Court. She was assigned to do research or write briefs as she was only being used as window dressing or briefcase holder for the more senior lawyers and partners. Also Dalton started hitting on her. He repeatedly asked her to dinner even after she insisted that she had no interest in him.

It finally came to a head one last time. She was in the firm's law library when Dalton cornered her. He had his hands on her shoulders as he whispered in her ear, "Come on Sarah. You're not married.
You wouldn't be doing anything wrong."

Sarah turned around and without warning, drove her knee into his groin. As he doubled over in pain she bent and whispered in his ear. "Dalton that was your last warning, leave me alone. I'm in love with a better man than you."

Right after that confrontation she went into her office. She wrote her resignation and cleaned out her desk. She left the letter on her desk where Dalton found it the next day when he went into her office to give her an assignment for a case.

When she came home that night, she told John that she quit, John's reply was, "Don't worry, we'll go back to JAG and see if the admiral will take you back."

Sarah replied, "I hope he's receptive to our request."

Thursday, October 30, 1997

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Fortunately Admiral Chegwidden was very receptive. John had a whole presentation prepared on behalf of Sarah's coming back. AJ cut John's pleas short when he stopped him, opened his desk drawer and pulled out her resignation letter.

"I hadn't processed this yet. I wanted to give you time to ensure that this was what you really wanted," he said holding up the paper. "JAG is not a fallback position and I don't want you to think that it is. How do I know that later on you might want to spread your wings and so on again?"

"Sir during the last two weeks I realized that the partners at Lowell, Hanson and Lowne were only going to parade me out when they wanted a woman to handle any cases that as they said 'needed a woman's touch'. I believe that's what is happening in any law firm. I don't get that at JAG. Here my abilities are looked at first and my gender second. I had to leave to see that."

"Well you have some catching up to do major. I'll see you tomorrow when you are in proper uniform, dismissed," AJ said ending the discussion and ripping up the letter.

Sarah popped to attention and yelled out a very sincere, "Aye, aye sir and thank you sir."

AJ just said menacingly, "Don't thank me yet Major. I intend to make you regret you ever left, dismissed, you too Commander."

Sarah and John both bellowed, "Aye, aye sir," about faced and marched from the office. AJ waited till they were out of the office then he smiled.

On the way through the bullpen, they encountered Bud. He saw the looks of relief on their faces and asked, "Ma'am what did the admiral say? Are you coming back?"

Sarah smiled and said, "Yes Bud I'll be back tomorrow."

Before Sarah could say anything else Bud spontaneously embraced her saying, "That's great."

Sarah shyly returned the hug and then she walked out with John.

As they walked down to the parking lot they stood at her Corvette and embraced. Sarah gave him a very deep kiss. When they came up for air she said, "Wow that's a relief. I didn't think he would take
me back."

John replied, "Well he sees that you are very good at what you do. Don't tell him I said so but for the
two weeks you were gone he kept asking me about you, whether you were happy and so forth. I
think he's just as happy to have you back as you were to be allowed back."

Sarah smiled wanly at that saying, "You think so? Well I got a lot of work to do to live up to his faith
in me."

John said, "I think you already did. I'll see you tonight at your place and we'll go out to dinner. I love
you marine."

"I love you to sailor." Sarah said laying a kiss on him. When they separated Sarah got into her car
and went home while John walked back into the office.

When John returned to his office, he called into Tiner, "Tiner can I get into see the admiral now?"

Tiner replied, "I'll check sir." After a few seconds Tiner called back and said, "The admiral will see
you now sir."

John got up and walked to AJ's office. He entered after the usual knock and "Enter". As he sat down
AJ asked him, "So what do you think?"

"Sarah is very grateful to be coming back sir. We missed her." John sincerely replied.

"Yeah so did I, and if you tell her I'll have your stripes." AJ said semi-threateningly.

John held up his hands in defense, "Don't worry sir, my lips are sealed. There is one thing I would
like to discuss with you sir if you have the time."

"What's on your mind Commander?" AJ asked semi knowing the subject.

"Well sir being that Sarah is coming back I have a request for you."

They spent the next 45 minutes discussing that request.

John left the office at the usual time and picked up Sarah for dinner. She spent the day getting her
uniforms into proper military order, dropping off those items at the dry cleaner that needed to be
cleaned and pressing her blouses and properly affixing the rank symbols and ribbons.

Friday, October 31, 1997

1100 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John and Sarah arrived at work at the same time. They long ago gave up the pretense of hiding their
affections for each other as the whole staff was in on it, though they didn't flaunt it by kissing and
touching in a non-military way.

Sarah's return to duty at JAG was met with enthusiastic and even grateful remarks from the staff.
Sarah smiled brightly accepting the welcoming remarks. However her smile vanished when she
walked into her office. She was somewhat divided in her feelings when she saw the stack of files on
her desk. While she was happy to have the work, she was a little dismayed that there was so much.
She just sat down and started on the first file in the stack.
Later in the morning on his way back from court, John stopped into her office to ask her, "Hey marine you want some help with that mountain you're trying to climb?"

"No thanks anyway, these only require my signature and stuff. I should be through these by lunchtime. Speaking of which want to join me in the commissary?" Sarah asked.

"Absolutely, you can vent telling me how hard your first day back has been," John replied.

Sarah gave him an exasperated look and was just about to voice the correspondingly smart remark when Tiner came to her door. "Commander Marshall, the admiral would like to see you sir."

"Right away Tiner." John replied as he walked to AJ's office. Before he left he mouthed 'I Love you'. Sarah returned the endearment the same way with 'I Love you to'.

When John sat down AJ handed him a document saying, "Take a look at this and give me your honest opinion."

After reading it John commented, "This is very damning to the commander in charge sir."

AJ snorted, "That's really hitting it on the head. Do you have any suggestions as to who should replace that officer?"

"Well sir I would have to look at the records of the officers that are rank qualified before I make a suggestion."

Without saying a word, AJ pointed to a stack of files on the 'coffee' table in front of the sofa. He asked John, "Do you have plans for lunch?"

John smirked indulgently as he replied, "Apparently not sir. Just let me get word to Sarah and we'll dive into this."

"I'll take care of that." AJ said as he called Tiner in and told him, "Tiner please tell Major Mackenzie that Mr. Marshall will not be available for lunch."

"Aye, aye sir." Tiner said as he left the office. Then he and John started on the first file.

It was 90 minutes of reading and discussion before they came to a decision.

AJ said to John, "You know she is not going to be very happy with this. She's going to think she's being punished for leaving."

"That's an understatement sir." John replied sardonically. He continued, "But she is the most qualified to take this on. Her experience of running a platoon and the brigade as the commanding officer's aide and the Investigation Division at NIS at Pearl makes her more than qualified. None of the other officers have her level of organizational experience, not even Commander Krennick."

AJ had to smile at the mention of her name. He said, "I agree. Rumor has it that before you and Mac became an item you gave Krennick more red lights than the Beltway at rush hour."

John smirked, "She wasn't my type sir. She's a user. Her only interest in me was to use me so that she could dispose of me as she climbed to the top. She saw me as an impediment. She certainly did not like it that I was the first chair prosecutor to her second chair at Commander Hobarth's trial. She and Harm butted heads when they worked that murder investigation on the Seahawk two years ago. As I recall Krennick wanted Harm removed because Diane was a witness as she experienced Hobarth's sexual harassment while she served her last sea duty on the Seahawk. And Diane's
roommate, Lt. Sarah Williams was Hobarth's murder victim because she wrote a letter outlining all his offenses."

AJ said, "When I assigned you to be the first chair prosecutor, I knew it was the only way the office could save credibility. The NCIS Agent Turkee reported that their feuding impeded the investigation. Besides I have other plans for the commander. Believe me she will not be any trouble for the foreseeable future."

"That's good to hear sir."

"Okay go have some lunch. You may catch the major for the last 30 minutes of her lunch hour. I'll have Tiner keep an eye out for her. I need to be the one to tell her John. It can't come from anyone else but me. Only after I do tell her you will need to help soften the blow and be an encouraging influence as she goes through this. She won't be able to take any cases or be involved with investigations until that section is reorganized and running properly."

John readily replied. "Don't worry sir. I'll be ready to do just that."

AJ said, "That's fine John. Also I'll let you know about the other thing we discussed yesterday when I have news, dismissed commander."

"Aye, aye sir and thank you sir." John said as he got up and left.

After John left AJ called Tiner in. "Tiner as soon as Major Mackenzie returns from lunch ask her to come in to my office please."

1900 Local Time

McMurphy's Tavern

Harm came into McMurphy's smoking one of his last cigars. Diane was trying to get him to quit. He only smoked them outside away from their home. Being that Diane was away with Sarah Cate to trick-or-treat with her favorite aunt in Baltimore, Harm didn't feel like staying at home alone. So he arranged to meet Sarah and John at the tavern. He went to the jukebox and selected a song, A-7. He saw a spot at the bar open up and he almost dived to fill it. He gave his drink order to the barkeep, "double bourbon straight up." As he sipped his drink Sarah came in. She went to the jukebox and selected the same song, A-7. She joined Harm at the bar. She ordered "tonic water with a lime twist". Harm saw her take a long look at his drink and said, "Does my having this bother you?"

Sarah looked up at him and smiled, "No I don't mind, it's your drink." Then as Harm took a puff of his cigar she said, "Now that I mind. I thought Diane was making you quit?"

Harm said, "She is. But I still have a few more left. As you know she's up in Baltimore visiting her favorite aunt with Sarah Cate. I couldn't get away because of the Sullivan case, so I took advantage of the alone time and I'm burning them off." Harm then asked, "Where's John? I thought he was meeting us here and we were going out to dinner."

Sarah sighed as she answered, "After Admiral Chegwidden assigned me to reorganize the Administrative & Legal Assistance Sections he was notified of high profile murder in New York. It seems that the Manhattan DA is charging an Admiral with killing a junior officer. Admiral Chegwidden assigned John the case to prosecute with the DA while another lawyer based at Fort Hamilton will defend. He drove up there after work this afternoon. He'll be gone at least two weeks. He's going to stay at his parents' house. I'm going to miss him. (Inwardly she noted the time.) He should be up there in a few more hours. He's going to call me when he gets there. I hope nothing
comes up this weekend. I want to drive up and surprise him tomorrow. I called Ann Marie and told
her what I had in mind and she gave me directions."

Harm asked her, "How do you feel being taken off 'trials & investigations'?")

Sarah sighed as she answered, "Not bad I suppose. He showed me the bad evaluation and told me
that after careful consideration, he decided I was the only qualified officer to get those sections in
shape."

Harm was thinking to himself 'I wonder why the admiral didn't assign me there'. But before he could
voice that thought, Bud walked in. Harm saw the long look on his face as he walked to the jukebox.
He also picked A-7.

When he got to the bar Sarah said to him, "Bud don't you dare order any drinks with an umbrella."

Budd nodded and morosely ordered a beer.

Harm asked him, "Why the long face Bud?"

Bud answered, "Harriet is mad at me again. She said I was being thoughtless when I called her
mother a shrew. She said something about only she was allowed to insult her mother."

Harm said, "You're not supposed to rag on your mother in law until after you're married. Don't
worry about it. Harriet will get over it."

Sarah added, "That's right Bud. She doesn't stay mad for long."

Harm then added, "Besides you have to remember that until you're finally married nothing with a
woman is great ALL the time. Hell you're lucky with 5 good days a month."

Sarah chimed in, "Oh where do I start."

Harm quickly backtracked, "You know it's always that way with men and women. You know with
the 'opposing sex' being different."

Sarah was somewhat mollified but not quite saying, "You mean the opposite sex!"

She rolled her eyes at her brother in law. Diane was always telling her that Harm had the bad habit of
putting his foot in his mouth, speaking more times than not without a filter.

Bud said, "Yeah you're right." Then he realized and asked, "How come you two are alone tonight?
Where are Mrs. Rabb and Commander Marshall?"

Sarah answered, "John is up in New York on an important case. I'm driving up early tomorrow to
surprise him."

Harm answered, "And Diane's in Baltimore with Sarah Cate trick-or-treating with her aunt. I'm
taking the train up there tomorrow to meet them." He added as his put arms on the shoulders of his
two colleagues, "So tonight the only ones that I have are you two as company."

Sarah and Bud both replied together, "Imagine how we feel."

The three shared a chuckle then the conversation grew quiet just at the point in the song where they
all knew the words; and, one by one, they started singing, lowly, along with the music:

As I walk this land with broken dreams
I have visions of many things
Love's happiness is just an illusion
Filled with sadness and confusion,
What becomes of the broken hearted
Who had love that's now departed?
I know I've got to find
Some kind of peace of mind
Maybe.

Harm & Sarah sang 'Maybe', while Bud sang 'Baby'.

Harm turns to him and says "Baby?"

Then the three sputtered into cathartic laughter.

Harm said, "C'mon, let's go and get some dinner."

The three finished their drinks as Harm paid for them. Then they left for a restaurant. As they exited the tavern they were arguing about what type of food they wanted.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 20

Saturday, November 1, 1997

1330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Far Rockaway, NY

John and his dad were sitting in the front porch on the house, which James insulated and converted to the TV room. They were watching a college football game. John arrived the night before at about 10:30. When AJ gave him the assignment, he suggested to John that he get up to New York ASAP so that he was ready to go first thing Monday morning. John told him that he would drive up that night. AJ readily agreed, apologizing for spoiling his weekend. He stopped into Sarah's office to tell her what he was doing then he called his parents from his office. Upon his arrival to his parents' house he promptly went up to his room and settled in. He plugged his cell phone into the home charger and then he called Sarah to let her know he was up in New York. They talked on the phone for two hours. The next day John went to 12:00 Mass as it was All Saints Day.

As they watched the game, John and his dad both heard the sound of a high performance engine rev up as it pulled up in front of the house. The Marshalls lived on a dead end street that was only two cars wide. John ignored the sound as he read the Daily News but James picked his head up and looked out the window and commented, "That girl really knows how to handle that Corvette. She just whipped it into the parking space behind your car like she's been doing it here forever."

The words 'girl' and 'Corvette' made John pick his head up and ask, "Is the Corvette cherry red by any chance?"

James looked out again and then answered, "Yeah it is. How did you know?"

John bolted off the couch and yanked the front door open. He smiled as he saw who was getting out of the car.

Sarah got up at 0600 threw her overnight bag in her car and gone to 7:00 AM Mass at St. Thomas for All Saints Day. She had her bag packed, as usual and just added some civvies the night before. Right after mass she hit the road. As she stood at her car's trunk counting the houses to determine which one was the Marshalls', she saw John coming out the door and walking to her. She smiled and waved. He had a big smile on his face. When he reached her he enveloped her in a big hug and laid a deep kiss on her. Sarah responded just as enthusiastically.

When they came up for air, Sarah saw the love in his eyes as she told him, "I should surprise you more often."

John smiled as he cupped her cheek, "You surprise me every time marine. I love you."

Sarah kissed him and said, "I love you to sailor."

John released her, reached into the trunk and picked up her overnight bag. They walked into the
house with their arms across each other's back. Sarah was resting her head on John's shoulder
smiling in contentment as John occasionally bent and kissed the top of her head. She was glad that he
was happy to see her.

Before they walked into the house John asked her, "Does the admiral know you're up here?"

"Yeah I notified him where to find me if he needed me. He said to me, "I figured you'd follow him
there'. Don't worry I'm not looking to work the case. In fact he specifically told me quote, "keep it
personal major" unquote. He gave me Monday off so I could enjoy the weekend. I'll drive back
down then."

John smiled and kissed her head again. As they walked into the house, they walked smack into
Maureen. Jim called her out of the kitchen with, "Maureen we have to make up the guest bed,
Sarah's here."

Maureen came running to the front of the house. Ann Marie was keeping her up to date on John's
growing relationship with Sarah and she was very excited to see her again. Even though she spoke
with Sarah at the Legion of Merit ceremony, it was only polite introductory conversation. She saw
that kiss and she knew that this was the woman that John wanted to marry.

She enveloped Sarah in another hug saying, "I'm so glad to see you again, it's been too long since we
spoke. Why didn't you call to tell us you were coming?"

"John didn't know I was coming, I wanted to surprise him."

They all settled in the kitchen. As Maureen poured Sarah some coffee she asked, "You must be
famished driving all that time. Do you want something to eat? We all got up late this morning and I
was just making some bacon and eggs."

Sarah said, "Oh yes please. All I had was a bagel and coffee before I left Georgetown. I only
stopped once for a bathroom break on the Jersey Turnpike."

They settled down to have a pleasant meal and a pleasant weekend. That evening they all went out to
dinner to City Island. While they were up there, they stopped in at John's Godmother, Aunt
Margaret's and then John's Grandmother's. The two were totally enchanted with Sarah.

Sarah stayed that night and Sunday night then hit the road for home at 0630 Monday morning. She
and John left the house at the same time. When she got home to Georgetown it was near 1130. Even
with the day half gone, she put on her uniform and stopped into work. She reported to AJ who was
glad to see her, even though he gave her the day off to travel. She called John that night. They spoke
for three hours.

Thursday, November 20, 1997

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

It was a week until Thanksgiving as John knocked on Harm's office door. Harm looked up and said,
"Come on in. You ready to plead out the Sanders case?"

"Heck no, I believe my client didn't super glue the Staff Sergeant's bayonet into its scabbard. Your
evidence is thin, circumstantial at best, and you have no witnesses. Also the Staff Sergeant was
known to have a bottle of 'Gorilla Glue' as he already broke the same bayonet handle and used the glue in an attempt to repair it. It's not Midshipman Sanders' fault that the staff sergeant can't properly take care of his weapons," retorted John.

"You know the honor code at Annapolis forbids lying," said Harm.

"Midshipman Sanders is not lying. He is exercising his 5th Amendment right against self-incrimination. He is entitled to not speak, as anything he says can be used to incriminate him. Besides that the Staff Sergeant has it in for everyone in Sanders' platoon. That's why he brought the complaint."

Harm laughed, "I figured that. I'll call the convening authority and have the charges dropped for lack of evidence."

John said, "Thank you. In the meantime, what plans do you have for Thanksgiving?"

"Well, since it's not practical to travel with a new baby, my folks are coming in from La Jolla. Diane and I figured we'd go out to dinner, Sarah Cate still hasn't learned to sleep steadily through the night and Diane is not up to cooking a full course meal for the holiday. What are your plans?" asked Harm back.

John answered, "Well 'Major Sarah' and I are staying in DC along with Pete and Ann Marie. As you well know with Diane, it's getting difficult for Ann Marie to travel being 5 months pregnant. Also her doctor advised against traveling that weekend as her pregnancy is rather delicate and she doesn't need the added stress of fighting the crowds. My two brothers are spending the holiday with each of their wives' families. So my folks are coming down and staying at my place.

Ann Marie and Sarah were talking yesterday that since that is the case, they are going to collaborate with my mother on the meal. Why don't you and your folks come over to my place for Thanksgiving? Besides it will be the first one Diane and Sarah will spend the holiday together."

"You know that sounds great. Let me ask Diane. I know my folks won't mind. My Mom told me she thinks of you as the brother I never had. I'll give you an answer before we leave for the day." Harm said smiling.

"Great," said John as he got up and went to Sarah's office.

He knocked his special knock on her closed door and went in when he heard her say loudly, "Enter".

"Good morning Major Sarah" said John with a big smile as he came in and closed the door.

John & Harm began calling her "Major Sarah" just like the old movie, whenever they talked with each other about her and Harm's daughter. Sarah at first thought it was cute, but she began to get gently annoyed whenever any of them called her that and they called her that to get under her skin in a family sort of way but only in private. Thankfully no one else in the bullpen picked up on it, or wouldn't dare call her that.

Sarah looked up and smiled sarcastically, but still offered her lips to his for a kiss. Since she and John became an item, they kept the blinds to their respective offices closed for just this sort of time so that they could steal affectionate moments at work. It made the day go by well for both of them.

"What's up sailor? You come in to annoy me or just to steal a kiss?" asked Sarah affectionately.

John began, "Both!" (Sarah flashed him a look that said 'very funny'.) I also spoke to Harm. He's
open for the idea of his clan coming over to our place for Thanksgiving. I'm waiting for Diane to give him the OK."

Sarah was startled, "That's first time you referred to your home as "our" place." Is that a Freudian slip or are you so used to having me stay over at Florida Ave. that you think of me as living there?"

John was thoughtful for a second. "You know, you're right. I have gotten used to you being there and you having your stuff including a couple of uniforms there, that I automatically used shorthand instead of saying 'my' place. Do you mind?"

"No of course not, I love it. You know as I think about it, the only thing of mine that doesn't go there is my mail."

"I've been thinking about that. In fact I've been thinking about that a lot since Captain Magnum's visit last Monday.

Sarah thought back to that day.

Flashback

Monday, November 17, 1997

1630 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

John's case up in New York ended the Friday before when the admiral who was charged was found guilty. For the case the New York DA relinquished the first chair to John and he prosecuted the case very assertively, much to the DA's satisfaction. The DA wrote a very complimentary commendation citing John's professional attitude and tenacity. Sarah was so proud of him.

He called her from New York Friday evening telling her that he planned to drive home Saturday morning straight to Sarah's apartment. Sarah was waiting for him. She wore a very sexy set of lingerie under her bathrobe as she met him at the door. After properly greeting him at the door she took his hand and led him into the bedroom. When they entered the bedroom, she stopped him and stepped away from him to give him a good view as she dropped the robe. Then she knelt on the bed.

"Are you going to just stand there and stare or are you going to strip and join me on this bed?"

John did not waste any time getting his clothing off. John and Sarah were very enthusiastic as they had their way with each other.

During John's time away Sarah began doing the job that AJ assigned to her. Today she was finalizing the plan for upgrading the office computers when she heard a knock on her door. 'It didn't sound like John's knock', she thought as she called out a very military, "Enter".

She knew John was out of the office doing interviews for a case and wasn't due to be back for the rest of the day. She knew she would see him later that evening to celebrate his promotion.

Admiral Chegwidden received the word that morning that John was promoted to full Commander and arranged the swearing in right away. Sarah stood proudly holding the bible as he took his oath from the Sec-Nav. She gave him his usual kiss with the correct enthusiasm required for the office. If it weren't for his strong arms though, she would have collapsed right there. She was so much looking
forward to celebrating with him tonight at the 'wet down' at McMurphy's and then alone with him later at her apartment.

The door opened and in walked a very tall, mustachioed Naval Captain who said pleasantly, "Hello Mac. It's good to see you again."

Sarah looked up, smiled, got up from her chair and went to shake his hand at the sound of the very familiar man that she had not seen in over 10 months.

"Captain Magnum, it's good to see you too sir. How's Maggie or Captain Poole?" Sarah corrected herself.

"She's fine. And it's OK to call her Maggie. You two were such great friends while you were stationed with me that I believe you've earned the right. Besides you two were not in the same chain of command. Belated congratulations on receiving the Legion of Merit by the way. You get another Corvette?"

"Thank you and yes sir. Do you still have that Ferrari?" asked Sarah as she showed him to a seat.

"Yeah, I do. I had it shipped here. It cost me a fortune."

She laughed at that. Then she sobered in consternation.

"You shipped it to DC sir? Are you relocating here sir?" asked Sarah.

"Yes I am. You know from when we served together they just merged N.I.S. and the other various naval criminal investigative and intelligence services into N.C.I.S. Well our original director has resigned and they appointed me director. We're setting up our new main office in the Navy Yard, as a matter of fact right up the block on Sicard St. You know from Maggie's letters that our twins Trip or Thomas III and Patricia are doing well as they start 3rd grade. Lily Catherine is doing well in high school. She wants to go to Annapolis. Also Maggie is here looking for a house, as the position requires me to relocate here. She'll move here permanently in July after the school year is done. I knew you were here so after I paid my respects to Admiral Chegwidden I stopped in to see you. What's up with you?"

"Well I'm really enjoying myself here. I love being in the courtroom so much that I resigned my commission to take a high paying position at a DC Law Firm. After 2 weeks I gave it up though. I found out the position would only be one where I was filing motions for other attorneys to take to court or essentially being a briefcase holder. I wouldn't even have been allowed to sit 2nd chair in the courtroom. Besides, the partner who recruited me was only after me to get me into bed. When he saw I wasn't interested because I am in love with someone else, he backed away and let me go. So I came back here. Luckily, Admiral Chegwidden hadn't processed my resignation and he let me resume my duties."

Sarah was also thinking to herself, 'I only accepted the offer to leave as a way to have a more open relationship with John, being that they would not be in the same 'chain of command'. John supported her leaving and even her coming back, saying to her, "Do what you need to do because it makes you happy. Don't worry about us because you and I will be all right. If leaving JAG and joining Lowell, Hanson and Lowne makes you happy we'll go on from there. If not we'll still go on from there."

After resigning from Lowell, Hanson and Lowne, she came back and practically begged the admiral for her job back. She remembered fondly that John also put in a passionate plea on her behalf. She loved the glowing words he used to describe her, good work ethic, excellent attorney and investigator and so forth. Fortunately her office was not assigned to another officer and she readily
moved back in the next day.

'Chegwidden wasn't kidding about playing catch up. He made me head of the Administrative Law and Legal Assistance sections. Since I came back, I haven't been involved with an investigation or trial. I've been overseeing everyone making wills and such.' She had tried to refuse afraid that he was putting her career on a path to administration instead of legal investigation but Chegwidden didn't accept any of her excuses.

AJ told her, "Mac you are the most qualified officer we have to straighten out these departments."

That statement made her feel better. Her first assigned project was to oversee the upgrading of all the office's computers.

It was particularly galling to do the research for but not even sit 2nd chair when Harm prosecuted Master Chief Sullivan for sexual harassment. He was the same Master Chief involved in the Issacs 'crossing the line' incident. Sullivan was even defended by Dalton Lowne. The only pleasure she had from the whole affair was when Lowne encountered her in the JAG Law Library to ask her if she really wanted to be away from his firm and away from him. She had told him in no uncertain terms that she never had any feeling for him and that if he didn't stop harassing her, he would be in the same situation as his client.'

When they were alone together in the evenings she groused to John about the assignment as she felt Chegwidden was "paying her back" for her resignation. He could tell she wasn't happy, but told her, "Stick it out. Do your usual good job. Besides the stuff he's giving you to do needs to be done anyway." John's unwavering support was one more reason why she loved him.

Now as she sat in front of Magnum she thought to herself, 'I hope that will eventually change, because if I leave JAG again, I'll never regain any credibility.'

Sarah came out of her reverie as Magnum replied, "That's some story. I guess your answer to my next question is a little more in doubt than before."

Sarah looked at him, "What question is that sir?"

"I'm looking for an Assistant Director to run my day to day operations. It's a command position and he / she would free me up to deal with the politics of my position, leaving him or her free to run a smooth operation also supervising ongoing investigations. Admiral Chegwidden mentioned you and another officer here for it. I'm here asking you first since you're a known quantity to me and I know how good you are. The position would have him or her at the same pay rate as his or her present rank, with promotion forthcoming. Would you be interested?"

Sarah paused for a long while. She pursed her lips and then said, "No I don't think so. Don't get me wrong please. I would love to work with you again. But I really like that both aspects of my job involve investigation and courtroom action. I feel that I've really embraced the law."

"That's fine. I'm not disappointed. I've seen your file and I see from reading it that you really do enjoy your work. Besides, who is that lucky guy you're so in love with?"

"I'm not at liberty to say, sir. We promised the admiral we'd keep it out of the office" Sarah said, lowering her eyes.

"Don't worry. It's none of my business anyway," said Magnum reassuringly with his trademark smile that she knew so well. "Why don't you and that officer you're in love with go to lunch with Maggie and me tomorrow. We could use some local commentary to re-acclimate ourselves to DC."
"I'd like that sir. He's out of the office now and I'll call him as soon as we're done," said Sarah.

"Great. In the meantime could you direct me to Commander John Marshall's office?"

End Flashback

Sarah was remembering that day. Being that John was out of the office Sarah asked Captain Magnum if he and Mrs. Magnum would like to attend the 'wet down' at McMurphy's. Captain Magnum accepted and called Maggie and she accepted. He offered John the job also that night. He gave John till after Thanksgiving to decide. She knew that he was leaning toward taking the position. Even though John was an excellent attorney and that he really enjoyed a good investigation, she knew that his heart was set on getting a command. She also knew that if the both of them were in different 'chains of command' it would be easier for them to have a more open relationship, maybe opening the door to marriage. She also remembered the long discussions she had with John between that day and now weighing the pros and cons of the job. She immediately paid attention when John said:

"I have come to a conclusion on Captain Magnum's offer," said John

"And what conclusion have you come to my love? Sarah asked.

"I like it when you call me that," John teased knowing he was getting under her skin as her impatience was starting to show. "Captain Magnum gave me till after Thanksgiving to decide. What would you think if we announced what that decision is at dinner that night?" asked John.

"I'll rephrase counselor. What decision have you come to my love?"

John sighed extravagantly. "Since you don't want to wait till Thanksgiving, why don't we go into the admiral's office so that I only have to say it once," he said, prolonging her agony.

"Alright as long as we can get this over with," Sarah said smiling in exasperation as she got up, preceded John out of the office and marched to the admiral's office with him.

Halfway across the bullpen though, John let her off the hook as he grasped her hand and whispered in her ear. "Will you marry me?"

Sarah stopped, as she was too stunned to walk, even speak. John gently pulled her along to the admiral's office. They waited for Tiner to announce them with the admiral.

When they entered AJ didn't even look up when he asked, "What brings the two of you here?"

"Sir, I have made a decision on Captain Magnum's offer," declared John

That brought his head up. "What decision have you made Commander?" AJ asked.

"Well sir, remember our conversation when you said you wanted prior notice as to what my plans were and that Sarah would be the third to know."

"Yes I do Commander," said AJ sensing where he was going. He smiled as he caught the look on Sarah's face. He got up and walked around to the front of his desk. He crossed his arms and leaned back onto the desk to watch the show.

"Sir, may I proceed with your indulgence?" AJ nodded. "I thought I would let you both know at the same time," John said as he reached into his pocket.
Sarah gasped as he took out a small jewelry box, took hold of her left hand and knelt down on one knee in front of her.

As John began his plea Sarah stood there more stunned than before they came into the admiral's office.

"Sarah I told you before that I have loved you since I first saw you in the Rose Garden. I also said that I want the whole package with you, marriage, kids, grandkids, everything. You asked me then if that was a proposal. It wasn't then but it is now. Sarah Catherine Mackenzie, my love, will you marry me?

Sarah looked down at him with tears in her eyes and her trademark watery smile. "Yes, yes my love I will marry you, today, tomorrow, for all time."

Sarah then gasped again as John opened the box to reveal a 1½-carat solitaire Marquise cut diamond in a platinum setting. She nervously took her Marine Corp ring off and held it in her right hand before he slipped the ring onto her trembling left ring finger.

John got up and before he could take a breath, Sarah was in his arms and faster than a speeding bullet captured his lips in hers for a deep kiss. It was only the sound of the admiral clearing his throat after 20 seconds that brought them up for air.

"So Commander you decided to say yes to Captain Magnum's offer?" asked AJ with a smirk holding out two Kleenex tissues, one for him to wipe Sarah's lipstick from his lips and one to dry Sarah's happy tears.

"Yes sir I did. I already called him this morning to tell him so," said John emphatically.

"Congratulations to both of you. And thank you for sharing the moment" AJ said with a smile as he went to kiss Sarah and shake John's hand. "Let's go outside so we can get some work done today. I suspect that everyone out there knows about our little tableau as Tiner left the door open."

Work had indeed stopped as all the people in the bullpen saw John whisper to Sarah as they walked across to the admiral's office. They also saw Sarah's reaction. So they had an inkling of the little tableau in the JAG's Office and had watched it through the open door expectantly.

First there were collective gasps as there was enough of a view through the door to see that John went down on one knee. Then the 'aahs as they saw the lovers embrace. So when Sarah and John emerged, closely followed by a smiling AJ, the whole bullpen erupted in spontaneous applause, which they had held for their arrival. It got louder as Sarah had smiled wide and bright and held up her left hand to show the ring. The diamond could be clearly seen from across the whole bullpen.

Sarah was surprised to see her sister, Diane standing with Harm outside his office holding her namesake, smiling brightly. Sarah went right over to them.

Diane handed Sarah Cate to her husband and met her sister half way and enveloped her in a smothering hug. She also had tears of joy running down her cheeks.

As they broke apart Sarah asked, "How did you know?"

Diane answered, "I didn't. John called me after I left from registering Sarah at the Pentagon's Daycare. He told me to just get over here. He didn't tell me why. I got over here as fast as I could. I'm so happy for you sweetie." Diane turned and gave John a big hug and kiss as Harm gave Sarah the same and then he shook John's hand.
AJ came over to join them. They all walked into Harm's office. AJ announced, "Commanders, Major, my house tonight 1900. I'll supply the steaks and rabbit food for you Mr. Rabb. Mr. Marshall, ask your sister and her husband if they would like to join us please.

"Yes sir, I'm sure Ann Marie and Peter will be delighted. Come to think of it I still haven't told her," said John.

"You mean I really am the second to know?" asked Sarah teasingly.

John sticking his tongue firmly in his cheek said "You know when you think about it, the bride is always the third to know. First there's the groom, then the jeweler…" Everyone groaned before he could say, 'then the bride'.

"In the meantime, we'll have a small celebration for the office at lunch time in the conference room."

When they emerged from Harm's office, Sarah pleasingly endured the collective oohs and aahs over the ring from the Harriet and the other women and John the handshakes and attaboys from the men.

As promised, at lunchtime AJ had the staff from the commissary deliver iced buckets of sparkling water to the conference room and the office staff came in and toasted the happy couple.

1915 Local Time

AJ's House

Mclean, VA

John picked up Sarah at her place and then they rendezvoused with the Rabbs at their apartment in Alexandria. There they piled into the Rabb minivan to go to AJ's home. Sydney was there and gave Sarah a very warm congratulatory hug. AJ showed Diane his room so that they could set up the portable crib to put a sleeping baby Sarah down. "How come she sleeps so well from the car to someone else's house, but can't stay asleep at home?" asked Harm. Diane just shrugged her shoulders as she hooked up the portable baby monitor.

Peter and Ann Marie soon arrived driven by the Secret Service.

Addressing everyone, Ann Marie said, "Sorry I'm late. You know I hate picking out the turkeys at Thanksgiving. This is the 4th year in a row that the President asked me to do it. The one I pick gets roasted and the other ends up at a petting zoo. It almost makes want to go vegetarian – shut up Harm- (she said this as she saw Harm take a breath to extol the virtues of being vegetarian) – "but not quite. Then the press asks some of the dumbest questions about it. Anyway what's the occasion Admiral, my brother going to retrieve the Constitution this time?"

Everyone gave a good laugh at that one.

Then Sarah, who was sitting covering her left hand held it up to reveal the reason. Ann Marie let out a shriek as she saw the ring then went and embraced Sarah. "Now I can say welcome to the family and really mean it," Ann Marie said in her ear. After hugging Sarah she went over and gave her brother a hug.

Right at that moment AJ brought out a tray with sparkling cider and champagne glasses. He filled the glasses and passed them around as he began his toast.

"When Sarah and John first met as partners in the White House Rose Garden last January I ordered them, 'don't get to comfortable, you're working together'. I gave that order as I saw the way they
looked at each other when I turned the corner with John. Fortunately it was an order they did not follow. I saw right then and there that it was only a matter of time until we got to this moment. I have never met a more professional pair of officers as they did follow my next order concerning them, up to a point, of keeping it out of the office. I was honored to be included in the moment as John proposed to Sarah in my office. It was his way of honoring my request of keeping me informed of his plans and at the same time of not letting Sarah being the last to know. So in that vein I propose a toast to the happy couple. May your troubles be few, your blessings be more, and may nothing but happiness come through your door."

Everyone drained their glasses.

John added, "There must be Irish blood in you Admiral."

AJ answered, "Maternal grandmother was from Kerry."

The rest of the evening went very well. It came to an end shortly after dessert when baby Sarah Cate reminded everyone that she was there. Diane heard her through the monitor. After Diane breast-fed and changed her, she and Harm got ready to go.

That was also John & Sarah's cue to get ready. Before they left Ann Marie asked AJ and Sydney; "What are your and Dr. Walden's plans for Thanksgiving admiral?"

"We really didn't have any. Sydney's son Danny is in the Navy stationed overseas and won't be home for the holiday. So we were going to enjoy the weekend off," he replied.

John nodded and Ann Marie asked, "Why don't you join us at John's house. We're all going to be there along with Harm's & my parents. We'd love to have you both."

AJ turned to Sydney who nodded. He replied, "You know, we will be there. What time is good?"

John replied, "Well the first game starts at 1230 so around that is good."

Sarah, Ann Marie and even Diane smacked his arms "Always with the football" they chorused at him.

John just put up his hands defensively. AJ and Sydney were laughing hysterically.

Thanksgiving Day 1997

1100 Local Time

John house,

Florida Avenue, NW

When the doorbell rang, Sarah and Ann Marie called out, "John get the door."

"I know I'm not deaf" John called back in fun exasperation.

The two women were working in the kitchen with John's mother Maureen while John, his father James and Peter were setting up the dinner table and chairs. The table extended through the arch that divided the living and dining rooms. John and Sarah also invited Bud & Harriet. That made a total of 14 people sitting down to dinner. They had to rearrange the couch and coffee table and place them against the walls to make room. John put the tablecloth on the table. The table would be set later.

John's parents arrived mid-afternoon via the New York-DC shuttle the day before. Sarah was with
him as they got off the plane at National Airport. Maureen enveloped Sarah in tight hug when she saw the diamond on her left hand. Then the three women spent the evening at the house cleaning two large turkeys. It was very late when they had finished. So Sarah slept over.

Now they were mixing the stuffing for the turkeys and pealing 2½ pounds of potatoes, two turnips and otherwise doing the other cooking needed for the meal. Sarah volunteered to peel the potatoes as she did on more than one occasion while doing KP in boot camp. To make it easier and less time consuming they requested that the guest couples bring their favorite side dishes for the dinner. They would use the dining room table to hold the side dishes before they were reheated in the microwave.

When John opened the door he saw Diane carrying Sarah Cate, with Trish & Frank following close behind. Harm was coming up the walk from the minivan carrying the portable crib and the baby's diaper bag.

John introduced everyone around. Diane and Sarah set up Sara's crib in the dining room right near the kitchen.

At that moment the doorbell rang again. John answered it and saw Bud and Harriet followed by AJ & Sydney. John took all their coats up to the bedroom. Harriet and Sydney put their dishes on the table.

Then Sarah announced in her best Marine voice, "Since Sarah is going to be here, and there being no room anyway in the living room you men will watch your football in the man-cave downstairs. You can do all your shouting down there without disturbing the baby."

John wrapped his arms around her waist as he pulled her into a hug, "Engaged a week and she's already acting like the woman of the house."

Sarah giggled as he squeezed her affectionately. They gave each other an affectionate kiss.

"My love do you have an idea where everyone is sitting?" Sarah asked.

"I do, but it can wait till just before we sit down." John said. Then he gave her a quick kiss and followed the rest of the men downstairs.

In the kitchen after the women were working for a while and Sarah was cleaning the potatoes at the sink, it suddenly struck her that this was the first Thanksgiving that she was happy doing the holiday chores. While growing up, her mother and she did the work and then sat back and waited in fear to see if her father would appreciate the effort. She saw that all the other women in the kitchen were chatting, checking pots, mixing dressing, playfully checking up on each other in their preparations. Sarah realized that she was a part of that. The thought that she was so happily connected to these women was so overwhelming that she started to tear up.

Diane saw it immediately. As part of her training in military intelligence, she double majored in psychology at Annapolis, so she knew what was happening. Since their reunion she and Sarah were having long talks on how they each grew up. While Diane's holiday experiences were pleasant, Sarah's were, more often than not, bad. Diane was on the watch for any emotional outbursts that the holiday may trigger. She went over to where her sister was standing and quietly embraced her.

Harriet and the other three mothers also saw that Sarah started to cry and moved to help. Ann Marie on the other hand also knew what Sarah was going through as she had the same long talks with her as Diane. Ann Marie stopped the other four women to let Diane handle it. They all agreed and went back to what they were doing, but still keeping an eye on what was happening.
Sarah got control of herself and turned to the other women. "I'm so sorry. Growing up, the holidays were not my favorite time of year. Mostly it was just an excuse for my father to drink and that made it very unpleasant for my mother and me. After I moved out of my father's house and joined the Marines I spent this holiday at whatever Marine base or camp I was stationed, with other marines but never with a family. I never felt this connected to anyone.

This is the first Thanksgiving where I'm part of a family and truly happy. So if you all don't mind I'm going to thank the man responsible for this." She turned with a smile and marched downstairs to the cellar. The other women just smiled after her.

John just finished setting up a rack of pool balls for a game and was about to take his shot when Sarah came downstairs. She shyly called him over to the foot of the steps. Before he could ask what Sarah wanted, she threw her arms around him and gave him a long deep affectionate kiss. The other men all clapped and whistled their appreciation of the show.

After they broke apart, Sarah turned to them and said, "You're all such men."

Then she smiled archly and marched back upstairs without giving any other explanation.

Harm said to John, "better get used to it, Diane does that a lot."

John for his part just didn't say a word or offer his own explanation. He just went and took his shot, feeling supremely confident of himself.

Just before they sat down to eat Diane went upstairs to feed and change a crying baby Sarah Cate, while Aunt Sarah called the men upstairs for dinner. John took his place at the head of the table. At first his father was heading there, but Mrs. Marshall stopped him and told him to wait till he was told his place.

John set up Sarah Cate's crib in the space to his right. When Diane came down with a now satisfied and dry baby Sarah, she laid her in the crib and John started announcing the seat assignments. Pointing to his right at the first seat he said, "Diane you sit here, Harm next to her, Trish next to Harm, then Frank, Sydney then AJ" Pointing to his left at the first seat he said "Harriet then Bud, Ann Marie & Pete then Mom & Dad."

When Sarah saw where John was going to seat her she started to protest. But Ann Marie told her, "You heard what John said before. You're the woman of this house now and that is your place."

After hearing that Sarah could only proudly comply.

After they said grace, John proposed a toast. There were flute glasses filled with sparkling cider. John stood and picked up his glass and began:

"Tonight we have many reasons to be thankful for the past year as we spend our first holiday season together. Harm & Diane are married and have each other and a brand new life in baby Sarah Cate to care for, giving Trish and Frank their first grandchild. Sarah and Diane have been reunited with each other as the sisters they were born to be. Sarah and I have found each other as she has agreed to be my bride. Ann Marie and Pete are expecting their first baby, overcoming all the difficulties that went along with that. Those last two occasions have made my mom and dad very happy. And Harriet & Bud and Sydney & AJ are at the beginning of new and hopefully long romances. As a result of all these happy occasions we all have a bigger family and many new friends to love and care for us. In that vein I found an Irish blessing that suits this occasion rather well:

"May God bless us and keep us and may His face shine upon us, may we see our children's children, may we be poor in misfortune, rich in blessings and may we know nothing but happiness from this
day forward."

When John finished there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

After everyone drained their glasses, John said enthusiastically, "OK, let's eat."

Dinner was consumed with relish. No one left the table without complaining that they were full or loosening their clothing a notch.

During the meal John took a break from eating. He sat back and looked over the table at his guests. He saw Sarah look up and give him a 'what's wrong?' look. He winked at her and smiled.

AJ noticed the silent exchange and asked, "You look like someone who's enjoying himself Commander. Care to share?"

"What's not to enjoy I have my family and friends around me in my home. I have the woman of my dreams sitting across from me. I'm just so darned happy that I wanted to sit back and take in the moment," John replied.

"Well let me propose a toast. May you have many more such moments," said AJ

They all raised their glasses in reply. The rest of the evening went just as pleasantly.
Monday, December 1, 1997

1500 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

John was working in the midst of transitioning to become the Assistant Director NCIS. He was feeling very happy and content with his life.

His phone rang. He recognized a Los Angeles area code. "Commander Marshall."

Harriet was walking by John's open office door. She stopped as she heard him say, "Oh my God No!"

As Harriet looked in silently from the bullpen she saw John listen for a time then hang up his phone. He dropped his head in his hands and started to cry.

Harriet rushed right into Sarah's office and said, "Major, I think Commander Marshall needs you. I think he just got some very bad news."

Sarah got up and almost ran onto her fiancé's office. She saw him turned away from his desk with his head in his hands. She closed the door and the blinds and went to him.

She knelt down in front of him and asked, "Baby what's wrong?"

John looked up at her with a tear streaked face and said, "It's Gail, she's dead."

Sarah cried, "Oh no, what happened?"

"Jack said that when she didn't come home last night as usual, he called the local sheriff. Being as influential as he is, they set out looking for her. They found her this morning dead in her car, down a ravine, next to a road not far from her home. A sheriff's deputy saw a broken guardrail and stopped to investigate and he saw Gail's car down the ravine.

When they pulled her car up and got her out she was dead at least 5 hours. She was trapped between the steering wheel and the back of her seat. Apparently the car hit a tree head on with everything crumpled inward."

"What happened?"

"Jack said that the accident investigators who examined the scene found skid marks on the road leading to the break in the guard rail. There were other skid marks as if a car crossed the median and then swerved back. They surmised that Gail was driving home last night and the other car crossed the line into her path. As she turned to get out of its way and being that it was dark, she didn't see the guard rail until it was too late."
John paused before he added, "There was something else."

"What?" Sarah asked, not wanting to hear more bad news.

John swallowed hard as this part was the hardest, "The autopsy showed that her aorta burst from the impact. She died instantly. The autopsy also showed that she was about a month pregnant."

"Oh my God!" was the only thing Sarah could get out as she too was overwhelmed with the same grief John was experiencing.

John went on, "Jack didn't know yet. He said that Gail called earlier saying that she was coming home early from the office to tell him something. He thinks that was it."

For John's sake she pulled it together enough to ask, "Oh John, I'm so sorry. What do you need to do? Are there any funeral arrangements?" Sarah asked.

"Jack said that he was going to call the rest of his family and get back to me on the arrangements. He said that he couldn't get in touch with Peter because he was on deployment on board the 'Truman' in the Med'. He needs me to call him. Sarah how am I going to tell him that his sister..." John choked back a sob and tried again to finish his sentence. "that his sister and her baby are dead."

As he sat back in his chair John had the look of someone who didn't know what to do next.

"C'mere," Sarah whispered standing and then pulling him into her arms.

John wrapped his arms around her waist and clung to her, allowing his tears to fall. "She had so much to live for..." he whispered, "so much..."

On the weekend of Gail's funeral Admiral Chegwidden graciously gave Sarah, John and even Traci Manetti permission to take leave to attend. So they flew out to Los Angeles. There they all saw many of Gail and John's family. The family was very glad to see them. Peter especially.

He was very devastated when John finally notified him of Gail's death. It was a very trying weekend for all involved.

Monday, December 8, 1997

1030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

After Sarah, Traci and John returned from Gail's funeral Admiral Chegwidden and now Admiral Magnum arranged that John spend the next three weeks clearing up his cases and breaking in his replacement. His replacement was an amiable if not slightly obnoxious Australian Naval Lt. Commander named Michael James Brumby. He insisted that everyone call him Mic. His navy, in an exchange program, assigned him to JAG. His mother was American so he had dual citizenship, graduated from Georgetown Law and passed the DC bar ten years ago.

His counterpart that went to Australia was Commander Allison Krennick.

Brumby arrived in DC the Monday after Thanksgiving. Sarah met him at the airport. At first she mistook another Australian Commander in uniform for Brumby, but that was corrected, much to her embarrassment, when Mic came up to her in civvies slightly inebriated from what he called
gasbagging on the flight with his mates. She brought him to his hotel. She saw how he was eyeing her up but ignored it.

He obviously did not her engagement ring. The inebriation may have contributed to his lack of attention to that detail. Also she shook his hand with her right and as it was cold she had her gloves on and the diamond of her ring was covered.

Mic took the week to move into his apartment that was rented for him by the Aussie Navy and he reported to AJ today and was introduced at the Staff Meeting at 0900. John was excused from this and future staff meetings as he was busy making his transition to Assistant Director of NCIS. Sarah was also not at the meeting as she was working with John on his transition and would not be taking any cases until he was through. Admiral Chegwidden had called it an engagement present.

As they exited the meeting Mic sidled up to Harm and asked. "I didn't see Major Mackenzie this morning. Will I be working with her at any time?"

Harm said, "Major Mackenzie is busy helping Commander Marshall in his transitioning. He needs to keep her abreast of all the cases he will be leaving behind."

"I tell you mate she is quite the looker. I'd like to be the one to bag her." Mic said wagging his eyes lasciviously.

Harm took an instant dislike to Mic. Keeping that thought on his mind Harm asked him to come into his office and have a seat. "You will meet Commander Marshall very shortly to get to know the cases he'll be leaving you. I suggest that you keep that thought about the Major locked up in your head. She is my sister in law as I am married to her sister." (Harm showed Mic his wedding picture.) "Major Mackenzie is also Commander Marshall's fiancé. Hence that is why she is assisting in his transition. If he heard what you said, you would have been on your way to intensive care right now."

Mic immediately looked contrite. "I had no idea commander. You'll find that I am not one to go after anyone's girl."

"Good then we'll get along well enough to do our jobs" replied Harm.

Right at that point Harm's phone rang. Harm saw by the caller ID Screen that it was the Security Station in the Lobby.

Mic only heard Harm's side of the phone conversation.

"Lt. Commander Rabb"

"No have him wait there. I'll be right down."

As he hung up the phone he turned to Brumby. "Come on I'll show you Commander Marshall's office."

"Lead the way mate," said Mic. Harm thought 'he has to drop the mate stuff'.

Harm introduced Mic to John then he went to see about the matter in the Lobby.

When he arrived at the Lobby, he saw a man in a motorized wheelchair. "Roscoe, what's going on? Did they discharge you from the Veteran Psychiatric Ward?"

"Good morning to you to Commander. I have a pass to be out for the morning. I told them I needed to consult with my lawyer on a personal matter. I knew you wouldn't come to see me if the reason
was not legit so I arranged an ambulette and my body guards here (indicating the attendants dressed in ambulance company uniforms that were standing close by,) so here I am. Scuttlebutt says that you're going to Russia to look for your father."

"How did you find out about that?"

"When you talked to my doctor, he told me that you told him you were going there, but he didn't say why. I put two and two together, knowing what I knew from our first visit" said Roscoe smugly. "I want you to let me know what you find out. It kinda gives the rest of us hope that you'll find other MIAs"

Harm recalled Roscoe's first visit to JAG earlier that fall.

Having just stabbed a man on a street corner, Roscoe arrived at JAG headquarters just before the police did saying his name was Willie. At first he was asking for legal representation as he knew he would be charged for a murder which he just committed. He then said that he had to report another 30-year-old murder related to the man he just killed. Harm and Sarah found him arrogant and deceptive. Later in the encounter Harm was stunned when Roscoe told him that he was imprisoned along with Harm's father. As the questioning continued, Roscoe revealed that Willie was not his real name. He told Harm that his father was a turncoat and a coward during the war. This shocking revelation prompted Harm to investigate Willie's, now Roscoe's story to determine the truth about his father, as well as the truth about the decades-old murder.

It finally dawned on Harm that Roscoe was a keen observer. He saw Harm's POW Bracelet and the pictures of Harm Sr. in the office and used them to get Harm to cooperate. Eventually Harm did represent him and had the charges dropped as Roscoe was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress when he stabbed the man. Ultimately, Harm found out that Roscoe's victim was the contemptible, sadistic commander of the POW camp where in which Roscoe was imprisoned. The judge agreed to have Roscoe committed to the Veteran Psychiatric ward for evaluation.

Harm brought Roscoe up to his office to consult with him in private. He concluded his visit with Roscoe telling him that he had court date for his competency hearing in the first week after the New Year and that he would be consulting with him on that prior to the Christmas Holiday.

He escorted Roscoe down to the ambulette and then went to find Sarah and John. Diane and Sarah Cate were coming by for lunch. Just before he got on the elevator he heard a familiar voice calling, "hold the elevator". He held it graciously for his wife carrying his daughter to enter. Just before the door could close, he heard another familiar voice calling him to hold the door. He was very surprised to see Meg Austen enter pushing her daughter in a portable stroller. This time the elevator closed as they went up to the 3rd floor.

As they arrived at the 3rd floor they chatted as they were walking toward Harm's office. Diane and Meg, now a Lt. Commander, knew each other from when Meg and Harm were partners. They went out to dinner together. They greeted each other warmly, introducing their respective daughters. Meg's daughter was named Cat, short for Catherine. Cat was 13 months old and just beginning to walk. Right now Cat was asleep in the stroller. "She was asleep in the car. I couldn't get a sitter today and her father is deployed. He's also in the Navy as a Commander and the Executive Officer to the CAG on the Patrick Henry. You know him Harm, Bob Pike.

Harm acknowledged along with his surprise. "How did you meet him?"

"We met at Bethesda while he was recovering from a broken leg and I was recovering from when Hemlock shot me. Nothing came of that as we were too wrapped up in our recovery to even think of keeping in touch. We met again when I was at Pearl and one thing led to another and we've been
married for a year and a half."

"That's great. I'm happy for you," Harm said. He then asked the inevitable question, "What brings you back to JAG Meg?"

"Admiral Chegwidden called me and asked if I wanted to work here again. He said that Commander Marshall was changing his designation and moving to NCIS and that he had a need for another good lawyer."

"Well it will be good to have you here" Harm said enthusiastically.

"Commander Marshall is also engaged to my sister," said Diane.

"Who's your sister?" asked Meg not seeing the relevance.

"Sarah Mackenzie" replied Diane.

"I replaced a Sarah Mackenzie at Pearl. Is she the same one who got the Legion of Merit along with Commander Marshall for helping to retrieve the Declaration of Independence?" Meg asked.

"Yes that one" said Harm.

"Wow I have missed a lot around here. When I was here I didn't know you even had a sister. You have to tell me that story later" said Meg.

"Why don't you leave Cat here in my office when you report to the Admiral? She's still asleep and Diane and I will be here to watch her. After you deal with the admiral, join us for lunch."

"Thanks Harm. That would help a lot," said Meg.

When she reported to AJ, he received her warmly telling her, "Even though Lt. Commander Brumby will also fill the personnel hole when Commander Marshall leaves, it's only temporary. We still have a need for a permanently assigned attorney to the office. I'm glad to have you back Meg. Can you start tomorrow?"

"Thank you sir, it's good to be back, and yes sir, I can. I have daycare for Cat lined up at the Navy Yard Daycare Center staring tomorrow also. Right now she's with the Commanders Rabb in Harm's office."

She was interrupted by a knock on the door as Tiner came in and announced, "Sorry sir, Commander but your daughter just woke up and started crying and so did Commander Rabb's daughter."

AJ turned to her and said, "Go we'll sit down with Major Mackenzie and discuss everything after lunch."

Meg excused herself and ran from the office.

"It's a wonder we don't run a day care center here," muttered AJ but not unpleasantly. He was happy that he had a staff that had very balanced lives, or least as balanced as the Navy allowed them to have.

Tuesday, December 23, 1997

1430 Local Time
Ensign Harriet Sims walked through the bullpen to John's office humming Christmas Carols to herself. Things were looking very good at JAG. Even though a favorite officer in Commander Marshall was leaving, his departure was tempered by the fact that he was getting a command at NCIS and that he was engaged to Major Mackenzie. Harriet was also in the middle of a daydream that saw Bud proposing to her in the same romantic way John proposed to Sarah.

Harriet came out of her daydream and knocked at John's office door, and entered when bidden. Whatever she was going to say was forgotten, as she saw John struggling with an envelope, a pair of scissors, and what looked like enough ribbon to strangle an elephant. "Sir, if you don't mind my asking what the heck are you doing?"

"Hi, Harriet" a flustered John Marshall surfaced from under the snarl of ribbon. "I got Sarah ballet tickets for Christmas, but the envelope looked kind of small, so I thought I'd put it in a card, but that still didn't look like much, so..." he waved his hands at the mess on his desk.

"Sir, with all due respect give me that before you hurt yourself!"

John gladly handed over the whole mess, then watched in amazement as Harriet deftly produced a lush cascade of ribbon curls and tied it neatly around the envelope.

"Harriet, you're a genius! I know I already owe you big time, but can I ask you and Bud for one more favor, before you leave tomorrow?"

Wednesday, December 24, 1997
1630 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

The entire JAG team was gathered in the conference room, where Admiral Chegwidden graciously provided a wonderful assortment of holiday pastries and cookies. A hush ran around the room as Harm stepped up to the Admiral and presented him with an envelope and a small package.

"Sir, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year, from the entire team." A round of applause went up from the assembled staff.

"Sir, the Admiral read his card with genuine pleasure. Then he opened the small box to reveal an elegant pen set, with his name engraved in the dark blue finish. "Someone here certainly has exquisite taste" he remarked. He thought he knew who, and his suspicions were confirmed when he saw Diane and Sarah exchange glances. "Thank you, each and every one of you. I'll treasure this."

As the gathering broke up, the Admiral noticed John and Sarah drifting towards the Commander's office. He was glad to see that his best officers were happy with their lives. He hoped that the happiness would continue.

John just finished packing his personal belongings from his office in preparation for his reassignment to NCIS. He was glad that Admiral Magnum gave him the week between the holidays off as a buffer to his transition. Admiral Chegwidden also gave Sarah the same week off.
"I think that about does it. Since my new office is right up the street, I should just walk this over."
John commented ruefully.

"Why don't you wait till after the holiday? I know you. As soon as you walk in you'll be chatting everyone up and we won't be able to leave as quick as I want. I'm real anxious to get home. We have to get ready to see Harm & Diane at 'The Wall' and we're having dinner at their place tonight. I can't wait to see Sarah's first Christmas. Then we're going to midnight mass at "St. Thomas, Apostle"
Sarah reminded him.

She then grinned and put her arms around him and whispered seductively in his ear, "Besides I have an early gift I want you to unwrap before we go out."

She was wearing a very 'holiday themed' set of lingerie under her uniform. It was a red camisole with a demi-cup bra with white piping and matching panties. She hastily put it on that morning as John was in the shower.

"Oh that sounds very promising. Won't that make us late for Harm and Diane's?" John asked in the same tone putting his arms around her.

"Maybe, if you play your cards right." Sarah answered as she tightened her arms around his neck and laid a deep kiss on him.

She didn't care that they were in full view of the bullpen. Besides all the staff didn't even notice; they had all been witness to it many times anyway since their engagement.

When they came up for air John reached for his hat and coat. During the kiss he opened his eyes to see Harriet go into Sarah's office to prepare his surprise. He didn't see Harriet leave the office yet so he tried to stall. "What did you get for Bud?"

"I got him a cartridge for his Gameboy. What about you?"

"I got him a model of the Starship Enterprise. You know he's such the 'Trekie'. I just hope he doesn't glue his fingers together!" They both laughed, knowing Bud was all too capable of such a feat.

John looked past her and saw Harriet giving him a 'thumbs up'. "OK. I'll get Tiner to help me with my things and then we'll leave together."

"Let me get my cover and coat" Sarah said as she left for her office.

Sarah entered her office and stopped short at the sight of her desk. A small tape player was set up in the center, with a post-it note that said "Play me." Her curiosity piqued, she hit the play button.
Immediately, the mellow strains of "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?" filled the office. Her attention was drawn to an envelope bearing her name, in John's familiar handwriting. Fine red and gold ribbons were tied around it, their ends curled into a festive cascade. She carefully slid the envelope free of the ribbons, and a shimmer of gold confetti sifted onto her desk. Inside the card, John wrote "Keep following your dreams." The card contained a smaller envelope, this one embossed with the logo of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Her eyes shone when she realized that it contained two tickets for "The Nutcracker" ballet, the New Year's Eve performance.

"Do you like it?"

She hadn't realized that John was standing in her doorway, watching the whole scene unfold. "Oh, John, this is so wonderful. Thank you so much!"

She didn't hesitate for a heartbeat as she stepped up to John, put her arms around his neck, and kissed
him. This time the Bullpen Staff was watching. They applauded Sarah and John as their lips met.

Friday, December 26, 1997

1130 Local Time

Highway 123, southwest of Fairfax, VA

John and Sarah shared a leisurely Christmas Day at their place exchanging more gifts. John folks stayed up in New York. So he and Sarah decided to spend the week relaxing. They talked about when their wedding date should be and all the other things they wanted to have on that day. They decided to wait till after the New Year to set a date and start making more concrete plans. For now they decided that Sarah could give up her apartment and move in with John. She figured the week prior to and on their wedding day, she would get ready at Diane and Harm's new home so as not to jinx the wedding day.

In fact John and Sarah planned to spend the next day with Harm and Diane seeing that same new house they bought the week after Thanksgiving.

Harm was driving the family minivan with his family and Sarah and John out to the Rabbs' new home. John noticed that the area was sparsely populated. The houses were all custom built and set apart from each other, offering large lots and privacy from immediate neighbors. John and Sarah looked out the window as Harm turned into the curved driveway of a ranch-style home. Slowly, they got out of the car and stood for a moment, looking at the house and the surrounding property it sat on.

"This is beautiful, Harm," Sarah murmured, taking in the expansive lawn and the half dozen massive oaks, shed of their leaves. She knew that in all their leafy glory would be shading part of the house and area.

"And quiet," he answered.

They followed Harm as he wheeled the empty carriage up a stone walk inside once he got the door open. They looked at each other and judging by their expressions, Harm was fairly certain they were awed as he said, "Go head, take a look around," he urged.

Diane came in carrying a sleeping baby Sarah Cate and lay her down in the carriage. She wheeled it around as they walked through the house.

Slowly, they moved further inside the house. From the tiled entryway they could see into the main body of the home. 14-foot ceilings housed a large living room and kitchen. The focal point of the living room was a giant stone fireplace, perfect for cold winter nights. 6-foot windows flanked the front and sides of the room before it curved into the kitchen. Following the line of the house, Sarah giggled when she saw the kitchen.

"This alone should've thrilled you," she teased Diane.

She smiled ruefully. "It's a dandy," she agreed, taking in the large work island in the center, the multitude of cabinets and state of the art appliances. A door on the far side revealed a walk-in pantry with built in shelves, a space that held boxes of foil and plastic wrap and another holder for a broom and mop.

John glanced around at Harm as he closed the pantry door. "Who lived here?" he asked, looking at the stainless steel, industrial size stove and refrigerator. "This house is very well designed."
"The owner was originally from south Texas. From what I understand, his wife died recently from a long illness and he needed to move back closer to their families because of their children." Harm said.

"How sad," Sarah stated. "So selling the house was a surprise?"

Harm nodded. "He wanted to hold off until he was absolutely sure he would need to be back in Texas. Our agent got the listing as soon as he made a decision. He wasn't in the frame of mind to handle negotiations so we were told he would accept any reasonable offer as long as it doesn't fall below a certain amount."

The house echoed the owner's southern heritage in the woodsy accents and earth colors he chose. If you went left at the front door, a short hall broke off into two smaller rooms next to a large full bathroom and a coat closet. A few feet more and the hall ended right in another set of rooms. It was a suite of bedrooms. Each bedroom had two with large windows, built in shelves and a big closet. In between the two bedrooms was a small bathroom with a charming claw foot tub and a matching pedestal sink. In there was a small linen closet and plenty of overhead cabinet. The appliances and fixtures were all white enamel, the walls lilac and the carpet a soft dove gray.

"Is this a second master suite?" Sarah asked Harm.

"Actually, this was the children's rooms. As you can see, each bedroom is large enough to hold two children and one would have plenty of play space. Mr. Maddox wanted the children to have their own bathroom to form early independence. The other two rooms would be a study and guest room with space when they have overnight guests who would be using the main bathroom," he explained.

"Smart man," John mused. "I don't think I would have thought of that," he smiled briefly.

"Wade our agent said that Mr. Maddox had a team of designers, too, and it's their job to think of every contingency," Harm grinned.

They went back to the front door where the main entry hall opened up into the living room and kitchen with its small eating area and bay window. Beyond a set of French doors was a formal dining room. The hallway that curved to the right from the front entry revealed a laundry room with a state-of-the-art washer and dryer and shelves lining the walls above the appliances. Another door opened to a large two-car garage. Continuing down the wide hall, John and Sarah followed Harm into the master suite and gasped softly.

"This is so beautiful," Sarah exclaimed.

Harm said, "Diane can't wait to start decorating." They stood in the middle of the room and slowly turned. The vaulted ceiling held two large skylights that would let in the stars at night and a ceiling fan to combat the summer heat. On the far side of the room, floor-to-ceiling windows flanked the sides of the wall where a bed would go. In the far left corner of the doorway was another stone fireplace and what could be a small sitting area in front of it.

"This room is bigger than a loft," John stated.

"There's another smaller room over here," Harm spoke up, passing them to open a set of French doors at their right. "I believe this was meant to be a nursery or perhaps an office for one or both of them. It's big enough to be a guest room if you chose and there's room to put in a door from the hallway."

John and Sarah glanced into the smaller space, seeing another skylight, a larger, single window and a
small closet. They drifted back across the main room and went into the master bath.

Harm couldn't hold back a laugh at the expression on Sarah's face. "Diane had the same reaction. What is it with women and bathtubs?" he teased.

"Bite your tongue," she groaned. "You could float a battleship in here!"

The black marble tub was on a raised platform in one corner of the room with two small steps, surrounded by natural stone in earthy colors. There was room all around for plants or candles or whatever else suited one's fancy. Instead of a window, there were two more steps on the other side down to French doors that opened to the private backyard.

"It would be just like an outdoor Jacuzzi," Sarah commented, ignoring the images the tub evoked.

"Among other things," Harm answered huskily, turning to show Diane his expression.

There was a walk-in closet big enough for a small family to live in, a shower stall walled with the same kind of stone around the bathtub with double showerheads and a built in bench, a toilet partially sectioned off by a half wall and matching his and hers vanities - one on either side of the doorway.

"He thought of everything when he built this house," Sarah told Harm.

"He did. It was a smaller version of their dream home since they hoped to move back to Texas later and buy a ranch. Wade handled his purchase of this property when they first moved to Virginia. Unfortunately, it isn't the first time Wade had to push through a home sale because of a death in the family."

"What's was his asking price?" John questioned.

Harm came back with a figure well below the home's value and John knew his eyebrows were hiked to his hairline.

"You're kidding!" he exclaimed. "He practically gave it away. That's almost at the level I paid for my house and that price was very low because of the shape it was in."

Harm elaborated, "He wasn't in any frame of mind to deal with it. He had two small children and his wife died less than a month before we bought it. He wanted to get rid of it so I'm quite certain that if we decided to pass it up, it wouldn't have lasted the week before someone else took it."

"I said I wanted it right away. It was more than I hoped I'd be able to find and it's perfect for raising Sarah" Diane said as she glanced down at her child.

"How could she not like it? There's tons of room for her to play. You'll probably have to get some yard toys or a playscape and with trees like those, a rope swing, too," Sarah answered, already imagining endless possibilities.

"When are you moving in?" John asked.

"Well our lease on the apartment in Alexandria is up at the end of the month. The living room and dining room furniture came with the apartment. So we only need to pack the kitchen stuff and move the bedroom furniture for Sarah and us. If it doesn't snow, we can move in the weekend after the closing, which is January 5.

"We figured that we would buy the living room and dining room furniture later. That way we can
buy sets that are better suited for the house. We'll go shopping after the New Year," said Diane.

"Well we'll be ready to help with the move," said John.

"That would be nice. The only heavy lifting is going to be the bed and dressers. It should go quickly," said Harm.

Wednesday, December 31, 1997

1926 Local Time

John & Sarah's House

Florida Ave, NW

John was pacing the floor of his living room. What the heck took women so long to get dressed? He checked his watch. "Sarah, we're gonna be late!" He called up the stairs

"Relax, we've got thirty-six minutes."

"Yeah, but it's gonna take us twenty to get to the theater."

"Well, if you're in such a rush, give me a hand with this."

John looked up at the sound of her footsteps on the stairs. His jaw dropped and he simply stared at her. Her dress was burgundy velvet, a simple, yet elegant design.

The top was tailored, with long sleeves, and a not-quite-off-the-shoulder neckline, the skirt was very full, and hung to mid-calf, and swirled with her movements. A single strand of seed pearls encircled her throat, and a delicate pair of garnet earrings shimmered and sparkled by her face.

"John?"

He blinked, and realized that she was holding out a dainty pearl bracelet for him to fasten. He also noticed that she was grinning broadly at his discomfiture. He took the bracelet and started fiddling with the catch. "Who designed this, someone at Fort Knox?" The tiny thing finally snapped into place. "There you go." John still hadn't released his grip on her hand as he said, "You look like you should be up on that stage. You are so beautiful."

They stood like that for a breathless instant, and then John leaned down and gave her a long gentle kiss. When they broke apart, Sarah smiled and asked gently.

"Aren't you the one who was worried we'd be late?" She carefully slid her hand free and gathered up her purse and coat.

"We still have, what, thirty minutes?"

"Twenty-eight."

John followed her out the back door to his car, accompanied by the sound of her warm laughter.

Wednesday, December 31, 1997

2230 Local Time

On the road to John & Sarah's House
"So, Major, how did you enjoy your evening?"

John's voice had a teasing note; his fiancé's shining eyes and radiant smile answered his question before she ever gave it voice.

"I had a wonderful time! It was my second-favorite gift." Sarah watched him out of the corner of her eye, anticipating his reaction to her last comment.

"Second favorite?"

"My favorite gift was this ring." she replied holding up her left hand smiling a warm smile that went straight to his heart.

"Well, that's OK, then."

"How did you like it?" she asked curiously.

"It was pretty; just like a big Christmas card come to life. You know, I -" The rest of his thought was lost a wildly careening car suddenly crossed the meridian.

"Look out!" Sarah yelled.

John just barely managed to swerve out of the path of the on-coming car. But the Caprice fishtailed, then there was a deafening crash as the back end and the passenger side smacked into a retaining wall in a welter of shattered glass.

The ensuing silence was so absolute that John could swear he heard the blood dripping down his face. He felt oddly detached as he turned off the ignition, then turned towards his fiancé. "Sarah?"

She seemed to come back from a far place, then drew a deep breath through lips that had paled to white. "I'm OK."

John opened his door and stood carefully, alert for further injuries. "I won't be able to open your door, can you slide over?"

"Yes, I think so." She slid across the bench seat easily. John pulled her into his arms as she emerged from the wreckage of his car. Sarah rested there for a long moment, her head on his chest.

A distant, muffled explosion caused her to look up, taking stock of their surroundings. At least ten other cars were involved in the accident, and the one nearest to them was burning. "John, that car's on fire! I can see the driver inside!"

John reached the other car several strides ahead of Sarah. He reached through the shattered rear window, and emerged with a screaming toddler strapped in a car seat. He passed the child to Sarah.

"Here, take him, I'll get the mother!"

"Be careful!"

The flames from the engine were shooting higher as John pried open the driver's door. The driver of the car was only semi-conscious - and quite pregnant. He lifted her clear of the car as carefully as possible and carried her to the relative shelter in the backseat of his car. Sarah was using his cell phone to call 911. "- a toddler, yes, his mother's pregnant. We had to move her, the car's on fire!"

The woman coughed and began to struggle weakly. "Jimmy!"

Sarah tried to restrain her. "He's right here, he's fine." she soothed. "Can you tell me your name?"
"Evie Miller."

"I'm Sarah, and he's John. We've called for an ambulance. How are you doing?"

Sweat stood out on Evie's face and her breathing was ragged. "It hurts..."

"Like what? Can you tell me?" Sarah asked, concerned.

"Like when I had Jimmy."

Sarah kept the same careful, gentle tone as she asked, "When are you due?"

"Not for eight weeks."

John pried open the trunk of his car and returned with a flashlight, a small first aid kit, and a blanket.

"John, I think Evie's in labor, call the 911 dispatcher back. Get Jimmy settled and safe and I'll see what I can do?" she suggested.

John put Jimmy in the front seat of the Caprice and handed over their supplies. A dispatcher managed to connect him with an obstetrician to assist Sarah. He held the flashlight as Sarah helped deliver the baby.

After what seemed an eternity, John finally began to hear sirens in the distance. At the same moment, a tiny voice shrilled a protest at arriving in the world so suddenly. "Evie, it's a girl!" Sarah exclaimed joyously.

John thought he'd never seen a more beautiful sight than his fiancé at that moment - on her knees at the side of the road, the new baby cradled in her arms, and the sheer wonder of having just witnessed a miracle shining in her eyes.

Seconds later, they were enveloped in a rush of emergency personnel. They loaded Evie, Jimmy, and the new baby into an ambulance and sped off into the night, or morning, as John discovered when he checked his watch. He suddenly became aware of the fact that he was very cold, and very, very tired. An EMT approached and began to check his injuries. He noticed that Sarah was busy giving a statement to a police officer.

"What happened to the guy who started this whole mess?" John asked one of the officers.

"We think that's him in the ditch over there" the officer nodded towards a smoldering wreck some ways down the road. "The Medical Examiner will sort it out. That's a fine thing you folks did."

"My fiancé did everything, I just held the phone" he grinned.

Sarah came up and took John's arm as the EMT finished cleaning the cut on his forehead. "OK, Commander, I think you can get away without stitches. Any dizziness or nausea?"

"None. Any chance we can get out of here?"

"Well, ordinarily, I'd have you both checked out at the ER, just as a precaution, but as it stands right now, you'd probably be waiting around until sometime this afternoon. I think, as long as you stay with someone tonight, and promise to call a doctor at the first sign of trouble, you can go home."

"We can crash at our place" Sarah offered.

John and the EMT winced at her choice of words.
Thursday, New Year's Day 1998

0150 Local Time

John and Sarah's House

Florida Ave, NW

"C'mon, Sarah" John gently prodded his fiancé awake, as the police car stopped in front of his place. "I am not carrying Beltway Burger's best customer across the yard and then upstairs!"

The officer who drove the car turned to John, "Do you remember Bernie's instructions?"

John ran down the list: "Hot showers, hot soup, plenty of rest, call a doctor at the first sign of trouble. Did I forget anything?"

"Yeah" the officer grinned "Happy New Year!"

"You too!" John said as he shook his hand.

John followed Sarah into the house, then turned to help her with her coat. She gripped his arm while she eased her aching feet out of her dress shoes. Sarah caught sight of her reflection in the hall mirror and groaned at her disheveled appearance. Her stockings were snagged, her velvet dress would have to go to the cleaners, and she needed a bath. 'A hot bath,' she silently amended with a shiver.

John saw the shiver and reached out to touch her cheek with the back of his hand. "You're pretty chilled," he observed, "Why don't you go upstairs and take a shower, and I'll make some soup? Wouldn't want to get in trouble with that nice EMT, would we?"

"Sounds good. I'll meet you in the living room." Sarah looked down to remove her bracelet and suddenly noticed that her wrist was bare.

John turned back at her cry of dismay. "What's wrong, Sarah?" he asked, alarmed.

"My bracelet's gone!" she exclaimed.

"What, that thing you need a lock smith to get open?"

"Uncle Matt gave me that when I graduated law school" she said quietly, as she shook out the folds of her skirt.

John understood at once why it was so precious to her. He retrieved her coat and checked the pockets and the lining of the sleeves, to no avail. "Maybe it's in my car." he said hopefully. "We can go check in the morning."

"Thanks." she said with a watery smile, "I know I'm being silly."

"No you're not. You're never silly. Pig-headed, or crazy maybe, but never silly." He turned her around and headed her up the stairs as he spoke.

"Pig-headed'? Look who's talking! And try not to burn down our kitchen!" she called after him, her voice warm with laughter.

The atmosphere was rich with the mingled aromas of chicken soup and hot chocolate when Sarah emerged from their room and came downstairs. She felt much better after taking a long hot shower. John set out mugs and flatware for two, along with a plate of sliced cheese and apples, on the coffee
table, the living room was illuminated only by the Christmas tree, the roaring fire in the fireplace and the television, which was tuned to a late-night broadcast of "It's a Wonderful Life."

"Have a seat, Sarah. You're just in time for some soup!" John called cheerfully.

Sarah settled herself in the corner of the couch and gratefully accepted her bowl of soup. John filled both their mugs with hot chocolate, then returned to sit beside her with his own snack. They ate for a while in companionable silence, enjoying the familiar holiday story playing out on the television.

As the movie came to a close, Sarah switched off the set. "Somehow, that's never seemed more appropriate than tonight" she remarked as she gathered up the dishes. John followed, and together they made short work of putting the kitchen to rights. "Let's go up to bed." Sarah said.

John caught her hand as she started up the stairs. "Look, I'm sorry tonight didn't turn out quite the way we'd planned..." A thousand 'should have's' and 'what if's' flashed through his mind, but her words and smile set his fears to rest.

"Well, it was a little more excitement than I was planning on, but just think - we helped bring a new life into the world! That's not such a bad way to start a new year."

"One of the best." he agreed, gathering her into his warm embrace. "Sarah?" he whispered.

"Yes John?" She shifted in his arms so she could look him in the eye.

"Happy New Year."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 22

Friday, January 2, 1998
1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

Most of the JAG team was gathered around the coffee machine, comparing various news reports of the horrific New Year's Eve car crash - and the JAG officers who delivered the child who came to be known as "Baby New Year." A young Marine Lieutenant carrying a toddler entered the office. Harriet Sims was the first to notice him.

"Can I help you, sir?" she inquired.

"Thank you, Ensign. Could you direct me to Commander Marshall and Major Mackenzie?"

"Certainly sir, Commander Marshall is no longer assigned here. I can bring you to Major Mackenzie, his fiancé."

She led him over to Sarah's office. "Ma'am, you have a visitor. Or two" she added with a smile.

Harm was in the office with her and caught sight of the child. "Say, that little fella looks cute," he said, extending his hand to the child, who delightedly grasped his finger to examine his Academy ring.

"Yes, sir," replied the Marine, shifting the child so he could salute and addressed Sarah. "Ma'am your fiancé saved him from a car wreck, New Year's Eve. I'm Lieutenant John Miller, and this is Jimmy."

"You're Evie's family!" Sarah exclaimed. "How is she? Did she get the flowers?"

"She'll be fine, ma'am. And yes, she got the flowers, and the balloons, and the bear!"

"I guess we got a little carried away." Sarah laughed, somewhat sheepishly. "What about the baby?"

John fished a small photo out of his pocket and passed it over.

"She's a beauty." Harm said warmly.

"Just like her Mama." John agreed.

"What's her name?" asked Harriet.

He laughed aloud at the recollection. "Evie badgered the police unmercifully until they found out your names. The baby's name is Sarah Joanne Miller. I hope that's all right. Joanne being female for John"

Sarah's eyes threatened to overflow. "All right? It's - oh, I don't know what to say - it's wonderful. Thank you. that's twice in 4 months. My sister's baby is named Sarah also."
"Thank you," he replied, earnestly, "both of you. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have a family." He reached in his pocket and came up with a small jeweler's box, which he handed to Sarah. "Major -"

"Please, call me Sarah."

"Sarah. I think this is yours. I found it tangled on Jimmy's car seat."

When she opened it she exclaimed, "My bracelet!"

"I took the liberty of taking it to a jeweler and having it repaired."

Now the tears really were flowing down Sarah's face. "This was a gift from my uncle. I thought it was gone forever. Thank you!"

"I do have one more favor to ask you both. Please say yes; Evie has her heart set on this. We'd like you and John to be Sarah's Godparents."

Sarah's radiant face and smile answered him, "We'd both be delighted. Let me call John now and tell him."

Tuesday, January 6, 1998

1830 Local Time

Carlton Jewelers

Georgetown

"I don't know, John, which do you like?" Sarah asked her fiancé.

He carefully studied the two pieces of jewelry laid out on blue velvet.

These were their final choices, after nearly an hour of perusing every case in the store, looking for a christening gift for their second goddaughter, Sarah Joanne Miller. "They're both very nice. What do you think?"

Sarah carefully held up one piece, a dainty gold heart-shaped locket.

"We can custom engrave that anyway you like," the salesman offered. "An initial, a monogram..."

She set it back and picked up the second, a small cross set with garnets.

"I think this is a little more appropriate to the occasion. John?"

He nodded affirmation. "And it's her birthstone."

"We'll take this one," Sarah informed the clerk.

"Lot of fuss over something she won't even wear for ten years," John laughed as he reached for his wallet.

What Sarah didn't know was John had was there the day before buying something for her. She thought that he forgot, but today was the anniversary of their first meeting in the Rose Garden. John wanted to commemorate the event just right.

Wednesday, January 7, 1998
Harm was sitting in his office with Sarah going over some administrative tasks. Sarah was still running the Administrative Section of JAG. She thought that if it wasn't for her fiancé's support, she was going to go nuts. The office computers were upgraded and she had the attorneys in the Administrative and Legal Assistance Sections writing wills and executing other legal documents as thoroughly as they thought they never could. She was still rankled when she was shut out of investigations and trials that she knew she could handle better than anyone, including Harm.

Harm interrupted her to take a phone call. She could see his expression turn from polite to distress. He hung up and told her what the phone call was about.


"Yes, what is she up to now?" Sarah asked back.

"She moved to Baltimore to take a job working in a bank in Maryland. Well her son Josh was on a school trip to the Naval Air Facility at Andrews. He broke off from the group and snuck aboard an F-14. It seems that while he was on the jet Josh witnessed a murder. Josh was caught coming out of the hanger. He said that he saw some sailors fighting. One probably killing another and loading him into a van, no one would believe him. Annie is asking for help. I'm going to see her now, want to come along?" Harm asked.

Sarah thought of what she had waiting for her on her desk. "Yeah, I don't have any projects that I need to attend to right now. Let's go." she said enthusiastically.

When she and Harm arrived at the Pendry's home he tried to downplay Josh's inquisitiveness. Annie shot back, "I don't need you to defend Josh against me!"

"Ok Annie I'll do what I can to help you." Harm reassured her.

When Harm returned to JAG he went to see the admiral to request leave to investigate. AJ had initially refused. But when Harm explained about Annie AJ granted the time off.

Feeling that he was on a roll with AJ, Harm asked, "Sir may I speak to you about what's going on between you and Major Mackenzie?"

AJ hollered, "Are you out of your mind? She may be your sister in law but that is something that is between the major and myself. Do your investigation and keep your nose out of how I assign my people."

Harm left the office afraid to ask for anything else.

When he arrived at Andrews he interviewed the maintenance chief at the airbase, Harley Marks, and told him of what Josh saw.

The chief asked, "Why did the boy get into the Tomcat?"

"For the same reason I would have, get inside the dream."

That evening while he and Annie were saying goodbye on Annie's porch, so Harm could go home
to his family, Josh spotted the same van coming down the street. Harm saw a gun sticking out a window.

He barely got Josh and Annie down as they escaped the gunfire from the drive-by shooting.

"Now do you believe me?" Josh asked.

"Yeah, I do," Harm answered. "We have to get you something place safer than here." Harm called Diane at home to tell her what he had to do.

"Diane I need to bring Josh and Annie someplace safe. There are some killers after them. Do you have any suggestions?" Harm asked his wife.

"Get them ready to go. Let me call Admiral Grafton. He knows of some safe houses in the area we can use. Also I'll call John. He can assign agents to guard them. If there was a crime committed on the Navy side of the base involving Naval Personnel he needs to get involved in the investigation anyway," Diane reminded him.

"I forgot about that. Okay call me when you have an address," Harm said just before he hung up.

Just as he was ready to leave with the Pendrys, Harm got a call from John.

"First of all why didn't you call me sooner? Second of all I found out that Webb is involved. He's investigating an arms theft ring with an inside contact, PO2 Elgin, who has gone missing. Here's the address of the safe house that Diane gave me. I'll assign Chris Pocchi and Vivian Blackadder to meet you there to protect the Pendrys. Bring them to my office tomorrow. We need Josh to identify who's who." John instructed Harm.

"Aye, Aye," Harm said. He was glad that John was now involved.

Thursday, January 8, 1998

0900 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

716 Sicard Street

Washington Navy Yard

Washington, DC

The outside of John's office was very large and open set up as a command center. John's office was at the far side of the command center opposite the entrance next to a large conference room. It was a two-office suite. The outer office was where his yeomen worked with his being the inner office. In front of the two offices and Conference room was a set of six open cubicles each with its own desk and 2 low file storage cabinets. The area between the cubicles and the entrance was filled with 6 more cubicles where the clerical staff worked.

John's Yeoman was a tall 5'7" dark haired 25 years old female named Carolyn Turner who had the civilian equivalent rank of Chief Petty Officer. Turner sailed through Navy Boot Camp at age 18 with high marks. After serving on various ships and overseas posts, she was chosen by Admiral Magnum to come to work at NCIS. Her previous posting before NCIS was at NIS Pearl Harbor as an investigator under Admiral Magnum.
Turner steered John quickly through orientation and helped him prepare the agency's budget in record time for presentation to the SECNAV.

Turner did not wear a uniform, as either did Admiral Magnum or Commander Marshall. Uniforms were not worn at the Administration level because the upper level leaders were civilian appointees, appointed by the SECNAV.

In the morning Harm met the Pendrys at the safe house Admiral Grafton sent them to. They arrived at NCIS with Pocchi and Blackadder. He introduced Annie and Josh to John and Webb.

"My future brother in law will take you from here," Harm reassured Annie and Josh.

John took Webb, Harm and the Pendrys into the conference room near his office. He asked Carolyn to get some beverages and then to sit in with them for the interview.

"Josh I'm going to show you some photos. Please tell me if you recognized anyone and from where," Webb asked him.

Josh was able to identify the people he saw. Elgin was recognized along with Marks and a man named Gunter Harvak, an arms buyer for Saddam Hussein.

"Thanks Josh, Mrs. Pendry. Why don't you go with Miss Turner to the commissary to get a more substantial breakfast," John said.

After the Pendrys left, Webb informed John and Harm, "They found Elgin's car with his body in the trunk,"

"You better let my people handle this investigation for here," John suggested to Webb and Harm. His tone though didn't leave any room for argument.

"Fine, but let Annie and Josh come with me down the street to JAG. They'll be safe there," Harm suggested.

"Fine," John said. In the meantime he assigned Pocchi & Blackadder to work with Webb.

1230 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

When Harm and the Pendrys arrived at JAG, he set Annie and Josh up in the commissary where they met AJ. Harm went to find Sarah. When he arrived at her office, she found her in her office on the phone with John.

"Okay sweetie, I'll keep Harm in line for you," Sarah said mischievously as she saw Harm enter the office.

Harm smiled sarcastically as she heard Sarah say "I love you honey" as she hung up.

"We're into the honey and sweetie phase now are we," Harm said teasingly.

"Yeah just the same as you and Diane were when you were engaged," Sarah retorted. "Where are Annie and Josh?"

"I left them in the commissary with Harriet. John's people are involved now since a Petty Officer was
found dead. Webb is reluctantly sharing the information he has. John is not taking 'no' for an answer. John was quite peeved that first, Webb did not notify NCIS that he knew there were crimes being committed on Navy property. Then second that I didn't call him first," Harm said.

"Don't worry about it. You know John doesn't stay mad for long. He gets over it pretty fast then he settles down to business. In the meantime, what are you and the Pendrys doing about dinner?" Sarah asked.

"Well Harriet and Bud were coming over to our house tonight for dinner. Why don't you and John join us? I'll ask Annie and Josh to come also. They shouldn't be alone tonight. My house is pretty secure," Harm said.

Sarah had another idea and voiced it. "Why don't I call John? He just had our alarm system upgraded to include a panic button to NCIS. Besides which Ann Marie already had one connected to the Secret Service. So if anyone tries anything there, two federal agencies will land on them so we can all have dinner there."

Sarah called John at his office and he thought that it was a good idea to have everyone over for dinner.

In the meantime let me find them for lunch," Harm said as he left Sarah's office.

Harm found Annie first then they found Josh wrestling with AJ Josh in AJ's office. Annie bristled when Josh told her, "The admiral knows three ways to kill someone with his bare hands."

Annie apologized to the admiral for Josh's intrusion.

"Not at all Mrs. Pendry, in fact Josh has expressed an interest in going to the Navy. If you want come back here when he is old enough and I'll write a letter of recommendation to Annapolis for him," AJ offered.

"Thank you sir, I'll keep that in mind," Annie said.

When they left the admiral's office she confided to Harm, "I hope his offer to write a letter of recommendation to Annapolis for Josh never happens."

Harm could only shake his head. He knew that Luke's death and the thought of losing Josh the same way scared the hell out of her. He knew he needed to get this case solved quickly to alleviate her fear. He was glad that he had the support from his wife, sister in law, Webb and now his friend and future brother in law.

1845 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

John came home that evening to find Sarah, Diane, Ann Marie, Harriet and Annie all gathered in his kitchen preparing an Italian feast and his goddaughter in the playpen he kept at his house for her. He picked up Sarah Cate and gave her a belly burp just to hear her giggle. He then collected his kisses from his fiancé, sister and sister in law. He surprised Harriet and Annie when he planted sweet kisses on each of their cheeks. "Here's one for each of you so you don't feel left out." Then he went upstairs to change out of his suit and into jeans, sweat shirt & sneakers.

Annie said to Sarah, "You are so in love with him. I saw how you lit up when he walked in. John
really loves to be in a big family doesn't he?"

"Yeah he does. He can't wait till we're married. He proposed to me in the admiral's office a week before Thanksgiving. He totally surprised the admiral and me it was so romantic." Sarah said lovingly.

When he came down, he found that Bud and Harm were in the basement shooting pool with Josh. Josh was hustling them something fierce. Soon Sarah called down saying dinner was ready.

Just as everyone was sitting down, the doorbell rang. John was surprised to find AJ at the door. "Admiral Chegwidden, anything the matter?" John asked.

"No Captain. I just stopped by to check on Mr. Pendry and his mother. They left JAG rather distressed this afternoon."

"Uh sir, we're just sitting down to dinner. Would you like to join us?" John asked. Then he voiced another question, "Uh Admiral. Where's Sydney?"

"Thank you Captain, I'm glad you asked. Sydney is at GW on call this evening. One of the younger residents came down with the flu and they asked if she could fill in for tonight," AJ said as he came in.

Everyone was astounded to see the admiral. John got another chair and setting for him and they settled down to eat. During dinner the conversation turned to the choice of dinner when AJ said, "This meal reminds me of when I was stationed in Naples, Italy once," he said.


"I had... knew a daughter of the Mayor there who went back to her mother because she was lonely," AJ said bluntly.

Sarah heard the slip and then the regret in his voice and wondered what that was about. She was brought out of her reverie when Annie asked her a question.

"Sarah, have you set a date for your wedding yet?" Annie asked Sarah.

"No not yet. We plan to go to the Willard by the spring to set one. We're getting married out of St. Thomas, Apostle here in DC. That much we know for sure. I still have to get my religious education papers from my old parish in Yuma so we can get married in the church. So far that is as far into the planning we've gone," Sarah answered.

Dinner was consumed with relish. Even Sarah Cate had some as John picked her up and placed her on his lap. John gave her the end of the Semolina bread dipped in sauce and she started to gnaw on it. Sarah got her camera from where she left it in the kitchen cabinet and took a few good photos of the baby before and after she made a mess of her face. Every one joined in the hilarity of Sarah Cate's happy faces.

After Bud, Harriet and the admiral said goodnight, John showed Annie and Josh the guest room. He left them alone to get ready for bed and went downstairs.

While Harm was sitting in the kitchen waiting for Diane to get Sarah Cate ready to go home, Major Sarah placed her Berretta 9mm and its cleaning kit on the kitchen table. Harm cracked, "Hey 'ninja girl', are you looking to pick a fight?"

John was coming down the stairs into the kitchen and upon hearing the 'ninja girl' crack said, "That's
my fiancé, a real stealth warrior. You should have seen her when she went with me the last time I went on a SEAL refresher course in the George Washington Forest. She really gave the other guys a run for their money."

Sarah smiled indulgently at Harm and bent her head to gratefully receive John's kiss. She said, "I qualified earlier this week and I didn't get a chance to clean my weapon. We may need it. I mean there are people shooting at Josh."

"You make a good point," Harm said in agreement. At that point Diane came down with a sleeping Sarah Cate.

John saw the Rabbs to the door giving Diane and Sarah a kiss each. "See you tomorrow, Harm. Be careful going home."

"You bet. See you tomorrow," Harm replied shaking John's hand

After he set the alarm, John called the watch officer at NCIS to let him know that the Pendrys were staying with him. Then he met Sarah in their bedroom. Sarah did not want to go back to Georgetown and since she already had a spare uniform there she stayed over.

Friday, January 9, 1998

0830 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The Pendrys went to JAG with Sarah in the morning. She and John were extra careful ensuring that they did not have anyone trailing them. Since both the JAG and NCIS people shared the same large parking lot, they often followed each other to work. John asked Webb to go to JAG to stay with Josh. "Stick with him and don't let him out of your sight Clay. We need him to identify the killers," John said.

Webb was still peeved that he had to work out of NCIS instead of the CIA. But John had Magnum call the CIA Director. The Director told Webb that because his inside man was killed, it became a criminal investigation and the 'cat was out of the bag' anyway when the perpetrators tried a 'drive-by shooting'. So Webb was relegated to guarding a child.

Josh on the other hand was becoming chafed by Webb's constant harping on his movements. Josh drew the line at the door to the restroom.

Josh said, "I'm not a baby. I can go to the toilet by myself."

But while Webb waited outside the restroom Josh was kidnapped by Harvak. Harvak got into JAG saying he was going to see Commander Rabb. When he saw Josh he ducked into the restroom before him. When Harvak saw Webb walk into the bullpen, he pulled Josh out and went down the stairs. He held a knife to Josh's back as they walked out passed the distracted sentries.

Webb became impatient waiting for a 12 year old to finish his bathroom break that he walked into the bullpen, where Harm spotted him.

"Where's Josh?" Harm asked.

"He's in the restroom. Come to think of it, he's been in there a long time," Webb said. He went to
look in there and came out with shock all over his face.

"He's gone!" he exclaimed.
Chapter 23

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 23

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The JAG office went into panic mode. Searches of the building proved negative and a lock down of the Navy Yard was done too late to prevent the kidnappers from leaving with Josh. Meantime, Sarah called John. "Webb is being very petulant. He is refusing to tell us any more information. He thinks we're going to screw up or compromise his sting that he says has taken many months to set up."

"Then I'll go around him. I'll have one of our IS Techs, Tim McGee do a computer search on Harvak. Maybe he can give us something that we can use. I'll have Tim call you when he can," John assured her.

McGee performed his search of Harvak. He called Sarah with his findings. "I found out that he served on a merchant vessel named the Tanager, which is bound for France tomorrow morning out of Baltimore. They must have taken Josh there Major," Tim told Sarah.

"Thanks Tim, could you put me through to John please," Sarah requested.

"Sure Major, please hold," Tim said as he made the connection

When Tim connected her with John she said, "We need to go to Baltimore, but we need blueprints of the ship. Can you get them?"

"No I'll have Tim and Bud initiate a joint computer search of the maritime records. In the meantime Webb needs to step up."

"He's still here," Sarah said.

"Good don't let him leave. Put me through to the Admiral, please sweetie," John asked. Sarah transferred his call.

"Admiral, Webb has to understand that this is an NCIS investigation. If he has information material to this case, then he has to give it," John advised AJ.

"I'll reason with him John," AJ told him.

AJ had Webb brought to his office to reason with him, aggressively.

Webb stayed stubborn though saying, "Admiral, I'm not in your chain of command."

AJ retorted, nose-to-nose, "No, but you ARE in my line of fire. This is a NCIS investigation and you will give us the information that we need to save this boy or so help me I will have you charged with obstruction. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes you do but I have my orders."
Before AJ could reply, Bud came walking in. "Admiral, Mr. McGee and I have been working together on the computer. Between the two of us we came up with blueprints for the Tanager."

AJ dismissed Webb as Bud brought in the ship's blueprints. After planning what they were going to do they set out to leave. AJ and Sarah went to NCIS to pick up John. Harm and Diane asked Ann Marie to watch Sarah Cate while they went with Annie. He left Annie with Diane at Annie's house in Baltimore. He waited there for AJ, Sarah and John. Then they drove to Baltimore Harbor.

1845 Local Time

Berth for the Tanager

Baltimore Harbor

They made a plan to board the ship. Harm & John would start at the forward part of the ship while AJ and Sarah went aft.

As AJ and Sarah entered a chamber thugs ambushed them as they popped up from the side hatches. The fighting was fierce but one sided as AJ & Sarah stood back to back and fought off the bad guys together. Sarah utilized her kick boxing and Tai bow techniques to take her share of the thugs down. AJ just kept bashing whoever was standing in front of him, banging one guy's head repeatedly against a bulkhead until he stopped resisting.

"Hoo Aah," AJ said to Sarah as the last one fell. Sarah smiled appreciatively at him.

Harm and John then encountered Harvak as he came out of a hatch. He held his arm out from his side. Before Harm or John could level their weapons at him, he pulled Josh to in front of him. He held a knife to his throat.

"Drop the weapons or he loses his head," Harvak ordered.

Before Harm or John could comply they heard a shot ring out and a dot appear in Harvak's forehead as he fell back away from Josh. John and Harm turned around and were surprised to find Webb standing there with a smoking pistol.

"I was afraid you would miss the party Clay," John said.

Harm went to check on Josh, who was unhurt.

As they left the ship AJ turned to Sarah saying, "Mac I think it's time for you to come back to Investigations and Trial. You've done your time in Administration & Legal Assistance. Starting tomorrow we'll let Lt. Coleman run those sections with Harriet.

"Thank you sir. There is one more thing I've always wanted to do though," Sarah said thankfully.

"What's that Mac?" AJ asked.

Sarah leaned over and kissed him on cheek.

AJ had to smile as she walked off hand in hand with John.

Annie was overjoyed to have Josh back unharmed. She thanked John, Sarah, Harm and AJ for getting her son back safe. As she said goodbye to Harm she told him: "I'm not loosing my son to Navy too." Harm had to sigh as he walked out with Diane.

Sunday, January 11, 1998
0930 Local Time
John and Sarah's House
Florida Ave, NW
"John?"

He looked up at the sound of Sarah's voice and approaching footsteps.

"Can you help me with my bracelet?" she asked.

"Sure." He wrestled with the stubborn catch while admiring her outfit.

She was wearing a jade-green dress that fell in soft folds and whispered with her movements. "You look great, Sarah."

"You're not so bad yourself, sailor," she replied mischievously.

"I've got something for you," John said, holding out a velveteen jewelry case.

"What's this?"

"Open it and find out," he suggested with a grin.

Sarah opened the case and saw a heart-shaped gold locket engraved with a cursive initial "S" surrounded by dainty curlicues. She looked from the case to her fiancé in puzzlement. "I don't understand. I thought we got the garnets for Baby Sarah J.?"

"We did," he agreed. "But this isn't for the baby, it's for you. Open the locket."

Curious, she complied. Inside were tiny photos of both their goddaughters.

John continued his explanation. "I know that being both Sarahs' godmother is a very important milestone in your life, so I thought you should have something to commemorate the occasion. Also check out the back of the locket." He extracted the necklace from its case and turned it over for Sarah to read the inscription that said 'L-A-F-S, 1/6/97, JM & SM.'

As John gently fastened it around her neck she asked through brimming tears. "L-A-F-S?"

"Love At First Sight" John whispered in her ear.

Sarah turned around and kissed him soundly.

"Thank you, John. It's lovely." Her eyes were overflowing as she smiled up at him.

"So are you," he replied softly.

Sunday, January 11, 1998
1530 Local Time
The Miller Residence
Arlington, VA

Sarah sat in the Millers' living room, gently rocking her goddaughter to sleep. The two Johns were
on the floor playing with Jimmy. They just arrived from Sarah Joanne's baptism at Our Lady of Angels R.C. Church in Arlington.

"Is she asleep?" Evie whispered.

"I think so," Sarah replied softly, smiling at the infant in her arms.

"Want to help me put her to bed? You haven't seen the nursery yet."

Sarah rose carefully and followed Evie upstairs. Evie flicked on the light, revealing a room decorated in white eyelet with pink accents.

"This is lovely, Evie," Sarah commented, looking around with a delighted expression.

"Sarah that's the longest statement you've made all night. Something on your mind?" She bustled around efficiently, preparing the crib for her daughter.

"Well, it's just that..." Sarah paused, trying to frame her thoughts. "Up until my sister had her baby no one had ever asked me to be a part of a child's life before. Now I'm involved with two in less than four months. I'm afraid of making mistakes. You see Diane and I were separated at birth and reunited only last spring after almost 30 years. Another family with a stable marriage raised her but my folks didn't have a good marriage, so I don't have much reference material for being a good role model for a child. I just don't want to let you down. I don't want to let her down," she concluded, looking at the sleeping infant.

"Sarah, I don't know what your childhood was like, but somewhere in your life, something happened to make you the person you are – you are brave, and loyal, and compassionate. You're willing to risk your own life for others. I can't think of a finer role model for your sister's daughter and my daughter."

"You're sure?" Sarah's voice trembled as she asked the question.

"With all my heart," Evie replied, carefully hugging her friend and her baby at the same time.

"Hey, what's going on in here?" John Marshall called cheerfully. John Miller was right behind him, carrying a sleepy Jimmy.

"We're introducing Baby Sarah to the fine art of girl talk," Evie replied.

"Now shoo! All three of you." She gently laid the child in her crib.

"Someone obviously had a good influence on you, even if it wasn't your parents. Who was it?" she asked curiously.

"My Uncle Matt," Sarah answered with a fond smile. "Everything I've accomplished in my life, I owe it all to him."

"I don't think you give yourself enough credit, but he must be a very wonderful person. If you ever have doubts about dealing with a child, try to think what he would do." She paused a moment to let that sink in, then took Sarah's arm. "C'mon, let's go see what kind of mess those guys are making in the other room."

A now-smiling Sarah allowed herself to be led from the room.

Saturday, January 24, 1998
1500 Local Time

John and Sarah's House

Florida Ave, NW

Sarah and John were sitting at the kitchen table enjoying lunch with Peter and Harm. They just finished moving the last of Sarah's belongings to Florida Avenue. The move was very simple. Sarah rented the apartment furnished, including her bedroom set she only bought the box spring and mattress, which she left behind. Also Sarah was leaving more and more of her stuff at Florida Avenue as her relationship with John progressed leaving only the same boxes with which she moved last January. It only took two trips in the Rabbs' minivan with the seats removed to move all of Sarah's boxes from Georgetown.

Harm & Diane moved into their new house the week before.

Diane and Ann Marie were out at the White House. Ann Marie said that she had to go in and catch up on some work. She had asked Diane to go with her and to bring in baby Sarah so they could go out to lunch.

"What time are Ann Marie and Diane due back?" Harm asked Peter.

"About 4 o'clock. While you were out at Sarah's for the last trip, Annie called and said that that your Sarah has enchanted the whole West Wing, including the President. He just happened to be in the wing, chatting with the staff when he stopped into Annie's office. He invited Diane and Ann Marie to have lunch with him and Mrs. Bartlett.

"Now it's my daughter that's hanging out in important circles," said Harm as he took a bite of his sandwich.

Saturday, January 24, 1998

1330 Local Time

White House West Wing

The real reason Diane came in with Ann Marie was because she was assigned by her boss Admiral Grafton to brief President Bartlett on the intelligence her section at the Pentagon was hearing from Russia regarding the US's acquisition of the Vietnam War POW-MIA Transfer List. It was 4 months since Harm, Sarah & John obtained the list in the course of their investigation out in Alameda. Admiral Grafton told Diane that the acquisition of the POW-MIA list was an intelligence coup of the highest order.

The President also wanted the briefing done without the whole of the Press Corp getting wise. Bartlett wanted to answer those questions after all the facts were in and confirmed. Being that the two women were closely related to the three parties made it very easy to hide the fact that they were there for a briefing.

They were sitting in the Oval Office along with Bartlett's Chief of Staff Claudia Jean (C.J.) Craig, Secretary of the Navy Nelson, Admiral Grafton, Admiral Chegwidden and Admiral Magnum. The Secretary arrived openly to the White House while the three admirals came into the White House clandestinely via the tunnel from the Treasury Building. To enhance the cover, all the military personnel were in civvies or casual business attire. Even the military personnel weren't going to wear jeans to the White House.
"Mrs. Rabb, I have to say that your daughter Sarah is very well behaved. She must instinctively know that she is in august company and must be on her best behavior," commented President Bartlett.

"It also may be that she's just been fed and changed, sir," said Diane bantering back with the president.

The President enjoyed the playful bantering when making personal conversation.

Bartlett replied in kind, "Then it must be that she knows a grandmother is spoiling her."

Diane could only announce surrender and smile at that one saying, "You got me there sir."

"Either way I'm grateful that Sarah Cate took to my wife well enough so that she could occupy her, allowing us the quiet time we needed for this briefing" commented Bartlett changing the conversation to the business at hand.

"So Commander, what do you have to tell me regarding the POW-MIA List your husband, sister and Ann Marie's brother obtained for us?" asked the President.

"Well sir in the last twelve weeks since I came off maternity leave I have been hearing that widely circulating the list to the agencies in both governments kept the Russians from being able to deny the fact that they were holding American servicemen in Siberia during the Vietnam War. The Russian Federal Security Service has confirmed that they have assigned men to investigate the whereabouts, dead or alive, of the men the 'communists' had transferred, one of them being my father in law. So far we haven't heard anything more beyond that."

Diane emphasized 'communists' as a way to identify the present Russian Government's attempt to distance them from that regime, at least publicly.

During the briefing, Clayton Webb came in. Ann Marie and Diane's dispositions immediately soured. This time he had real information to relate in regards to the alleged Marc Falcon.

"Before we deported him 'persona non grata' he was debriefed by our people in San Francisco. We found out his family was sent to Houston in the sixties to spy on the space program. His family name was Sokol and the parents did name him Mark. When the KGB heard that Hale's body was found in the void of the Hornet, they sent him to try and acquire the list. It's a good thing John has a good right cross, otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here talking about this," said Webb. Ann Marie had to smile at that.

Bartlett took up the conversation, "Knowing that all governmental parties have been made aware of the list of names we will go about ascertaining the veracity of the list by our means. We still can't make it public knowledge that there is a list. If we did there would be too much publicity and we would never know the truth."

Turning to the SECNAV, Magnum, Grafton and Chegwidden he gave them their orders. "Gentlemen we're going to send Commanders Rabb, Commander Marshall and Major Mackenzie to Russia under full diplomatic privilege in full uniform as a military commission to openly obtain information of the names of the service men listed."

Diane as well as Ann Marie had to nod at that. Even the Communists had to abide by the diplomatic rules.

Magnum spoke up, "As you know Mr. President Commander Marshall has been reassigned to NCIS as my Assistant Director. So far I have only been working with him on our budget and I haven't yet
briefed him on the more sensitive programs NCIS is involved in. I'll assign him to only less sensitive crime investigations until this matter is concluded. That way he can go to Russia and we don't have to worry about him being compromised."

"That's fine. Admirals please brief the other three parties as soon as possible. We can probably get this resolved by Memorial Day at the earliest or Labor Day at the latest, that's all. Everyone have a pleasant rest of the weekend," Bartlett said standing up, thus signaling the end of the meeting. He walked out of the Oval Office with C.J. while Ann Marie and the Navy personnel exited the room the other way.

The SECNAV addressed the three admirals, "Find a way to brief the other three as soon as possible and as low key as possible." Turning to Diane he asked, "Commander, where is your husband now?"

"Right now sir he is at Ann Marie's house waiting for me and Sarah along with my sister and John. We can brief them while they are all there."

Admirals Grafton and Magnum had not yet been to John's house and they agreed to accompany AJ under the guise of a social visit.

"All right then. Commander, Ann Marie, let's meet at Florida Ave. in 40 minutes," said AJ

Diane and Ann Marie agreed. They went to retrieve baby Sarah from Mrs. Bartlett's loving care.

Saturday, January 24, 1998

1630 Local Time

John & Sarah's House

Florida Ave, NW

Ann Marie and Diane arrived at John and Sarah's just before the three admirals. Ann Marie asked Peter to take care of Sarah Cate for an hour in the basement playroom as the information was still classified. Peter understood Ann Marie's position completely.

All the parties assembled in the living room as AJ began the briefing. "The president has ordered that you four are now a commission that will go to Russia to determine the veracity of the POW MIA list. You are going there under full diplomatic privilege. When you will go will be determined by what information we can obtain and when we obtain it."

Admiral Magnum spoke up, "John as of Monday you are now the head of that commission. Your office will be dedicated primarily to that task. You'll assign your yeoman and your research staff, including the field agents under your direct authority to collate all information they come across through your office. We'll instruct our, tech and other support staff, to prioritize processing all the information when they get it. You will have access for all the funds you will need to send any personnel wherever they need to go to obtain that information. Coordinate all the information from Diane's office as well as from the CIA. Clayton Webb will be assigned under your authority. Webb has been notified that he'll take orders from you and he is to hold nothing back."

Turning to address Harm & Sarah AJ continued. "Turn over all your cases to Commanders Austen and Brumby. I have also ordered that Lt. Manetti be reassigned to JAG to take up the caseload. You two will be working out of NCIS Headquarters in the Navy Yard with John until further notice."

Grafton spoke up. "Thomas, do you have room for one more desk. It would better serve the process
if Diane were there. She's been gathering all the intelligence since the list has been obtained. I think I can spare her. With the communications abilities we have, if I need her for anything besides this matter, I'll know where to find her" he said with a smile.

Magnum replied with a twinkle, "That's fine with me Jake, but do you think she and Harm can stand seeing each other 24/7. It may put a strain on their marriage."

Diane spoke up, "I'll have my marine sister help me keep him in line sir." Everyone had a good laugh before they all turned serious.

AJ continued the brief. "We have widely circulated the list to various agencies in both the governments. So don't be concerned with restricting your research. When you do go to Russia, everyone will know you're coming.

"When will we be going sir?" asked Harm.

Admiral Grafton answered, "We figured after April 1st when it's spring or sometime into and before the end of the summer. That would make it more conducive to traveling to Siberia if we find we need to go there. So you have a little over two months to get as much information as you can."

Monday, January 26, 1998

John's Office,

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, NE

John and Sarah entered his command center with coffee cups filled with their favorite blends. John had on a dark gray suit while Sarah had on a navy blue pants suit. The suit was cut almost like her uniform, still feminine, but not as military in appearance. It covered her weapon that she had clipped onto the belt. John carried his weapon also clipped to his belt.

Also weapons were worn into the complex and put into locked desks while in the office. Sarah, Diane & Harm were made aware of those and other regulations during the briefing at Florida Avenue.

Harm and Diane soon followed, wearing similar civilian dress as Sarah & John. They had arranged for daycare for baby Sarah at the Navy Yard's Daycare Center.

When Carolyn Turner came out of her office and saw Sarah, she smiled and went to greet her, reaching out her hand. "Mac, it's so great to see you again." Sarah brushed her hand away and instead embraced her tightly.

"It's great to see you too Carolyn."

John stepped back and cocked an eyebrow in astonishment, "You two know each other?"

Turner answered, "Mac and I worked with Admiral Magnum in Hawaii when she was a captain. We were involved in some hairy adventures."

Sarah continued, "Turner is the best shot with all sorts of weapons I have ever seen. She can line up the "double 0" on the 7 of spades from 50 feet away. She saved my life on more than one occasion."

John commented, "I read up on her cases when I was choosing a Yeoman. When we interviewed
she didn't tell me she knew you. We have to sit down later and hear the stories."

"Who gave you the rock you can’t go swimming with?" Turner asked pointing to Sarah's engagement ring.

Sarah pointed to John, "He asked me when he told the Admiral Magnum he accepted his assignment as Assistant Director."

Turner embraced her again and then shook John's hand, "Nice going boss. I know the two of you will be very happy."

"Thanks Carolyn" Sarah & John said together.

Then Turner showed Harm, Sarah and Diane their desks.

"I'm expecting three more agents from our team to get here. And here they come now" John said as he saw two men and one woman walk into their command center.

Let's all go in here where we can introduce ourselves," John said ushering them all into the conference room.

John started; "In here we are relaxed about our ranks, so drop the sirs, ma'am's, commanders and majors. While we are all working here we are all Special Agents."

"I'll start introducing each other and this will be the last time we will use ranks. Major Sarah Mackenzie ("Mac"), Lt. Commanders Diane ("guess' chuckles around the table) and Harmon ("Harm") Rabb meet Special Agents Leroy Jethro Gibbs, ("call me Gibbs), Kathryn Larkin ("Kate please) and Anthony DiNozzo ("Tony"). Each person raised his/her hand when his/her name was mentioned.

"Gibbs is a marine gunny, once a Marine always a Marine, Tony was a Baltimore Detective and Kate was in the Secret Service on the Presidential Detail. Diane is from J2 at the Pentagon and will coordinate all our info for the task of this commission. Sarah and Harm are Navy JAG Lawyers. All three are temporarily assigned to NCIS for the duration of this commission. Sarah, Diane & Harm, Carolyn will help get you get your NCIS Credentials before lunch."

"Harm you and Kate will partner up, Sarah you and Gibbs, Diane you and Tony."

Tony spoke up, "Who's partnering with you boss?"

"That would be me," said Carolyn.

John replied, "I knew Carolyn was good that's why I picked her as my yeoman and investigative partner. Each of us, Harm, Diane, Sarah and I, is emotionally attached to each other and we have an emotional investment for this commission to succeed. To that end we each need partners that are not as invested as we are. We have to have dispassionate eyes to watch us to tell us if we are getting too close or becoming target fixated. Harm you know what that does."

"Yes you focus too much on what is in front of you, you forget the threats from the other directions."

"That's right. Diane's research has told us that there are a great many people out there some in Russia and some in our country who want nothing more than to keep this commission from succeeding, even resorting to murder. We ran into one out in Alameda in Marc Falcon or Sokol. If he wasn’t subdued, he would have taken the list back to Russia and we wouldn't be sitting here talking."
"When we get a lead, a pair of you will pursue it together. I don't want anyone going rogue. Try to
speak with all persons as openly as possible. If our lead wants to tell us clandestinely, we set up
surveillance, body wire, listening van etc. That way none of us gets in a jackpot. Also we can speak
to anyone here if they want.

We have access to funds if someone wants to sell us information, which we will gladly buy. Use
your discretion and document what we paid. We have clerical staff to help us collate our information
and manage our funds. Carolyn will manage how the clericals work. Any reports that need to be
typed, give Carolyn your notes.

Diane spoke up, "Be mindful that the information that someone wants to sell may be
manufactured in order to throw us off the scent. We need to verify the authenticity of the material."

Carolyn added more to the three officers, "We have a very good forensics lab and Abby Scuito does
a great job"

John continued, "At this time we're not out to arrest anyone. During the course of this investigation if
we encounter wanted criminals, spies, conspiracies, etc., then we'll do what we have to. We don't
need to beat the information out of anyone. The same people that want us to fail could be the same
people doing what they can to cover up or destroy evidence so time is of the essence."
Clayton Webb was doing exactly as he was ordered, that is giving John's team all the information that he obtained either through contacts, research or hear say. The legalities of this information were not in issue.

He sat in the conference room relaying the information. "The line of requests for information that we've been casting has brought us a big fish. A Russian named Stephan Gregoravich Konaplonik is interested in selling documents detailing when and which pilots were taken to Russia during Vietnam. He wants $20,000.00 for the dossier and he wants to give it to Harm."

"Where and when is the meet going to be?" Harm asked.

"At a Russian Import warehouse in DC, tonight at about 2300" said Webb.

John started giving orders, "Alright Kate, you and Harm go to electronics and get wired and make arrangements for Sarah CAte. Call Ann Marie, she's been dying to spoil her and hone her parenting skills. Carolyn, call procurement and tell them we need the $20,000.00 and tell them what it's for. Also call the FBI. I got a feeling that they have been keeping an ear out for our friend Stephan. Ask them if they want to be in on the operation. Stress to them that after we leave with the dossier they can do what they want to Konaplonik.

Sarah will be in the surveillance van with Tony and our tech assistant Tim McGee." McGee raised his hand. "We'll have one of the FBI Agents in the van with you. Carolyn, you and I will be in one car at the one end of whatever street the warehouse is, Gibbs you and the other FBI Agent in a car at the other end. Diane you'll stay here and coordinate our communications from ATAC. Diane your call sign is 'Den Mother, Surveillance Van-Scout 1, Harm & Kate-Scout 2, Carolyn & I-Scout3, Gibbs & Agent-Scout 4." All parties nodded in agreement and left the conference room to prepare and make their personal arrangements.

Ann Marie agreed to baby sit Sarah Cate at John's house. So Harm & Diane had left her making plans to sleep over there themselves later that night.

Everyone was wearing jeans and sneakers. Tim, Tony and Sarah were sitting in the van for an hour
with one of the FBI Agents named Novak. He was African American who looked like he could block for the Giants Offensive line he was that large and fit. He was talking on his cell phone to his counterpart special Agent Grenin who was in the car at the end of the alley with Gibbs. They wanted to use the commlink, but Sarah gave Novak her best Marine look and that alone dissuaded him from doing so.

While Novak was on the phone, Tony slid closer to Sarah for a more private conversation. He inadvertently keyed his commlink open. "So Mac, who gave you the rock, anybody we know?"

Before Sarah could answer, Tony heard Diane in his earphone "Stay off the commlink unless you have something more constructive to add Tony. And yes it is someone we know, he's our boss."

In their car John and Carolyn exchanged widely amused smiles. Sarah also smiled, shook her head and sighed.

Harm & Kate were waiting inside the warehouse for 30 minutes. Harm was just about to signal that they should call it a night when they heard Sarah's voice over their earpieces, "Heads up Scouts, we have company."

A car had pulled up outside the warehouse. The only occupant was the driver. He got out and went into the warehouse.

He encountered Harm & Kate. Harm asked, "You Konaplonik?"

"I am. Are you Rabb? And who is your girlfriend?" said the person in heavily accented English.

Harm replied, "She's my partner. She's going to keep me out of trouble. Do you have the dossier?"

"If you have the money," said Konaplonik as he handed over the dossier.

Harm looked at it. "It's in Russian." He took out the envelope with the money. "$10,000.00 now and the other $10,000.00 after we translate."

Konaplonik replied, "I risked my life to get those papers. I want my money, all of it, now!"

Before Harm or Kate could answer, another voice came from the shadows. "Save your money Commander Rabb the dossier is fake."

A very well dressed man smoking a thin cigar walked up to the group holding a pistol. He was aiming it at Konaplonik.

Konaplonik replied, "Misha, how nice to see you. Who told you I was here?"

"No one, I have been following these documents since you stole them in Moscow." Holding out his hand to Harm, he commanded, "Commander Rabb, please give me the dossier. I have no orders to kill you tonight."

Kate & Harm heard John command over the commlink, "Everyone move in slow."

Harm stalled for time, "Misha, what's in the documents that scares Russia so much?"

Before Misha could answer, all the lights in the warehouse snapped on. They heard John's voice say loud & clear. "Everyone freeze, Federal Agents."

Misha tried to get away, but Kate tripped him up. Misha fell and before he could do anything further, Kate grabbed his gun wrist and gave it a twist. There was a snapping sound as Misha gave a cry, and
dropped the gun. Kate handcuffed him.

Konaplonik tried to run away. When he opened the door he came in, he stared right down the two barrels of the weapons Novak & DiNozzo were holding at his eyes.

Konaplonik slowly raised his hands. He had the feeling he was lucky to be alive.

Tuesday, March 3, 1998

0230 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

John and Harm were sitting at Harm's desk. The other NCIS agents occupied their own surrounding desks in the bullpen as they came to call it, and the FBI Agents were sitting in chairs in between. "What made you come in at that point?" Harm asked John.

"As soon as I heard our friend Misha show up and say that he didn't have orders to kill you, that didn't mean he wouldn't if he had to. I knew we didn't have much time before any shooting started. Tony & Novak took the door nearest them, same with Carolyn & I. Gibbs and Grenin took the last one where they were. Kate, you really went to town on Misha."

Kate replied, "I don't like guns pointed at me. Before he turned it toward me, I figured I'd better act to keep him from shooting."

Tony spoke up, "Well remind me not to get you mad at me. I don't think my wrists could stand it." Everyone laughed tiredly.

John continued, "Well we didn't have to spend $20,000.00 of the agency's money. Carolyn please put it in my office safe until we can give it back tomorrow. Also Harmon, the next time you want to deviate from the plan and negotiate, let me know. You knew we had Sarah and me here to translate. There was no need to haggle. Next time when we plan the flight, fly the plan."

Harm had the good grace to look chagrined, "Aye, aye sir" he said with a tired smile.

John held up the dossier. Sarah wasn't only fluent in reading and speaking Russian she was better at it than John. She translated the documents in the dossier in little under an hour. The document did not detail names, but said that all prisoners from Vietnam were brought to central Siberia, for safekeeping, Sarah copied them and placed the copies in John's safe.

After Sarah completed that he sent her home with Diane. John would come with Harm later.

Misha for his part was sitting in the interrogation room speaking with Clayton Webb. His wrist was set in a cast. They brought him to the nearest ER to have it set. Right now he had a flask with Vodka in it. Since they weren't going to arrest him, they indulged him to help him alleviate his pain.

Webb came out of the room and joined the tired group in the bullpen. "His name is Mikhail Parlovsky, KGB Colonel. He has been known to travel under the name of Major Nikolai. You guys grabbed a big fish. He wants to see the dossier."

John handed it over to Webb and replied, "Sure. Maybe he can corroborate them for us."

Webb and John entered the interrogation room and sat across from Parlovsky. John spoke to him in Russian, "Good evening Colonel. My name's John Marshall. How's your wrist?
"It is fine as long as I have this, spaseba." Parlovsky said holding up the flask. "And I know who you are Commander. When you retrieve your Declaration of Independence your press is ready to practically anoint you."

"What can you tell us about these?" John said handing him the dossier.

Parlovsky took the documents out and spread them out on the table in front of him. After reading them he started to curse. "I was right, these are fake. You're lucky that you didn't have to spend money. You have accomplished my mission for me. I know you Americans love a good deal. I'll make you one you can't refuse."

Tony was standing with Gibbs, Carolyn, & Kate listening in the observation room as he looked through the one-way mirror. "Who does he think he is, Brando?"

Carolyn and Kate just gave him an indulgent look. Gibbs just ignored him.

Parlovsky continued, "I can get you real proof of what you are looking for. But I will need to go back to Russia."

Webb objected strongly, "No way comrade. We have you dead to rights. You're going to prison."

John sat back, slouching in his chair, with his hands folded across his stomach and took it all in. He looked up at Webb and asked simply, "For what, just for being Russian?"

Webb looked like he was going to have a conniption. "He is the #1 K.G.B. agent we have ever caught."

"Again, caught him doing what, retrieving stolen documents that belong to his government anyway?"

"But he's KGB!" sputtered Webb.

"It's my understanding that the KGB is no longer in business in the new Russia," replied John succinctly.

"That is true commander. We call it the Federal Security Service and our functions have changed. We are more open with our methods, much like your FBI," replied Parlovsky.

"So Webb, are we going to put the colonel in prison for pursuing a known criminal? True he could have informed our State Department and because he didn't, we have him for immigration violations and nothing else."

Before Webb could counter, John sat up straighter and continued, "This is what we're going to do. Colonel we have an assignment for you. You are going back to Russia. You are going to send us that proof. You are also going to tell your people that we are coming under full diplomatic privilege. You will also tell them that our president is sending us. Do you think you can do that? Before you answer, let me tell you that if you can't, I will tell Mr. Webb here to put you in Leavenworth and I'll also tell him to throw away the key. We'll tell your people ourselves that we are coming. Do we have a deal?"

Parlovsky sighed, and replied in English, "When you put it like that Commander, how can I refuse."

0430 Local Time

John & Sarah's House
Harm and John entered the back door of the house as quietly as possible and tiptoed up the stairs. John went to his room and crawled into bed and nestled next to a sleeping Sarah. She woke up enough to accommodate him. Harm went into the guest room and saw the other Mackenzie sister sleeping peacefully. He didn't see Baby Sarah's crib. Diane also woke up enough and told him, "She's inside Ann Marie's room. You know the first rule of childcare, 'never move a sleeping baby'. I've got the baby monitor here so if she wakes up, I'll get her and let Annie sleep."

Harm couldn't agree more. As he fell asleep, he thought that he and Diane were so lucky to find Sarah as her sister and that John found Sarah. They really became a very close extended family.

Friday, March 30, 1998

1915 Local Time

John & Sarah's House

Florida Avenue, N.W.

Shortly after the NATO Ball John and Sarah decided to take dancing lessons as much as they could to better enhance their relationship. Since Sarah was doing ballet with Ann Marie she became enamored with ballroom or partner dancing also. So John saw it as another way for them to become intimate. Besides John really needed lessons. So they scheduled lessons at the same studio, but on Friday nights.

When they went out dancing Sarah dressed in loosely fitting and revealing clothing that showed a lot of leg and cleavage. "I look like a harlot," she said that night as she looked in the mirror in the entrance foyer when they returned home.

John had only replied, "That's alright. But now it's time you acted like one."

With that he picked her up and carried her up to their bedroom like Rhett did to Scarlet. Sarah giggled all the way upstairs.

Thursday, April 30, 1998

1830 Local Time

John & Sarah's House

Florida Avenue, N.W.

The work of the commission stalled. John's team did not receive very much more information since the apprehension and subsequent release of Parlovsky back in March. And Parlovsky had not sent back the proof he was assigned to send. So they had handed copies of the information over to Webb to bring to the State Department and have them set up the diplomatic particulars for the commission to go to Russia.

John requested to Admiral Magnum that they keep Diane permanently assigned to NCIS as a Supervisory Information Analyst in ATAC. Diane readily agreed, as she would still be doing the same job at NCIS as she did in 'J2' at the Pentagon. Admiral Magnum requested and Admiral Grafton approved the transfer. Diane also received her promotion to full commander grade in accordance with her new management position. Diane also transferred Sarah Cate's daycare to the Navy Yard Daycare Center.
Admiral Chegwidden was also getting anxious to have his people back. So Harm & Sarah went back to JAG on Monday, March 30. AJ immediately partnered them up with the promise that they would be in on any new developments when the commission came up with them. John ensured that Harm & Sarah kept their NCIS Identifications.

While Harm & Sarah were working at NCIS in February Bud asked Harriet to marry him. He did it in typical Bud Style. The two were having one of their awkward discussions about where their relationship was going, etc. Harriet was going around the office working and Bud was trying to juggle a case he was working on and trying to find time to surprise Harriet so he could pop the question.

They were talking about things when Bud pulled her into Sarah's empty office. He told Harriet that he wanted to be with her forever and he reached into his pocket and pulled out a jewelry box. When Harriet opened it, she saw it was empty. At first Bud panicked then he reached back into his pocket and found the ring. He blew off the pocket lint and slipped it on her finger. They heard applause coming from outside the office as the whole retinue of staff stopped to watch. Harriet happily held up her hand to show everyone her ring.

Harm and Sarah dove right back into their work. They were sent to Miami to diffuse a situation that involved an incident in Florida involving former Navy Underwater Demolition Team members. They were harassing a local drug dealer who had diplomatic immunity. The drug dealer ran over and killed a grandson of one of the team. So they bought surplus military gear and explosives and sank one of the dealer's yachts and stole his drug earnings. They ended up rescuing the grandfather after the dealer took him hostage in order to get his money back. Harm & Sarah successfully lobbied the State Department to revoke the dealer's immunity and arrested him. Bud accompanied them on the case. While he was down there, Harriet went to arrange for him to meet her parents who lived in Naples, across Florida from Miami.

After they came back from Florida they went out to Arizona. They worked with a Forensic Pathologists named Lt. Commander Theresa Coulter to verify the identity of the remains of a World War II Navajo Code Talker named Jimmy Blackhorse whose body was found in New Zealand and brought back home to the Navajo Reservation just outside Yuma.

It took them a week and a half to deal with that case as she and Harm had to fly to New Zealand to investigate the circumstances of Blackhorse's death. There they found that Jimmy fathered a child with a local New Zealand girl. They brought the mother and son, also named Jimmy Blackhorse back to Arizona where they were welcomed into the Navajo Tribe.

After the trial at the reservation, Sarah and Harm went into Yuma to get copies of her Baptism, Communion and Confirmation certificates from her old parish. She needed those documents to show Father Mario at St. Thomas so she and John could have a nuptial mass for their wedding. She had no desire to check on any friends from her pre-clean & sober life.

Sarah came home from Arizona earlier that morning and slept the day away to get over her jet lag while John was at work. When John came home that evening, they had a simple bacon and egg dinner and then they sat and relaxed in their living room as she recounted Jimmy Blackhorse case and something else that had happened to Bud and Harriet.

Sarah began her story, "To set this up John you have to know that Bud and Harriet are openly discussing their wedding plans in the bullpen at JAG and she even got the admiral involved. They continued their discussion out in Arizona. Bud became so frustrated that he asked, 'why do we need a wedding?' Needless to say Harriet wasn't thrilled and accused Bud of backing out. Bud then clarified that he was all for a marriage, but why do we need to have such a big party to go along with
a simple ceremony. So they asked Harm & I for 48 hours leave and they went to 'Vegas.

Well when they came back they looked like the walking wounded. They had burn marks and scratches all over their faces and arms. It seems that they went to the 'Chapel of the Eternal Flame'. While they were going up to the altar, a gas line that was feeding the flame ruptured and exploded sending glass and flames everywhere. Bud and Harriet barely got out of there before they became more wounded then they were. Needless to say they didn't get married. But Bud being Bud then showed us a cocktail napkin and said, 'at least I got Tom Jones' autograph'. So they decided to push up the wedding date."

"To when?" John asked.

"As soon as we returned to DC Harriet booked the Army & Navy Club and a church. The date is May 23."

John was sipping some tea and he almost did a spit take. Then he asked, "Geez, they don't want to waste any time do they? Who's in the wedding party?"

"Well she asked me to be maid of honor, and then she asked Diane and Meg to be bridesmaids. They both said yes. She would've liked to ask Traci, but she is out at Pearl Harbor T.A.D. until June. She is going to ask Ann Marie tomorrow though."

John interrupted, "She might want to wait on that. She's due any day now. She saw Dr. Warner Tuesday. Cheryl doesn't like her blood pressure and is afraid of toxemia. She may want to induce. As a matter of fact, Ann Marie is supposed to call us later tonight to let us know if that's what was going to happen. In the meantime tell me more about this whirlwind wedding."

Sarah continued, "Harm is the Best Man and Bud is going to call you tomorrow to ask you to be an usher. When he does tell him about Annie and Peter cause he was also going to ask Peter. His brother Mike is another usher."

"Speaking of weddings, when would you like to set our date?" John asked.

Sarah replied, "I was thinking middle or late October. I'll have accrued the necessary leave and you'll be well along at NCIS that you can take the time off. How do you feel about that?"

"I think that's great. It won't be too cold or two hot. Do you still want to have it at St. Thomas, Apostle?" John asked.

"I think that would be fine. I still want to have the reception at the Willard," said Sarah

John said, "Tomorrow you call the Willard and see if they have a date open then. Then we'll book the church."

Sarah then went over to him and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Great now that we settled that, I have an idea on how to make up for the time we've been apart."

"What has that sensuously devious mind of yours thought of now, my love?" John asked seductively. He always enjoyed that Sarah was willing to explore new and different ways to keep their love life exciting.

Whispering seductively in his ear she said, "After I woke up this afternoon while you were at work I got busy. Take a hot shower and then meet me in the bedroom. The time in the shower will let me finish setting everything up."
John got up from the couch to quickly comply. After he showered, he entered the bedroom to find her waiting for him on the bed. She had flavored oils and was ready. She called him to her and he willingly gave himself over to her. She knew what to do and she took him to new heights with little problem.

Saturday, May 2, 1998

1900 Local Time

John & Sarah's House

Florida Avenue N.W.

They were lucky. Sarah wanted an evening affair. The Willard had their ballroom open for October 24 for 7:00 PM and St. Thomas, Apostle had a slot open for a 3:00 PM Nuptial Mass. They booked both of them. They went over to the Willard to place a deposit on the ballroom that morning. Then they settled down for an active but still relaxing day.

While they were working together at NCIS, they also decided to take cooking lessons. They figured now that they were living together they needed to cook for each other. Before, because they were each living alone, they never had the urge to cook if each of them was going to eat alone. Mostly they ordered in or ate out.

Before Sarah went out to Arizona they went to the culinary school at Georgetown. They each explained what they wanted and the limits of their cooking skills. Their teachers were Chefs John and Nancy. They picked up on the fact that this couple was together and scheduled Basic classes for both starting with the Monday night group at 7:00 PM. They bought their books and received their first reading and cooking assignment.

After John and Sarah came home from church they concentrated on completing their reading first. Then they gathered all their utensils and food items. They followed directions and started their cream sauce first and each made sure all the items were added. After that was started, they started the pasta and shrimp. They constantly seemed to be in each other's way, which required a lot of rubbing and touching. It was cooking but the foreplay component was so arousing. They added all the other items to complete the meal and finally sat for their first Shrimp Pasta dinner prepared together. The sauce was a little overcooked but everything was done together and their skill level could only get better with time. After enjoying their first jointly cooked dinner, they put away the dirty dishes in the dishwasher and then they walked arm in arm up to their bedroom.

John asked seductively as they went upstairs. "Remember the pretty camisole you wore on my birthday? Do you still have it?"

Sarah started to nibble on his ear. "Yes I do. But what good is it going to do? You'll just take it off me and fuck me senseless anyway."

John loved it that she talked dirty at times.

"You're right about that. But put it on anyway and call me into the bedroom when you're ready."

Then he got himself ready to do just what she said he'd do.

The camisole he liked was pink and part of a set with matching bikini panties and thigh band stockings and stiletto heels. As she put the set on she thought to herself that she loved that he loved to look and even stare at her in her lingerie and peel it slowly off her. She knew some of her girlfriends had boyfriends that treated the lingerie as an impediment to their love making and practically ripped
the offending garments off their bodies.

Sarah called out to him when she was ready. She trembled with excitement as she waited for him to come to her.

He entered the room wearing only his gym shorts and turned out all but one small lamp on her dresser. He approached her and rubbed his hands down her arms from her shoulders to her wrists. He gently commanded her, "Stand still, I want to have a good look and I want to play a little." Sarah did as he asked trembling with anticipation.

He cupped her chin in his hands and kissed her forehead, her eyes and her lips. He didn't deepen the kiss but sucked delicately on each lip. He walked around her taking a good look, gently rubbing her arms and planting kisses on her shoulders and neck. She raised her hands and ran them through her hair as a way to keep from touching him and to let him get a good view. He went around to the back and started slowly placing delicate kisses all over her back starting at her neck. He pushed her arms down and pulled the spaghetti straps of the camisole off her shoulders and left them on her forearms pulling the camisole down a bit to expose more of her back. He lightly rubbed his fingertips and the back of his hands up and down her sides barely touching the silk. She started rebounding from the tickling sensation of all the light touches but it changed quickly to pure sensuality.

She stood shaking as he moved around to the front. He pulled the silk cups of the camisole down just enough to expose her nipples. He started at her neck working his way down to her breasts. Again he used the backs of his hands to caress and touch her chest. She wanted to move to caress him herself but he asked her not to. "Please just stand there." She loved that he asked but in a demanding tone. To keep from reaching for him she folded her arms across her back, grasping each forearm with the other hand. His hands were very busy stroking her sides from her hips to her breasts.

He kissed and worked first on the right nipple. She was trembling with the pleasure of his delicate ministrations. He held her tight to him as he felt her shudder with release. As she came back down, he moved to the left. Her reaction told him that the left was a little more sensitive, so he paid it a lot of attention. As he pulled the nipple into his mouth, he sucked it as hard as he could. She was moved to new heights as she screamed his name as she came again. A delicious electrical shock went straight thru her ending in her nether region.

Before she came completely down he knelt in front of her and pulled down her bikini panties. He put a hand on each of her cheeks pulling her firmly to him. He pushed the camisole up and started in on her navel ring. She shivered with the exquisite pleasure she always felt when he did this.

John asked her to lie at the end of the bed for the big finale. She took the position as he knelt on the floor and pulled her into place. He started slowly until he had her complete attention before he started using his tongue, as he did the same to her as the first time they made love. He took her up, down and all around until she begged for her release. He then knelt on the bed and like their first time placed both his hands on her butt and lifted her hips off the bed. With her legs hanging down behind his shoulders he brought his mouth back to her. It wasn't long before she was practically shrieking as she came closer and closer to her climax. At this John took hold of her clit with his lips and sucked it. This pushed her over her limit as she came in the most powerful orgasm of the session. Her legs pounded his back and she let out long wails and screams. He held her to him and licked her luxuriously until he felt her relax.

When he moved his face from her, Sarah was almost insensate. Still holding her hips off the bed John positioned her more fully on the bed. He gently lowered her hips and as she lay there he took off his shorts. He lay down next to her and kissed her deeply. He gently spread her legs, knelt between them and mounted and slid easily into her, sinking gently all the way into her. She became
more aware of him and responded. She wrapped her arms around his neck and body. He took his time, gently but firmly pounding into her. He wanted to prolong this experience as long as he could. Their lovemaking became more frenzied as he gave her all of himself. Sarah adjusted her thighs and crossed her ankles across his back so that he was always fully in her. They went at it for a good 5 minutes before she let out a cry of "Oh John take me all the way". As always her climax brought on his. He nailed her to the mattress and she held herself tightly to him, as they spent themselves in mutual gratification.

As he lay on top of her, Sarah stroked his hair and back. "My fine strong man, you are such a good, good man. I'll always be there for you. I'll never hurt or leave you."

John didn't say anything as he rolled off her and cuddled up to her. He kissed the top of her head and pulled her in tight. Sarah smiled as they both fell into a restful sleep.
Timing Is Everything
Chapter 25
Sunday, May 2, 1998
0630 Local Time
John & Sarah's House
Florida Avenue, N.W.

The ringing of the phone woke John. He had to move his arm from under Sarah before he could
reach for it.
"Hullo."
"John wake up!"
"Mom what's up? Is Ann Marie alright?" He thought immediately that his sister was not doing well.
He was waiting for her to call to let him know if she had the baby.
"Don't worry she's fine. In fact she lost a lot of weight."

He was still half asleep. "Lost a lot of weight? So the toxemia isn't a problem anymore?"
"Wake up John," his mother shouted into the phone.

This time even Sarah woke up. She just turned her head on her pillow. "John, what did Ann Marie
have?"

John's mother heard Sarah's question. "She had a boy. He was delivered after 25 hours of labor."
John was fully awake now. "How big and when?"
"He's a big one. 8 pounds 10 ounces 21 inches. At 2:30 this morning. He's got all his toes and
fingers. They're naming him Andrew Charles. Ann Marie is doing fine."
"Mom, you should have said that in the first place. You didn't have play the word games. You knew
how worried I was," said John exasperated and now fully awake.

"Well, you know me. Ann Marie also said that she wants Sarah to be godmother. She'll call you
later. Bye son," said his mother sweetly.

John relayed the birth particulars and Ann Marie's request to Sarah. "That makes three. I'm glad she's
all right. Now I have a nephew and new godson to spoil," said Sarah happily. She was so honored.

"A little testosterone in the family is a good thing. We'll tell Harm & Diane later. We'll also call
Carolyn. She's been asking after her and I know Bud & Harriet and AJ & Sydney were concerned
to. We'll let the rest of the offices know Monday. If I know the President, he'll probably announce it
from the Press Room anyway," John said.
Then he asked, "Now that we're up, what was that line last night about never hurting or leaving me? You've never said that before." Then it dawned on him. "Ann Marie told you about Annie, didn't she? He said it with a smile to let Sarah know that he wasn't angry.

"Yeah she did. It was at that point that I realized why you never called your sister Annie, you always said Ann Marie. I felt so bad that she did that to you. I know from being with you that you didn't deserve that. Ann Marie told me that all you ever wanted is to be loved by someone who shared your values. And I'm so glad that I am that someone. Before you, I have never felt that I could give myself so completely to a man. Every other man I knew abused, dominated or tried to possess me. As I told you before, you were the first man that ever loved me just for me. You took me as I am, accepted me with all my faults and insecurities and turned them into pillars that support the person that I became. I am so grateful for that."

John told her, "You know when you told me all about yourself when we unpacked your boxes, I also felt no one deserved to be treated the way you were treated. I made a vow then that I would never do that to you either. We're so lucky that lost souls such as us found each other. It almost seems that it was meant to be."

Sarah embraced him as they lay back down. "Now that we got that out of the way, let's make a promise that we never speak of the past again. I only want to experience nothing but good things from now on. Do we have deal?"

"It's a deal." John said. "In the meantime as we're already up, how about some exercise?"

"What do you have in mi...?" Sarah asked but she stopped as John leaned over and started kissing her breasts. "OOH that," Sarah breathed as she lay back and submitted to John's ministrations.

They had their way with each other then they cuddled and settled in for a leisurely nap. At 1000 they got up, showered together, changed the bed and called all their friends to let them know of Ann Marie's good news.

Monday, May 18, 1998

JAG Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC

To

Saturday, May 23, 1998

Trinity United Methodist Church

Army Navy Club

Alexandria, VA

Bud and Harriet's wedding week came upon them very quickly. Ann Marie was thrilled to be asked to be a bridesmaid. She worked hard at getting back as much as her pre-baby figure as she could so she could fit in a gown comfortably. She was happy that she breastfed Andy. It helped in shedding her pounds.

John's parents were also invited to the wedding and they helped Ann Marie care for Andy as she and the other girls got ready. John's mother Maureen flew down to DC to be with Ann Marie on Monday and stayed at John's House. John's father James and Ann Marie's husband Peter would fly down on
Thursday in time for the bachelor party.

John was tied up in a case at NCIS and Sarah was tied up in her own case. Ann Marie was at the White House with Maureen introducing her and Andy around, especially to President & Mrs. Bartlett. So AJ graciously volunteered to pick up James and Peter at National Airport. They three hit it off very well at Thanksgiving.

Harriet's father Roland was a total gentleman, but Harriet's mother Lydia turned out to be a total bitch showing that she was the epitome of southern prejudice. She had nothing but criticisms about Bud, his family, friends and the Navy in general.

It came to a head on the Tuesday before the wedding. Sarah Cate & Andy were both in an oversize carriage that Harm's mother bought when Sarah Cate was born. It was big enough to accommodate the two sleeping babies. While they were all in the dress shop, the babies started crying while Harriet, Sarah, Diane and Ann Marie were getting fitted for their gowns. Lydia let go with a "someone shut those stupid brats up." The comment about her grandson got Maureen's Irish up and she had a murderous look in her eye as she confronted Lydia.

"If you weren't so busy flapping your gums complaining all the time you would know that the babies' diapers need to changed. So get your head out from up your ass and give me a hand."

Maureen then grabbed Lydia by the arm and had her wheel the carriage into the ladies' room.

It was fifteen tense minutes before the two came out. Both babies were quiet. Baby Sarah was holding her own bottle as she lay in the carriage and Lydia was cradling Andy as she held a bottle to him.

Harriet was astounded and looked at Ann Marie and Diane. They heard the babies crying but had not moved from their fitting stands. They both knew that John's mother could handle the situation. She did raise 4 children of her own, all born within 5 years of each other and her other sons gave her 6 more grandchildren that she loved to spoil.

The only glitch came when Harm was called into AJ's office on Tuesday. He pointed out that a male stripper was doing his act with a set of Navy Dress Whites. Harm didn't see the relevance until AJ pointed out the JAG insignia on the shoulder boards. Harm went immediately to the dry cleaners with Brumby. They were on their way to an interview a witness to a case. He left his set of whites there the previous Thursday in anticipation of wearing them for the wedding. There he had to haggle with the proprietor who would not give him any information on his uniform because Harm left his claim ticket at home. It was only the promise of setting up the proprietor's pretty daughter with Mic, who readily agreed to have her accompany him to the wedding, that Harm was able to get the name of the male stripper.

When he went to the club to get his uniform, the stripper was in the middle of his act, dancing to "In the Navy" by the Village People. When he looked out from backstage he was astounded to see Diane, Sarah, Ann Marie, Harriet, Lydia and Maureen enjoying the show. Harm was able to catch the top and pants as the stripper threw them off stage.

Another dancer tried to stop him from 'stealing' the clothing. "You can't take that, I'll call the police."

Harm countered, "I'm a lawyer, I'll sue you." That made the dancer back down. Harm was further astounded when the dancer asked him help him with a sexual harassment suit. Harm just shook his head and walked out. He took the whites to another dry cleaners that specialized in military uniforms and rush jobs.
Everything was fine until Bud's father showed at JAG Headquarters. He was a former Chief Petty Officer and he turned out to be as obnoxious as Lydia. He kept pushing Bud's brother Mike around and making insulting comments about officers and such.

Sarah and Harm just tried to ignore him as much as possible for Bud's sake. It finally stopped when Bud confronted his father in the elevator lobby of headquarters and told him to stop. Bud's father backed down and mumbled an apology as he walked out.

Everybody thought that was the end of it. It was until the bachelor party the Thursday before the wedding. Harm & John planned to take Bud to a local go-go bar for his last night of freedom.

Harm, Bud, John, Peter, Roland, AJ & James arrived at the bachelor party together. Big Bud and Mike were there. Big Bud was already three sheets to the wind acting very belligerent. He started picking on Mike again. When Harm asked him to settle down he took a swing at him. Harm ducked and Big Bud hit another patron, not involved in the bachelor party. That started a brawl. The club manager called the police.

John's father James was a former Army Sergeant. So he knew, as well as AJ how to fight. He and AJ stood back to back defending themselves against the other drunken combatants. John, Harm and Bud were also holding their own just trying not to cause anymore damage, but the other brawlers were not so accommodating as John and Harm threw a couple of brawlers over the bar. When the police came all of the Roberts were herded into the police van, that is except for Big Bud. After starting the brawl Big Bud, being the bully and coward that he was, beat a hasty retreat, pulling Mike along with him.

Now, before the festivities started, Bud noticed that one dancer on a break was a law student in one of his classes. They were talking comparing class stories. Just before the brawl started, she excused herself and went to the ladies room. As Bud was being led out by the police she came up to him and held up a Pregnancy Test stick and said, "Buddy I'm pregnant." Harriet came with Sarah looking for Bud and she arrived just in time to see the exchange and was furious. She stormed out crying. Sarah ran after her.

After dealing with Harriet, Sarah got hold of her troops to bail the men out.

2130 Local Time

4th Precinct DC Metro Police

The Roberts party was sharing the same cell away from the other combatants. John knew the precinct's commander of detectives. He assisted John and Gibbs in an investigation. John was successful in using his influence to get him and his friends in the separate cell. He agreed that separating the Navy prisoners from the other bar patrons was a wise idea because that would prevent further hostilities. Unfortunately he couldn't speed up the process of sorting out the mess of charges and counter charges. So John and the others had to wait in the cell until everything was expedited.

John asked Harm, "So which Mackenzie sister will be more angry, yours or mine?"

Harm had to chuckle as he answered, "It's one thing I know about is a Mackenzie sister's temper. When Diane was pregnant I walked on eggshells. Even if I was kidding around, she let me have it. And living in the apartment, I had nowhere to go and I had to sit there and take it. You're lucky."

"How so?" John asked.

"I have to deal with the both of them when they get angry. I get it when Sarah gets mad at me at
work, then I have to go home and deal with Diane, hoping I don't do something stupid to get her angry. Also since you left JAG, I have to deal with Sarah alone. At least with you there, her attention was more on you. I had some leeway in my legal maneuvering." Harm corrected himself as he saw AJ shoot him a look. "That is the right maneuvering.

Damn right!" AJ said. He turned his head and smiled at James' own smile.

Harm continued, "She never lets me get away with anything. She knows the law so much better than anyone we know and sometimes I hate her for it."

John smiled at that.

James asked AJ, "So what was it like having both John and Harm under your command AJ?"

AJ snorted a laugh as he said, "It was to say the least interesting. I had both alpha males in the same cage. Sometime I would just sit in the court room on those cases when they opposed each other. It was a sight to see. When they were on the same side, lord help the other side."

"Who won the most cases between them?" James asked.

Before AJ could answer both Harm and John answered together, "I did!"

That brought laughter from all the others in the cell.

Just then the jail guard came down and said to them, "You guys have some visitors."

He moved aside as first Sarah came down the stairs. She was followed by Harriet, Diane, Ann Marie, Lydia and Maureen. They all came from the Rabbs' home where they were having their own bachelorette party. The only reason Sydney wasn't there was because she was on call at George Washington Hospital.

The men all got up in anticipation of getting released. What happened next brought bouts of laughter from the guard and the other prisoners. Each wife/fiancé lined up in front of her spouse/fiancé and started to simultaneously wail on them.

Maureen – "Jim, how could you let this happen? Sometimes I think you just love to get in a fight. You got arrested at Matt's bachelor party too. You'd think that would have taught you."

Sarah –"John, you're a law enforcement official. You should have known better. Admiral Magnum will roast you alive. Forget about what the SECNAV will have to say about this."

Lydia –Roland I have never been so embarrassed in my life. The idea of my husband arrested in a barroom brawl."

Diane –"Harm, I had to leave our daughter and Ann Marie's son with the neighbor next door to come here to bail you out. I was too embarrassed to tell her that we had to do that because you and Pete were in jail.

Ann Marie – "Peter, the President found out about this because when your name came up on the computer, the Secret Service was notified."

Ann Marie then turned to AJ saying, "And you admiral, the President also heard that you were there. I had to hear it from the President and I don't like to hear it from the President when someone else screws up. Do you have any idea the questions I will have to answer when the Press Corps hears about this? As the highest legal authority there, you of all people should have known better. I swear
you and my father are cut from the same cloth. The two of you just love getting into a good fight."

Harm, Bud, Harriet and Sarah turned to look at the sight of their commanding officer being dressed down by a wound up Ann Marie. She was sight to behold, standing with her feet apart at hip width, bending toward AJ with one hand on her hip and the other shaking a finger at him.

All AJ could do was stand there and take it. After all Ann Marie was not in his chain of command and she was also speaking on behalf of the President.

The spectacle caused the JAG officers to turn their faces so that their CO could not see the grins plastered on their faces. It took a great deal of control on their part to not burst out laughing. Even John and the other women had trouble controlling themselves as they practically sputtered.

After it finally got quiet Harriet began to speak to Bud, "Bud why were you speaking to that stripper and why was she so excited about telling you she was pregnant?"

"Well she was in some of my law school classes and we were comparing stories about some of the instructors. That's all Harriet. Other than that, I've never been near her, I swear."

Harriet looked at him skeptically.

John came to Bud's rescue saying, "He's right Harriet. I was standing next to them when they were talking. It was all about law school."

The other men nodded in unison at this, confirming Bud's story.

Harriet finally relented, saying, "Ooh Bud."

At that the duty sergeant came down. Addressing Bud and his friends and the other patrons in the other cell he said, "The owner is upstairs and he agreed that if everyone agrees to pay for the damages, he will not press charges. The bill for damages is $1500.00. That's going to come out to."
He paused as he counted twenty prisoners, including the Roberts party, "$75.00 bucks a piece. He is accepting checks and credit card payments. Also if none of you agree to press charges, we can dispense with the booking process and you can all go home."

That brought a cheer from the other cell and words of agreement from the Navy personnel. The guard opened the cell and they all went upstairs. Roland was gracious enough to pay for the whole of the Roberts party's part of the tab. Then they all left the precinct and agreed to continue the bachelor party at Florida Avenue.

So Harriet, Sarah, Ann Marie, Lydia and Maureen went back to the Rabbs' house to continue their own party secure in the knowledge that the men would not get into any more trouble in John's man-cave.

At the end of their evening Ann Marie and Andy stayed at the Rabbs' to sleep over while Sarah and Maureen took Harriet home and Lydia to her hotel before they went back to Florida Avenue to sleep themselves. Ann Marie rightly figured that it was more prudent to keep Andy far from Florida Avenue to let the boys enjoy themselves the rest of the evening without worrying about disturbing the baby.

The men sat up drinking, playing pool or watching the basketball playoffs and SportsCenter for a long way into the night. At about 0200 Roland, AJ & James beat an early exit. On his way home AJ drove Roland to his hotel and James went upstairs to the guest room to sleep.

After the older men left, Bud John and Harm sat down to talk. Harm asked Bud, "Why is your father
"He always had a heavy hand with both of us. He calls it tough love," Bud answered in a bitter tone.

"Well he said he knocked us around to make us tougher," Bud said before he took another swig of his beer.

They three talked well into the night and eventually fell asleep on the couches. That's where Sarah found them the next morning.

On Friday AJ was at his desk when SECNAV Nelson called him. Nelson told him that he and the President had a good laugh speaking about the incident and Ann Marie's dressing down of AJ. Both the President and the SECNAV agreed that the incident was better left forgotten as long as the damages were paid for. AJ was happy for that.

John, Bud and Harm had Friday off and they went to find Big Bud. They were dismayed to find that Mike had a shiner courtesy of his father's 'heavy hand'. John and Harm ripped him a new one for that as well as starting the fight and running away to let his son and his friends face the consequences. Bud finished with the admonishment to his father to keep his mouth shut and his hands to himself for the rest of the weekend, or not bother coming to the wedding. Big Bud showed up at the rehearsal and the dinner somewhat subdued. John, Harm and AJ watched him carefully to keep him on his best behavior.

On Saturday the wedding ceremony went well. Bud & Harriet came out from the church to go through the gauntlet of raised swords. Harm, as Best Man led the call, "For the first time in public, presenting Lieutenant and Mrs. Bud J. Roberts."

Everyone laughed heartily as Harm whacked Harriet's six with his sword saying, "Go Navy."

Lt. Commander Carolyn Imes surprised everyone on the receiving line as she came up to the wedding couple saying, "Everyone gets to kiss the bride. Well here's one for the groom". She gave Bud a long and deep kiss.

"Red light Commander," said an incredulous but still sporting Harriet.

The reception at the Army Navy Club was another smooth affair as everyone had the best time. Even Mic enjoyed his date.

Toward the end of the reception John and Sarah found a quiet corner and sat enjoying cups of ginger ale. John never drank alcohol when he was out with Sarah. John also wore his dress whites resplendent in his new Captain's Bars. He was jumped up another pay grade right the previous week due to his position.

"Penny for your thoughts guv'nur" said Sarah in that 'cockney' accent.

John looked her sideways. "You know since ours will be an evening affair, I think I'll wear my mess dress uniform. What do you think Mac?"

Sarah let him call her Mac in private because she liked it. He sometimes slipped and called her that in the heat of passion and when she heard him say it now, it brought her right to that passionate place.

"I think that'd be great 'hot stuff'" she said saucily. They shared a kiss then got up to say goodnight to the bride and groom. They gathered his parents and Ann Marie & Pete and headed home.
Sunday & Monday

Memorial Day Weekend – 1998

John & Sarah's House

Florida Ave., NW

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

The Memorial Day Weekend passed peaceably after Bud & Harriet's wedding. John's parents decided to stay the weekend into Tuesday. Ann Marie and Pete set up Andy's crib in their room so they could settle in DC. Peter's firm opened an office in DC and they were looking for a house of their own in the DC Area and they would be staying at John and Sarah's in the interim. John and Sarah were glad to have them. Sarah even suggested that they set up Ann Marie's room into a full time nursery and they move into the guest room. Setting up the room as a nursery would be nice for her and Pete, but also good for Andy. Sarah also thought that it would also be practical for her and John. Since Sarah was engaged, she privately confided in Ann Marie that she wanted a Honeymoon baby. Ann Marie agreed to keep her plan a secret.

Sunday was spent going to church and generally relaxing in the patio out back, watching baseball. Monday was spent at Harm & Diane's house as they had a barbecue. Despite Harm's penchant for vegetables, he was quite good at barbecuing steak. He just cooked his vegetarian shish kabob alongside as Diane checked the steak.

Diane loved how James Marshall played and cared for Sarah Cate and Andy without any help. He so loved being a grandfather. Maureen saw how close Harm and John became and they were each married or going to be married to one of the Mackenzie sisters. Since Diane's adopted parents were dead and her real parents estranged and unknown, Maureen asked if she and James could be surrogate grandparents. Diane loved it. So Maureen promised to include Harm, Diane & Sarah Cate in their lists for Christmas.

Tuesday, May 26, 1998

0900 - 1400 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Since James & Maureen were going back to New York on Tuesday afternoon after John gave them a tour of the unclassified part of NCIS. John introduced his parents to Abby, Carolyn & Admiral Magnum. Admiral Magnum treated them and Diane to lunch with his wife Maggie before John brought them to the airport.

At JAG Sarah had just settled into her office after lunch when Harm came rushing in. As she and Harm came through the bullpen after lunch a young Ensign named Loren Singer, who was on duty filling in for Harriet, handed him a special delivery envelope that arrived while he was out. It had no return address. When he opened it he rushed right into Sarah's office.

The envelope contained a photo with a note saying, 'This is real'. The photo was labeled on the back
as taken in 1980. It showed a group of seven men. Five men were in uniform, obviously Russian. The other two were in civilian dress in overcoats, hats and such. One civilian was on the extreme left of the group photo. He had a mustache and wore a Fedora hat and a shabby overcoat. His face bore the signs of hardship and deprivation.

Sarah took the photo and examined it. She went back to Harm's office and pulled down the photo of Harm Sr. showing a 5 year old Harm Jr. his Phantom Jet cockpit. The father/son photo showed Harm Sr. in profile, but when placed side by side with the other, one could be certain that the two men were one and the same.

"We gotta call John. I think this is Parlovsky's proof." He pointed to the civilian with the mustache. "The photo quality isn't so good, but that's my father. There's no mistaking him."

Without checking her watch Sarah said, "John's parents are at NCIS before they go home. John called me to tell me Admiral Magnum is treating them and Diane to lunch with Maggie. Let's bring this to our admiral and call Webb in the meantime.

Harm agreed with her. Sarah called Webb and asked him to meet her and Harm at JAG. Then they marched across the bullpen to AJ's office. They brought the other photo with them.

"It certainly looks like him," said AJ as he perused the both photos side by side. Webb arrived shortly after. He took one look and said, "The other civilian is Victor Lushov, a KGB Interrogator."

"Is he alive? Where is he? Can we talk to him?" asked Harm in quick succession.

"Sure you can talk to him. He lives under the alias of Sam Louis. He works as an engineer consultant for Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego," said Webb.

Harm just stared incredulously.

"Well major, you'd better get to your fiancé. It looks like you all better plan on going to Russia very soon." said AJ

Tuesday, May 26, 1998
1430 Local Time
NCIS Headquarters
Navy Yard, Washington, DC
Just as Admiral Magnum paid the check, John's cell phone rang. The lunch party only heard his side:

"Harm & Webb are certain of the two men in the photo?"

"Ok, Diane and I will meet you at my office after I drop Mom and Dad at National."

"I love you to."

When John ended the call he looked at Magnum & Diane, "our friend Misha sent his proof," was all he said.

"Uh huh" was all they said. Magnum said, "Come back to the office after you drop your Mom and Dad off. Maureen & James, it was a pleasure to meet you. We're very proud of John and the work he's doing. He is a credit to both of you."
James said, "Thank you admiral. I could hear from John's tone that he has to attend to urgent business. We'll catch a cab from here to the airport. We only have one bag each and they're both on wheels."

Before anyone could say anything else Maggie spoke up, "I can drop you off at the airport. I came in my own car"

John looked to his parents and asked Maggie, "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Nonsense, I have nothing urgent to take care of this afternoon," replied Maggie.

"Okay thank you Mrs. Magnum."

"John, if you call me Mrs. Magnum again I'm going to slug you. You only work for my husband not for me, please call me Maggie," she insisted.

John acquiesced to her order, saying, "Never argue with the boss' wife. Thank you Maggie."

Maureen & James accepted the hospitality. The admiral kissed his wife goodbye and he got his car and drove back to NCIS. John and Diane said goodbye to them as they waited for the valet to bring Maggie's car around. When they left, they got into John's car and drove back to NCIS.

Diane and John went directly to his office. Sarah, Webb & Harm were waiting for him in the conference room with Carolyn, Gibbs, Kate and Tony. They had all seen the photo.

After John saw the photo he sent it to Abby to verify its authenticity. Then they discussed their next plans.

Harm call your mom. We promised her we'd keep her up to date if we had anything concrete. Tell her you and I will be out for a visit within the week. If you want to keep your flying qualifications up, I'll sit RIO. I've been working with Diane's old Supervisor Captain Tarkington on that. His wife Rita has taken me up a few times. Then while we're out there, we'll go find 'Mr. Louis' at Consolidated Aircraft. Webb start the ball rolling on our travel plans. We'll decide when we're going to Russia as soon as Harm and I come back from California."

Wednesday, May 28, 1998

1400 Local Time

Burnet Residence,

La Jolla, CA

As Harm and John went through the house and out to the patio in the back, Harm called out, "What does a son have to do to get a drink around here? The sun's already over the yardarm."

Trish Burnett turned at the sound of his voice. "Harm darling and John. We weren't expecting you for another hour." She gave each man a tight squeeze and kisses on their cheeks.

"You're getting younger and younger every time I see you. We caught a tailwind," said Harm.

"Tailwind my butt, you had it redlined all the way from Colorado," said John.

"Boys will be boys," laughed Frank from behind them. He shook both their hands. "Good to see you both."
"How are you doing Frank?" Harm asked him.

"I'm just trying to keep up with your mother," Frank said.

He had brought out drinks for all. He offered a quick toast "to good friends" as they all clinked their glasses.

"How's the gallery going mom?" asked Harm.

"Fabulous, it seems that I'm supporting every starving artist from here to Ventura." Trish said in semi exasperation.

She changed her tone as she said, "John I'm so glad to hear Ann Marie had the baby. I bought a gift for Andy. Please don't let me forget to give to you before you leave," Trish offered.

"Thanks Trish," John replied.

"Harm, you said on the phone that you had some news. Is it related to the POW Book?" asked Trish.

John motioned Harm to continue, "Mom John is the head of a Presidential Commission investigating the information in that book. It's not public knowledge that there is a list or a commission. If we told more people than we have there would be too much publicity and we would never know the truth. We have spread the names around only to officials in Russia and our government only by doing that we knew it would not get lost.

We caught on ex KGB colonel trying to retrieve documents that stated when and where prisoners were placed in Russia. The documents did not name names though. The man we took them from said they were fake. We sent him back to Russia to get us real proof. Two days ago I received this photo."

Harm pulled the picture of his father in Siberia from his leather jacket pocket and gave it to Trish.

"It's him mom. The back is dated 1980. In a place called Vorkuta in Siberia," said Harm.

Trish started trembling and then she turned and went into the house without saying a word. John sat back in his chair as Harm told his narrative. He assumed his listening position of slouching in the chair. He got up to go to Harm & Frank.

Frank said, "Harm no matter how close Trish and I have become, the ghost of your father has always been between us. She needs closure you need closure. What are you two planning to do?"

John spoke up. "As soon as we can arrange it we are going to Russia. We haven't determined when just yet."

"Well when you do I would like to help. When you get to Russia, get a hold of Hugh Blackadder. I going to have him make available to you any funds you'll need."

"Frank you don't have to do that," Harm said.

"Your right, but I want to. I know you never thought of me as a substitute for your father, but you have been like a son to me. I need to do this. Let me help."

"Harm take it." John said simply. Harm nodded and shook Frank's hand.

Trish came back out to the patio. "Harm you haven't heard this tape. It was among your father's personal effects that were returned to me after he was shot down. Basically it told me to go on with
my life, saying that you needed a father. Please, Harm listen to this. Then go to Russia and end it." She hugged him very tightly. She then turned to John and whispered in his ear, "Please keep him safe" then she hugged him just a tightly.

Thursday, May 29, 1998

1730 Local Time

Consolidated Aircraft Parking Lot

San Diego, CA

John stayed in the car, but he had convinced Harm to have a tape recorder going in his coat.

Harm walked up to an elderly man who sported a beard cut in the Russian style. "Major Victor Lushov."

The man turned and he was totally shocked by what he saw. "Harmon?"

"No I'm his son."

They nervously shook hands then went to sit on a bench.

"What can you tell me about my father?"

"I interviewed Harmon for the first time in spring 1970 in Hanoi. He was flying what you call 'iron hand'. He was very effective. We had to know. He told me that he had shot down three missiles. Then one exploded near him and shrapnel damaged his plane and he crashed."

"The 'golden beebe," said Harm.

"Yes that is what he said. In fact he told me everything."

"No I won't believe it!" Harm exclaimed.

"It's true!" exclaimed Lushov in return. "But what he told me was false or disinformation. When the KGB determined that he was of no use, they wanted to dispose of him. Despite that we became friends we talked about flying, our families and so on. He always wanted me to get information out to you and Trish."

"Why didn't you?" cried Harm.

"I wanted to live. I convinced them to transfer him to a gulag near Vorkuta in Siberia in the summer of 1972. In 1980 he was badly injured in a mining accident, we treated his injuries we became friends. I saved his life. The KGB thought he was of no more use to us but I convinced them that he could be of use to us in the future. So they transferred to a gulag near Berloyka also in Siberia. That was in 1980. That photo was taken just before he was put on the train to Berloyka. I did not hear about him anymore after that."

Harm was feeling a mixture of grief and doubt. "How can I believe anything you're telling me?"

Lushov took out a pen and pad and wrote a number. "Here use this number this will tell you anything you need to know." He gave Harm the slip.

"S394652, what is it?" asked Harm.
"His KGB Prisoner File number" answered Lushov.

Harm was speechless. Before Lushov got up he thanked Harm. "Why?" asked Harm.

"You have relieved the guilt I have held all these years of not telling you and your mother sooner." Lushov said before he walked away.

Harm waited some time before he got up and joined John in the car.

Saturday, May 30 1998

1730 - 1945 Local Time

National Airport

Washington, DC

Florida Ave, NW

Harm and John walked out of the jet way and saw double. Sarah and Diane were waiting for their men. Diane was wearing her Navy uniform & Sarah her Marine uniform. Each woman rushed into her man's arms and gave them each deep affectionate kisses.

John cupped Sarah's face in his hands. "Hey 'Mac', miss me?" he said with love.

"Yes I did 'hot stuff'. I find that I can't sleep without you," said Sarah back also with love.

"Where's Sarah?" Harm asked Diane.

"She's with Ann Marie and Andy at Sarah & John's" replied Diane.

"Ann Marie's got the mothering stuff down pretty well, huh," said John.

"Yeah she does. She's peppering me with questions." Diane said with a smile.

They all went to the baggage claim to retrieve John and Harm's luggage and they went out and piled into the Rabb's minivan and drove to Florida Avenue. When they arrived there John gave Ann Marie Trish's gift.

Ann Marie opened that bag and saw the big panda bear. When she opened the envelope, her jaw hit the ground. "Harm this check is for $1,000.00. Your mom is very generous, but this is too much."

Harm replied, "Mom said that she thought you'd say that. She said she only wants to hear thank you when you call her. She would like to think that you're part of the family, since we'll be related when John and Sarah get married. She wants more grandchildren to spoil when she visits DC."

Ann Marie went to kiss his cheek, "Well then that's for her when you see her again."

At that John asked, "So listen does anyone have an idea for dinner?"

"Well Harm and I are going home to get some rest." Diane said as she and Harm walked out with Sarah Cate.

"And Pete and I are gonna stay home tonight, so you and Sarah are on your own. I mean you can stay home with us and relax." Ann Marie offered.
"Well I'm still wired from the flight and I'm in the mood for a good steak dinner. Would my fiancé be amiable for a trip to Bobby Vans?" John asked.

"Yes she would. You take a shower and change. I'll be ready when you finish." Sarah said giving him a brief kiss.

"Have a good time you two." Ann Marie said as Sarah and John went upstairs.

After John took his shower he changed into tan slacks, a light green three button polo shirt and his favorite white suit jacket. He clipped his weapon to his belt at his right hip and put his shield/identification case in the left inside jacket pocket.

Sarah was waiting for him downstairs. She was wearing a cream white skirt, a pink tee shirt and her own light tan jacket and 4 inch stiletto pumps. Her tee shirt was clinging to her slim form accentuating all her curvy attributes. John also liked how the pumps accentuated her calves.

As John came down stairs and entered the living room, she was waiting for him. He took her by her hips and pulled her to him. As he laid a good kiss on her she felt his arousal against her belly. She smiled into his kiss and said, "I like that I can do that to you every time."

John held her away from him and took a deep breath to calm himself. He whispered into her ear, "You do that to me whenever I think of you."

She laughed and walked away from him completely satisfied with herself. They went out to his car.

He was driving his Camaro. His position called for him to have a 'company car' and they provided him with a Crown Victoria, but he decided to leave it home. His Caprice was totaled out from the accident on New Year's Eve and he took his payment from the insurance company.

When they pulled up to Bobby Vans the doorman opened Sarah's door and politely assisted her out. She went to wait for John by the restaurant entrance. John left the car keys with the valet parker and walked around to the sidewalk buttoning his coat. As he stepped onto the curb he noticed a man approaching him from his right. He was about 30 feet away from John as he reached both hands behind his back. It was the movement of the hands that alerted John.

John turned toward him and went for his weapon. He managed to clear it from his holster, but he was a shade too slow. The man brought a gun up in front of him and holding it in the combat stance, fired three times. One slug hit John in his left shoulder, while another hit the left side of John's chest. This spun him against his car as his gun slid toward Sarah. As John fell the third slug hit him in his lower back near his spine.

As John fell to the sidewalk he heard two more shots, but they were from a different gun. As he lay on the cement, his head was turned so that he could see under his car. He saw a car skid to a stop on the other side and two feet stagger and get into the car. Then everything turned black.
Chapter 26

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 26

Monday, June 22, 1998

1030 Local Time

George Washington Medical Center

Washington, DC NW

John's first thought was 'This dream world sure was busy.' To him it revolved more slowly than the world had before he went to sleep. There was a lot of random noise, a lot of sudden and unexplained light coming and going. There was movement, jostling, wailing and blaring and long stretches of dark silence. There was an occasional blurred human sound and the smell of chemicals and the feel of his breath and some pain, the thud of his pulse that sometimes enveloped all other sounds. The slow revolutions got slower. The thunder of his pulse quieted. His throat was sore. The light was too bright and it was hot. He knew then he wasn't dead. He sat straight up in his bed. He heard alarms and then he saw a group of people rush into his room pushing a cart with lots of small equipment. He started feeling dizzy and that made him lay back down and close his eyes. He listened as the alarms were silenced and they helped him settle back down in his bed. It was then he realized why his throat was sore. There were tubes in his throat, a feeding tube that went through his nose and a breathing tube that was held between his teeth. There was an IV in the back of his left hand. When he opened his eyes again he looked up and saw a woman in white looking down at him.

"Welcome back", the nurse said.

She was a black woman. Her voice had a Caribbean lilt to it.

He smiled pleasantly or thought he did and said, "Glad to be back", or thought he did.

"You're not coherent yet." she said. "It will take a little while"

It took a couple hours. During which time a resident appeared and took the breathing and feeding tubes out of his throat and nose and put an oxygen canula in his nose. The nurse cranked up his bed so that he could see his yeoman, Carolyn Turner sitting reading a book by Robert B. Parker.

"Where's Sarah?" he managed to rasp out.

"She's at work. We've already called JAG to let her know you woke up," Carolyn said.

"I want to see her."

"She'll be here", Carolyn said.

"Where is here?"

"You're at George Washington Hospital."

"How long have I been out?"
"You've been out over three weeks."

"Three weeks?"

"Yeah you're here under Secret Service & NCIS guard. The President ordered maximum protection. It seemed the prudent thing to do since Ann Marie is on the White House Staff. Admiral Magnum and the Secret Service Director set up a detail including Kate, Gibbs, Tony and other Secret Service agents from the Presidential Detail. Also, Sarah, Ann Marie, Diane, Kate and I have been sitting here in shifts for the whole time. It was the only way we could be sure that Sarah and Ann Marie got the rest they needed."

That was too much information to process and John had to beg off any further discussion. He closed his eyes for what he thought was a moment.

1345 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah was notified of John's awakening while she was in court in front of Admiral Morris. She and Harm were defending CPO Anthony Sevalis, an electronics expert, for allegedly assaulting a prostitute. The prosecutor was Lt. Commander Mattoni. Tiner came in and handed a note to Morris. Morris read the note and said, "Both counsels please approach."

When Mattoni, Sarah and Harm approached, Morris said, "Major Mackenzie I have some good news from George Washington Hospital." Harm reached for and held her hand. "John has come out of his coma."

Sarah almost collapsed with relief but Harm and Mattoni were there to support her. Morris smiled as he continued, "I'm going to declare a recess until tomorrow morning at 0900."

"Thank you sir," Sarah said choking back a sob. The three attorneys walked back to their tables and waited only long enough for Morris to bang his gavel declaring the recess. Sarah almost raced out of the room. Harm drove her to the hospital.

When she arrived she saw Ann Marie and Carolyn waiting outside John's room. Ann Marie told her, "He fell back to sleep again. Don't worry the doctors said that he will do that on and off for the next couple of days. He has lost a lot of his strength due to the coma. Now that he's come out of that he can build that back up."

Sarah drew Ann Marie then Carolyn each into a fierce hug. She spoke to John's doctor to get a better understanding of his prognosis. Then she went in, took off her uniform tunic, sat and waited for John to wake up.

When John opened his eyes he saw Sarah sitting in the dark. He put his right arm out to her and without a word she bent over and kissed him. He held her against him as hard as he could, which wasn't very hard. He smelled her perfume, the scent of her soap and shampoo and the scent of her.

He felt that the air going into his lungs was fresh and plentiful. He felt himself starting to shake as he was wracked with quiet sobs. Sarah kicked off her pumps, adjusted herself till she was fully on the bed and snuggled up against him, held him tighter and let him cry it out.

"It's alright. I'm here. You don't have to be afraid now. It's all over. I love you." She kissed his cheek and whispered the last three words in his ear a few times until he calmed down.

After a while his sobs subsided and he lay quiet. They stayed that way for a long time with her face
against his, his arm weakly around her as Sarah stroked his cheek and hair. He loved the feel of her
breath on his face.

Hearing the heart monitor alarms go haywire the nurse went to the door and peeked in. She saw
Sarah lying on the bed as she comforted John through his emotional episode. She quietly let the door
close.

She saw Harm, Ann Marie and Carolyn get up in distress. She told them, "It's alright John just
needed to vent some. Sarah is getting him through it. Let's give them some time alone." The three
friends agreed as they sat back down in the waiting area.

After a while Sarah sat up slowly, carefully took his arm and putting it back down on the top of the
sheet and kept one hand on top of it, took a tissue and gently wiped the tears from his face with the
other.

John grinned up at her. "It's good to see you"

She patted his hand quietly as she wiped at her own tears.

"How am I really?" John asked.

"You're going to live"

"I don't have much feeling in my right leg or left arm."

"The doctor said to expect that", Sarah said.

"For how long?"

"I don't think he knows", Sarah said.

John nodded, which brought on a wave of dizziness and he closed his eyes for a moment.

Sarah sat back down and watched him sleep. She reached into her pocketbook and brought out the
Rosary Beads that she carried. She thought of the first few days after the shooting.

(Flashback)
That Friday night after John had survived 6 hours of surgery, Sarah went back to Florida Avenue
and slept all day Saturday into Sunday morning. Ann Marie had stayed home to be there for Sarah.
The protection detail was set up and she needed her rest to.

Sarah had gotten up Sunday morning and gone to church with Ann Marie and then they had spent
the rest of the day at the hospital. They left and went home after Kate had relieved them that evening.

On Monday Sarah went to work at JAG but when Admiral Chegwidden saw her at Staff Call and
the precarious emotional state she was in he called her into his office.

He started off gently, "Mac, please sit down." He leaned back onto his desk and waited till she was
settled before he began. "You know you don't need to be here." Sarah opened her mouth to protest
but AJ cut her off gently saying, "I know you feel that you want to accomplish something but there
are no cases pending for you today and you need to process what's happened to John. Take the rest
of today and tomorrow off. Come in on Wednesday and we'll go from there."

Sarah saw the wisdom of his plan. She stood up and acknowledged him with an, "Aye, aye sir and
thank you for understanding."
"You're welcome Sarah." AJ said. As soon as she heard him using her given name she just lost it as she started to cry. AJ opened his arms for her. She cried for a short time in his embrace then she pulled away. He gave her a tissue to wipe her tears.

"Thank you sir, I'm sorry for that display." Sarah said as she wiped her eyes.

"It's okay major. Go now before we both embarrass ourselves." AJ said gently.

Sarah smiled as she stood at attention saying a very military "Aye, Aye sir" before she turned and walked out the door. She got her things and went right to the hospital. After spending all day at the hospital she went to be alone to think some things out.

1745 Local Time

John's room

George Washington Hospital

Harm went to the hospital after he left JAG. When he arrived, he didn't see his sister-in-law and asked, "Where's Sarah?"

Carolyn replied, "Mac was here all day until I came at 1500. She was in uniform. She left after we spoke a bit but she didn't tell me where she was going. I just assumed she was going home."

After he visited for a while longer Harm left and went to John's house to see if Sarah was all right. He didn't find her there. He called Diane at home asking, "Did I just missed Sarah at the hospital. She's not at home. I'm starting to get worried about her. Did she go there?"

"No sweetie, she's not here. Let me know if you find her though, I'm worried to," Diane replied.

Diane was so worried that Sarah being in her precarious emotional state, would fall off the wagon and go on an alcoholic binge.

After she hung up she raised her eyes to heaven and said a short prayer, "O Lord please help my sister and future brother-in-law. He needs to get well so he can have a life with her and she's worked so hard to stay sober. Please don't let her fall."

Harm then went to McMurphy's and still he didn't find her. He didn't know where else to go so he went back to Navy Yard and the office to see if Sarah left word where she might be. The duty officer a young ensign named Yvonne Morris told him, "Commander Rabb, Major Mackenzie was here for a time. She got a Firearms Qualification Form. She said that she was going to the Quantico Range. She said that she felt the need to shoot something."

Harm left the building and went to the Marine Base.

1830 Local

Quantico Officers' Club

Sarah sat rigidly at a table, a drink in front of her. She was there for two hours already and the drink had not yet been touched. Her eyes fixated off in space, hands folded around the warming drink. The other occupants of the bar left her alone after the Marine Major had rebuffed all advances of the single officers to engage her in flirting and conversation. She turned her cell phone to vibrate and left it in her purse, which was draped over the back of the chair. She went to the base still in her uniform that she wore at work intending to change into the BDUs that she kept in her ready bag when she got
there. But when she got there she found that the range was closed for maintenance. So she went to the O-Club to get some dinner. When she got there she thought that what she really needed was a drink. So she ordered one and sat at a back table just looking at it.

After not finding Sarah at the range Harm called Diane and told her, "She's not here either. She's been missing for almost 2&½ hours. I don't know where to go next."

She said, "Listen it's late. You're at Quantico right?"

Harm said, "Yeah so."

Diane continued, "It's a half hour ride home from there. Why don't you grab a bite to at the O-Club. We're only having leftovers tonight. If Sarah calls here I'll let you know. Remember Harm she is a grown woman and you know as well as I do that she is quite capable of taking care of herself. She probably felt the need for some alone time. Despite that I'm still worried about her. If you do find her before you eat, bring her here for dinner."

Hearing her go into command mode Harm acknowledged Diane's request/order as he went to the O-Club intending to get a sandwich. Heck even a beer appealed to him, he was technically off-duty. He was a little ticked with his sister-in-law too, as he just spent the last ninety minutes in and out of traffic from DC to Quantico looking for her. When he pulled into the O-Club's parking lot he saw Sarah's Corvette. He went in with a sigh of relief.

Walking up to the bar, he was about to ask the bartender if he saw his sister-in-law.

Before he could ask though he heard a Marine Captain a few seats over from him comment, "Damn, she's beautiful."

"Yes, but if that diamond on her finger isn't a 'Do Not Disturb' sign, and then I don't know what is", his companion another Captain commented.

"Besides," the first one commented, "She's out of my class. She has oak leaves, but I didn't catch silver or gold."

Harm turned his head to the subject the two of them were discussing.

"Shit, damn, hell!" He said out loud, drawing the attention of the two Marines.

"Yes, Sir, that's what we thought when we saw the oak leaves." The Marines were somewhat friendly to the Navy Lt. Commander.

Harm mostly ignored them. He told the barkeep, "I want to send a drink to the lady major."

"She's not accepting drinks tonight, Sir." The barkeep replied.

"What is that drink in front of her?" Harm asked, with his heart pounding.

"It's a vodka tonic." The Bartender replied. "She's been the recipient of at least 10 other drinks in the last 2 hours, but she's turned all of them away."

"Two hours?" Harm inquired.

"Yes, Sir, she's been here quite some time, getting a lot of attention too."

"Set me up with an ice water. Send her tonic water with a twist of lime, light on the ice. Please make sure she knows what is in the drink." He ordered. "When you serve it, tell her that is from 'Flyboy'."
"And if she refuses?" the Barkeeper insisted.

"She won't." Harm said as he paid for Sarah's drink.

The marines to his side immediately placed a friendly bet that she would refuse the drink.

A few moments later, the bartender set Harm's water next to him. Harm turned to watch the waitress serve the tonic and lime to Sarah.

Sarah did not look up as the waitress approached yet again. "Ma'am, Flyboy bought this for you. It's tonic water with a twist of lime."

Sarah nodded an acknowledgement. "Leave it please." She ordered.

The waitress set the fresh drink down and asked, "May I take this other one?"

"Not yet. Um, could you do me a favor?" Sarah requested.

The waitress made her way over to Harm. "The Major said that you could join her, if you knew her nickname."

Harm picked up his glass of ice water. Leaning forward, he whispered the nickname in her ear. "It's 'Ninja Girl'."

The waitress smiled broadly. "That would be correct, Sir. Enjoy your evening."

Harm made his way over to Sarah and sat in the chair beside her.

"This isn't good, Marine," he observed.

"That's an astute observation, Navy." She shot back, still looking at the drink.

He placed his hand on her back, right over the shoulder blade, caressing gently.

"What can I do to help?" he asked.

"I think I need to get out of here, but I really, really want to drink this vodka tonic." Sarah answered.

"You walking out of here on your own power, or do I have to carry you?" Harm demanded urging her to go.

"I'm walking, under my own power, thank you." Sarah rudely replied.

Harm dropped his hand from her shoulder and stood up. "Well, then Marine get your ass in gear."

She let go of the drink and started to scoot back.

"Harm, I can't." she paused. "I need that drink."

Harm leaned down to her ear, whispering, "John wouldn't want you to do this."

That got her. She looked up at him in despair.

Harm hesitated, just a second, and then plunged ahead. "Is that what's bothering you?"

"I'm so afraid of losing him." Sarah said almost crying.
"Want to talk about it?" Harm asked.

"Not here." She said.

"Then where?" He pushed.

"At our house, the one I want to share with my husband," Sarah said as her eyes welled up as her tears threatened to fall.

He held out his hand, for her to take. "C'mon then." he offered.

Sarah grasped his hand and rose from her chair. "Get me out of here."

Harm pivoted them towards the front door, and wrapped a protective arm across her back.

"March." He ordered.

She sighed as they made their way out to the parking lot. "That undercover gunnery sergeant gig made you think you are some kind of marine."

Once out to their cars, he asked, "Are you hungry?"

"Not especially." She replied.

"Well you have to eat something. I know you want to go home but come back to my house and be with Diane and me. You shouldn't be alone tonight."

Sarah replied, "Harm it's alright, Ann Marie will be there and..."

Harm interrupted her telling her, "When I left her at the hospital, she said that she needed to stop at the White House to catch up on some work. You need to eat something and you need to be with your sister. She's very worried about you. If I don't show up at home with you, she'll put me in intensive care next to your fiancé."

That made Sarah smile as she said, "Okay I'll follow you home but I want to sleep in my bed tonight. I have this overwhelming desire to put on one of his tee shirts, crawl into bed and smell his cologne on the sheets."

Harm agreed as they left for Fairfax. When Harm got into his car, he phoned home and told Diane that Sarah was following him home.

30 minutes later Diane met them at the door and she drew her sister into a tight embrace. Sarah sat and played with her goddaughter while Diane made dinner. While Diane was in the kitchen she called Ann Marie to let her know that Sarah was having dinner there. After dinner Sarah left for home. When she got home Ann Marie met her and she embraced her to.

Ann Marie admonished her, "You know you don't have to go through this alone. You have a lot of people who love you and as well as John. Don't be afraid or too proud to let us help you."

Sarah thanked her with another hug and her watery smile. They sat in the living room and talked until they were both nodding their heads with exhaustion, then they went to bed.

(Flashback)

Tuesday, June 2, 1997
Sarah got up the next day and went straight to the hospital. John's parents met her there.

Sarah said to John's father, "I'm so scared for him. He's the first man I ever truly loved. God I wish I had a drink." Sarah said this as she remembered the night before.

That's when he pulled out the set of Rosary Beads and gave it to her. "John told me about when you were growing up. Take these. They were John's Grandmother Winnie's, my mother-in-law's. Whenever you feel like having a drink, just hold on to them. I know they'll help. Winnie was a good woman and John was her favorite grandson. I'm sure she would have loved for you to have them, they helped me when my father was sick."

Sarah reached for him and he enveloped her in a tight hug as she had a good cry. 'Now I know where he got his compassion from,' she thought to herself.

"I know, we all love him", said James.

After that Sarah and Ann Marie knew John wouldn't want them to sit and waste their days watching him sleep so they went to work. They made it a routine to meet up at the White House after the business day to go and see him every weekday until it was late. When they left, Carolyn or Kate relieved them to stay into the night. Diane would come during the afternoons. So during the time John was in the coma, Sarah changed her daily routine. Before the shooting she regularly went to mass with John every week. During the whole time John was in the hospital she got up early every day to go to 7:00 AM mass at St. Thomas, Apostle before she went to work.

One evening she was sitting at John's bedside when Kate came in. She saw Sarah just holding the beads. Kate, who also was Catholic, asked Sarah if she's like to pray a cycle. Sarah didn't quite understand. She forgot so much of her Catholic upbringing that she didn't know how to pray the rosary. Kate gave her an extra instruction card she had with her set. Then she pulled up a chair next to Sarah and they began to pray. After that Sarah took her lunch hour every day at the Navy Yard's Chapel, just up the street from the JAG office, to pray a whole cycle. Some days, when she wasn't working a case, Kate would come over from NCIS Headquarters to join her.

Sarah confided in AJ and Harriet about her lunchtime routine. AJ had Harriet arrange Sarah's schedule so that she had that hour every day to give her the privacy she needed. Harriet also made sure that Sarah had something to eat after she returned from the chapel.

Harm was also a rock for her. Whenever he wasn't busy in court or out of the office on a case he joined her and sat quietly with her as she prayed then took her to lunch. AJ sent other junior attorneys with Harm for the out of town assignments keeping Sarah in town to handle the local cases.

Sarah clung tenaciously to her faith for without that and the support of her friends and family, she knew she would have fallen back into the bottle.

Now she prayed in thanks as she waited for John to open his eyes again.

For the rest of the afternoon and evening, John slept on and off. Harm, Ann Marie & Carolyn all set up camp in the room and talked amongst them or with him when he was awake.

As the sun set outside Sarah saw that John was really getting tired. She got up and said to him, "It's getting late. Diane and Sarah Cate are meeting us at our house for dinner."

As she went to give John a kiss good night, he reached for her and held her to him for a deeper kiss.

When Sarah stood up she cupped his cheek and looked tenderly down at John as he said, "I've wanted to do that since I woke up. I glad you didn't slap me or report me for conduct unbecoming."
Sarah smiled as she remembered the time they first met Diane at the Rabbs. She said, "I've wanted you to do that myself."

As she bent again to kiss his forehead, John said, "Good night ninja girl. I love you."

"I love you to hot stuff. Good night, I'll see you tomorrow afternoon after work."

John nodded wearily as he closed his eyes and went back to sleep.

Harm, Ann Marie & Carolyn smiled at the tenderly funny scene. Sarah and the rest slipped quietly out of the room. They all knew then that John would be all right as he was back to cracking jokes.

Tuesday, June 23, 1998

George Washington Medical Center
Washington, DC NW

The next morning when John opened his eyes he wished that he hadn't. The sun was too bright against the far wall. Gibbs was there. There was also a man that was very familiar to John standing reading his chart. He had a stethoscope hanging around his neck. He wore a white lab coat with a crisp white shirt and yellow tie with a blue pattern. It was Petty Officer 1st Class Matt Franklyn the SEAL Team 3 Medic.

"What are you doing here Matt? Last time I saw you we were in Saudi Arabia when our Blackhawk crashed", John said.

"That was 7 years ago. I'm the surgeon who put you back together."

That brought John's eyebrows right up.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Like I've been shot on the street"

"Makes sense", he said. "Feel like talking?"

"I feel more like listening", John said.

"Okay", Franklyn said. "If the man who shot you had used bigger bullets you'd be dead."

What did he use?

"Twenty-two longs, the same kind Hinckley used on Reagan. And you were lucky. The bullet that hit you in the chest just missed your heart. It seems that it was deflected by this."

He put John's ID Case down on the over-the-bed table. It had a hole in the outer flap at the badge holder. The hole there was through the edge of the badge. The bullet path line continued through to the back flap.

"It seems that the case combined with the badge deflected the bullet enough away from your heart to penetrate the outer edge of your left lung. Also a lot of the bullet's energy was absorbed by the shield and case. It did minimal damage to your lung, again similar to Reagan's wound.

Also Sarah was right there with you. She managed to staunch a lot of the bleeding. You were very close to here. When the paramedics arrived you had no pulse, and they got you started on the way to
"Right now I don't feel very strong"

"Right now you're not", said Franklyn. "You're going to need a lot of rehab. Can you move your left arm?"

John could only manage a twitch

"Right leg?"

There was only another twitch.

"How technical do you want this?"

"Eventually I want it all", John said. "But right now all I want is prognosis."

"I don't really know", Franklyn said. "I'm a good surgeon and the repair job I did on you was first rate. You were damn near shot to pieces. The bullet in your back fractionally missed your spine. That caused swelling around your spine. Thus constricting blood flow to the nerves located there. The bullet in your shoulder nicked the brachial artery, thus inhibiting the blood flow to that nerve. Because there was blood loss, some nerve endings deteriorated. It's exactly like when you have a stroke. Blood loss or constriction damages nerve cells.

I can make some informed guesses, which is mostly what prognosis is anyway. Your body has to learn how to send the signals to those nerves that were damaged. Because you still have feeling in your leg and arm, shows there is no paralysis, just general weakness. I think if you're willing to work hard enough you can come back from this. I don't know how far. It is probably a matter of how hard you work.

"I can work pretty hard." John said.

"I know that. I've seen you do it. Once you're able to get up, we'll start you on simple exercises with a trainer. It will be a long slow process."

"How soon?" John asked.

"Don't know. We'll watch you. We'll get you started as early as possible."

"I'm in kind of a rush. I need to find some people and I'm getting married in October", John declared.

"Let me tell you, you're pretty battered and the amount of anesthesia you've had is very debilitating. Mr. Gibbs, do you wish to say something?"

"Yeah", Gibbs said.

Gibbs stood and stepped to John's bedside.

"Do you know who shot you?"

"No but I can identify him. He seemed familiar to me."

Gibbs held up a set of photos on a single sheet of paper. "Is his photo here?"

John scanned and stopped at one photo. "That's him!" John declared putting his finger on the photo
"That's what we thought too. You see Sarah put two in the perp as he tried to run away. He was at Georgetown Hospital ER. He took bullets in his right arm and shoulder. The ballistics matched your weapon. He was a D.C. Metro Police Lieutenant named Coster.

John interrupted, "Wait a minute I know that name. I can't think from where, but go on."

"Harm knew him from when Roscoe Martin stabbed that Vietnamese prison guard. Coster was the one who came to JAG and caught the complaint. It seems that he's been stalking Sarah since then. Did she ever tell you of the phone calls she was getting at her apartment before she moved in with you?"

John shook his head no. "She never mentioned them. How did you figure that he was stalking her?"

"When we went to search his house they found in his basement that the walls were covered with hundreds of photos of Sarah and you, time stamped from right after he was at JAG with that complaint. They also found a log detailing your movements for the past 6 months. He wrote love letters and plans detailing what they were going to do once they were 'finally' together. His plans mentioned a cabin in the Appalachians. Tony, Kate and I found it in West Virginia. He had bondage material and a subterranean room set up. He was one sick individual. Sarah has made it her mission to ensure he ends up doing hard time. So far he's pleading insanity, but Admiral Chegwidden doesn't think he'll win that plea. It's too bad that he's a civilian and we can't nail him in a JAG Court."

John had another question. "Could that have been a smoke screen? How do we know that this wasn't a set up to keep us from going to Russia?" John had another question, but his mind still hadn't focused on everything just yet. It was one fact that was right there, seemingly just out of his reach. He knew he would think of it later.

"We weren't sure if your shooting had anything to do with the POW List. Admiral Magnum had McGee going over Coster's home phone and cell phone records. So far there's nothing from anyone with a Russian connection."

John remembered what he wanted to ask. "Just before I blacked out I saw through under my car someone stop and pick up the shooter. At least I thought it was the shooter. He seemed too stagger to the car. Did we get a plate number partial or otherwise?"

"We thought of that to. Sarah did see Coster get into a car after she shot him. But she stayed on the opposite side of your car to attend to you so she wasn't in a position to get the number. We interviewed the other witnesses, such as the valet parker, doorman, patrons etc. None of them got a look at the plate either. They did say it was dark colored big sedan either a Caprice or Crown Victoria."

"So we don't have anything else to go on", said John.

"No you don't have anything to go on. We are still looking. All you need to think about now is getting better", Gibbs said.

"That's all you're going to tell me?" John said.

"Yeah that's all", Gibbs said with his usual sideways grin.

"Thanks Jethro," John said tiredly.

Two days after he woke up, John was moved from intensive care to a private room. Sydney saw him
every day. She was on the G.W. Hospital staff and she took over as his internist. Matt Franklyn gladly handed John off to her seeing that his work was done. She supervised his drug intake to manage his pain and inflammation.

The doctors had scanned him every two days. They told him that the swelling around his wounds was decreasing. As it got less and less, more and more feeling returned to his leg and arm. Sydney's therapy of anti-inflammatory medicine helped there.

It was only a matter of rebuilding the strength in those limbs. He also started going to therapy a week after he woke up. During that first week they manipulated his limbs so that he could start recognizing the new feelings in them. They used electro stimulation and hot and cold therapies. Once he became familiar with those stimulations he progressed faster than they anticipated. He began to move his leg and arm more easily. But he was still very weak, so he had to come and go to therapy by wheelchair.

During his weeks in the coma he lost 40 pounds. He was down to 185 pounds when he started therapy. His muscles atrophied to such an extent that he could not stand on his own. Every time he had to go to therapy, he had to be lifted by two nursing aides out of his bed and transferred to his wheelchair. While in therapy, they had him wear a harness that was buckled around his chest and back and under his arms. Cables were hooked into eyelets in tracks in the ceiling over a treadmill or parallel bars. When he was on the treadmill, it was turned on at a slow walking pace and he had to keep up with the speed of the belt. The parallel bars were easier. He could walk at his own pace.

For his arm he was given lifting and hand manipulating exercises. If he wasn't using his hand to eat or support himself in therapy, he was squeezing a foam rubber ball. He regained enough strength in his arm to hold himself up on the bars, but still not enough to go without the harness.

After he was transferred to the private room, the flowers and get well cards started to come. John really appreciated them and asked the nurses to take the flowers to other patients who would appreciate them more. He and Sarah marveled at the cards that were being stacked on the room's credenza or taped to the walls. There were usual cards from the relatives and the individual cards from the President and the SECNAV as well as each from Admirals Magnum and Chegwidden. Then there were the big ones that were each signed by the JAG Corps Staff and the NCIS Staff. But there were two that really surprised them. One card was signed by all the members of the White House Staff and another by all the members of the White House Press Corps.

His parents came to see him during the second week after he woke up as well as his two brothers. On the weekends Ann Marie took Andy with her. He lit up whenever he saw him. She and Sarah were there every day after work and Sarah was there all day every Saturday & Sunday.

Diane and Harm were in periodically with little Sarah as well as Bud & Harriet. Magnum with Maggie and AJ came to see him that week.

Finally President and Mrs. Bartlett came in to see him. Sarah and Maureen & James were there at the same time. The President shook James's hand, "Jed". "Jim. How's our boy here?" Bartlett asked.

"What are you asking me for? Ask him", Jim answered going into the playful verbal sparring and pointing at John.

Bartlett turned to John and Sarah, "Your father's lucky he isn't a sergeant in the Army anymore. Otherwise I'd have him up for insubordination", Bartlett said with a twinkle in his eye.

"Don't worry sir I'll straighten him out after you leave", John replied in the same good humor.

Bartlett sobered up, "Really how are you doing?"
"Well sir there is no paralysis and that's always best. The loss of feeling in my leg is because of the swelling near the spinal cord and the loss in my arm is because the brachial artery was nicked. It was repaired in time but the nerves were in shock. Now it's just a matter of regaining my strength but it's slow. The farther away I get from the anesthesia the better I'll feel."

"Well I'm sure you'll overcome this setback as you did the last one. By the way you better hurry and get well soon. Your sister is driving us all up the wall at the White House. Whenever anyone says how bad he or she is feeling, all she says is go talk to my brother and let him know. We're not allowed to feel sick around her."

Everyone shared a good chuckle at that.

"I want to see you up and about by Labor Day at least. So get well soon. Abby and I are praying for you."

"Thank you sir," John said.

Sarah asked, "Mr. President there is one more thing."

"Yes Major?" Bartlett said.

"Sir our wedding date is October 24. We would love it if you could be there," she asked.

"Abby and I would be glad to come. What church are you getting married from?" Bartlett asked.

"St. Thomas, Apostle here in DC and we're having the reception at the Willard," Sarah answered.

"Well that shouldn't be a problem. I'll have C.J. arrange my schedule so that I don't have to deal with any issues or crises then. Abby and I will do our best to be there," Bartlett said.

"Thank you sir," Sarah and John said together.

"We'll send the invitation. What's the address? 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, right sir?" Sarah said mischievously.

John, his parents and Abby couldn't hold back the snorts of laughter.

The President just looked at her with a straight face but one could see the twinkle in his eyes. "You've been hanging out too long with Jim here. I can't do anything about him but you I can take care of. Just wait till I see your name on the promotions list young lady." Bartlett said.

"Yes sir, sorry sir," Sarah said contritely but she couldn't keep a straight face and stop from sputtering into laughter. Then the President and everyone else started laughing.

The hilarity subsided only after John started to groan because the laughter was making his wounds ache.

"Well that was rather cathartic. We better leave though or we'll send your fiancé here into a relapse," Bartlett said still chuckling. He gave Sarah a good hug. "Semper Fi' Marine keep up the good work. He really needs you now," he whispered into her ear.

"Thank you sir, I will." She returned.

The President said his goodbyes to John and his parents and left.
Sarah was wheeling John out the front entrance of G.W. in a wheelchair. Not that he wanted it. Harm was walking beside him carrying his belongings. When they came out the front door they saw Ann Marie and Peter with Andy and all his friends from JAG and NCIS waiting there for him. Ann Marie, Diane, Harriet, Kate and Carolyn bent over to kiss his cheeks.

They were standing by a dark blue Chevy Trailblazer.

"Did you rent this for the trip?" John asked.

"No, I traded in the Corvette for this", Sarah said.

John just looked at her astounded. "You loved that car."

"But I love you more. This is more practical for where we're going. I can keep your wheelchair in the back a lot more easily in this than the Corvette. You need all the work you can get. I intend to swing dance with you at our wedding and you need to go to Russia to find Harm's father. We can't do either of those things without you."

"Where are we going?" John asked.

"We are going to a rehab center near Plattsburgh Air Force Base. It's 5 minutes outside the air base and has a beautiful view of Lake Champlain with individual cabins for those patients that want to rehab with their spouse or significant other there. It has swimming as well as physical therapy. The mountains offer a real challenge to running and so on. It's far enough away from Washington to keep out those distractions, but close enough get us back here within a couple of hours by jet if you're needed for the trial. Admiral Chegwidden gave me unlimited leave for your rehab. So I'm going to be there to kick your ass if you slack off."

"Well let's get started then. The sooner I get there, the sooner I can get better. I need a little help climbing up into this thing though", John said as he tried to stand.

To his astonishment Harm and Gibbs were at either side of him. They picked him up by his shoulders and knees and hoisted right into the back seat.

"I didn't need that much help guys", John said. Everyone shared a chuckle. Sarah got behind the wheel. Then Harm got in the passenger side. They waved to everyone and Sarah drove away.

"Where are you going?" John asked Harm with incredulity.

Harm replied, "Sarah can't drive there by herself. It's a 14 hour trip at least and you're in no shape to
drive so who else can go. Diane and Sarah Cate are staying at your house with Pete and Ann Marie. So I know they'll be fine. I'll fly a Hornet that's waiting at Plattsburgh base to be ferried to Anacostia. So just sit back and relax 'Captain'."

"Aye, aye 'Commander'", replied John in mock exasperation. "It figures you would find a way to get a flight out of this."

"Booooys don't make me stop this caaaaaaar", Sarah said in a high-pitched 'Gilda Radner' voice. "I won't stand for any fighting it's a long trip. And I don't want to hear...."

"Are we there yet?" Harm & John both asked together.

"Yeah and any other such nonsense", said Sarah still in her 'Radner' voice.

Sarah coughed and switched her voice to normal. "John I brought all your CDs from your car so pick one."

"Country Girls #1", John requested.

The sounds of Trisha Yearwood came through. John listened for a while looking out at the scenery. He was marveling that it had never looked more beautiful than now. He knew he was lucky again to be alive. Soon he drifted off to sleep. Harm reached over to turn the music down. Sarah drove on with some tears running from under her sunglasses. Harm asked her, "Are you all right to drive?"

"Yeah I'm fine. I try not to cry in front of him, but I'm just so damned angry at what happened to him. I'm also scared that he won't be back to what he was," she said as she wiped the last of them away. "We nearly lost him."

"I know how you feel. I love him too. He's done so much for all of us. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have Diane and Sarah Cate. Now it's our turn to take care of him. And don't worry, this didn't change whom he is inside. John's like the Hulk. The angrier he gets, the more determined he gets. Right now he is very pissed off."

To illustrate his point Harm told Sarah, "I spoke to his father one day when we sitting together in the hospital. Whenever they used to play catch, James would always yell at John to throw the baseball right. John would get so frustrated and mad that he would fire the ball back. At the end when he came in, James's hand would be aching for hours. You watch he'll run out of that rehab center."

Sarah reached for his hand, gave it a squeeze and held it for a time.

She smiled as the chorus for 'She's In Love with the Boy' came over the speaker:

She drove into the morning with a lighter heart.

Monday, July 6, 1998

2100 Local Time

Cabin 15

Adirondack Mountain Rehabilitation Center,

Plattsburgh, NY

It took them 13 hours to reach the rehab center. With Harm offering his arm for support and using his cane with the four feet John was able to walk across the parking areas into the restrooms at the stops
they made along the way.

During the trip John slept on and off. When he slept he dreamed. He kept seeing a flash, felt the impact and then two feet without a body running away. He still couldn't understand what the dream meant.

They wanted to avoid the 95 North route with all its traffic so they took a less crowded route to Plattsburgh. They took 270 Northwest out of Washington to 70 West. That took them to Halfway, MD where they got onto Route 81 North. After a while Harm asked Sarah if she wanted to take a break driving.

Sarah said, "We'll switch after Harrisburg. We should make that by 1100."

They did get to Harrisburg before 1100. Harm thought that he drove fast, but Sarah drove faster than him. She was pushing 80 all the way out to Harrisburg. When Sarah relinquished the driving to Harm, she sat in the back with John. A lot of the time she rested her head on his thigh and napped. John would just lovingly stare down at her and tenderly stroke her hair. One time at a gas stop, Harm had to smile as he looked back and saw they were both asleep. He filled up and got back on the highway.

After Harrisburg they took 81 North through Pennsylvania to Binghamton, NY where they caught 88 Northeast to Schenectady. They weaved their way to 87 North at Albany. From there it was a straight drive all the way to Plattsburgh.

When they arrived Harm insisted that John sit in the wheelchair as they went into the cabin. There they met the administrator of the rehab facility in their cabin. His name was Jim Whalen. "We are one of 8 rehab centers in the country that specialize in caring for those military or government patients who have high Security clearance. You fit that bill. That is why we are up here. It's isolated enough to allow for privacy and security. No one comes in to see you unless they are on a list that you fill out. Even after that we do a full security check on each individual.

We have this cabin set up for you and Major Mackenzie. It has all the medically assistive devices you need.

"Well while we're working, I can eliminate the necessity for their use", John said defiantly.

"Be nice sweetheart", Sarah chided as she squeezed his hand.

"Yes dear", John said.

Whalen continued, "We'll evaluate you first thing after breakfast. That will determine the extent of the therapy you'll be receiving. So rest up and I'll see you tomorrow. Commander we made reservations for you at the VOQ at the air base. Major."

"Please call me Sarah", insisted Sarah.

"Sarah, the aides at GW trained you on how to transfer John when he needs help etc.?" Whalen asked her.

"Yes they did. They stressed the important parts and I know how to deal with a 'crabby sailor'", Sarah said with a smile. "Didn't think I knew about that did you?" she said with the same smile when he saw the look on John and Harm's faces. One of her nurses overheard it when had John had said it at the nursing station and mentioned it to Sarah when she was shot a year ago.

Whalen said, "I'll bid you a good night then." He walked out of the cabin.
Harm also said good night. "I'll come and see you two tomorrow before I leave."

"Good night Harm", Sarah said as she hugged him and kissed his cheek. "Thanks for everything."

"You're welcome Sarah", he replied then he shook John's hand and left the cabin.

"Okay how do you want to do this?" Sarah asked as she wheeled the chair close to the bed. The cabin had a queen-sized bed with rails. Sarah lowered the rails and John scooted over onto the bed himself.

"Just help me get changed for bed, then we'll negotiate the toilet", John replied. "Just like on the road I can stand and walk short distances with the cane and leaning on the walls. Just stand by me as I do that. Let's save the wheelchair for moving around the facility. Otherwise the staff will get real ticked off when they see us not following their safety rules."

"Okay let's get started", Sarah said. John was able to unbutton his shirt and unbuckle his belt. Sarah helped him as she pulled his shirt off. He was able to help with the minimal movement of his left hand.

They dealt with the toilet and walk around the cabin without much more drama. When John settled into bed, there was a bead of sweat on his forehead. Sarah got him a towel and put it near him so that he would have near when he needed it. She changed for bed, got in and snuggled up next to him as they settled into bed. The next morning they started his long road back.

Friday, July 10, 1998

2300 Local Time

Cabin 15

Adirondack Mountain Rehabilitation Center,
Plattsburgh, NY

John and Sarah were lying in bed. John went through an especially grueling day of therapy. He was walked 5 times around the rehab gym and one time around the grounds. All during each trip, he was accompanied by Sarah and his therapist. He was a squat barrel chested man by the name of Ed Murtagh. Ed was a former Marine Gunnery Sergeant who retired after 20 years in the Corps. He came into physical therapy when his brother lost his leg stepping on a land mine in Iraq.

Ed was very demanding. While he walked along side John, urging and cajoling him on, Sarah followed close behind with the wheelchair. Though Ed never said it, he took it as an insult if John quit before his walking distance goal to rest in the wheelchair.

When he wasn't walking John to death, he was sparring with him. He would bring John close to a punching bag and have him take punches at it with his left hand. He used insults, such as 'you punch like a girl', you're a light weight' and such to goad him into trying harder. Ed always managed to get John angry enough to punch harder and harder every day.

Ed also had him do fine motor exercises using only his left hand. Ed would strap his right hand down and have him write. This was especially difficult as John was naturally right handed. When his writing had progressed to being legible, Ed had John disassemble and reassemble a Sig-Sauer 9mm pistol with minimal use of his right hand. If he caught John not squeezing a ball in his left hand during John's idle moments, he yelled at him.
"You want to get out of here Captain, you better get moving!"

John regained about 20% of his strength in his leg and arm in that first week. He also gained back 15 pounds. When he left G.W. he only gained back 5 pounds. Now he weighed 205 pounds. He knew though that he had a long way still to go to tone that into muscle.

As they lay in bed that night, Sarah was wearing one of her negligees as she cuddled up to him. "Gunny told me you're doing well." (Ed insisted that they call him Gunny. Once a Marine, always a Marine.) "He says you still need some more therapy in other areas. I tell you he was not shy about saying it either." She started kissing his temple, his cheek and then his lips.

"What exactly did he say?" John asked feeling tingly all over.

"Well, he said that you need to get laid", Sarah said very matter of fact.

That morning Murtagh pulled Sarah aside while John rested up. "Has he shown any sexual desire since he woke up?"

At first Sarah was embarrassed. But when Murtagh explained, "There is nothing prurient about what I'm asking. The doctors noted in his chart that they were afraid of nerve damage there and we need to know that he is able to function normally. So tonight I need you to ascertain that for me. I don't need graphic detail, just a yes or no will do.

"I have to admit that I'm not really up to it. I'll only just fumble around. My left arm is still just about useless", John said.

"It's not your arm that I want to use", Sarah said as she reached for him. She smiled as she said, "I feel something developing now. Just lay back and let me do all the work."

John groaned as her hand left him. Then he caught his breath as her mouth descended on his semi-erection. She expertly brought him to full stiffness and close to climax as she felt a drop of pre-cum. She knew he was ready as she removed her mouth from him and hiked up the long skirt of her negligee and mounted him. She sighed with pleasure as she was penetrated. He groaned in response as she sank lower until she had him inside her up to his hilt. She stayed there, feeling him pulse inside her as she slipped the spaghetti straps down her arms and let the silk pool at her waist. Then she started to stroke her body on him. She was thrilled when he pumped up into her in response. Without thinking about it, John reached both his hands for her hips. She cried out with the pain and the joy that groping brought. She alternated her undulations, feeling that he was coming close. Finally John wrapped his arms around her and pulled her down to his chest. She held her hips down onto him as she felt him pump his climax into her.

She lay on top of him for a long time as tears streamed down her cheeks as she silently cried with joy. She knew now that he was well on his way to recovery.

Friday, August 21, 1998

1230 Local Time

University of Albany Campus

New York Giants Training Camp

Albany, NY
John progressed very well at his Rehab. Sarah was with him for the whole process. He almost gained back all the weight that he lost. He now weighed 218 pounds, all of it muscle. Gunny Murtagh was relentless. He started him walking without his cane in the third week after he saw that he was able to leg lift 40 pounds. The week after, he started jogging. The next week he started swimming. He was always a strong swimmer but he was breathing hard after only one lap in the pool. To have him redevelop his manual dexterity Gunny had him stripping down and reassembling an M-16 Rifle in a little over 2 minutes. Slow by Marine standards, but fast compared to where his dexterity level was. It wasn't that John didn't know, it was the fact that he had to learn to feel again. The one good thing that came from the therapy was John was now ambidextrous in his writing.

All in all he was showing strong progress. His walking and swimming distances had steadily increased as his endurance got better. Gunny had him doing 2 miles of walking and 10 laps of swimming every day after the third week.

Along with his endurance came the confidence of driving. After the 4th week, Sarah and he had wanted to go out to dinner. When Sarah moved to drive, John asked for the keys and insisted that he drive. Sarah had happily relinquished her driving chores.

Everything came along so well that Sarah thought he deserved a reward. So she and Murtagh made a few phone calls. They were driving down Route 87 approaching Albany. Sarah was driving only to preserve the surprise factor. She steadfastly refused to tell John where they were going. She only said it was something he always wanted to do. It wasn't until they had exited 87 at Western Ave. then pulled into the University of Albany Campus that he had an idea of what she did. Right at the entrance was a banner declaring that the university was the summer home to the New York Football Giants.

They parked at the Visitors' Parking Lot and walked around the stadium to find Pat Hanlon, the Giants VP of Public Relations waiting for them. After greeting them, Hanlon gave Sarah a VIP Pass and assigned one of the university students to escort her to the practice field and showed John the locker room. Inside John was introduced around to the players and shown a locker. There he found a white uniform jersey with his last name and #64, his year of birth, a team tee shirt, a pair of practice shorts, socks and cleats, helmet, also with #64 stamped on it and shoulder pads.

"Get dressed practice starts in 30 minutes", Hanlon told him.

Sarah stood and watched the wonder on John's face as he ran out with the players. Here was a Legion of Merit winner who could slice and dice you at a moment's notice, standing in awe of pro football players. He was in his glory as he went through the warm-up calisthenics then when Sean Payton, the Quarterbacks' Coach came up to him and asked him to warm up Quarterback Kent Graham.

Sarah happily snapped photos of John strongly tossing and catching the football. His right leg, left arm and hand showed no signs of ever being injured. He moved his feet normally as he threw and caught the ball. He even caught a few stray balls one handed with his left hand without even thinking about it. Kent gradually lengthened the throwing distance, making John strain to reach him. They stopped when the distance reached about 45 yards. After 50 tosses at that distance John was really breaking a sweat.

After Sean called Kent to take snaps with the 1st team, Head Coach Jim Fassel had John go with the punters to shag and run a few punts back. "Do some practice cutting. Let the trainers see how your footwork is", Fassel instructed him. Sarah went along still snapping photos.

Pat Hanlon directed Head Trainer Ronnie Barnes and his staff to closely watch John. After working out for 90 minutes Ronnie had his assistant take John into the locker room for a physical evaluation.
While John was in the training room Hanlon spoke with Sarah. "When Ed Murtagh called, he told me that he wanted John's agility evaluated, I told Ronnie and his staff to give him the full work up. They'll write their report and send it tomorrow."

"Thank you so much for what you did. Except for when I said yes, I have never seen him so happy. I know this will go a long way to his recovery", replied Sarah.

"It's the least we could do for such a loyal fan", teased Hanlon.

Hanlon then introduced Sarah to Wellington Mara. "I must say if sailors and Marines were as pretty as you when I was in the Navy, Mrs. Mara would never have let me join."

Sarah blushed at that. She went on to tell him of John's shooting and his recovery from his injuries. Mr. Mara was fascinated with her tale of how they retrieved the Declaration.

Eventually John came out from the locker room. He showered and changed out of his 'uniform'. Hanlon had the equipment manager pack the jersey, tee shirt, shorts and cleats in a gym bag for John to take with him. John joined Sarah and Mr. Mara telling them, "Ronnie's assistant checked my range of motion and he said I was in good shape. I still need some work though it's still not 100%.

They stood and discussed the Giants chances for the upcoming season. They all commiserated on the loss to the Vikings in the previous season's Wild Card Game.

Sarah took photos of John with Mr. Mara and Hanlon, John with all the coaches in a group, John and the quarterbacks and of John with Mr. Mara and Coach Fassel. Pat had his student assistants take photos of Sarah and John with all the others as well. Practice ended at 1630 and Mr. Mara invited them out to dinner. During dinner, Coach Fassel came over to present John with a football and his helmet. They both were autographed by all the players.

After dinner they stayed at the Best Western right across the road from the campus. Sarah had the most passionate and joyous night of her life as John made love to her as if it was their first time.

They drove back to Plattsburgh early the next morning and dove back into his therapy with a new urgency.

Tuesday September 8, 1998

JAG Headquarters to NCIS Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC

They left Plattsburgh the Friday before. They stopped at John's parents in Far Rockaway at their beach club. They walked from the cabana to the clubhouse to have dinner. As they went into the bar, they were met with the cry of, "SURPRISE!"

James called his and Maureen's extended family to have them come to the club and celebrate John's recovery. Even Ann Marie and Pete came up from DC with Andy. She greeted them with such joy that she couldn't stop crying for a long time seeing how well John had done. Everyone else greeted him with the same joy as all his aunts and girl cousins gave him very enthusiastic hugs and the uncles and guy cousins all gave him the man hug. John was totally overwhelmed as his eyes welled up.

After he made his way through to greeting each relative he got to the bar. He was greeted with the shouts of "Speech, speech!"

He got a glass of ginger ale each for him and Sarah. As he held up his glass he said, "I want to thank
each and every one of you for coming. I am so happy to see you all. I would like to give a toast to those from our family who are not here today, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. I would especially like to mention one cousin who is not here, Gail Tierney Grayson. A lot of you know that Gail and I went to and graduated Fordham Law together. She pulled me out of the doldrums I was in at the time. I could not have survived law school without her help.

What some of you don't know is that Gail and I worked a JAG Man investigation together a year ago. It came about from helping Peter out of a legal jam. In the course of the investigation we had to interview a biker gang. Well Gail had a way of getting information from one reluctant biker. He didn't like it very much that she whipped his butt playing pool. (There were chuckles at that.) So much so that he went to do her physical harm. Well he forgot that she still had her cue stick in her hands. As he got close enough to her, she broke it in two over his head." (There some gasps of surprise combined with laughter at this.) "Then she compounded his misery by punching him in the nose." (More laughs were heard.) "Needless to say he went down. It also took the fight out of him and he told us what we needed to know. She was something else.

The reason I needed to relate that story was because I wanted to say that I miss her. I miss her intelligence, her moxie, her confidence, her beauty and even her goofy laugh. She was my cousin and my best friend.

So here's to Gail Tierney Grayson, one tough cookie and an even more beautiful woman."

There wasn't a dry eye in the house as all those present raised their glasses in salute to their lost cousin.

They relaxed at James & Maureen's beach club on Sunday and left with the Matthews for DC early Monday morning. Leaving early on Labor Day assured that they would get out of New York before the holiday traffic got bad.

When they returned to Florida Ave. Monday afternoon, the Roberts, Rabbs and Millers were there waiting for them. Harm and Diane went over there with Baby Sarah Cate and John & Evie Miller with their son Jimmy and baby Sarah Jo, over for a Labor Day cookout to celebrate his return. John Miller and Evie weren't able visit him in the hospital as John was deployed. Evie and Sarah J. stayed with her parents in Tennessee during the month her husband was away.

John especially loved that he could finally lie in his bed with Sarah after three months.

Today John and Sarah used his car to drive to the Navy Yard. They first walked over to JAG to save Sarah the trouble of answering all the inevitable questions about his health. On their way in they saluted AJ in the parking lot and they stopped to salute him.

"Major, nice to have you back to work and Captain, it's really good to see looking so well. How are you doing?" AJ said as he shook their hands.

"Thank you sir, I'm good. I still have some outpatient therapy to do. Other than that it'll be nice to be back into a working routine," John replied.

"That's good to hear. I'd like to stay and chat, but I'm on my way out to a meeting with the SECNAV. I'm having a dinner party at my place this Saturday evening. I'd like you and your fiancé to attend," AJ finished.

"We'll be there sir," Sarah replied for her and John.

"Good, see you at about 1800 Saturday," AJ said before they saluted each other and walked away.
When John and Sarah walked into the bullpen they heard something that they were unaccustomed to hearing without the admiral around,

"Attention on Deck".

The dozen or so men and women in the bullpen snapped to attention. John glanced behind him looking for someone of higher rank than he. Both he and Sarah technically merited it because of their rank, but neither was much for formality. It was Sarah who first recognized that they were standing at attention for him. She stuck an elbow in his ribs and she belatedly whispered, "Captain it's for you."

John was surprised and touched by the display of respect. He barely managed to yell out, "As you were!"

At that the whole bullpen burst into applause.

Meg and Traci each came over and hugged them fiercely. Traci was the most emotional as she held John in a hug for a long time. "My dear, dear friend, I am so happy to see you so well." she whispered to him as she shed her own happy tears.

As John's partner for a very long time before Sarah, Traci was very distressed over the shooting as well as her friends at JAG for not calling her to tell her as she was on assignment TAD in Hawaii for two months when John was shot and had only been informed of John's shooting when she returned the week after he went up to rehab in Plattsburgh.

Sarah shed her own tears watching John and Traci embrace. Traci was Sarah's personal confidant in all things John when they became partners and then started dating.

"Thank you, everyone", he said quietly.

John was overwhelmed with the whole display. He barely suppressed his tears at the outpouring of joy. Ever since his shooting he had a hard time containing his emotions. At the start of his recovery at GW he started seeing a counselor / psychiatrist from Bethesda, Lt. Commander Dr. Jordan Parker who encouraged him to recognize his feelings for what they were gratitude at being alive. He was scheduled to see her that very evening at Bethesda.

After answering all the inquiries thrown at him, Sarah walked out with John. Before he walked away to his office, he and Sarah shared an embrace off to the side of the building.

At NCIS Headquarters he received the same warm reception. After discussing his reinstatement to work with Admiral Magnum, John went to his office and then called Carolyn and Gibbs in.

"I want you to find out where Konaplonik is. I know Coster had help. I saw him get into a car after he shot me. I know McGee didn't find any phone records of Coster communicating with any Russians. So have Tim check if either of them had received any calls from a pay phone. Start with the pay phones near where they both lived and expand from there. Also see if Coster called or was called by anyone on my old case lists when I was at JAG even Harm's and Sarah's cases", John ordered.

"Speaking of Harm & Sarah's cases I seem to remember that Harm and Bud were out in California back in April investigating a helo crash. They encountered a top secret test center run by Bradenhurst. The guy who was running Security for that place was named Clark Palmer. I hear he was really pissed that the Secretary of Defense disbanded the 'Defense Security Division'. That put him and a lot of agents out of work. See if any of them were involved with Coster."
"I'll get right on it John and Mr. Webb is waiting to see you", Carolyn replied.

"Good I was expecting him", John said.

Webb came in after Carolyn left. "It's good to see you up and around. I hear you had a tryout with the Giants." Webb also saw the autographed helmet and football in glass cases on the shelf in John's Office wall unit.

"It wasn't a try out. It was an evaluation session my physical therapist arranged with their trainers", John said irritably. He didn't like it when Webb told him something about his own private life. It seemed to show that he was more interested in keeping tabs on John than on what he was ordered to do.

"Tell me about Clark Palmer", John ordered.

Webb was taken aback. "What do yo want to know?"

"How about his whereabouts, what's he doing. Is he employed somewhere? I heard Palmer has a major beef with Harm and wasn't at all thrilled when Harm and Bud Roberts investigated his little operation out in California."

"Well as you know right after that the DSD was disbanded. He and other agents dropped out of sight. While you and Mac were in Plattsburgh there was a trial of a Marine Colonel named Vickers selling nerve gas. Harm and Mac investigated the disappearance of the gas before they did the Blackhorse case. They were ready to go to trial just before you got shot. While you and Mac were away, Harm and Meg Austen teamed up to prosecute the case.

The trial brought Palmer out of hiding, because the Colonel was involved with some disgruntled DSD agents who sold the nerve gas canisters. Palmer killed and then tried to impersonate Vickers' attorney James Gribaldi and kill Vickers with nerve gas. As he questioned Vickers on the stand, Harm saw him take out a syringe. Palmer managed to squeeze the entire contents in Vickers' face. But as he tried to get away, Harm tackled him. They also found another syringe with the antidote. They injected Vickers with the antidote just in time and he survived. They continued the trial after a week and Vickers was convicted. The last I heard, Palmer was doing his time in Leavenworth."

"Why did Palmer wait till the trial to try and kill Vickers?" John asked.

"Vickers was kept under protective custody when he was not in court. So the only time Palmer could get close enough to him was in court," Webb answered.

"Alright so it wasn't Palmer driving. Still work with Carolyn and McGee to investigate Konaplonik,' John ordered. Then he changed the subject.

"On another note, before I was shot, I began to set up the NCIS' new anti-terrorist and intelligence unit. While I was in rehab Diane finished that job. We're folding our POW Commission's work into that unit. While you're assigned to us you'll work with them. Work closely with Diane in ATAC, giving her all the intelligence you gather for her and her team's analysis. You'll still be our liaison to the CIA, coordinating any related operations. Based on what we get out of that, we'll act accordingly.

After we complete the POW work you can have the choice of staying on at NCIS. If you do you will still answer to me, reporting on all and I mean ALL the operations you will have going. You would keep your usual low profile and such. You think you can do that?"

Webb replied, "Can I recruit some of my people from the CIA to work here?" Webb asked.
John replied, "No need. I've already done that. Despite what you might think I wasn't just doing rehab in Plattsburgh and playing football in Albany. I was on the phone with Thomas and Carolyn almost every day setting the unit up. I also have a knack of delving into things that people don't know about. I knew all about your team of operatives at CIA. I already had Carolyn recruit them and have them transferred here. She set them up at desks in the intelligence unit downstairs they seemed relieved to be out of the 'company'. They said it'd be nice to be able to plan things out some more and work with back-up and not on a shoe string."

Webb raised his eyebrows. He knew he often did things on the fly without much time to plan. Sometimes the spy world was like that, you had to react quickly and do what the job needed to do. Most times there was no time to plan adequately and set-up the back-up one needed. He decided to hold off on his decision. Besides he liked to work alone.

"You're giving me a lot to think about. Despite what you might think I like working with you. You're a no bullshit kind of guy and you don't like to waste time. Besides it'd be nice to not have to lie anymore about what I do for the government." Webb lied.

He got up and reached over John's desk and shook his hand. "I'll give you my decision after we deal with the POW question."

John smiled and shook his hand back. Inwardly he believed that Webb wouldn't be working for him long after they dealt with that question.
Chapter 28

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 28

Wednesday, September 9, 1998

1730 PM

Navy Yard Fitness Center

Washington Navy Yard, DC

After he woke up from the coma John was relieved that Sarah didn’t postpone their wedding plans. In fact she put a deposit down on the hall at the Willard. This night she was out with Ann Marie, Diane and Harriet getting fitted for her wedding dress and bridesmaids' dresses. She picked it all out in May after she and John set the date. While she and John were dealing with the shooting and its aftermath, the three ladies was keeping the plans for the wedding going. Harriet was just wonderful in working with Sarah on the computer in designing and printing and sending the invitations. John's parents gave Sarah John's part of the list and Sarah had her part of the list settled also.

Even with all that John knew he still wasn't all the way back from before the shooting. So he set up some training and conditioning sessions with a man that Gunny Murtagh recommended. Lt. Colonel Gordon ['Biff'] Creswell met John at the door to the locker room.

Creswell began, "Good evening sir. Ed Murtagh called me from Plattsburgh and he told me about your 'try out' with the Giants.

John rolled his eyes at the 'try out' line. "Will you please do me a favor Colonel? Let's drop the sirs and stuff. My name is John."

"Gordon", said Creswell as he offered his hand.

"I just want to get better here and I don't want you to hold anything back. Did you read the report from the Giants' trainers and Gunny Murtagh?" John asked.

"Yes I did. They said that your agility was good if not a little tentative. I called Murtagh and he said that a boxing training regimen as well as sparring should be right up your alley especially to exercise your shoulder and legs. So let's get started."

With that they went and changed. First Creswell had him do the rope work. John did know how to skip rope. Creswell had him doing it the boxer's way, very energetic and coordinated.

Next they went to the punching bag. John had never done that. To strengthen his left-handed coordination he had him tuck his right hand in his waste behind his back. He showed John how to tease the bag first with the front of his fist, then with the back of his fist. John started slow then as he got more confident and his hand speed increased. They did this for about an hour then they put on the gloves. Actually John put the gloves on where as Creswell put on the hand pads. He showed John jabs and hooks and crosses and uppercuts. Then he called out blow-combinations. They went at this for another hour. Creswell then told him to swim 10 laps before he showered.

2030 Local Time
Since John and Sarah both worked in the Navy Yard and their two services shared the same parking lot, they always drove to work in the same car. The rationale was that if they had to go away from the 'Yard' on cases, they would use the cars from the motor pool. On nice days they came to work in the Camaro. On the inclement days they took the Trailblazer. That evening Sarah went off to do what she needed for the wedding and left John at the health club, intending to come back and pick him up.

Even though he went through an intense three-hour workout, John was totally refreshed and relaxed. When he came out of the locker room, he found Sarah standing at the Camaro waiting for him.

She was dressed in jeans and man styled shirt, tied at her waste. It showed her navel ring and her cleavage to their fullest. Her hair was spikey from being wet.

'God she was beautiful' was the first thought to race through his brain. The next one was 'that shirt looks very familiar'.

She came up to him and wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him soundly. "How'd it go?"

"Didn't you say you knew Creswell from Okinawa?" John asked.

"Yeah he was my brigade's JAG Officer. Sometimes we worked out together. He was tough and he taught me how to box. What did he do work you to death?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah he did. He put me through the same stuff Gunny Murtagh did. We're going to do this Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays for the next few weeks."

"Good. How do you feel now?" Sarah asked.

"Just a little achy. I take some Tylenol when we get home." John replied. "What did you girls do tonight?"

"We tried on our wedding dresses. Remember we only have 5 & ½ weeks till the wedding."

"I can hardly wait", John said as he pulled her tighter and kissed her soundly. "Why's your hair wet?"

I took a short shower just before I came to meet you."

"Isn't that the shirt you wore..?"

"...When we first made love; why yes it is. You said you'd never be able to wear it again so it's been hanging in my closet."

"Well it looks better on you than on me."

Saturday, September 12, 1998

1800 Local Time

Chegwidden Residence,

McLean, VA

The whole JAG Staff was at AJ's house for his dinner party. There were two reasons for the party.
One reason was to celebrate John's recovery and Sarah and his engagement. The other was to introduce his daughter Francesca Paretti. She was his daughter from his former wife Marcella. Marcella divorced him and moved to Italy when Francesca was an infant. Marcella couldn't stand being worried about AJ being in the Navy. Marcella remarried a man named Vittorio Paretti.

Harm was astounded to find she was AJ's daughter. The previous Friday afternoon he was backing out a JAG Staff car on his way to an interview when another car bumped him from behind. When he got out with the intention of exchanging information, he encountered a beautiful woman with an Italian accent. She was about 5'7" with a slim but shapely figure. She refused to give her information to a strange sailor, even after Harm produced his business card and told her that it was illegal to refuse to give information in an accident. Also she insisted that her car was a rental and that it would be a waste of time to get the small amount of damages fixed. She drove away leaving a befuddled Harm in her wake.

When she approached him at the party, he quickly discarded his astonished look for one of cool familiarity.

"Miss Paretti, may I introduce my wife Diane", Harm offered.

"I'm very pleased to meet you Diane and please call me Francesca", Francesca said as she offered her hand. She turned as she heard the door open and everyone turn and clap as John walked in with Sarah. Francesca looked between Diane and Sarah. She wondered why a lot of people were making a fuss over John.

Diane took her by the elbow and guided her over to the arriving couple. "C'mon, I'll introduce you to my sister and her fiancé", Diane whispered. But AJ beat her to it.

After he welcomed Sarah & John with hearty handshakes and a kiss to her cheek, he turned and saw Diane coming over with his daughter

"Sarah, John may I introduce my daughter Francesca Paretti, Francesca, Captain John Marshall and his fiancé Major Sarah Mackenzie. They're getting married next October."

It was only after she heard John's name that Francesca realized why the guests were greeting John so warmly.

"I am very pleased to meet you both. I hope you are very happy wedding day", Francesca said graciously.

Harm had trailed the two women as they approached Sarah & John. Turning so that she could take in the two couples Francesca could see that Diane and Sarah were almost identical. They wore their hair differently and it was too dark to see that they had different color eyes. She saw that each couple clung to each other. She could see how Harm & John each looked at Diane and Sarah. She could see that each man and each woman was in love with the other. She facetiously asked the two men, "Tell me please Harmon & John, how do you keep each woman straight when you are together?"

John couldn't resist answering, "At work it's easy. They wear different uniforms. Otherwise Harm and I try to keep them from shopping or getting their hair done together and before each party we call each other to make sure Sarah and Diane are not wearing the same dress, etc. It's the only way we two men can keep our sanity."

Francesca laughed heartily along with Sarah and Diane.

"When Sarah and John get married I don't think he'll have any trouble telling one Mackenzie sister
from the other that day". AJ said to the group.

She asked John, "Papa told me of your injury how are you doing John?"

"I'm doing fine thanks for asking, though it would have been a lot tougher without Sarah with me. She's been my rock", John said as he pulled Sarah closer.

Sarah turned her head to hide the tear she shed, embarrassed by his declaration. Francesca just went and hugged her. Kissing both her cheeks, she softly whispered to Sarah, "Do not be embarrassed by such love. You are so lucky to be so loved by such a man. Hold on to him."

"I will", she acknowledged as she hugged Francesca back. Then she turned and slapped John's arm. "You always make me cry at the worst times." She softened her chastisement with a smile and a kiss to his cheek.

Sarah asked Francesca, "Our wedding day is next October 24. I would love it if you could be there."

"I will rearrange my schedule. I wouldn't miss it for the world", she told Sarah.

Sarah continued, "While we're here Admiral I have a favor to ask."

"Yes what is it Mac?" AJ said.

Sarah drew a deep breath before she blurted out, "Admiral Chegwidden, I was wondering if you would do me the honor of giving me away at my wedding, Sir."

AJ's eyebrows rose in question. "Mac, are you sure you wouldn't rather have your father do that?"

"With all due respect, sir, no I would not. I don't even know where my father is. Also all my efforts to find him have come up dry. You have been more like family to me than my father ever has. Outside of our families you and Sydney have become the closest friends John and I have. I know John would always be grateful for the care Sydney gave him and I will always be grateful for the love and support you gave me when John was injured. I could never have gotten through that without your help. You have accepted me into your family and there is nobody that I would rather have walked me down the aisle on my wedding day than you."

AJ fought down a wave of emotion at her words. He had taken a special interest in Sarah ever since she came to JAG. He read her record and he was proud that she had come so far under his command.

"It would be my honor, Sarah", he replied softly.

Sarah let out a sigh of relief and visibly relaxed as she smiled. "Thank you, Sir."

"No, Sarah. Thank you", said AJ as she went to hug him.

Francesca was never more proud of her father than now.

Monday, September 21, 1998

0930 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC
John was feeling better and better every week since he started working out with Creswell. He felt that he was just about all the way back physically from before the shooting. He was humming to himself as he came out of a meeting with Admiral Magnum. They spoke about his performance since he came back to work. Thomas admired his work ethic. He felt that John had come back all the way professionally. He even told him that he admired that he was still working on his job all during his time in rehab.

He was just outside his office when Webb entered the bullpen, with Diane following closely behind him. "We have some new information on Parlovsky", Diane announced.

"Come on in and let's talk", John instructed them. As he passed Carolyn's desk he told her to come in as well.

Webb began. "We found out that Misha was the one running a rogue KGB operation that took the Vietnam POWs to Russia. We heard from some serious sources in Russia that the government at that time had no idea what he was doing. That means that he could be sending us on a wild goose chase. Also we found Konaplonik. He was found dead in an alley in 'Little Odessa', a section of Brooklyn called..."

"Brighton Beach" John finished. "Remember I grew up in New York. I have some friends in the NYPD who I talked too now and then. They tell me that the Russian Mafia is becoming very powerful up there. Ever since Perostroyka a lot of formerly Russian felons have been coming over to here and setting up shop, mostly up there."

"His buddies probably didn't like the idea that he was caught and he spilled his guts", Diane added.

"That possibility is most likely true. Besides Konoplonik's blood, they found another type on the passenger's side. They matched the sample to Coster," Webb said.

"I knew it. Konoplonik was the driver when Coster shot me," exclaimed John. "That explains a lot. It seems that someone either Sokol or Parlovsky didn't want us going to Russia. Getting at one of us would stop or delay our departure."

"We think Parlovsky put the hit out. We also heard that Parlovsky may be involved with selling nuclear tipped missiles from the Russian arsenal to certain Russian mafia types. Konaplonik had a big mouth and probably blabbed about it so Misha had to silence him. He might be more afraid of his buddies in the mafia than in his government", Webb finished.

"Alright, Clay, you leave tonight, take Carolyn with you. Set up everything that you can. Harm, Diane, Sarah and I will follow let's say tomorrow or the day after. Find out as much as you can before we get there."

"Ok boss. I'll book us our flights. I'll have our itineraries before lunch", Carolyn replied.

"Diane, you, Harm, Sarah and I will meet at my house tonight. I'll call JAG now and let Sarah and Harm know. I'll also call Admiral Magnum and he'll tell the SECNAV and the President. If no one has anything else, let's begin." Everybody got up and set about their different tasks.

Tuesday, September 22, 1998
1830 Local Time
Dulles International Airport
Aeroflot Flight 818 Non Stop to Moscow
Diane and Harm left Sarah Cate to stay with Ann Marie, Pete and Andy. The two babies spent a lot of weekend time together and they became accustomed to each other.

Right now they were settled into their seats on the plane. Diane and Sarah sat in between John and Harm. John sat at the window seat. They were wearing casual clothing.

Earlier that day Carolyn and Webb called saying that they were in Moscow and that they had reservations for the two couples at the Posolskaya Hotel.

John had his 'Giants' 'ny' ball cap on and he pulled it over his eyes and attempted to sleep. "Wake me up when we get to Moscow."

Sarah, Harm & Diane just shook their heads and smiled. They were just as happy that he was with them. They were a team. They all felt that there wasn't anything they couldn't handle as long as they stuck together. They were going into the unknown in Russia. There were so many things that could go wrong. There were too many people that they didn't or couldn't trust. Right now though they felt they were ready for it all.
Timing Is Everything
Chapter 29
Wednesday, September 23, 1998
1430 Local Time
Shermyetovo Airport
Moscow

The flight was uneventful and they landed after 10 hours of flight. They got through customs, collected their luggage and went to find a cab.

Sarah approached one very energetic cabbie. She spoke in Russian, "Do you know how to get to the Posolskaya Hotel?"

"It alright I speak English. I take you to your hotel. My name, Alexi"

Sarah called the entourage over. They piled into the small cab. Diane and Sarah got in the back with John and Harm got in the front. They didn't see Colonel Parlovsky watching them from a car across the street.

They were driving for about 45 minutes when Sarah said, "You didn't have to go through Red Square to get to the Posolskaya Hotel?"

"Oh you've been to Moscow before. You think I cheat you?" Alexi replied.

"No but I have a map", Sarah replied.

"That is old map. Everything new in Russia as long as you have the money to buy it. I can get you anything you want even a ride in a tank", Alexi said.

"How about a MIG-29?" Harm asked.

"Sure boss, just $50,000.00 American", Alexi replied off handedly. "If you you can find one intact. They are selling the planes and parts off to the highest bidder. Soon the only thing left will be the runway.

Harm and John just shook their heads in wonderment.

Alexi then looked out the window and spat twice. He saw that they were al looking at him strangely. Alexi pointed out the window. "There is Lubyanka Prison, headquarters to KGB."

They drove to the hotel without further conversation.

Wednesday, September 23, 1998
1545 Local Time
Posolskaya Hotel
When they walked into the Lobby, they met Carolyn and Webb. Carolyn handed John and Harm their room keys. "We were lucky. We got the last three rooms left. I checked you in with the firm's credit card. (The firm being NCIS). John & Sarah are in 718 and Harm & Diane are in 720. Clay and I are sharing 716. He was good last night. He slept on the couch."

"Yeah and my back will never forgive me", Webb said.

They went up to their rooms. Webb accompanied John and Sarah to theirs and Carolyn went with Harm & Diane.

Webb handed John the rolled up newspaper he was carrying. "For God's sake don't shoot anyone."

John had to smile as he extracted the Russian pistol from the paper. "Tell Harm that. He got one?"

"Yeah I had Carolyn give it to him."

"All right while the four of us are actively inquiring about Harm's father, you and Carolyn beat the bushes and find out as much as you can about those missiles", John instructed.

"Right Carolyn and I will get started tomorrow. Good luck", Webb replied.

"For tonight I need to get over the jet lag", John said with a yawn.

After Webb left Sarah and John changed into their bedclothes. Sarah wore a full length negligee with spaghetti straps and a lace embroidered bodice with the skirt flowing down to her feet. John just wore his usual gym shorts and tee shirt. As they lay in bed before they fell asleep John decided to get something off his chest that he was contemplating for a while.

"Sarah there's something I want to discuss with you about the wedding", John began.

"What do you have in mind?" Sarah asked.

"Actually, it's more about the honeymoon. You're going to think I've gone over the deep end on this, but I've been giving this some serious thought and I want your honest opinion on it", John began.

"Will you please go on, you're driving me crazy", Sarah said.

"Well here goes since our wedding is only little over a month from now, I'd like us to wait to have sex again until after we're married. What do you think?" John asked with trepidation.

"You're not asking a simple thing, you know. Do you mind if I ask what brought this on?" Sarah asked, but not without love.

"It's just something that I've been thinking about. One I think it will add a little more anticipation to our wedding night. Also, I would like it if we didn't wait to have a baby. I would like to start trying right away. I wouldn't mind if we conceived the baby on the honeymoon. This month would give you an opportunity to stop taking the pill before we started trying", John said. "If you think it's a dumb idea, just say so. Believe me, I'm not going to turn down the opportunity to sleep with you if you say you don't want to do this", he finished.

Sarah could only look at him with love as she smiled her patented watery smile. "You're making me cry again. I love you so much. And I do not think it's a dumb idea, John. Just before we decided to come here I told Ann Marie that I wanted to try and make a baby on our honeymoon. I already stopped taking the pill right after your 'tryout' with the Giants. I was waiting until we got back to the states to tell you. That's why we haven't been making love lately."
"Really, that's so great. I love you so much", John said as he kissed her long and slow.

"Don't start anything we can't finish, John or we'll make that baby now", Sarah said seductively

"It's going to be very, very hard to keep my hands off of you. This is going to be the longest 32 days of my life isn't it?" he asked as he pulled her into a tight embrace.

"I don't know about the longest," she replied as she deliberately allowed her gaze to travel the length of his body. "But I can pretty much guarantee it will be the hardest. I'm up for the challenge though. So I guess if you're serious about this, you can count me in", Sarah said.

"Thank you, Sarah. I love you so much", John said with a sigh.

They fell asleep in that tight embrace.

Thursday, September 24, 1998

0745 Local Time

Posolskaya Hotel, room 718

John and Sarah had slept the whole night in their tight embrace. They woke up together.

"Sarah what time is it?" John asked.

"Eastern, Zulu or Local", Sarah replied.

"Doesn't anything throw that sense of yours off?" John asked in his usual wonder.

"Not even jet lag throws my timing off. Daylight savings time does make me think twice though", She responded with her usual grin. He gave her a lingering kiss.

They broke it off suddenly when they heard someone at the door. Sarah grabbed the gun as John went to the door. He threw it open and grabbed the man crouching there and threw him onto the bed.

Sarah held the pistol to his head.

"Please boss I didn't know if you were sleeping or not. It's only me Alexi", said the now frightened cabbie.

"Could the nice lady stop pointing the gun at me. I only wanted to see if you needed ride to go eating or shopping is all", he stammered.

"Well we need to go to breakfast .. We'll get our friends and meet you downstairs", said Sarah.

John, Harm Sarah & Diane came out of the hotel together. They all approached Alexi's taxi. They stopped when they saw it was already occupied as he was stepping out of the cab.

"Hello Sarah"said Marc Falcon / Sokol. "Come take a ride with me and let's discuss what brings you all to Russia. But we're not all going to fit in Alexi's small cab. Why don't you get in here and follow my car. The four officers saw no other choice but to cooperate as they climbed in for the ride.

0915 Local Time

Lubyanka Prison

When they entered his office Sokol "Commander Rabb introduce me to your lovely wife", Sokol
Diane forestalled Harm's introduction by coolly offering her hand, "Commander Diane Rabb, US Navy", she said shaking Sokol's hand. Sokol turned her hand and kissed the back.

Turning to Sarah he said, "I always thought we were destined to meet again Sarah, but seeing your sister the pleasure is doubled."

"So did I but I wasn't looking forward to it", Sarah replied coolly. "Why did you pick us up Marc?"

"I feared for your safety", Sokol declared.

Diane cut in, "What can you tell us about the POW Book that you tried to steal in Alameda and where my father-in-law is being or has been held."

"Not much except that I don't have any knowledge of what the information the book allegedly contained or of your father-in-law", he replied.

"How about S394652?" Harm asked.

"S394652, what's that?" Sokol asked back.

"Write it down. S394652 is the KGB File number assigned to my father while he was held prisoner", Harm replied acidly and raising his voice.

"Easy shipmate", said John from his place against the wall. He had taken up a casual pose of leaning on a bookcase against the wall. Sokol looked his way.

"Commander, I still owe you for that sucker punch in Alameda", Sokol said rubbing his jaw. "It still gives me a tingle just thinking about it."

"That was the idea", said John with a satisfied smile. "And its Captain now. I also remember you set the fire as a way to destroy the list. You are KGB aren't you? You should know that file number shouldn't you?"

"There is no more KGB I work for the Federal Security Service, similar to your FBI", said Sokol.

"Now where have I heard that before?" John asked his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Probably Colonel Parlovsky, he's a very dangerous individual. He wants to destroy Russia bring it back to the days of Stalin. Did you bring the photo?" asked Sokol

"Why so you could destroy it?" Harm asked in the same acid tone.

"Look Commander I don't know who is fabricating this information, but we need to stop him. If this gets out more than it already has, it could destroy my country. I need to know who that fabricator is", said Sokol.

"We don't know who wrote the POW List or who sent the photo. Unless there's something else, are we free to go?" asked Sarah.

"You came here of your own free will didn't you?" replied Sokol.

"Thank you", Sarah said as she and the others got up to leave.

Before they left though, Sokol said, "Sarah I seem to recall that we have an open dinner date or does
that ring preclude eating with a friend?"
"Ask my fiance", she said pointing to John.

"Want to double date?" John said smugly. Sokol just looked at him sourly.

1100 Local Time

Posolskaya Hotel, Front Entrance

As they drove back to the hotel, Sarah asked Alexi, "So you work for the KGB?"
Alexi answered, "No lady, I work for the highest bidder."

"Well at least you're honest", Sarah said.

"Unless you pay me to be dishonest", Alexi said.

Nothing more was said as they had arrived at the hotel.

As the foursome debarked from Alexi's cab at the hotel, Sarah said, "I like him."

"Men with no integrity seem to gravitate to you", Harm teased. Diane slapped his arm.

"Hey watch that", John said.

"I'm sorry, that's the jet lag talking", Harm apologized. "Would you have gone out to dinner with Sokol if you weren't engaged?"

"You know I was thinking. Why don't I go to dinner with him? He might tell me what we need to know. Remember vodka loosens lips and he may be more receptive to tell me things if we are alone." Sarah answered turning to John.

John shrugged his shoulders. "Sure why not. You may be able to get him to help us some. Just flash the ring at him a few times." Sarah smiled at that. She loved that John trusted her romantically as well as professionally.

John held Sarah back and let Harm & Diane walk ahead. "While you're with him, see if he knows who might be selling the missiles."

"You're asking for a lot!" Sarah exclaimed softly.

John replied, "We have to know one way or the other. When you get that information, we'll compare it to what Carolyn & Webb turn up."

Sarah agreed, "Ok I'll see what I can find out."

Just about as they came through the door when they almost bumped into Colonel Mikhail Parlovsky.

"Good morning everyone. I trust you are enjoying your stay in Moscow?" asked Parlovsky.

"I don't know, all we've seen is the airport, Lubyanka and the hotel", said Sarah sarcastically.

"Then maybe I can interest you in this nice alley", Parlovsky said as he led them around the corner of the hotel.

"I heard that you talked to Major Sokol at Lubyanka" he said as they all entered the alley. "Did you
tell him I sent you the photo?"

"No I said that I didn't know who sent it to me", Harm said.

"That is good. He is KGB", Parlovsky declared.

"I keep hearing that is no more KGB", Diane said.

"Only the title changes. Governments change all the time but there will always be a KGB."

"I seem to recall that you work for the Federal Security Service. How come you and Sokol aren't working together?" John asked.

"I really work for Foreign Intelligence. It is similar to your FBI", Parlovsky answered

"There's that sentence again", John sighed.

"Why did you send the photo colonel?" Harm asked.

"Call it a very foolish gesture of a father with a son missing in Afghanastan", Parlovsky replied. 
"Surely commander your father is dead. Give up this foolish quest."

"I have to know one way or the other. Do you know that for sure that your son is dead Colonel?"
Harm replied in kind.

Parlovsky could only shrug.

1800 Local time

Posolskaya Hotel restaurant

Sarah and Sokol sat discussing the menu. "The Sturgeon Caviar in buttersauce is excellent", Sokol offered

"What do you usually have Marc?" Sarah asked.

"A good steak, medium rare", he replied with a smile.

"Then that's what I'll have to", Sarah said smiling back.

Marc raised his glass and offered a toast. "To good friends. Tell me how long have you been engaged to Captain Marshall? What did you see in him?"

"Since just before Thanksgiving. He has shown me nothing but love since we met. He totally respects and trusts me. That's why we're sitting here alone and not double dating", Sarah said impishly.

"What about Commander Rabb?" Marc asked.

"Which one? One's my sister and the other is my partner at JAG and my brother in law. He respects me as much as John does", Sarah said proudly.

"What would I have to do to earn your respect?" Sokol asked.

"Help Harm find out what happened to his father", Sarah said definitively.

Sokol could only agree.
"There is one more thing we need to look into. It may affect your national security much more than the POW List," Sarah added in all seriousness.

"What's that Sarah?" Marc asked. So she told him. You think you can find that information out for me?"

"Meet me at Red Square tonight an hour after we finish dinner. I'll have all the information you will need", Sokol said.

They were served and finished their dinner.

1930 Local

Posolskaya Hotel, room 718

When Sarah came up from dinner she found John, Harm & Diane waiting for her.

After giving John his kiss she told them what transpired. "He wants to meet Harm & I in Red Square in 30 minutes. He seems ready to help us with everything."

"Harm and Sarah will meet him while Diane and I wait in the car. No sense in gathering a crowd. After the meet we'll determine what we need to do", John said.

2015 Local time

Red Square, Moscow

Harm and Sarah did not have to wait long as they saw Sokol approaching with a folder in his hand.

Harm went to take it, but Marc pulled it back. "Do you read Russian Commander?" he asked.

Before he gave Sarah the dossier he asked, "If you find out it is your father, you tell no one else but me."

Harm agreed before Sarah could say anything.

Sarah took the dossier and started to read aloud, "Subject file number S394652 brought to Chechia in 1970."

"What's that?" Harm asked.

"It's a scientific research air field 30 Kilometers East of Moscow", Sokol answered.

Sarah continued. "Subject was sent to Vorkuta Gulag in 1972. Subject was then transferred to Berloyka in 1980 where in 1982 he."

"Died?" Harm asked dismayed.

"No, escaped", Sarah finished.

"Escaped, then he could still be alive", Harm exclaimed.

"The dossier doesn't mention a name only the number. It's not your father,' Sokol said.

"How many people get sent to an air force testing center then transferred to a gulag? S394652 is my father. Where is Berloyka?" Harm asked.
"About 1300 miles away in Siberia", Sokol answered. Who gave you the photo commander?"

"I don't know. It didn't have a return address but on the back that person wrote '1980' and 'this one's real", replied Harm.

"I'll leave for Berloyka in the morning", declared Harm.

"We'll leave", corrected Sarah.

"What you two are planning is dangerous, but it seems I can't stop you", Sokol stated. With that he went a kissed Sarah on both cheeks, saying in Russian, "Good luck on your wedding. John is a lucky man. Stay safe." Then Sokol walked away.

"What did he say?" Harm asked.

"Just to stay safe", Sarah answered.

"Then why are you blushing?" Harm teased her. Sarah walked away, putting her hands in her coat pockets. She felt the slip of paper Marc had slipped into her right pocket as he kissed her. She would wait until she was in the car before she removed it. She knew persons other than Marc were watching her.

They met back up with John and Diane. After they got into the car, Sarah gave the slip to John. John showed it to Harm and Diane.

Harm commented, "Well, now we know we have to go to Berloyka, if only to draw our target out." All four officers agreed.

The slip of paper said that Parlovsky was spending time with a known Russian arms dealer named Kadashev.

They did not notice that Sokol stop at a car parked on the opposite side of Red Square. The window was lowered and Colonel Parlovsky showed his face.

Sokol told him, "They leave for Berloyka in the morning."

"Then they go to die", Parlovsky muttered.

Friday, September 25, 1998

0900 Local Time

US Embassy, Moscow

The 'Cultural Attache' Ed McGill showed Harm into the ambassador's office. A Mr. Blackadder called here a little while ago. He said he would be here to meet you. Also Webb called. He told me to give you every accommodation. He said to use the secure phone to call your C.O."

"Thanks", Harm said as he reached for the phone. He called AJ's office and reported what he had done and heard so far, especially about Parlovsky & Kadashev.

"Well commander I hope you find your father and stop those missiles from being sold. Just the same be careful", AJ warned him.

"Thank you sir", Harm said as he hung up.
At that moment a well dressed man with a gray trimmed beard came in carrying a briefcase. "Harm?" he asked as he approached with his hand out.

"Mr. Blackadder?" Harm replied.

"Frank said to give you what ever you needed. You said that you needed funds. There's $100,000.00 in the case."

"Yes. I need to buy a ride to Siberia", Harm said.

"It's nice when you can buy what ever you need, isn't it?" Blackadder said sarcastically.

"Yes isn't it", confirmed Harm.

1100 Local time

Posolskaya Hotel, room 720

Harm brought the case back to the hotel. He met with John, Sarah, Diane, and Webb & Carolyn and discussed what they were going to do. Sarah spoke up, "Well I checked with the hotel travel service. All flights to Berloyka have been cancelled."

"That's alright, we can buy a ride on a MIG-29, Harm said.

"Why a MIG-29?" John asked.

"It's a rip off of a Tomcat", Diane said. After the looks she got she said, "Well my husband is a pilot after all."

"Ok Harm and I will buy a check ride and fly to Berloyka", John said.

"Why you?" asked Sarah.

"No offense honey but if you think I'm going to let you or Diane go when I'm more than able to fly RIO for Ace here you're sadly mistaken", declared John sweetly. He added, "While we're gone you two need to work with Webb and Carolyn to run down the Kadashev lead."

"All right then you two be careful", Sarah said.

"Yes dear." John said punctuating it with a kiss.

1300 Local time

Vnokova Military Airfield

'Coincidently' Alexi was available to drive the foursome to the air base. There Harm & John suited up in flight suits. As they approached the plane they met the pilot. John introduced everyone then spoke to the pilot in Russian.

"We won't need you. My friend is an experienced pilot and I can fly as his RIO." John then handed over the money. "Here's $50,000.00 American for your trouble. The pilot gladly took the money and walked away.

Harm took his hand out of his pocket. He was ready to cold cock the pilot with his pistol if he didn't agree to the bribe.
Harm and John kissed their girls then climbed into the cockpit. Just before Harm started the engines, Alexi climbed up to speak to them. "Boss you are not the highest bidder. He tells me that they are waiting for you I could be killed for telling you, but you needed to be warned."

Harm looked back at John. John told him, "We've gone too far now to stop. Let's get as far as we can get."

Harm determinedly agreed and started the engines. They waved to Sarah and Diane as they taxied away.

Harm took off and flew a northeasterly course. "We'll fly low along this river for a while to avoid their radar. We can't stay this low; we'll use up too much fuel. Sooner or later we got to climb to make Berloyka. See if you can get the radar working", he told John.

"Ok ace. Do what you need to", John acknowledged as he got the radar up and running.

After about 45 minutes Harm went for altitude. Just as they cleared 10,000 feet, he heard a warning. "Is that what I think it is", John asked.

"Yep, we're being targeted."

The warning changed cadence again. "They've fired, hang on", Harm said as they climbed for the sun. When he thought he was in position, he banked sharply to the left. He saw the missile over shoot them to their right.

"I suppose that's not all we have to contend with, is it", John asked.

"No, they were heat seekers. They went into the sun because it's a hotter target. They won't make that mistake again", Harm said. Just then they heard machine gun fire hit the right engine nacelle.

"Do we have anything to fight back with?" John asked.

"Only spit", Harm informed him.

"Woonderful", John said sarcastically.

Then another warning sounded.

"These are radar guided and they're locked on. We're in no shape to fly away from them, we have to punch out." Harm called as he climbed into the clouds.

"Harm if we land up in the hospital again, I swear I'll kill you in your sleep", John called out to him.

"Bitch, bitch, bitch, get ready," Harm, yelled back as he pulled the jet into a steep climb. Then he pulled the ejector handle for both their seats. They cleared the plane and had just started falling down and away when the missiles hit, obliterating the aircraft.
Chapter 30

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 30

1445 local time

Lake Uchenskoya

100 Klm east of Moscow

As their chutes opened John saw that they were over the edge of very large lake that was surrounded by thick forest. They were both able to steer their chutes into the trees. John went through the trees and stopped about 10 feet above the ground as his canopy snagged in the branches. After he surveyed his predicament he set himself for the fall and hit his release catch. He hit the ground and rolled a little. He was very happy that all he had was some scratches on his hands. He took his helmet off, pulled his pistol and set out in the direction where he saw Harm came down.

Harm for his part lost his helmet and hit his head rather hard on a branch as he fell through the trees. As he started to come to, he saw a large eye looking right at him. He realized that he was looking at a horse. He heard some voices speaking in English. They came from the cart the horse was pulling.

"Do you think he came from that plane that exploded?" a female voice asked.

"He must have. I do not see any others around. Do you think he is Russian?" a male voice answered.

"I don't know, but he is handsome", she declared.

"Let's leave him. Why risk trouble", he said.

"All right, but I want the silk", she said.

With that the man stirred his horse forward. He stood and drew his knife. Just as he reached to cut the harness, Harm became fully alert and seeing the knife in front of him, reached up to get leverage and kicked both his feet into the man's chest. This sent the man sprawling onto the ground. Harm hit his quick relase and fell awkwardly to the ground.

The woman started to shout, "He was trying to help you." at that point John showed up.

He shouted in Russian, "Stop don't go near him."

"You are Russian?" the man asked.

"No American", John replied.

"Spy pilots?" she asked.

"No, tourists", John said.

"To bad then. At least spy pilots had gold coins to give to anyone who helped them", she said.

"We don't have gold coins but we have hundred dollar bills, lots of them", John said waving the bundle he took from his pocket.
That stopped the man and woman in their tracks.

Same time

Vnokova Military Airfield

Sarah and Diane decided to go back to the hotel when Webb and Carolyn pulled up.

"Where are John & Harm?" Webb asked.

Diane answered, "They went flying in a MIG-29 to Berloyka." Then she asked, "Where have you two been? What have you found out?"

"We confirmed that Parlovsky was the rogue KGB Agent running the prisoner captive program. We also found out that he and maybe Sokol are the ones selling the nuclear tipped missiles to Kadashev and the Russian mafia", Carolyn told them.

Sarah interrupted, "It's Parlovsky whose selling the missiles. Sokol was hearing the same things and he relayed the message to us last night when he showed us Harm Senior's dossier."

"That's why Parlovsky wanted us to stop. He knows that if it came out about the POWs then he would be implicated as the rogue and then his missile selling would be exposed", Diane added.

Webb continued, "That's right. That also means Harm and John are in danger. A Major Zhakov called the Russian Air Defense command from Lubyanka and told them that their plane was stolen and that the two flyers were terrorists."

Before they could continue the saw a ZNN News truck pull onto the airfield. A newsman named Chuck DePalma came out and set up his camera. He saw the Mackenzie sisters and approached them.

"Ladies are you acquainted with the pilot and RIO of the plane that crashed just a while ago. Sarah and Diane were shocked to hear that their fiancé and husband may be dead, but they hid it well. Sarah replied in Russian that they did not know what he was talking about. Carolyn and Webb ushered them into a car and they drove to the American Embassy.

2100 Local time

Uchenskoya Forest

Harm and John were introduced to their hosts. His name was Vasya and her name was Rusza. The told them that they were 'The People' or Gypsies.

"You know the Navajo Tribe in America call themselves the people," Harm told them. "Where did you learn English?"

"Our family left Russia when we were babies and brought us up in London. When Communism collapsed, we came back. We've been living on the land for the last three years. We make our living doing things for people."

"Is this the only transportation that you have access to?" Harm asked.

"Yes it is. Where would you like to go?" Vasya asked him.

"Berloyka, that's where we were going when we were shot down", John said.
"Shot down! Are you criminals?" Rusza asked.

"No, we must have been mistaken for someone else. We paid for the ride on the jet and so on. We can't understand why we were shot down," John lied.

"How long would it take if we rode with you to Berloyka?" Harm asked.

"About a month maybe more; it is the end of summer and the cold will be setting in," Vasya replied.

"What about other transportation?" John asked.

"The nearest railroad station is at Perm for the Trans Siberian Railroad. We could reach there by the end of tomorrow", Vasya said.

"Will you take us there?" Harm asked.

Of course we would", replied Rusza. "You pay well enough", she said with a smile. "But first we need to change your clothing. In those uniforms, you will stand out like, what do Americans say, a sore finger?"

"Sore thumb", said Harm. "And thank you."

2200 Local time

US Embassy

Sarah and Webb were using the speaker on the secure phone as they spoke with Admiral Chegwidden. A news report of Harm and John's plane crashing into Lake Uchenskoya was running since yesterday. Diane was beside herself. Carolyn was consoling her. Sarah on the other hand was calm as could be. She had a feeling that John and Harm were alright. She couldn't explain it, but she knew. She also realized that she had to hold it together for her sister. That made her the only one composed enough to give the admiral a report.

"The reports I've been hearing is that they were on a check ride with another plane following beside them when they flew into a flock of migrating geese and exploded over the lake. The Russian authorities say that they found wreckage, but no bodies. Dragging the lake to look for them would be impossible as it is quite deep. Admiral I don't think they're dead. There are too many lies going around. There was no other plane. They took off alone. And our cabbie Alexi told them and us that 'they were waiting for them'. He wasn't able to tell us who 'they' were."

Webb continued, "I spoke to Chuck DePalma of ZNN. He knows that the reports he's been handed are lies. It's September, the geese up here don't migrate until October. We do know that Sokol is out looking for them at Uchenskoya. He did promise us that he would call us when he has something definitive to report."

"All right Mac, Webb I'm flying out of Andrews tonight on a Lear in about 30 minutes. I hope when I get there we'll have better news," AJ said.

Saturday, September 26, 1998

0200 Local time

Deep in the Uchenskoya Forest

Rusza woke with a start. She was trembling. She had a dream, she saw herself bathing in a stream.
Then 4 soldiers came upon her and starting to pull and grab at her. She saw that her brother and Harm heard her cries and came running. Before Vasya could stop him, Harm jumped up from hiding and advanced at the soldiers. He was firing his pistol. He managed to shoot three soldiers before the fourth gained enough sense to return fire. Harm was hit and he fell dead. It was at that point Rusza woke up.

0800 Local time

Deep in the Uchenskoya Forest

The next morning she was acting like a crazy woman. She started throwing Harm's and John's things in a pile. She yelled, "I want you gone, get away from us".

Vasya tried to calm her. He knew what was bothering her. She had told him of her vision. "Tell them Rusza", he insisted.

"Tell us what", John asked.

Rusza has the gift. She can see the future", Vasya told him.

"What did she see?" Harm asked.

"I saw you die," she cried. "I was bathing in a pool when soldiers came on me, pulling and grabbing and you didn't do anything to help," she cried and pushed at her brother.

"Well we'll avoid the pools until you leave us at Perm and your dream won't come true," John said.

"You mock the gift. I once dreamed that we would return to Russia and here we are," Rusza said.

"That would be a self fulfilling prophesy wouldn't it?" Harm asked.

"Oh one time I dreamed that Vasya would be shot chasing chickens," Rusza cried.

"I have never gone near a chicken," Vasya said.

"And that's because of my vision," Rusza declared.

"Look we'll watch out for soldiers and after Perm you won't have to worry anymore, OK," John assured.

His plan was accepted. Vasya instructed Harm and John to follow him. "Come here you two; try on these shirts and pants. If the pants are to short, you can tuck the ends in your boots." When they were done John & Harm could pass for gypsies. They packed the cart and headed out for Perm.

On the way the heard a helicopter fly overhead. Harm stuck his head out to look. Vasya pushed him back inside. The wagon were apparently spotted as it came into a clearing in the trees. The pilot brought the copter to a hover a short distance away.

They heard Sokol's voice come over the loudspeaker in Russian. "We are looking for two pilots from the plane that crashed yesterday. Have you seen them? There is a reward of 50,000 Rubles for their safe return."

Vasya and Rusza both waved and shook their heads no. The copter flew off. John and Harm stuck their heads out from in the wagon.

"Well Major Sokol is looking for us. Do you think he saw you oh impulsive one?" John asked
"Maybe, but I did see him. When we get to Perm we'll deal with him," Harm said.

"It's no doubt that he'll be heading there," John said.

They settled in for the trip.

1830 Local time

Trans-Siberian Railway station

In Perm

Vasya, Rusza, Harm and John arrived at the depot late that day. They missed the early afternoon train going east and the posted schedule said that the next one was due to arrive in 45 minutes. They all agreed that Vasya should buy their tickets as he was not being looked for. John and Harm picked out a bench on the platform to wait. Their plan was to continue to Berloyka until they were stopped. It would give their plan of exposing the seller of the nuclear missiles a chance to succeed. Now they would just wait for the train.

John pulled out his Giants cap and pulled it over his eyes, sat back, crossed his arms and stretched out his legs. "Wake me when our ride gets here will ya Ace," John requested.

Harm shook his head and said. "Where did you hide that thing? Also we don't want to stick out."

Without lifting his head John replied, "I had it tucked into the leg pocket of my flightsuit. After that I had it tucked into my belt at my back under my shirt. Also we want to stick out. That way there's less of a chance they'll start shooting. Sit back and relax I got a feeling we'll be leaving soon anyway either by train or otherwise. I think this may be Sokol's next stop. If he's not here we'll get on the train."

Harm looked at him bemused. Ever since they were working together he always thought John seemed to know something more than what was going on. He followed John's example and pulled his gypsy cap over his own eyes put his head back and stretched out his legs.

Vasya and Rusza were on line and they bought the two tickets to Berloyka. Just before they walked away, a gloved hand reached out and snatched them from Vasya's hand.

"Berloyka, they must have paid you more than fifty thousand rubles," Sokol said to them as soldiers surrounded them.

They walked out to the platform. Sokol looked around the platform and spotted two men sitting on a bench with their legs stretched out. He almost turned away, but then he saw the blue cap with the lower case 'ny'. He walked over to them.

As John heard the footsteps approach he tipped his head back to look from under his cap. He nudged Harm and said, "Hey Harm I think our ride is here." He and Harm stood up.

Turning to Sokol John added, "What took you so long?"

Sokol just shook his head. "Awfully sure of yourself aren't you Captain? I figured you were with the gypsies."

"So why didn't you just land and pick us up?" John countered.
"Too many trees." Sokol stated with a smile. "Why didn't you show yourselves then?"

"We were shot down. We couldn't risk exposure just then. We didn't know who else was around. Also, what was the idea about shooting us down? A simple follow me and land immediately would have sufficed," John said. "You owe us $50,000. We bought that ride fair and square."

Sokol smiled at John's sarcasm as he replied, "Sorry I didn't give the order to shoot you down. I only told the pilots to shadow you for your safety. After you left I heard that the 'shoot down' order came from someone in Lubyanka. I was too late to stop it so I came out here to see if you survived and find you and to keep you safe."

Addressing Harm, "Commander, when we get done here, I'll help you find your father. Right now we need to get back to Moscow. There's something bigger going on. The fact that you were shot down proved that."

"So it is Parlovsky," John declared.

"Yes we pulled in Kadashev and he told us he was dealing with Parlovsky," Sokol added.

"Lead on MacDuff," John said nonchalantly.

John and Harm went with Sokol. On the way down the platform they stopped at where Vasya and Rusza were standing with the soldiers.

Shaking Vasya's hand and kissing Rusza on both cheeks Harm said, "Thank you for all your help. Now your dream won't come true."

Rusza smiled and kissed his cheeks back. "Both of you be well," she said.

Then they and the soldiers followed Sokol to his helicopter which was parked a short walk away from the station.

Vasya and Rusza watched them leave then walked to their wagon. Taking comfort in the fact that they were left alone.

2330 Local Time

Vnokova Military Airfield

AJ arrived that afternoon after his own 10 hour flight. Webb sent Alexi to pick-up AJ Now he, Sarah and Webb were sitting in Alexi's cab outside the gate to the airfield.

Webb began, "As you know before we left the states, we found out that Parlovsky was trying to procure 6 nuclear tipped missiles through an arms dealer named Kadashev to sell to the highest bidder. We weren't sure if Sokol was involved with him. John sent Carolyn and me to beat the bushes to find out. We hooked onto Alexi. Kadashev and the Russian mafia think Alexi is working for them. They've been paying him to keep tabs on Col. Parlovsky and Maj. Sokol. Parlovsky and Sokol were both paying him to spy for each of them.

"You work for the Russian Mafia, Parlovsky & Sokol?" AJ asked Alexi incredulously.

"They pay me to spy on each other," Alexi confirmed.

"How do you keep em straight. Hell that's worse than dating three women at the same time," AJ quipped.
"I should be so fortunate," said Alexi.

"All Alexi has to remember is that he works for the highest bidder, me. Right Alexi?" Webb added.

"Right boss," Alexi added sullenly.

"So what's all this got to do with Rabb and Marshall looking for the POWs?" AJ asked.

"Once a bad apple always a bad apple. We found that the same one who Kadashev approached to steal the missiles, is the same rogue KGB Official who brought Harm's father and the other POWs to Russia and that's Parlovsky," Webb said.

"John also figured that if they went about looking for Harm's father, they would flush out Parlovsky, Kadashev and his missile buyers. Harm was going to keep coming anyway until he did," Sarah said.

"What about Sokol?" AJ asked.

"We don't know for sure, Webb said.

You don't know?" AJ asked incredulously

"Sokol is too young to have worked the POWs operation as he was growing up in Houston. We know it's Parlovsky but Sokol could be working with him," said Webb.

Sarah said "Also most of the intel points to Col Parlovsky, but that intel comes from Maj. Sokol who could be planting it to cover his own butt. We've been working him."

"And we can't afford to nab one man and let another guilty man go, not when there're nuclear weapons at stake. We're talking 6 nuclear tipped missiles in the hand of the highest bidder. You would risk a dozen SEAL teams to stop that," Webb added.

AJ had to agree. "So Rabb and Marshall are the bait and who ever kills them, that's your man," AJ said.

"I wouldn't put it like that," Webb said

"Then how would you put it Webb," asked a disgusted AJ

"I am not trying to get them killed. Remember Sarah just said it was John's idea to keep going. He was banking on Carolyn and I to definitively prove it was Parlovsky and eliminate Sokol as a suspect before they went to Berloyka. Sokol pulled in and questioned Kadashev after Harm & John took off. Also remember Parlovsky's survived three government changes. We had to have proof that we could bring to the Russian Government. Proof that would keep Parlovsky from wriggling out from under," Webb said informatively

"But you didn't. They blew them out of the sky and you did nothing-(turning to Alexi) you knew they were going to be shot down didn't you. So how is it that you don't know who gave the order?" AJ asked with venom.

"He didn't. He heard about the order from his mafia contact. I couldn't ask Alexi to stop John & Harm from flying off without blowing his cover with the mafia, Kadashev, Parlovsky and Sokol. So Carolyn & I tried to get to the airfield and stop Harm & John ourselves, but we were too late," Webb said.

"We put it all together on our way to the embassy after we heard the jet was shot down. Clay told me
Ed McGill, the CIA station chief, has his people eavesdrop on all calls coming out of and going into Lubyanka Prison. He heard a call going out from a Major Zhakov relaying an order to shoot down the plane shortly after Harm and John took off. We believe Zhakov is Parlovsky. Also today before you got here, McGill heard another call. Col. Parlovsky received a call that Major Sokol picked up John & Harm at the Perm Railway Depot traveling under the guise of gypsies," Sarah said.

"So they are still alive. Why didn't you tell me?" AJ asked annoyed

Before Sarah could reply they heard the sound of a helo. Alexi said, "Listen, it is Maj Sokol returning."

"And here's Col Parlovsky to meet him," Webb said as he saw a limo being driven through the gate.

"If he sees Rabb & Marshall, they're both dead," AJ informed him.

"Not if we're quick enough," Sarah said as she checked her weapon.

"Give me a weapon," demanded AJ

Webb reached over and gave AJ a 9mm. sig. AJ checked its ammo.

"Let's hope John & Harm are on that helo," AJ said almost in prayer. He and Webb looked through binoculars.

They all looked as the helo landed and the limo approached it

"There's Parlovsky getting out of the limo and there's Major Sokol getting out of the helo." Sarah said excitedly.

"But where are Harm & John. Damnit Webb they're not on the helo," AJ yelled.

Then AJ watched as the helo lifted off and he saw Harm & John. Sarah had to smile as she saw John's 'ny" Giants cap.

"Yes they are," Webb said triumphantly.

"Thank God," AJ breathed

"Parlovsky's definitely our man," said Sarah.

"Wait, Parlovsky's driver is going for a weapon he's going to kill them all," AJ warned as he grabbed the wheel and stomped on the accelerator.

The taxi surged and burst forward through the gate as Alexi took back control to keep it going. As it crashed through the gate, Parlovsky's driver turned and fired at it. AJ in front was low and Sarah in back was high as they hung out from the passenger windows of the cab. Webb was relegated to holding Sarah's legs to keep her from falling out. They returned fire and hit the driver. As the driver went down Parlovsky turned and shot Sokol. Harm and John ran forward and shot Parlovsky.

"Admiral?" asked Harm astonished to see his CO.

"Are you two OK?" AJ asked as he exited the car.

"Yes sir." Harm and John replied.

Sarah jumped out of the cab and ran to John. After she hugged and kissed him she knelt by Sokol
saying, "It's ok Marc it's not that bad."

"I should have gotten shot sooner if that's what it took to get you to hold me Sarah," Sokol said with a smile

"Careful or I'll shoot you again," John said with a smile as he stood looking over Sarah's shoulder.

"Alexi what are you doing here?" Sokol asked.

"I came to tell you I quit boss," Alexi says and then turned and walked away.

Harm went over to dying the Parlovsky. "Colonel you know what happened to my father."

Parlovsky whispered something.

"What?" he asked as he bent closer.

Parlovsky whispered again. This time Harm understood what was said but not what it was.

"Svischevo?"

Sunday, September 27, 1998

1030 Local Time

Svischevo, Siberia

Sarah translated what the Russian lady said for Harm John & Diane followed close behind.

"How come you don't translate?" Diane asked John.

"Sarah's Russian is better than mine. She's more fluent. I have to think twice before I translate what was said. She's like lightning compared to me" John replied.

Svetlana was the woman's name. She looked at Harm as she spoke and Sarah translated.

"When I heard that you were seeking your father in Svischvo I knew it must be the man I call Tetia. That was the name I gave the one who looked like you. I found him in the barn nearly frozen to death and nursed him back to life. For two years he worked the farm with me and my brother. We spoke Russian, but he never told us who he was or where he came from. But I knew it was from far away because he seemed to always be looking to the horizon. I knew someday he would leave me.

Svetlana spoke in Russian and Sarah looked dismayed as she hesitated to translate.

"What, what did she say?" Harm asks.

"She said that this is where the three of them came to picnic the day Tetia was killed."

Harm went from shock to dismay to resignation. John and Diane went through the same gamut of emotions.

"Tell her to go on," Harm says. Sarah urged her in Russian.

"I was swimming in the pool when the soldiers came." She described Rusza's vision. "My brother tried to stop Tetia from helping me. He was afraid we would all be killed. But when he saw how bravely Tetia died, it inspired him. He killed the fourth soldier with his bare hands." They all stopped
...and look at each other.

"Where is my father buried?" Harm asks.

"My brother took the bodies into the Taiga to bury them. I don't know where, he wouldn't tell me. He was afraid I would go there and someone would see."

"Where is her brother now?" Harm asked.

"He died fifteen years ago."

"Checkov says 'that the strength of the Taiga does not lie in its giant trees and silence, but that only migrating birds know where it ends'. Only the birds and your father."

Svetlana cupped Harm's face, kissed him on both cheeks and embraced him as she cried on his shoulder.

Harm broke the embrace and walked a short distance and stared out over the forest. Diane went over to join him, linking her arms to his.

As tears fell down his cheeks he said, "Goodbye Dad, I love you."
Chapter 31

Timing is Everything

Chapter 31

Monday, September 28, 1998

1930 Local time

Arrivals Terminal

Andrews Air Force Base

Washington DC

After Svischevo they went back to Moscow and filed a report from the American Embassy. Sokol was sent to the hospital to have his injuries treated. From there he was instrumental in getting the Military Affairs people to keep looking into the 'rogue' POW transfer operation to find any more bodies that were out there. They decided that after Parlovsky was ferreted out, the other rogue KGB personnel had to be rooted out as well.

They flew the Lear out of Shemytevo Airport at 1700 local time on the 27th.

Now as they went through the terminal, they saw Sydney, Ann Marie and Pete. Ann Marie was holding Andy and Pete was holding Sarah Cate. Sarah Cate was just beginning to walk. Pete put her down and she toddled to her mother.

Diane was so long without her daughter that she couldn't wait for her baby to get to her. She crossed the distance between them faster than a speeding bullet. She took hold of little Sarah, raised her high and then engulfed her in a smothering hug.

"Happy Birthday my baby, Mommy missed you so much," Diane cried as she kissed her child.

Harm joined her and embraced the two most important women in his life.

Ann Marie gave Andy to Pete and she rushed forward to engulf Sarah and John in smothering hugs of her own. Then she slapped John's arm.

"Ow. You know I'm getting tired of all you women slapping my arms. Knock it off willya!" John yelled.

"What's the idea of frightening us again? When the President heard you may be dead, he couldn't face me. He sent Toby Zigler in. Even he couldn't tell me until I practically strangled him," she informed her brother.

"Did Mom and Dad hear the reports?" John asked with trepidation.

"No thank God. But you still better call them as soon as you get home. They didn't trust that you'd come out of Russia at all," she said.

AJ heard the exchange and he had to laugh. "We should have more siblings giving orders, I never saw him that scared of me when he worked at JAG. All right people, go home get some sleep. Tomorrow we'll start a new day. John I called Thomas while we were in flight and you were asleap."
He said he'll see you and Diane tomorrow also."

"Thanks Admiral. Good working with you again," John added shaking his hand.

"Same here John," AJ said with a yawn.

"Admiral, we'll have Sarah Cate's 1st birthday party this Saturday. Harm will give you details tomorrow or Wednesday. We'd like you and Sydney to come," Diane asked.

"Wouldn't miss it," AJ said. "Good night everyone," he said as he walked away with Sydney to his car.

The Rabbs, Marshalls and Matthews walked out to the parking lot. Harm left his minivan with Ann Marie and Pete. They piled in, buckled the kids and went home to Florida Ave. There they took out Andy's seat and then the Rabbs went home.

Sarah and John just piled into bed not even bothering with supper. The next day they went right back into planning their wedding, but with one small hitch.

Tuesday, September 29, 1998

1400 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

Harm was packing up his memorabilia and information of his father that he kept in his office. When he put the last item in the box he took the photo of him and his father from his wallet. He heard his father's words, 'Tell Harm I'll see him soon. Be strong Trish. I love you'.

He was so lost in that memory that he didn't hear his sister-in-law come to the door.

He sensed that she was there as he looked up saying, "Hey come in. I'm just filing some stuff away."

"How's your mom?" Sarah asked.

"She's good. I spoke to her last night before we went to sleep. She called for Sarah Cate's birthday. I told her everything that we found out. She's glad it's over and she'll see us at the wedding," Harm said.

"You're still wearing his MIA Bracelet," Sarah pointed out. Harm took it off and dropped it into the box resignedly.

"You know Harm, just because your filing his things away, it doesn't mean you're filing away your memories away. You'll always have them," Sarah offered in consolation.

Before Harm could say anything, Bud came to the door saying, "Sir, ma'am, the admiral wants to see you ASAP."

On their way in Harm & Sarah saw John, Diane, Webb and even the SECNAV come into JAG. They all trooped into AJ's office.

They sat and watched a news report saying that the Sudanese people were protesting their government's lack of reaction to the US Bombing of a suspected chemical weapons factory in Sudan.
Webb began as he handed photos of the parties out.

"When we got back to work today we walked right into a buzzsaw. As we already knew the Sudanese president was assassinated seven weeks ago. No one is claiming responsibility. As a result there is a civil war going on. The forces in the south are led by General Hayad Zulakai, the leader of the Sudanese Freedom Party. He's old school hard core. The forces in the north are led by Ambassador Khaim Moshak, new school politically savy. General Zulakai is all muscle, Ambassador is all brain."

"Sounds like they should get together," Sarah quipped.

"They probably will, at ten paces," AJ said.

"Which would leave room for Professor Dubotu, who is the heart and soul of his country, a poet who speaks for his people," Webb continued.

"Whoever he endorses wins the election," AJ added.

"Which way is he leaning," Harm asked.

"Nobody knows," Webb replied.

"Sounds like he should run for election," commented Sarah.

"The professor despises politics," AJ said.

"He was supposed to sit down with our president last Thursday, but he never showed," Webb said.

"Kidnapped?" Harm asked.

"Most likely, Ambassador Moshak and General Zulakai are, of course, blaming each other," Webb finished as he put the photos away.

AJ continued the briefing. 'Sudan has a strategic importance to this country. It borders Libya and the Red Sea. Iran has a base in the Port of Sud. General Zulakai does not want an American presence in his country, Ambassador Moshak will."

"Guess who we're rooting for," Harm commented.

"Harm, Diane told me that you were invited to an embassy party Ambassador Moshak is giving to solidify his support," John said.

Harm just looked over at his wife, sitting next to John on the couch as she smiled primly at him.

"You know the ambassador?" Sarah asked.

"Not really. I took him for a ride in a Tomcat once as part of a plan by the Pentagon to woo him to our side." Harm answered.

"The ambassador likes to surround himself with military types. He thinks this helps boost his image as a leader," AJ continued.

"So you and Sarah will have the perfect cover, going in as husband and wife." Webb added.

"Cover for what?" Sarah asked.
"This is a perfect opportunity for us to learn if he knows anything of the professor's abduction. We need you to go in and access the embassy's computer system," Webb said.

"You want us to break into a foreign embassy's computer system. What aren't we being told?" Harm said.

"Tell them the other thing," John instructed Webb.

"There is also a report of a sample of the Ebola Virus being stolen from a research lab in Delaware. The evidence points to the same people who kidnapped Dubutu. We don't know for sure. We need to find out," Webb finished.

Everyone sobered up at that revelation.

"When's the party?" Sarah asked.

"1900 tonight," AJ Answered.

"Tonight, my dress uniform is in the cleaners, I don't have a dress ready. I have to do my hair," Sarah trailed off.

"Your hair is fine major and Diane already took care of the dress," AJ said.

"John and I went to buy your gown. We are the same size and all. I also went to Florida Ave. to get your cosmetics and accessories together. Also I know what Harm needed. We have everything in John's car. You can change here," Diane said with a smile.

"Then why don't Diane and I go in?" Harm asked.

"Normally I'd say Sarah and I or Diane and you. But we need Diane at ATAC and Sarah and I are too well known as a couple. So it has to be you and Sarah. Sarah you think you can be Diane for a night? All you need to do is put on a wedding ring a little sooner than we planned." John asked.

"Sis you are so bad. You knew we couldn't say no. Now you know why we get our hair done the same way," Sarah teased Harm & John.

"Yeah I can do it," she answered.

Even the SECNAV smiled at the sisterly exchange. Her sobered up when he intoned. "Remember people we are doing fact finding. We do not need to start an international incident here in Washington, so tread lightly."

A chorus of 'aye. aye sirs' rang out from the participants.

"Dismissed!" AJ called.

"Ah Captain Marshall, please stay a minute," the SECNAV ordered.

When everyone had cleared the room and Tiner closed the door, the SECNAV began.

"The President called me this morning. He wanted me to commend you on the job you and the others did in Russia last week. What your team did over there was extraordinary. You got your intelligence and acted accordingly. You did what you needed to do to stop those nuclear missiles from landing in the hands of criminals; never once forgetting about the Russians' sensitivities. Finding out about the POWs was a bonus."
As for me, Captain I have been watching you as you've been working at NCIS and Admiral Magnum has kept me abreast of your progress since you began and after you recovered from your shooting. You have assembled quite a team of people around you between here and your office. I want to tell you keep doing what you are doing. I sleep a lot better knowing we have people like you working for us. An official commendation will appear in yours and the others' files." He got up and shook John's hand and prepared to leave.

"Thank you sir, I appreciate hearing that," John replied.

"Please relay my congratulations to the rest of your squad and keep me apprised of this operation tonight," the SECNAV ordered him and AJ as he left.

"Aye, aye sir," they both said.

1800 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm was dressed in his mess dress uniform. John and Webb were briefing him in AJ's office. Webb was pointing at blueprints spread out on AJ's desk as he spoke.

"The reception is being held in the ballroom. Moshak's office is on the 2nd floor here. There's a fire escape door here, but it has an alarm on it. At 1946 there will be a 6 second power outage. That will give you enough time to get into the stairwell. Then all you have to do is get past the Security Room here," Webb said.

"Is that all," Harm asked sarcastically.

"There is a maximum of two Security Officers watching the video monitors at one time. If you can get them out of the room you're home free," Webb finished.

"Now how am I supposed to do that Webb?" Harm asked.

Instead of answering, Webb looked to the door to the office. Leaning against the frame was Sarah. As she moved off the lintel she fully showed the gown she had on. It was blue made of shimmering silk. It was sleeveless with two straps over the shoulders with a plunging neckline. As Sarah walked, she showed plenty of leg as the dress was slit up her left leg to mid-thigh. All four men stared openly at her. John just smiled appreciatively. Sarah just drank it all in. AJ cleared his throat as a signal to continue.

"There is a computer in the ambassador's outer office. You'll need to reboot it." Webb said.

Webb extracted a computer disc and cell phone with a USB wire connected.

"You're a regular James Bond, Clay," Sarah said with a smirk. He just smirked back.

"Use this disc. Then hook up this cell phone. It's programmed to speed dial a modem at ATAC where we have a data specialist waiting with Diane."

"Also, you can't make any personal calls, it's only wired for high-speed modem transfers," Webb finished.

"And if the Commander gets caught?" Sarah asked.

"He'll be in and out in 2 minutes max," Webb finished.
"It's a simple acquisition job. Get the information from the computer and leave," John said.

"This is strictly a voluntary assignment. Neither one of you need to do it if you don't want to," AJ advised.

"Well I didn't get dressed up for nothin' sir," Sarah said.

"And I already shaved twice today sir," Harm added.

Harm then reached into his pocket and pulled out Diane's wedding ring. "Here's your loaner." He said handing it to Sarah. She slipped it on her finger right next to her engagement ring. She held her hand up to admire how it looked.

John winked at her and said, "Not too long now." Sarah smiled back.

1932 Local Time

Sudanese Embassy, Washington

Harm & Sarah gave their invitation to the uniformed usher at the door. They were introduced as 'Lt. Commander and Mrs. Harmon Rabb'. As they walked into the ballroom Sarah whispered, "I can't wait until John & I are introduced that way." Harm squeezed her hand affectionately. "25 days to go," he whispered back.

The embassy had its main ballroom on the 1st floor. They took their champagne glasses. Harm sipped his politely while Sarah held onto hers. As they entered the ballroom the ambassador spotted him.

"Ah commander Rabb it is good to see you," he said effusely.

"May I introduce my wife, Diane," Harm offered.

"Charming," Moshak said as he kissed her hand.

They chatted for a minute then Harm said, "Excuse me I see someone I know."

He walked off toward the fire exit stairway leading to the 2nd floor.

After he got situated, he caught Sarah's eye and motioned for her to come over. She poured her champagne into a convenient vase at the foot of the main stairs.

"What time is it?" Harm asked her.

"1947, they're late," Sarah commented.

"We may have to call this thing off," Harm whispered.

Before Sarah could answer, the lights went out.

The two officers went right into the stairway.

As the lights came back the ambassador joked, "I must remember to pay that electric bill." The guests chuckled accordingly. Moshak then went to a guard and ordered, "Find out what is going on."

Up on the 2nd floor Sarah came stumbling out of the stairway as if drunk. The guards on video duty spotted her right away. One came out to her. He tried to get her to go down stairs.
"I seemed to have lost my way," Sarah slurred. She stumbled slightly and the guard caught her. He called his fellow for assistance. The 2nd guard came out of the video room. Harm, who was watching Sarah’s performance through the crack in the doorway saw his opportunity when Sarah held her stomach and said, "I think I'm going to be sick." The guards urged her toward the nearby ladies room. As they stuck their heads in the door of the lavatory, Harm stepped out of the stairway and scooted into the ambassador's office. He disabled the camera on the wall in the corner and set to work on the computer.

He did all he was instructed and waited for all the data to be transmitted. "c'mon, c'mon" he muttered. When the transfer process was completed Harm disconnected the cell phone and got up to leave. Before he could get to the door, he heard gunshots coming from the ballroom downstairs.

2005 Local Time

Sudanese Embassy, Washington

Sarah came out of the Ladies' Room saying, "I'm alright now could you direct me back to the party?"

"One guard stopped her though, "I'm sorry miss, we have to escort you out."

Sarah keeping in character shouted indignantly, "Is this how the ambassador treats his honored guests?" She kept shouting as she was led down the main stairs to the ballroom and the front exit. Before they could guide her to the door, Sarah broke away and ran toward the ambassador.

"Ambassador, is this how you treat your guests?" she said.

Before Moshak could react, one waiter pulled a gun and shot twice into the ceiling.

2010 Local Time

Sudanese Embassy, Washington

John had left Webb to monitor the situation from JAG. He was waiting at a café across the street from the embassy. He was dressed in his black jeans and sneakers. He wore a black collared shirt and a black windbreaker. He was ready to infiltrate the embassy. He and Webb decided that the infiltration would only be done as a last resort if anything went wrong.

John, Harm, Webb and Sarah went over the plans of the building and there was a way in through an abandoned tunnel in the basement of the building just outside the embassy wall. The Sudanese delegation did not know of the tunnel so it was not alarmed. The door at the embassy end of the tunnel was built as a set of shelves in a little used storage room. Harm and Sarah knew that they could use the tunnel if they needed to duck out of the embassy unseen.

The State Department owned that building. John had Gibbs and Tony waiting in the basement. In fact it was Gibbs and Tony who had cut the power for the needed 6 seconds. They had simply gone through the tunnel, shut off the main circuit panel, waited the 6 seconds, turned the power back on and retreated back through the tunnel.

He and Sarah sewed a small bug into a strap of her gown. He listened on a portable receiver through an earplug. He grinned as he heard her perform her tipsy bimbo act and being escorted out. He dropped his smile when he heard the gunfire. He alerted Gibbs and Tony and hurried to the basement where they waited.

They went through the tunnel and cracked the door open. They thanked the State Department techs who oiled the hidden hinges of the door. They didn't see anyone prowling around the basement. All
the activity was centered on the 1st & 2nd floors.

The entrance to the door leading from the basement to the fire stairs that Harm used to get to the office was not alarmed. They crept up the stairs and listened at the door. They didn't open it because they knew the alarm would be activated. They heard the guests being ushered up the main staircase to the 2nd floor. They crept up the stairs to that floor.

"From what I can hear from Sarah's dress is that the waiters are taking hostages. They are not making demands yet. I guess they are waiting for the media to get here. Let's hope no one tries to get brave," John said.

Just as he said that he heard Moshak try to reason with one of the terrorists. They heard one shot. Then they heard Sarah's voice come over the bug. "You've shot the ambassador". John breathed a sigh of relief. That was her way of letting him know she wasn't the victim.

In the ballroom, Sarah went to help Moshak, but she was stopped by the guards. She could see that he was shot in the shoulder. Then she suddenly realized there was less blood than there should be. She remembered this because she was intimately aware of a wound at that location because she saw it last spring when John got shot. She knew then that there was more going on than what appeared.

The terrorist leader spoke up, "Cooperate and no one will get hurt."

It's a little late for that," Sarah answered.

The leader spoke again. "We will splitting you up into groups and putting you in secure rooms. Now we have a number of war heroes here tonight. I assure you now is not the time for senseless acts of violence."

Sarah was led away with the other guests.

Upstairs Harm saw through the door where the guests, especially Sarah, were being placed. He went back to the desk and called JAG. He told the admiral what was going on. He heard AJ tell Bud to call the DC Police.

"Commander, stay put, don't try and be heroic," AJ Ordered.

"You know me sir," Harm answered.

AJ had to smirk at that. "Yes I do. Also if I know your future brother in law, he's already on top of what is going on. So wait for his back-up."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm acknowledged. He heard someone at the office door. "I gotta go sir." Then he hung up the phone and went to stand behind a door. A guard came in, pulled a chair to under the camera. Harm snuck up behind him. He pulled the guard down and punched him. While the guard was groggy, he relieved him of his weapon.

Harm heard another on the guard's radio. "Have you fixed the camera yet?"

Harm held the radio to the guard's face and the gun to the back of his neck. "Yes, I will do it now," the guard replied. They heard the elevator open in the hallway. The guard managed to say "hey" before Harm knocked him out with the gun butt to the back of his head. The guard lay still as Harm dragged him to behind the office couch. Harm ducked down under the desk. He heard Moshak and the terrorist leader walk into and speaking in the inner office.

Moshak removed the special effects device that simulated him getting shot and began.
"Want a drink?"

"No!"

"It may help calm you."

"I don't want to be calm."

"Relax the worst part is over. You did well."

"The worst part? Every law enforcement agency and military group in Washington now has this place surrounded."

"Of course they do. That was the plan. Don't be getting cold feet colonel. Everything is going as expected. Right now the entire world is pointing fingers and throwing accusations at General Zulakai. He'll deny it of course, but the damage will be done. So here's to Sudan's next leader, President Moshak. I like the sound of that."

Just then the office phone rang. The colonel answered. He said, "The hostage negotiator from the Secret Service is calling."

Moshak answered. "Right on time. They want you to release the hostages."

"What should I tell them?" the colonel asked.

"Tell them nothing. It's time for act two. Shut down the switchboard," Moshak ordered. The colonel relayed the order over the phone.

Moshak was loading a pistol and putting his arm in a sling. He gave the colonel his pistol back and walked out of the office.

When the outer door closed Harm came up from under the desk. He tried the phone again then cursed silently when he found it was dead. He went to find Sarah.

Sarah was in the room with other hostages. She took out a set of lock picks and tried to pick the lock. Kate Larkin showed her how to expertly do it while she worked at NCIS. She was having some success when she heard someone at the other side. She stepped back then sighed in relief when Harm came through. Harm went through the door pointing the guard's weapon. He lowered the weapon when he saw Sarah.

"What's happening?" Sarah asked him.

"It's a scam. There are no terrorists. The shooting was faked. It's all a ploy to make the ambassador look like a hero and discredit General Zulakai."

Sarah turned to the other hostages in the room. "Everybody stay put." The she walked out with Harm. They crept down the main staircase. The stopped when they could see into the ballroom They saw the colonel lying dead in front of the podium. They also saw Moshak speaking into the camera enacting his farce.

"This is Ambassador Moshak. General Zulakai's terrorists have attempted to take over the embassy."

A man fired a machine gun in the air.

"We have disarmed some of them, but there are still several still at large. If my people are watching back home, I assure you we will not let this senseless act of violence go unavenged. What General
Zulakai has tried to destroy, will become even more powerful. Our country will be united."

More machine gun fire.

"We will overcome our enemies. General Zulakai will be overthrown and the Sudanese Freedom Party will be crushed, ending their reign of terror and I will bring peace to Sudan. You have my promise." He looked around furtively.

"I bet he's got a lot of people fooled," Sarah commented. She and Harm saw Moshak remove his sling and order a lackey to remove the colonel's body.

"He really killed him!" Sarah softly exclaimed.

"Yep, the only way this thing works if you have at least one body," Harm answered.

"Harm, we're the only ones who know this is a scam," Sarah said.

"Not quite" John softly said from behind them.

2050 Local Time
Sudanese Embassy, Washington

Sarah and Harm were so engrossed in Moshak's production that they jumped in fright. Then they turned and saw John behind them.

John gave Sarah his extra sidearm, a Smith & Wesson .38 automatic. "Hide this somewhere. If we're lucky you may not have to use it." Sarah pulled her slit open and tucked the gun in her stocking top on the inside of her thigh. She caught John looking at her leg then saw him smile when he saw the stockings were held up by garters.

Smiling she patted his cheek saying, "Later lover boy." They retreated back up the stairs and into the fire stairs.

Harm briefed John. "When I heard the shots and I saw the guests being rounded up, I called JAG. The admiral called the DC Police"

"So what's the plan now? Do we leave by the tunnel and let this farce go on? Or do we stay and keep feeding intel to the police?" Tony asked.

"We still need to find out if they have the virus," Harm reminded them. Also we still haven't found Duboto. Moshak is holding him here, but for what?"

John agreed and then gave orders. "Ok Tony and Harm, find Duboto. Sarah, Gibbs and I will try to find out where Moshak is keeping the virus."

"I have one more thing we need to do. Tony come with me to the video room," Harm suggested.

While Gibbs, John and Sarah waited in the stairway, Tony and Harm went to the video room. They just barely closed the door when a guard came around a corner. The three in the stairway breathed a sigh of relief as he walked by the video room. In there Harm switched the camera feed from Moshak's office and plugged it into the live feed to ZNN. "Now everyone will know what we know."

But before they could bask in the success, the power went out. "Shit!" Harm swore. The two went back to the stairway.
In the stairway Harm told John what he did. John picked up his cell phone and called NCIS. He got Diane.

"Diane."

"Yes everyone's fine for now. Harm? I'm looking at his ugly face now."

Harm looked at him sarcastically and Sarah shook her finger at him.

"Have them turn the power back on for the embassy now please."

"Ok thanks." He hung up.

"It should be any time. Now while the power is out let's get to work," John ordered. They went to the door and saw the hall was empty. They went their way as planned.

Harm & Tony went down to the kitchen level. They went around a corner and came upon a guard sitting outside a storage room. He jumped up and tried to extract his sidearm from its holster. Harm shot him in the leg and the guard fell. Tony went and disarmed the guard and took the keys he had and tossed them to Harm. Harm turned and unlocked the door and came face to face with Professor Dubotu.

Upstairs Gibbs, Sarah & John went into the office opposite Moshak’s. Gibbs spotted only one guard walking the hallway. They had a plan to get him out of the hall. Sarah agreed with it. When the guard turned into to check an alcove, Sarah stepped out of the stairway and deliberately strolled down the hallway. The guard turned and saw her.

Gibbs and John watched Sarah as she tried her sick bimbo act. But the guard drew his weapon, pointed it at her head saying, "Come with me or I will shoot you." Sarah dropped her act and went with him into Moshak's office, leaving the hallway empty.

"Ah Mrs. Rabb," Moshak began as Sarah entered the office.


"And where is your brother-in-law, now Major?" Moshak asked contemptuously.

"Right now he's eliminating your guards one by one. Soon you'll be all alone." Sarah told him with a sneer.

"We'll see about that," Moshak said. He approached her. He spoke into his radio.

"Commander Rabb, I have someone in my office that wishes to speak with you."

He held the radio to Sarah and keyed it for transmission. "Say hello to the commander, major."

Sarah refused, so Moshak slapped her face and chopped down on her shoulder. Sarah cried out in pain.

"Moshak you're a dead man," Harm said over the radio when he heard Sarah cry out.

"We'll see commander," Moshak said.

Just then the power came back on.

AJ & Webb saw the whole scene being broadcast live over ZNN.
"You know you can't hold me here. I'm an American citizen," Sarah said as she got up to leave.

Moshak yelled, "Sit down major. This is Sudanese territory. As ambassador I can do as I please."

Outside, John heard every word over the bug in Sarah's strap. It took all his patience not to rush the door and kill Moshak. Gibbs saw him clench up and whispered, "Easy stick to the plan". Then they watched as Harm was escorted into the office by a guard. There were no more guards in the hallway. So far they counted 4 guards in the office.

As Harm came in he went right over to Sarah and asked, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah I'm fine. He hits like a girl," Sarah said.

Harm turned to Moshak, "What does Professor Dubotu have to do with this.

"I'll show you," Moshak said.

They watched as Moshak went to the wall behind his desk. He opened a panel that hid a safe. He opened the safe and extracted small case that contained some vials. He placed the case on the desk. He stepped over to stand in front of Sarah.

Sarah knew what it was but she asked anyway to preserve her cover. "What is that?"

"This is the dreaded Ebola Virus. Professor Dubotu will be found dead of this disease. General Zulakai will be blamed and the people will call for me to end the civil war and declare me president," Moshak said grandly. He was waving his weapon in his hand as he spoke.

"There is one tiny flaw in that plan," Harm said.

"What is that Commander?" Moshak asked smiling sarcastically.

"Me", John said from the door. He and Gibbs went to the door after Harm entered with the last guard and left the door ajar. Gibbs & John stood outside and listened to the conversation. They now knew where the Ebola sample was. Now he and Gibbs stood in the doorway with their weapons drawn.

Gibbs was covering the guards. "Uh, uh" he said loudly as they tried to go for their weapons.

Moshak didn't pay attention as he pulled Sarah off the couch and positioned her in front of him. He went to grab the vial case, but Sarah dug her elbow into his ribs. As he reacted Sarah ducked. John had his weapon trained only on Moshak and he shot him ironically in the shoulder that Moshak pretended was wounded when the farce began. As he went down he reached for Sarah. She grabbed his arm and shifting her weight threw him over her hip in perfect judo technique. Moshak lay stunned and bleeding. Harm jumped up and grabbed the Ebola Case.

"Never mess with a Marine, even if she is a girl," Sarah said with satisfaction.

2130 Local Time

Sudanese Embassy, Washington

Tony heard the shots just as he came up the stairs with Dubotu. They came into the office.

"Seems I missed all the fun," Tony said.

"Tony stop. Professor please proceed into the room," John ordered.
"Harm come over here and disable this camera." John said.

He and Gibbs positioned themselves so that they were not on camera. He stopped Tony from stepping into camera range. The last thing the State Department needed was photographic evidence that US Agents infiltrated a foreign embassy.

After Harm unplugged the camera John put away his weapon. "Professor, we were never here. Please deal with the commander and major."

John winked at Sarah and motioned his head towards outside the room then he, Gibbs and Tony walked out. Gibbs had the Ebola case. Tony went to the video monitor room and pulled out the video tapes. Sarah went out after them. They rounded the corner out of range of prying eyes. John pulled Sarah into a smothering embrace and their lips met in a deep lingering kiss. "Everything seems to be under control. We're going out through the tunnel. I'll wait for you outside in my car. It's in front of the café across the street," John told Sarah.

"You're right. We need to keep up appearances for the media. I'll be out in a little while with Harm," Sarah said as she kissed him again.

Sarah walked back into the office. Harm had somehow convinced Dubotu to make a televised plea of peace to his people. Dubotu went downstairs to the podium to begin his plea. Then she and Harm walked down the stairs and then out of the embassy.

"I had a wonderful time tonight. How about you?" Harm asked.

"I did too. We have to do this again sometime," Sarah replied. Then they both burst out laughing.

They met Webb on his way in. "Clay, talk to John tomorrow. We got everything we set out to get and now we're beat."

Webb didn't say anything. He just waved goodbye and went in to deal with the professor. John told him to wrap it up, pretending to be the State Department Liaison, something he was more than prepared to do.

After dodging the media, they met John across the street where he said he would be. As he sat in the car John had his Giants ball cap on pulled low over his eyes to cover as much of his face a possible. He put the car in gear and drove away with Harm & Sarah.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 32

Friday, October 2, 1998
1200 Local time

JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

After Sudanese Embassy affair life for the JAG/NCIS team went back to being routine, well almost routine.

During the night of the incident, Harriet felt ill. She had thought she had the flu, but she took a pregnancy test and discovered that she was indeed pregnant.

Sarah was overjoyed to hear that Harriet was going to have a baby. Right now Sarah and Harriet were spending their lunch hour in the conference room with their meals and the wedding reception table plan spread out on the table. They needed to have the seating arrangements of the guests done and sent to the Willard's Party Planner by Monday.

Sarah, Harriet as well as Ann Marie and Diane was spending every lunch hour and weekend since John and Sarah returned from John's rehab in September planning the wedding. The only out of town trip that got in the way was the trip to Russia. Even while Sarah and Diane were there, Harriet and Ann Marie stepped in and handled a lot of the tasks that had to be done.

"John and Ann Marie say that their cousins from both sides of their family like each other and it doesn't matter where we put them. A lot of my cousins from my mother's side will be there. So let's mingle my side and John's side with half and half at every table. Does that sound good to you Harriet?" Sarah asked her best friend.

"That's sounds great Major," Harriet answered. "We'll seat John parents and Harm's parents with the Admiral and Dr. Walden. They get along so well. The rest we'll scatter in alpha order to save our sanity. That ok with you Major?"

"Sounds good to me," Sarah answered as she sipped her coffee. She knew that planning her wedding to John on her lunch hour was preferable than going to the Navy Yard Chapel praying for his life. She still tried to go church every day at 0700. She loved that John admired her for that, sometimes joining her.

Before Sarah started going to mass in the morning, she went out running. To make up for not running in the morning she worked out at the Navy Yard Fitness center after work with John while he worked with Col. Creswell or with one of the other boxing trainers assigned to the center or she went swimming. Sarah was already adept at kickboxing. They loved going out after their workouts feeling totally refreshed and alive. They also had resumed their Friday night dancing lessons. The dancing also gave them a good workout.

Their first dancing lesson since returning from Russia was scheduled for Saturday night so that Diane, Harriet and her could finally put to paper the final seating plans that night. For the next few
weeks before the wedding she and John planned to go three nights per week to perfect the dance they were planning to dance at their wedding. That wanted to be confident at the little moves that the dance entailed. They weren't going to enter any competitions; they just wanted to look good at their wedding. They were sure that they would knock their guests for a loop when they saw it.

In the middle of their planning, Tiner came in. "Major Mackenzie, the admiral needs to see you ASAP ma'am."

Sarah gulped down the rest of her coffee and replied, "On my way Tiner."

When she reached the admiral's office, she saw Harm was already there.

AJ said, "Have a seat Major. I'm sorry for this but I have to interrupt your wedding plans for the weekend. It seems that we have a report of an accusation of rape of a young Japanese girl in Yokosuka, Japan. Her father caught the rapist and the victim in a park near the Yokosuka Naval Base. The attacker ran off before the father could identify him, but when he ran off, he dropped his ball cap. It was a cap for the carrier Reprisal. The Navy has decided to let the Japanese authorities prosecute the case. I need you to go and observe to make sure that all the legalities are followed, the Japanese and ours. Admiral Fessenden is the convening authority. Your flight leaves Dulles tomorrow evening at 2000. Commander, you and Diane will have time to put on Sarah Cate's 1st Birthday party. I didn't want you to miss that."

"Thank you sir," Harm replied.

"Take this afternoon to reassign your caseloads, pack, make the usual personal arrangements and notifications, and so on, dismissed," AJ said.

As Harm and Sarah got up to leave AJ asked, "Major, stay a minute, please."

Sarah sat back down and waited for Harm to leave.

"Mac, how far along are you in the planning?" AJ asked.

"Well Harriet, Ann Marie, Diane and I are pretty much finished with the big stuff. Our final dress fittings are scheduled for the 17th. The menu is already planned. We saved the seating arrangements till last. That's what Harriet and I were doing when you called. We need to have them to Audrey Wilson the Willard's Party Planner by this coming Monday. Why do you ask sir?" Sarah said.

"Well being that I'm sending you out of town and Harriet had me very much involved with planning her wedding and I am giving the bride away, I figured I'd lend a hand in finishing the arrangements, that is if you still need anything done?" AJ asked.

"Thank you sir, that's very sweet. But like I said that's the last thing that needs to be done. The four of us pretty much have it all down. It was just a matter of putting it to paper. We were going to meet tonight at Diane's to do just that. I don't think me going out of town jeopardizes that being completed. If you could help Diane, Ann Marie and Harriet with any last minute glitches that come up while I'm out in Japan that would be fine sir."

"Fine, please tell the ladies that I am available for any assistance they may need. By the way, what has John been like through all this?" AJ asked.

"John has taken a very practical attitude toward the whole affair. He doesn't want to know how everything is being done other than his necessary contributions, such as arranging the limousines, the tuxedoes, the groomsmen's gifts and the bachelor party. He thinks knowing what the bride is planning will jinx the wedding. All he keeps saying is, 'just tell me what time to show up'," she said.
rolling her eyes, but with a smile.

"It's a wise man who knows his limitations," AJ grinned back at her. So other than any last minute issues that may crop up while you're gone; there's nothing else that you would need me to do?"

"No sir. We pretty much got it covered. Thank you all the same sir," Sarah said sincerely.

"If that's all then I hope everything goes well in Japan so that you can get back here very soon. After you get back I'll have Lt. Austen and Harm partner up till after your honeymoon, other than that, dismissed."

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said as she stood at brief attention before turning and walking out.

Sarah made her way to the conference room to inform Harriet of the change in plans. That's all right Mac. Can we still meet tonight at the Rabbs?" Harriet asked.

"Sure, the admiral gave us the afternoon to pack and make the usual arrangements. We're leaving tomorrow evening from Dulles at 2000 after Sarah Cate's birthday party."

"Well I promise I'll get you home before midnight to give you plenty of time to get some sleep," Harriet said.

1830 Local Time
Rabb Residence
Fairfax, VA

Sarah arrived at Diane's on time as usual. She walked to the door carrying her file with the seating plan. When Diane opened the door wide and let her in, Sarah was immediately assaulted with a call of "Surprise!"

Diane decorated the entrance foyer, the living and dining rooms with white streamers with fold out white paper bells and all the other the accoutrements for a bridal shower.

Sarah was speechless as she went through the door and saw all the ladies gathered in the living room. She could see that the entire female staff of JAG as well as Kate, Carolyn and Abby and other ladies she knew from NCIS, all John's female cousins that she met last Labor Day, John's mom Maureen, Ann Marie, Harm's mother Trish, Sydney Walden and even some of Sarah's aunts and girl cousins from Arizona and California were there. Sarah cocked her head and grinned lopsidedly then dissolved into laughter and happy tears at the surprise. She let herself be pleasantly assaulted with the usual bridal shower fun. Harriet was true to her word. She got Sarah home before midnight.

Saturday, October 10, 1998
0830 Local Time
Dulles International Airport
To
Marshall Residence
Florida Ave, NW

John was waiting for Sarah's flight at Dulles. She called him from Japan to let him know her flight
number so he could meet her. John then called Diane and told her that he would drop Harm at home as it was on his way back into DC.

He waited up all night for her at home. As usual when Sarah was out of town for days at a time John was miserable. Just as Sarah admitted that she couldn't sleep without him, he also found he couldn't sleep without her. He met Sydney at Dulles, as she was there to pick up AJ. Sarah waved at him as she stepped through customs with AJ & Harm. When she got to him, they shared a long kiss. She was so glad to be home.

The case in Japan was so fouled up with deception, obfuscation, and irrelevant personal agendas and just downright lies. Sarah, who by being in Okinawa for two years understood the Japanese point of view and language, got so frustrated that she lost her temper with Harm and almost with the Japanese girl, named Jun whose father leveled the supposed rape charge.

To start off the Ensign whose name was Guidry lied about his involvement. At first Guidry denied being the attacker and that he didn't even know the girl. The girl had also lied about not knowing him. They met at a social bar a couple of blocks from the park a few times over the course of three nights. She accepted money for the ensign's company.

The father was ashamed for having his daughter prostitute herself for money. He was also ashamed for being unable to provide adequately for his family because of a disability from a birth defect sustained as a result of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. As a result he had a keen resentment for all things American.

To make matters worse Harm put his foot in his mouth when he disputed how the Japanese attorney, Hiro Kitamura assigned to defending Guidry was proceeding. The prosecution produced the ball cap as evidence. Before Kitamura, could say anything, Harm spoke up, "That ball cap could have belonged to any of the sailors on the Reprisal."

The Prosecution then rightfully asserted that all the sailors needed to be investigated. When he realized that he had inadvertently broadened the investigation, Sarah kicked him hard in his ankle.

The international news took a real hold of the story. They were pressuring the Navy to resolve the case. During a garden party, Admiral Fessenden got drunk and said some very inappropriate remarks to a reporter there. They were along the lines that 'the military got daily allegations of rape from hookers' and such. When he saw what his drunken indiscretion had wrought, he committed suicide.

Because of that Admiral Chegwidden came out to take over the case and Harm got into a pissing match with him.

Harm asked Chegwidden, "Sir, are you here 'supervise'?"

Chegwidden replied, "Washington just wanted assurances. I suggest you start working to discredit the father's 'eye witness' account."

Harm disagreed, "We need find the real perp. Sir you don't trust us."

Chegwidden Said, "It's not about trust, it's about responsibility, and I'm taking it!"

Harm demanded, "Why?"

Chegwidden retorted in his face, "Because I can!" Chegwidden then paused and told them to do what they wanted.

Then Chegwidden called Harm aside from Sarah and told him, "I've always allowed responsible
disagreement. But you ever badger me like that again and I'll supervise your ass right out of Washington."

They reexamined the videotape. They found a Seaman Lafferty in the restaurant with the same cap. He told them that he went to the "hostess house" next door. The "Madame" remembered Lafferty as a good customer who yelled at her because he requested Jun but she went to another man, Guidry. Guidry still held to his story of mistaken identity and refused to talk further. Harm found Jun, told her that he saw turmoil in her eyes and convinced her to testify. She said that she was actually a "hostess" for the "Madame" in order to help support the family but fell in love with her former "client," Guidry. She didn't tell her father because he hated Americans so much, but it wasn't rape. Guidry then said that he knew he would lose Jun because of this but thought that he would be exonerated because evidence was all 'circumstantial' and wanted to prevent her shame.

Chegwidden landed on him saying "You had the entire Navy spinning on your lies. Now that you have trashed your future, what have you got to show for it?"

Kitamura quoted an obscure Haiku poem that he translated: "love is Eternal."

At home at last Sarah got into the front passenger seat of the Trailblazer and fell asleep before they got past the airport exit. She stayed asleep when they stopped at the Rabbs. Diane came out to say hello, but stopped when she saw Sarah asleep in the passenger seat.

"Ask Sarah to call me when she's able, ok John" requested Diane.

"Sure thing Diane," John answered as he kissed her cheek.

When they pulled into the driveway to the back door John had to wake her up. Sarah went into the house and without even waiting to take off her trench coat trudged upstairs. He got her military suit wardrobe, personal carry-on and computer cases from the back and brought them upstairs. Sarah was looking forward to sitting in a hot tub for a couple of hours and sleeping through the weekend, not necessarily in that order. Sarah was so tired from the anger, frustration and the 14-hour flight that she just sat down on the turned down bed. She still hadn't taken her purse off her shoulder.

John started to undress her. John took her coat off her slender frame and hung it up behind the bedroom door. He unbuttoned her uniform jacket, blouse and unzipped her skirt. Sarah rolled down the top of her pantyhose then let John take them off the rest of the way. John got her bathrobe as she unhooked and took off her bra. He helped her put her bathrobe on and left her to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Wait there, I'll run the bath for you," John told her as he kissed her temple.

She just nodded as he went in to fill the tub. He got the water to the right temperature then let the tub fill up. When he walked back into the bedroom he found Sarah curled up at her pillow sound asleep. John had to smile. His tough Marine was totally exhausted. He pulled the covers over her. He kissed her forehead, pulled all the shades down to darken the room and went to turn off the water and let the water drain. He changed into his gym shorts and got into bed beside her.

She was facing his side of the bed, as she lay there curled up. He lay propped up on his elbow just looking at her for a little while. John whispered to her, "Sarah Catherine Mackenzie, you are the most beautiful woman ever. I missed you so much. I can't wait till we're married."

He brushed a stray lock of hair behind her ear and kissed her cheek. Then he lay down and went to sleep. They both slept the day away.
Later that day

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

When Sarah woke, she felt a hand at her right breast and she was holding it there. Sometime during the day she turned and spooned with John and pulled his left hand to her breast. She loved when John held her like that. She gently removed it and turned around under his arm. She saw the sleeping face of her fiancé. She snuggled in some more so that she was in the crook of his right arm and closed her eyes contently. A short time later when John awoke he beheld the angelic face of his fiancé. As he kissed her forehead she woke up. "Good morning sleepy head," he said tenderly.

"More like good afternoon," Sarah, answered. Her sense of time was still functioning as well as ever. "It's 1545. Do you want to go to 5:00 o'clock mass?" she asked.

"Yeah, you get into the shower first. After mass what do you have in mind?" John asked.

"I just want to relax at home tonight. There is nothing really pressing for the wedding. Diane and Harriet have been keeping up on the RSVPs. I'd been e-Mailing them as well as you from Japan."

"Ok, Ann Marie and Pete are up in New York with Andy. They'll be back late tonight. Let's cook something light. Some peppered steak, over rice with salad sound good to you?" John asked.

"Yeah that's great," Sarah answered.

"Also Diane asked me to have you call her," John remembered.

"Thanks love, I'll call after dinner," Sarah said

They both showered and went to mass. After that they came home and changed into sweats. They puttered around the kitchen preparing their meal together. They were very careful on how they were rubbing against each other. They were very good at their abstention from sex since they made that promise back in Russia.

They set themselves up to eat at the table. After dinner they cleaned up and made themselves some hot fudge banana split sundaes. John had 'mint chocolate chip' while Sarah had 'rocky road'. They took them into the living room. They put the movie, "Apollo 13" in the VCR, curled up on the couch and settled in to relax.

Sarah set her dessert down and reached for the phone to call her sister. She had spoonfuls as she talked to Diane.

"Diane! It's Sarah. How's it going?"

"Just great, while you were in flight from Japan, I got some more RSVPs. We had to add another two tables. I faxed the plans to the Willard so they're good to go," Diane told her.

"Who sent them?" Sarah asked.

"They were from the President, SECNAV Nelson and John's old S.E.A.L. Team members. They and their spouses are coming. That makes 20 more people coming," Diane informed Sarah.

"Wow that makes 200 so far," Sarah exclaimed.

"Yeah, Harm & I didn't have this much at our wedding," Diane said.
"Diane thanks for all the help while I was in Japan," Sarah said sincerely.

"Sarah, it was no trouble. What's a maid of honor is for anyway?" Diane answered.

Sarah read down the list that she had memorized, "So the Wedding Party after John & I are you & John's Brother Matt, Maid of Honor & Best Man, followed by the Ushers and Bridesmaids, John's other brother Mark & his wife Christine, Ann Marie & Peter, Meg & Harm, Harriet & Bud, Carolyn & Tony, Kate & Gibbs, Matt's wife Leslie & John's cousin Billy."

"That works out well for the dais, you'll have 4 couples on either side of you," Diane said. "I tell you Sarah, Harm & I just had Jack Keeter & Sturgis Turner and a bridesmaid for each at our wedding. More power to ya for corralling that bunch."

Sarah continued, "Thanks kiddo. You know me, I can't say no to friends. I didn't have room for Traci Manetti & Abby Sciuto though. Traci was John's partner before me and she has become such a dear friend to us. She's only been reassigned to JAG recently and I didn't know Abby well enough to ask them to be bridesmaids. I did feel bad about that so I asked them to do the first & second readings at the mass. They loved that idea.

"The next 2 tables seat eight each with John's parents, John's Aunt Margaret & Uncle Bill, President & Mrs. Bartlett, Admiral Chegwidden & Sydney at one and Harm's parents, SECNAV Nelson & his wife, Admiral Grafton & Callie, Admiral Magnum & Maggie at the other. As I think about it, maybe we should just combine them all at one big table. What do you think Sarah?"

"You know, that just might be the way to go. That way no one is insulted or intimidated by the brassiness of it all," Sarah said. "We'll put it in front of the dais. We'll scatter the cousins . to the other tables like we discussed. Now that we got that out of the way, what else is going on with you?"

"Oh nothing special I went for my yearly last week and I found out I'm pregnant again," Diane said nonchalantly.

"Get out, that's great sis. Does Harm know yet?" Sarah asked.

"No I'm waiting till after the wedding to tell him. I don't need him getting in the way of my planning for the wedding. You know how overprotective he gets," Diane said.

"How far along are you?" Sarah asked.

"I'm as regular as you are and I was only a week late when I went in for the yearly. I mean Harm and I jumped right into bed after we got back from Russia. You know how I was when we thought he and John were dead when they were shot down. So I'll still be able to fit into my dress. The seamstress may need to let out only an inch or not. We'll see at the fitting next week," Diane said.

"You know Harriet is pregnant also. She might need help at the fitting. Maybe we'll have our babies at the same time in nine months," Sarah said excitedly

"You're not pregnant to?" Diane asked incredulously.

"No but I've been off the pill since Labor Day. John and I agreed to wait till the wedding night before we had sex again. We both would like to have a honeymoon baby like you and Harm." Sarah confided in Diane.

"That's so romantic. Wouldn't it be funny if all three of us go into labor at the same time? We'd drive the nurses at Bethesda crazy. They wouldn't know whom to call Mrs. Marshall or Rabb. And that is
yet another reason to get our hair done the same way. And there would be Harriet right in the middle. Our three husbands would go nuts," Diane said.

Sarah couldn't help but giggle. "That would be hilarious. Speaking of daddy, where's Harm now?"

"Oh he took Sarah out in her jogging stroller with him on his run. He's been doing that every Saturday since we got back from Russia. He'll love to hear that we're going to have another baby. He and Bud are planning the bachelor party with Matt. Harm swears that it's not going to be at a strip bar. So no exotic dancers or strippers and no one will be arrested," Diane said.

"There better not be. We don't need that fiasco, what with the President coming to the wedding. Besides, John is taking major control over it. He laid down the law to his brother and has told him what he wants or more importantly what he doesn't want," Sarah said.

"Yeah could you imagine the questions from the press Ann Marie would have to answer if that happened? John, Bud and Harm wouldn't have to worry about you, Harriet & I, Ann Marie would strangle them herself," Diane giggled.

Sarah roared as she rocked with laughter on the couch. "Oh I almost forgot to tell you. Speaking of Ann Marie, she and Pete found and bought a house. It's in Silver Spring. John told me by e-mail last week. Their closing date in this Monday and they're going to move in while John & I are on the honeymoon," Sarah said.

"That's great. Tell them congratulations from Harm & I. Also we'll be available with help moving & babysitting Andy," Diane said.

"Ok I'll tell them and I'll see you next week, if not before. I love you sis," Sarah said.

"Love you too sweetie," Diane answered as they hung up the phones.

"What fiasco about the President were you referring to?" John asked.

"About your bachelor party and the need to avoid being arrested and how your sister would strangle you, Harm and Bud if that happened," Sarah answered.

John had a good chuckle as he pulled Sarah into a comfortable embrace on the couch. "Well I promise to be on my best behavior that night, so none of my girls needs to worry about that."

Sarah loved how he referred to all the women in his life that he loved as his girls. It was so endearing.

They settled in to watch the movie. Sarah was amazed to see that John was so emotional at the end when 'Apollo 13' came out all right in the end. She loved the heroism of the whole story. She cuddled up to him and hugged him closer. They fell asleep on the sofa.

While they were asleep Ann Marie came home with Peter & Andy. She saw them asleep on the sofa. Sarah was lying on John with her face tucked into his neck. Her hand was up under his tee shirt and John's hand was up inside her shirt on her back and the other down the inside of her sweat pants resting on her butt.

"They can't even keep their hands off each other even when they're asleep." Ann Marie muttered happily as she turned off the lights and TV.
Chapter 33

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 33

Saturday, October 17, 1998

1130 Local Time

Beautiful Bride Bridal Shop

Men's Wearhouse Tuxedo Rental

Arlington, VA

Sarah, Ann Marie and Harriet carpooled to Diane's and then they all went to the bridal shop in Fairfax. Kate & Abby arrived shortly after. Leslie Marshall & Christine Marshall were already there. They came down to DC from their homes in New Jersey & New York with Matt & Mark respectively.

It was the same shop that Diane used for her wedding. Everyone's measurements were the same as at the first fitting. Only Harriet's dress needed to be let out an inch to accommodate her developing baby bump.

While the ladies were at the dress shop, John had those groomsmen who did not have Mess dress uniforms go to the 'Men's Wearhouse' in Arlington. They had a line of civilian tuxedoes that mimicked the military's Mess Dress uniforms. Only John's father James and John's brothers Matt, Mark & brother in law Peter along with Gibbs, Tony and McGee, needed to rent theirs. Harm, Bud and AJ already had their Mess Dress uniform's ready to go. Harm's came out of the dry cleaners in good shape after the embassy affair.

The men would pick them up on Thursday, the 22nd and the women would bring their dresses home that day.

1930 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

Saturday night of the bachelor party Sarah and John went to 5:00 Mass. John knew he wouldn't be in any shape to go the next day. John insisted that the bachelor party be that night also and that it be at McMurphy's. Matt, Harm and Bud rented the tavern for the night.

"I know that's a safe place and I want the week to recover from the hangover. The guys from the JAG staff and the NCIS staff and some of your uncles and cousins are coming," he told Sarah when he explained why he wanted it there and then.

As he headed out to McMurphy's he gave Sarah her kiss. "Behave honey," she warned him.

"You know I will. Or else I answer to you and Ann Marie," John called as he walked out with his brothers Matt and Mark to Harm's car.
Sunday, October 18, 1998

0930 Local Time

Man Cave, Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

Sarah went to sleep long before John came home. When she awoke the next morning she went downstairs to the kitchen. She saw the basement door was open. She also heard a movie being played downstairs. She crept down the stairs and found John, Matt, Mark, Peter, Harm, Bud, Tony & Gibbs asleep on the couches in the basement. ‘Where Eagles Dare’ was playing on the TV.

Sarah went back upstairs and made a pot of coffee. While it was brewing she went down to the guys. She kissed John awake and he woke the others. They came upstairs. Ann Marie was also up giving little Andy his breakfast. She and Sarah made bacon and eggs for the men's breakfast.

"What did you guys do last night?" Ann Marie asked.

"We watched the baseball playoffs, drank, and had a pool tournament with the other JAG sailors and NCIS Staff and your 8 cousins and 3 uncles that came. We smoked the last of Harm's cigars that he saved for this occasion. You didn't tell me that he gave them up while you were conducting the Blackhorse investigation." John said

"Sorry I forgot." Sarah said.

When we closed McMurphy's, Dad and the three admirals, (Chegwidden, Magnum & Grafton), and most of the JAG & agency staff went home. I really appreciate AJ & Sydney putting Mom & Dad up for this weekend and next weekend. The eight of us were having such a good time and we didn't want the night to end so we came back here and shot some more pool. We figured if we were going to crash, we should just come here. When you found us I think we were only asleep for about an hour." John finished.

"So there were no strippers and no jail time?" Sarah asked.

"Not a single stripper in sight, but your uncle Asad from Yuma had a group of 4 belly dancers come in. Asad had me sit in the middle of the floor and they danced around a few minutes and then they draped a veil each on me and kissed my face. That's all" he replied.

"You know Uncle Asad's wife Aunt Mehry told me that he did that. It's an Iranian tradition. I'm glad you had a good time and I'm glad you came home after the bar."

"I'm glad too." John replied.

After breakfast the guys left for their homes or hotels.

"What do you ladies have planned for today?" John asked his sister and fiancé.

"We're picking Harriet and Diane up and we're all going to the new house with some little odds and ends. We're going to measure for curtains and carpeting. Aunt Mehry, Aunt Niki and Aunt Zoya are going to meet us there and then we'll go out to lunch. That will keep us out so that you, Harm, Bud and Pete can get some sleep." Ann Marie said.

"Thanks sweetheart." John said with a yawn. When the guys left he kissed Sarah and then went up to take a shower. After that he fell in a deep sleep for the rest of the day and the whole night.
Monday, October 19, 1998

0630 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

John moaned in appreciation when Sarah's hand trailed up his bare thigh, her fingernails barely grazing his skin, causing goose bumps to rise on his flesh. When he looked up at her, he saw the desire in her eyes and knew that he was lost. A smile slowly spread across her face as she moved until she was straddling his hips. He moaned again when he felt her pressing against him and he shifted to bring her closer.

Sarah chose that moment to lean forward and press her lips to his, causing her body to brush against his bare chest and eliciting a gasp from him. His hands moved to her waist and slid under her nightgown, coming to rest on the small of her back. He sighed against her lips as their tongues dueled, but it wasn't enough.

He broke off the kiss and rolled them so he was on top, hearing her sharp intake of breath followed by his name on her lips.

"John...John...John!"

John awoke with a start, his breathing ragged and his arousal obvious. He looked around in confusion, startled to find Sarah standing at the door to the bathroom instead of in the bed with him. She laughed softly as she realized his predicament. "That must have been some dream, Sailor."

"You have no idea," he replied as he leaned back against the headboard. He took several deep breaths in an effort to calm himself, but the mental images running through his head were competing with the reality of Sarah standing across the room wearing only a towel, and he was having difficulty regaining control.

"Did you hear anything I said?" Sarah asked as she walked over to stand beside the bed.

John shook his head as he looked up at her. "No. I'm sorry."

Sarah smiled again when she saw the desire in his eyes and his obvious struggle for control. "I said you'd better get up and get in the shower if you're going to make it to work on time."

"Work. Right," John replied as he forced his eyes away from her bare thighs. "What time is it anyway?"

"0630 Monday morning," came Sarah's reply as she walked over to the dresser. "You slept all the way through from yesterday to just now.

John watched from his spot on the bed as she dropped the towel and pulled on a matching set of blue lace panties and bra.

"Have I told you how incredibly beautiful you are?" he asked.

Sarah smiled over at him and shook his head. "Flattery will get you nowhere, Mr. Marshall. We made a deal and we're going to keep it. Now get your six out of that bed and into the shower. You only have 5 more days to be frustrated."
"Yes, Ma'am," John replied with a mock salute once he got out of the bed.

Sarah watched until he disappeared into the bathroom. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she pulled on her stockings, uniform skirt and shoes and then headed back into the bathroom to dry her hair.

"What time did you get to bed last night?" John asked from the shower as she pulled the hairdryer out from under the sink.

"It was a little before twelve, I think," Sarah replied. "You were still out of it, so I tried not to wake you."

John rinsed the shampoo from his hair then asked, "I was so tired that I didn't get a chance to ask how your party with the girls was Saturday?"

"Harriet, Ann Marie, Diane, your mom and I had a great time eating popcorn and watching movies. Then Aunt Mehry, Aunt Niki and Aunt Zoya and their daughters came in." Sarah replied. "We did eventually turn off the TV and sit around talking about the men in our lives, but nothing you need to worry about."

Sarah turned on the hair dryer. After she finished drying and was fluffing her air into its military do, she heard the water shut off and she watched in the mirror as John opened the shower door and reached for his towel. Paying only minimal attention to her hair, she followed his every move as he dried himself, enjoying the way his muscles rippled as he moved. She was so grateful that he was back to where he was physically before the shooting. The only signs that he went through that ordeal were the scars on his left shoulder, his left chest and his back. She watched him for good long time.

It wasn't until he looked up and smiled at her that she realized she'd been caught. With a smile of her own, she turned to face him.

"See something you like?" he asked as he wrapped the towel around his waist and stepped out of the shower.

"I like it all," she replied, reaching out to run her hand down his arm.

"Easy there, Sarah," he stated. "You don't want to start something we can't finish."

"I think you started it with that dream you were having," she retorted as she circled him, allowing her hand to dip down to where the towel rested on his hips.

"Actually, in that dream, you were the one who started it," he replied, reaching out to pull her in front of him. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against him before he leaned down to kiss her.

Sarah sighed when he broke off the kiss and leaned his forehead against hers with a mumbled, "Good morning."

"Good morning," she replied, trailing her hands up and down the smooth expanse of his back.

His hands weren't idle, sliding up and down her bareback. He had to stop himself from undoing her bra clasp as he traced circles on the small of her back.

"Okay, let's go over the plan for the week one more time," he suggested.

Sarah started, "Tonight Harm & Diane and you & I are going to dinner with the rest of my cousins from Arizona and California who didn't get in this weekend. They want some getting to know you
time with Harm, you and especially Diane before the wedding."

John interrupted her saying, "You know I'm really glad that you were able to reconnect with the Mackenzie / O'Hara / Hassan sides of your family and introduce them to Diane. I saw the difference in you when you first started getting letters from them last month. You were so happy."

Sarah smiled as she told him, "Well it was you who told me to write them and let them know how I was doing. The replies I got were so overwhelmingly positive. Then when they started to call, they made me feel like I was the prodigal daughter. The Aunts and girl cousins who were at the shower and Uncles and cousins who made it in this weekend were so glad that they were able to get here."

"Yeah we had a lot of fun at the bachelor party. I can't wait till tonight to meet the rest of them." John said.

Then he turned serious for a second when he asked, "They still couldn't tell you if they knew where your mom and dad were, could they?"

Sarah patted his cheek signifying that she wasn't angry at the question then she answered, "No, mother hasn't wrote or called them since she left when I was 15. My father just dropped out of sight. No one knows where he is. You know all our searches have reached a dead end."

John brought her back to the present, "Okay what's next?"

Sarah continued, "Tuesday we can all relax. On Wednesday evening, we're supposed to meet with Father Mario one last time and he's going to want to see a copy of our vows."

"I guess that means we should practice them," he replied.

"Not right now, though. We don't have time."

"Do we have time for this?" he asked before his lips claimed hers in a searing kiss.

"No," she moaned softly. "And even if we did, we made a deal."

"Too bad," he commented before kissing her again.

"What happened to not starting something we couldn't finish?" she asked breathlessly.

"You're the one who was walking around our bedroom naked earlier," he argued.

"I was trying to get you up," she replied as her hands moved up to his shoulders.

He laughed softly at that. "No, you were just trying to torment me."

She shrugged slightly as her eyes met his. "Maybe."

John leaned down and kissed her again, then with one final squeeze, he stepped out of her embrace.

"Okay, then on Thursday?"

Sarah leaned against the sink to watch as he lathered his face to shave. "On Thursday, we're meeting with the florist and the caterer to make sure there aren't any last minute snags that need to be addressed."

On Friday, Diane, Harriet, Ann Marie, Meg, Abby, Traci and I are spending the day relaxing. This includes manicures, pedicures, a bikini wax and a trip to the hair salon."
"Can I watch the bikini wax?" he interrupted.

"No," she replied. "However, you can inspect it Saturday."

When she started to talk again, he held up his hand. "Wait a minute. Let me enjoy that visual before you go on to the next thing."

She shook her head at that. "You're impossible."

"You make it sound like you didn't already know that," he teased. "Okay, so what's after that?"

"The rehearsal is Friday night followed by the rehearsal dinner. After that, your mother and father will escort you back to here and I'll go to Harm & Diane's for the night and we won't see each other again until Saturday when I walk down the aisle."

"I like that part, although I'm not too fond of the having to sleep without you on Friday night."

"Look at it like this," she stated. "You need to sleep here on Friday because you need to get all the rest you can. Once Saturday is here and we're officially husband and wife, I plan on making up for the last two months, and believe me, you're going to need your strength."

"I love it when you talk dirty," he teased.

"If you don't get a move on it, I'm going to start playing dirty," she replied.

He rinsed his razor then bent down to rinse the remaining lather from his face before he turned to look at her. "I think I like the sound of that."

Sarah rolled her eyes at that and headed out of the bathroom. "I'm going to start some coffee. Hurry up."

"Be there in a flash," he yelled after her.

Sarah shook her head as she reached the kitchen. What on earth had she been thinking when she'd agreed to wait until the wedding? It was going to be a very long week.

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

1830 Local Time

George Washington Hospital Emergency Room

Washington, DC

Everything for the wedding was going very smooth. Then a near disaster struck.

In addition to helping out with the wedding Harriet was going through a period of nesting as her pregnancy progressed. Her obsession about the cleaning and rearranging carried over from home to the office.

Harriet further exerted herself at JAG to the point that when she moved a coffee table and she felt a pop in her abdomen. She said she was fine but later Sarah found her in the break room doubled over in pain. Harriet was afraid she was losing her baby. Sarah called Bud and they rushed Harriet to the hospital. Sarah walked behind Bud and Harriet as a nurse wheeled Harriet into the Emergency Room.
Thankfully the pain was due to low hormone levels. The doctor gave her a shot and some medication and told her to take it easy. Then they listened gratefully to the baby's heartbeat on the ultrasound. Diane had showed to pick up Harm who was there on another matter. She told Harriet to relax and let her do the rest of the wedding planning.

"All you need to do Ensign is to show up to the rehearsal on Friday." Diane said in her best command voice.

"That's right Harriet. I order you to take the rest of the week off. I don't want to see you until Friday night." Sarah added in her own command voice.

Harriet could only agree. "At least the Captain and Commander have to face you one at a time. How did I get so lucky to face the two Mackenzie sisters at the same time?" Harriet commented ruefully.

They all shared a cathartic laugh at that. Then Diane went to find Harm.

She found him visiting his client. It was the psychotic Vietnam veteran Roscoe Martin. He roped Harm to volunteer to defend him when he was accused of aiding the suicide of a fellow a fellow V.A. patient in a war-stress recovery unit. When the patient leapt out a window during a subsequent hallucination, a second-degree murder charge was leveled at Roscoe. Harm argued in court that Roscoe withheld the victim's medication as a way to free him from the trancelike state in which it left him, the prosecution claimed that the lack of medication is exactly what caused the man's death.

Disappointed with the direction of the case, Roscoe felt that the cards were stacked against him and he engineered an escape from the V.A. facility with three other patients. He called his group the Martin Baker Fan Club named after the inventor of the ejector seat, Martin Baker. Their escape took them to Roscoe's old apartment in a rundown neighborhood north of Union Station from where he called Harm. While Harm was talking to Roscoe and two of the two escaped patients, a cop came to the door looking for them. While the cop talked to Harm, the other escaped patient came up behind the cop with a pizza. He surprised the cop and took his pistol from his holster. The patient, named Brookhurst, fired a shot in the air to scare the cop away. The cop called for SWAT. They came to the apartment thinking there was a hostage situation. They confronted the group with Harm standing in the middle trying to negotiate a peaceful resolution. A SWAT member told Brookhurst to lower his gun. Brookhurst did so, but at the same time Roscoe dropped his accordion. A trigger-happy cop shot Roscoe two times. Harm rode in the ambulance with Roscoe.

Now Harm looked down at Roscoe on a respirator, as he lay paralyzed without the use of his limbs. "I'm sorry you ended up this way. You're a man with something to say. I keep going wrong with you thinking you needed my advice, when all you wanted was my ear."

Roscoe told him, "That's alright Commander never refuse to defend a person who has been denied the freedom of his own mind."

Harm thought about that as he walked out to check on Harriet. He saw Bud bring her in when he arrived with Roscoe's ambulance. After Harm left two of Roscoe's friends came into the room. Roscoe told them to go to Canada. They put Roscoe's flag between his teeth and watched him as he flicked off the respirator. Roscoe's last word was "Ejecting". When Harm came back into the room, Roscoe was dead. The flag was still between his teeth.

Diane came in behind him and took him in her arms to console him. Sarah followed her. Later when she got home, she told John the whole story. She started to cry some so John took her in his arms to console her. They went to bed that night and slept in each other's arms.

Friday, October 23, 1998
0730 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

"I'm going to miss you tonight. You know how I can't sleep without you." John said as he hugged Sarah close. She put her overnight bag in the Trailblazer.

"You'll see me tonight at the rehearsal and the dinner later at the restaurant. And after tonight we'll never have to sleep apart again." Sarah said as she hugged and kissed him.

1800 Local Time

Outside St. Thomas, Apostle R.C. Church

John was waiting in the church parking lot. Just as he was about to look at his watch for the tenth time, Sarah pulled in driving the Trailblazer.

"I was beginning to think you'd changed your mind," John teased as he opened Sarah's car door and waited for her to get out.

"Never," she replied. "We just got stuck in traffic is all."

John pulled her into his arms and kissed her thoroughly before he said, "I missed you today."

"Get a room, you two," Meg said from the other side of the car.

"Yeah, wait till tomorrow night," Abby said from the other side of her car.

Meg and Traci came over with Sarah to the rehearsal. Abby came over with Tony & Kate.

John and Sarah both laughed, but it didn't stop them from sharing another passionate kiss before making their way inside the church.

The rehearsal went by quickly, with everyone doing their part to make sure things were going to run smoothly for the actual ceremony and they soon found themselves back outside of the church, making arrangements to ride over to the restaurant for the dinner.

"John, why don't I drive the Trailblazer so Meg and Traci can ride with us? Then you and Sarah can ride over in the Camaro," John's Dad Jim suggested.

"Sounds like a good plan to me," Meg said.

John walked around to the passenger side of his car. When Sarah got in he leaned across the console to kiss her.

"I'm going to miss sleeping in your arms tonight," Sarah commented as she started the car.

"Perhaps I should give you a little something to fuel those dreams?" he suggested.

"What did you have in mind?" she asked as he pulled the car out of the parking lot.

"I don't know," he replied nonchalantly. "Maybe a little test of your willpower?"

"You're not thinking about starting something you aren't going to finish, are you?" she asked,
catching his hand before he could make contact with her knee.

"Oh, I'm going to finish it," he replied. "Maybe not tonight, but I'm definitely going to finish it."

"Then perhaps this is a game better suited for tomorrow? Especially since the restaurant is just around the corner."

John gave a soft sigh and pulled her hand to his lips. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

"A little, I think," she replied. "After all, you did ask me to marry you."

"And just think, twenty hours from now, you'll be walking down the aisle agreeing to be with me for the rest of our lives."

She flashed him a smile as he pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant. "First, we have to go inside and have dinner with our friends. Then Matt will make a toast, and then we'll dance for a while. After that, you'll be a good groom go back to the house where you'll stay until it's time to leave for the church in the afternoon."

"And while I'm doing that, you'll be in Diane and Harm's guest room where you'll dream about making love to me while sleeping alone."

"But only for tonight," she replied.

"Now there's a nice visual image," he said as she turned off the engine.

She unfastened her seat belt and turned to face him with a soft smile playing on her lips. "I love you, John."

"I love you, too Sarah," he replied, meeting her halfway as she leaned in for a kiss.

The incessant pounding on the hood of the car finally broke them apart and they were laughing as they got out of the car to join their friends for one last pre-wedding celebration.

Saturday, October 24, 1998

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

Rabb Residence,

Fairfax, VA

The plan for the wedding morning was all the bridesmaids would meet at the Rabbs in Fairfax while the ushers would meet at the Marshall's at Florida Avenue. John rented three limousines to accommodate all the bridal party. The bride and the bridesmaids would have two limos at Fairfax and the third would pick up the groom and groomsmen at Florida Ave.

1445 Local Time

St. Thomas, Apostle R.C. Church Bridal Room

"Sarah, please stop pacing. You're making me nervous." Diane said in exasperation. I wasn't this nervous when I married Harm."
Sarah glanced over at Diane with a smile. "I can't help it, Diane. I've got all this...energy."

"Are you nervous?" Diane asked.

"Not really," Sarah replied. "I'm just antsy and excited. I can't believe this day is finally here."

A knock on the door interrupted them. Hearing Harm's voice on the other side of the door, Diane hurried over to see what he needed. "Harm, is everything okay?"

"John is going a little stir crazy is all," Harm replied.

"You don't have to stand in the hall, Harm," Sarah called.

Harm stepped into the room. "Wow, Sarah. You look fantastic."

"Thank you, Harm."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, but John insisted that I come and check on you."

"How is he?" Sarah asked.

Harm shook his head with a smile. "He's worse than little Sarah on Christmas Eve. He keeps asking me if it's time yet. I don't think I've ever seen him this excited about anything."

Sarah couldn't help but smile at the mental picture that provoked. "Well, you can tell John that it won't be long now."

"Actually, Sarah, I was hoping you would tell him yourself," Harm replied.

"No way am I letting him see me before the ceremony," Sarah stated.

Harm smiled as he pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. "Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of a little modern day technology."

Sarah arched an eyebrow at him, but took the offered phone. "What number should I dial?"

"Just hit number six on the speed dial," Harm replied. "Now, if you'll excuse me."

Sarah looked up in time to see Diane give Harm a quick hug and peck on the cheek before he left and then she dialed the number. After only two rings, she heard John's voice on the line.

"Sarah, is that you?"

"Were you expecting someone else?" she teased.

She heard him let out a sigh before he spoke again. "This whole waiting thing is driving me crazy."

"Me, too. But it won't be long now. Only a few more minutes."

"My mom was just in here. She said you look absolutely beautiful. I can't wait to see you."

"I can't wait to see you, either."

"Do you suppose we could start early?"

"I don't think so, John," she replied with a laugh.
"I, John Patrick Marshall, take thee, Sarah Catherine Mackenzie, to be my lawfully wedded wife."
Sarah drew in a deep breath when she heard him start reciting his vows. After a brief pause, he continued. "I promise to be faithful to you. To love you and to cherish you. To honor and respect you. To do my best to provide for you and our family. I will be at your side for all eternity. From this day forward, we are one."

"I, Sarah Catherine Mackenzie, take thee, John Patrick Marshall, to be my lawfully wedded husband," she replied, not even noticing Diane's exit from the room. "I promise you my love, my respect, and my honor. I will be your helpmate, standing beside you for all eternity. From this day forward, we are one."

"I love you, Sarah."

"I love you, too, John."

"How much longer?"

"Ten minutes and twenty-five seconds."

"I missed you last night."

"I missed you, too. I don't like sleeping alone anymore."

"Harm just walked back in. I think that's my cue."

"I'll see you soon, John."

"I'll be waiting for you."

With that, he disconnected the call and Sarah slowly lowered the phone from her ear. As much as he denied it, John had to be the most romantic man she'd ever known. And she was undoubtedly the luckiest woman in the world to be marrying him. Now, if she could just find a way to speed things up a little.

As if on cue, Diane and Ann Marie entered the room. "Are you ready?" Diane asked taking and turning off Harm's cellphone.

"Unbelievably so," Sarah replied.

"How is John?" Diane asked.

"I think we're both just anxious to get things started."

"More like you're both anxious to get to the honeymoon," Ann Marie snorted.

"Annie!" Sarah stated.

"Just calling it like I see it," Ann Marie replied with a grin.

Diane stepped between them with a laugh. "Okay, do you have everything?"

Sarah nodded as she listed the items she would be carrying with her. "Something old...the lace handkerchief Aunt Margaret, John's Godmother gave me. It's tied around my bouquet. Something new...the diamond earrings from Maureen. Something borrowed...your pearl headpiece. And something blue...the garter, which Harriet provided. I think I'm set."
"Okay, then let's get your veil in place," Diane replied.

After only a couple of minutes, they had the veil secured to the headpiece and dropped down over Sarah's face. A knock on the door was followed by the Admiral's voice, "Ladies, we're ready when you are."

"Let's go," Sarah said.

She waited until the others left the room before she stepped out into the hallway where she found Admiral Chegwidden waiting for her with a smile in place. "Sarah, you are beautiful."

"Thank you, Sir."

"May I?" he asked as he held his arm out to her.

She slid her arm around his and they slowly made their way out into the vestibule to await the beginning of the processional.

John waited patiently at the front of the church, his eyes on the doors that would soon open to allow Sarah to make her way to him.

The doors opened to allow the bridal party. The bridesmaids' dresses were long sleeved Navy Blue silk with off the shoulder bodices that clung to each woman that flared out at the waist to long flowing skirts with no trains.

First were Harriet & Bud, Carolyn & Tony, Kate & Gibbs, John's cousin Billy & Matt's wife Leslie, Mark & his wife Christine, Ann Marie & Peter then Meg & Harm.

Lastly was Diane, looking as lovely as ever as she walked towards him. She smiled at him before she turned to take her place beside Meg and John found himself suddenly holding his breath in anticipation when the music changed and the guests all rose to their feet.

She was absolutely stunning, the veil covering her face doing little to hide the smile radiating from her.

Sarah's dress was just as beautiful as she said it was. It also had an off-the-shoulder bodice that clung to her before flaring out at the waist. But this flared into yards of flowing satin under more yards of intricately patterned lace with embroidered lace roses sprinkled over it. The roses signified where she and John met. The veil was attached to the headpiece of pearls. The headpiece matched her pearl necklace and her pearl bracelet.

John had to force himself to breathe as she came to stand beside him, the Admiral shaking his hand before placing hers in it. With a smile reserved only for her, he tucked her arm under his and led her up the few remaining steps to face the priest.

"You look amazing," John whispered under his breath.

She merely smiled at him, not trusting her voice at that moment, the emotion so evident on his face bringing tears to her eyes.

They stood for the beginning of the mass and sat and listened as Traci came up to do the first reading:

"A reading from the book of Proverbs;
When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize. She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She obtains wool and flax and makes cloth with skillful hands. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle. She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates.

The Word of the Lord."

As Traci read the reading John reached for Sarah's hand and gave it a soft squeeze. She picked the reading from Genesis but John switched it. He wanted the whole world to know of his love and admiration for her. She had to reach under her veil to dab at the tears of happiness she shed.

After the Psalm Abby stepped up to read the second reading:

"A reading from the letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have no love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself. Love is not puffed up. Love rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. When I became an adult, I put away childish things. And now I abide by these three things faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.

The Word of the Lord."

After the gospel the exchange of vows was performed. John forced his attention to the priest, trying to concentrate on the words he was saying instead of losing himself in the beauty of the woman standing at his side. It wasn't long before they were once again reciting their vows to each other, this time face-to-face, the sincerity of the promises clearly evident in each other's eyes.

When it was time to exchange the rings, John released his hold on her hand long enough to slide the ring on her finger. "With this ring, I thee wed."

Sarah smiled at him through her veil when he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. Taking the other ring from the priest, she slid it onto John's finger. "With this ring, I thee wed."

They turned their attention back to the priest who smiled down on them. "By the power vested in me by the Roman Catholic Church and the District of Columbia, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss your bride."

John turned back to Sarah, his hands lifting the veil from her face. He smoothed it down, his eyes drinking in the sight of her, before his lips slowly lowered to hers in a gentle kiss.

Sarah smiled against his lips, her hands going to the lapel on his jacket as she deepened the kiss. It was several breathless moments later when they broke apart to the applause of their friends and family.

After giving the blessing to end the mass, the priest announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Captain John Patrick and Mrs. Sarah Catherine Marshall."
No further words were needed as John once again tucked Sarah's hand under his arm, this time leading her away from the altar and towards their new life together.

2130 Local Time

Willard Hotel Ballroom

Washington DC

After accepting congratulations from the congregation at the back of the church, John and Sarah went through the traditional gauntlet of swords with Harm at the command.

It was Harm who gave the introduction, "For the first time in public presenting Captain John Patrick and Mrs. Sarah Catherine Marshall ".

After they went through the gauntlet, Harm smacked Sarah on her six with the usual "Go Navy".

They spent time taking the usual wedding photos at the church and in a special suite at the hotel during the cocktail hour. At the hotel they danced their first dance as husband and wife to Martina McBride's 'Valentine'.

Sarah danced the father daughter dance with AJ while John did the mother-son dance with Maureen. After mingling, dancing, the traditional frivolity of cutting and feeding each other the wedding cake, throwing the bouquet and retrieving and throwing the garter was done with, Sarah changed into a shorter skirt. Sarah's wedding dress was made so it could be worn in two settings. The traditional long train/skirt could be unbuttoned and dropped. A shorter skirt could be put on. She and John planned and practiced this next part in their dance classes as many times as they could since they got back from Russia.

John was waiting near the dais side of the dance floor. He was holding a long stemmed rose. He removed his tunic, tie & cummerbund and rolled up his sleeves to mid forearm. Sarah came back into the ballroom from the opposite end of the dance floor. The band struck up a tango. They approached each other like predatory animals. Their dancing was like watching 'True Lies' as Arnold Schwarzenegger twirled Tia Carrere. Though they concentrated on the dance they were smiling. The whole audience could see the joy and fun they saw in each other's eyes as they performed the difficult dance flawlessly.

When the last note was finished, Sarah was breathing hard as John held her up in a dip as he supported her at the small of her back and her head. John laid a deep and luxurious kiss on her right then and there. Their guests erupted in applause, as they cheered, hollered and whistled.

Keeping in the showmanship spirit, John and Sarah stood then acknowledged their audience. They faced in all four directions as he bowed and she curtsied deeply. This brought more applause as her JAG and his NCIS colleagues saw a side of their friends that they never saw before.

Sarah was going to walk off but John kept hold of her hand and kept her on the dance floor. He led her to the master of ceremonies and John took the microphone and said, "Mr. President the floor is yours."

They waited as President Bartlett made his way through the guests to meet them. He had some items in his hand.

When he got to the couple he took the microphone and began:

"Last spring Abby and I were visiting the Captain in the hospital as he recovered. John's parents and
Sarah were there. I first asked Jim how John was doing. Jim told me to ask John myself, as he was lying there wide-awake. I told John that Jim was lucky he was retired from the Army or I'd have him up for insubordination."

The guests chuckled at that.

"We had a pleasant visit. Before Abby and I left, John and Sarah invited us to this joyous celebration. I said I would have my Chief of Staff arrange my schedule so that I would not have any pressing issues, catastrophes and so on to keep me from being here."

He got a few more chuckles from the audience.

"Anyway the colonel said that she would send the formal invitation. She stuck her tongue firmly in her cheek as she verified my address saying quote, '1600 Pennsylvania Avenue right sir?'"

More chuckles were heard from the guests. Sarah hid her face in John's arm from the embarrassment.

"I told her that though I could not do anything about Jim's insubordination, I could do something about hers the next time I saw her name on the promotions list and that time has come."

It was at that moment that Sarah realized that the President called her 'colonel'. Bartlett could see it on her face as the realization dawned on her. He began the ceremony.

"Attention to orders!"

John and Sarah snapped to attention along with the other officers in the room. All the assembled guests also stood up out of respect for the ceremony.

"It is hereby noted that having proven her loyalty and dedication to duty it is the order of the United States Congress and the United States Marine Corps that Sarah Catherine Mackenzie, now Marshall be promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Marine Corps effective this date, 24 October, 1998. Colonel Marshall, please step forward to take the oath of your new office."

Sarah stepped forward with John at her side. Bartlett revealed that he was holding a Bible and a jewelry box with the badge of Sarah's new rank, a set of silver oak leaves. John stood between the President and Sarah holding the Bible.

"Please repeat after me colonel." The President intoned.

Placing her left hand on the bible Sarah raised her right hand and repeated the oath, "I, Sarah Catherine Marshall, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of Lt. Colonel in the United States Marine Corps. So help me God."

"Congratulations Lt. Colonel Marshall. Usually Captain Marshall would be switching oak leaves on the colonel's uniform, but seeing as she is not wearing her uniform, we'll proceed to the next part. Captain would you please do the honors." Bartlett concluded.

"With pleasure sir." John readily complied.

John took Sarah in his arms and they bent their heads for the kiss. Again they didn't wait for the usual "Gently Captain" as their lips met in a long passionate kiss. The guests erupted in sincere applause as the couple kissed. The President counted the usual twenty seconds and then coughed
loudly. John and Sarah separated and snapped to attention before him. He kissed each of Sarah's cheeks and shook John's hand as the guests applauded again.

2330 Local Time

Willard Hotel Honeymoon Suite

Washington DC

After the reception John and Sarah stood at a station set up for them in the Lobby as the guests filed out on their way home. They collected their gift envelopes. John's brothers and sister took the other gifts back to Florida Avenue. It was all they could do to stay calm until the last guest left. They made the suite reservations when they booked the ballroom. John checked in and delivered their luggage earlier that day. They would stay here for their wedding night then catch their flight to the vacation part of their honeymoon in Kauai, where they would spend 2 weeks. Now they were up at the suite.

"Here we are," John said as he turned to Sarah. "I believe it's tradition for the groom to carry the bride across the threshold."

Sarah laughed as John swept her into his arms and carried her into the room. "How very romantic of you, Mr. Marshall."

"I aim to please," he replied as he kicked the door closed behind them. He slowly lowered her to her feet, enjoying the feel of her body as it slid against his.

Her arms remained around his neck and she pulled his head down to hers, her mouth insistent against his when their lips came together.

When they finally broke apart, John leaned back slightly. "Don't you want to look around the room? It's supposed to have a Jacuzzi tub and everything."

Sarah merely shook her head as she pushed his jacket off his shoulders. Their covert touching and smoldering glances throughout the reception and the tango had her more aroused than she could ever remember being in her entire life and the only thing she had on her mind right now was he. "We can look around the room later," she offered. "Right now, I just want to make love with my husband."

John smiled as he shrugged out of his jacket and tossed it to the side. "I like the sound of that...your husband."

As her fingers began working on the buttons of his shirt, he slid his hands around to her back and slowly lowered the zipper on her dress. She changed out of the rest of her wedding gown before they'd left the reception and he was grateful for that. As pretty as it was, he seriously doubted if he would have had the patience to undo all of those tiny buttons.

As it turned out they didn't have any patience as they soon gave in to the desire threatening to consume them. As they lay together in the bed later, John pulled Sarah onto his chest, his hands drawing lazy circles on her back. "That was amazing," he said softly.

"Definitely worth waiting for," she agreed as she folded her arms across his chest and rested her head on them.

John could feel sleep trying to claim him and he shifted under Sarah, causing her to look up at him through her own heavy eyelids. "There's something I want to tell you," he said.

"What is it?" she asked, doing her best to not drift off to sleep.
"In the time that I was recovering, I realized something. The reason I was fighting so hard to wake up and worked so hard during the rehab, was because I wanted to get back to you, to get home. Right now being here with you ...this is home."

Sarah flashed him a sleepy smile and moved to press a kiss to his lips, agreeing completely and knowing that no more words were necessary.

Sunday, October 25, 1998

1030 Local Time

Dulles International Airport

Delta Airlines flight to Dallas

Connecting to

Honolulu, HI

"So my love, when did you find out about my promotion?" Sarah asked John.

They were climbing to altitude on their first leg to their Hawaiian Honeymoon.

"Last Monday. The President called Admiral Chegwidden and the admiral called me at my office to tell me. I asked if he would like to do the promotion ceremony at the reception. AJ then told me that the President had the same idea and asked AJ to check with me first. I had no problem with it, since the wedding day is the bride's day; I felt I would just add to it. Not even Ann Marie knew. President Bartlett asked me if she should know, I asked him not to tell her, as she can't keep any good news secret. She would have burst by Friday if she knew during the whole week," John said.

"Well it certainly was a surprise and a good one at that. I love the way you try to make everything just that little bit more special or memorable. I think I'm going to like being married to you Mr. Marshall. I know you'll keep me on my romantic toes." Sarah said as she kissed him. "Also of course you know this means war," she added as she waggled her eyes.

"Well if that means I have to look over my shoulder at you all the time I think I can live with it." John said.
Chapter 34

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 34

Tuesday, October 27, 2008

To

Friday, November 6, 1998

Harm, Meg and Bud went out on a case to 29 palms. Back at JAG Harriet's pregnancy hormones were raging. She would burst into tears at the drop of the hat. AJ found her crying about Bud not having called from his assignment in 29 Palms.

"It's your HORMONES Harriet," he said gently. Then he and showed her two scars on his balding head.

"The first one was given me by the Viet Cong and resulted in 39 stitches. I hardly felt it as I walked out of the jungle a day after this wound occurred. This next one was when my ex-wife knocked me unconscious for six hours with an electric can opener in her 2nd trimester."

"Come on Harriet it's late I'll treat you to dinner, but do not make me regret it."

Apparently his pep talk didn't hold as the next day she nauseated him with a sardine Dagwood sandwich then threw out his risotto lunch when she cleaned out the fridge.

AJ couldn't wait for Sarah to get back. He had plans for her workload that would keep him from dealing with this sort of drama.

Also as he promised AJ, assigned Harm & Meg as a team till Sarah came back from her honeymoon. They had three interesting cases.

The first one involved a trial against Sarah's Law School Professor, Juanita Ressler.

It began with an Arab named Nassen who was hired, with others, to blow up the USS Wake Island. The attempt was discovered and Nassen was captured Nassen was airlifted, under guard, back to Washington; and, on television a guard, Corporal Barry, shot him. Harm was assigned to defend and Meg was assigned to prosecute.

While investigating his case Harm encountered FBI Agent Novak. Novak was obstructive to Harm's investigations telling him don't think because we worked together that I'm going to be accommodating.

On the stand Harm asked Novak what Nassen had said before he died. Novak claimed, "nothing."

Harm got a psychiatrist to admit that Barry didn't believe he committed murder because "killing a terrorist is not wrong."

Barry then surprised everyone when he fired Harm and got a civilian attorney, Juanita Ressler who had never lost a murder case.

On the day Harm and Ressler were in his office exchanging case information, Diane came down the
street from NCIS to have lunch with him. The Rabbs loved that their two offices were close to each other, as they spent many lunch hours together at either headquarters' commissary.

Diane was wearing a civilian business suit. Ressler thought she recognized her and immediately pounced. "The last I heard of you Sarah was that you were assigned to JAG, why did you leave, the law get too tough on you?" Ressler asked Diane derisively.

Diane just smiled back shaking Ressler's hand, "Hello, I'm Diane Rabb. You obviously have me confused with my sister. Sarah is still assigned to this office and she is one of the finest attorneys I have ever met, even better than my husband here."

Harm smiled sarcastically at his wife but he knew why Diane said it.

"Right now she is on her honeymoon. She married a former JAG lawyer named John Marshall, who himself is no slouch of an attorney. You may have heard of him. He won the Legion of Merit along with Sarah for retrieving the Declaration of Independence. Right now he is the Assistant Director of NCIS." Diane finished triumphantly.

Ressler looked correctly chagrined. She got up and said, "Thank you Commander. I have what I need to win this case. It was nice to meet you Mrs. Rabb."

"For one of us anyway," Diane replied still smiling.

Then Ressler walked out.

Harm got up and kissed his wife. "Remind me again not to ever get between you and Sarah. I don't think I can survive the trauma."

Diane smiled at that and said to Harm, "Sarah told me about her. For 14 weeks Ressler humiliated her in class and told her that she should "drop out of law and take up lap dancing. I wish Sarah was here and I hope Meg takes her down."

Harm went to lunch but he was still upset about being fired, Meg told him to stay away. She didn't want a mistrial.

During the trial Meg shot down Ressler's witnesses but told Harm, "She's good, I'll give her that."

Harm replied, "Yeah but you're better. I'm going to do some digging. Barry doesn't make enough money to afford Ressler. Someone else is footing his legal bills."

He then set out to tail Ressler to one Percival Bertram, a loud-mouthed, "super-patriot", tycoon at Vectrocomp.

Harm barged into the meeting between Bertram and Ressler.

Bertram asked, "Can I call you Harm my friends call me "Bert."

Harm replied "Really, not Percy."

Bertram was not happy, as he retorted, "Not to my face."

Ressler excused herself and left to let them see "who's was bigger."

Harm asked him why he was replaced. Bertram replied, "As a civilian, Ressler would do anything for an acquittal including blame the military, a line that you won't cross. We're the most powerful nation on earth, and by God we're going hunting."
Harm shot back, "It's because we were the most powerful, that we can't. We are a nation of laws, which is what makes us great. Vigilantes like yourself are as dangerous to this country as the terrorists!"

The trial continued. Ressler began blaming the "brainwashing" of the military for Barry not knowing "right from wrong." Meg shot her arguments down again.

Harm continued to distrust Novak and reviewed videotapes. Contrary to the autopsy revealing hemorrhage, there was no blood or wounds on the tape. He demanded that Novak produce the body and threatened to tell the SECNAV and the Attorney General. Novak showed him Nassen who they were keeping hidden so that the "real" bomber a Syrian named Kasi didn't go underground. He already led them to money that was paid them and wanted Harm to keep quiet until they could trace serial numbers and capture the middleman. Meg, of course was incensed. Chegwidden had Harm set up a meeting with Barry and Ressler.

When confronted with the evidence that there was no murder, Ressler blew up and quit. Before she walked out she said to Harm, "Let me know the verdict."

Barry decided to "play it through" so they could capture Kasi. He told them that "he had done wrong to shoot Nassen, that's what they do, and I don't want to be like them."

Novak was able to trace the money. It was sent from a Washington bank to Amsterdam where it was sent to Riyadh then to Syria. Harm and Novak confronted Bertram and showed him some of the money they retrieved from a Syrian apartment. Bertram said he had met with Fazal Kasi about an agreement to finance factories. Another transfer was due and he was told to go through with it. In Riyadh Novak watched as Kasi left the bank with the money and was gunned down by a drive-by shooter.

After Harm was notified that Kasi was dead, Harm revealed that the victim was indeed alive. The charges were changed to attempted murder. Barry was found guilty of that charge. A deal was made that because he assisted in the operation, he would not face prison time. He was instead given a dishonorable discharge.

The next case took Meg & Harm out to the Persian Gulf to investigate the loss of a Tomcat aboard the Coral Sea.

Lt Cdr Rice (Karma) and his RIO Anne "go-go" Bender ejected after "popping up" between attacking Iraqis and his wingmen, Lt "Slider" Morrison and Lt Brian "Bear" Hass in the "no-fly" zone. The Iraqis drew them in with one aircraft then came up behind with another. The Iraqi was on Slider's tail with a lock. Karma got a lock on the enemy craft but didn't fire. Instead, he "charged" the craft shearing his wing and ejected before it exploded it's fuel into a fireball. PO Moses said the plane was OK when it left. Go-Go said that Karma acted like he didn't hear her telling him to take the shot and kept saying "what?"

Karma finally admitted that he "heard a voice" ordering him NOT to fire. The doctor said Karma was in good health then the CAG climbed on Harm for "saying something that made Karma resign." Harm and Meg found Karma and Slider in a fight and had to break them up. Harm asked Meg which one she wanted to take and she said "I'll take the cute single one." "Just kidding," she said.

Harm found Karma in the chapel where he claimed that it was God who ordered him not to fire. The radio tapes revealed Karma saying "what?" but no other voices or transmissions. They even asked a contact with the CIA if there was a new "radio-jamming device" that they didn't know about. Harm told Meg they needed "advice from a higher source," and Meg asked Chegwidden. The chaplain said that he believed Karma was honest and heard something. "Whether it was God or not was between Karma and the Man upstairs." Meg retorted, "unless the Man is a Woman."
Harm tried to talk Karma out of resigning. Karma asked him, "did you think your his night blindness was for a purpose so he could help people as a lawyer?"

Harm said, "I don't believe so."

Upset Karma replied, "There may be a grand scheme that we are only privy to now and then. The laws of physics: gravitational force, centripetal acceleration and Bernoulli's principle are my ten commandments. There is not room for God, or angels, or anything like that- I didn't talk to God, why is he talking to me? I don't want to stop flying, but I don't ever want to hear that voice in my cockpit again."

Harm asked the CAG to let them re-fly the mission and was given 1 hour in the air with Slider as his RIO.

Karma told Harm he got his call sign by surviving a couple of close calls.

Harm told him, "Flying a combat jet was the most dangerous job on earth. Who needs a higher power more than the men who drive them? And even if the voice was God he told you not to fire. He didn't tell you not to fly."

Before they went up together, Meg advised Harm, "Be home before the streetlights come on or Mrs. Rabb will have my ass."

"Aye,aye ma'am." Harm replied with a smile.

Karma asked Harm, "Are you ready?"

"I'm always ready!" Harm said.

At altitude on autopilot, Karma and Bear began hallucinating and went unconscious from bad oxygen. They were heading toward Iraqi airspace. Meg was in CIC observing the flight. She asked, "Is there a way to disengage the autopilot?"

The CAG blew up at her for her naiveté and she was sent to check the source of the bad oxygen. Meg and the maintenance officer found a bad O ring which contaminated the oxygen.

While there the CAG was thinking of what Meg said about disengaging the autopilot. When Meg came to report of the bad O-ring he apologized. He ordered her to get a technician from Grumman on the phone. The technician said that if the planes sensors got sent out of parameters by tilting greater than 45 degrees the autopilot would automatically disengage.

Harm was ordered to fly his wing tip under Karma's and use Bernoulli's principle to lift it over 45 degrees.

"Whose brilliant idea was this?" Harm asked.

Meg had to admit it was hers. The dubiously designed plan was to disengage the autopilot then have Karma, who was unconscious to the point of seizures, wake up in time to pull out of the power-dive in time to not hit the ground. Fortunately it worked.

When they landed Karma was told, "You heard the voice while you were flying on clean oxygen.

Karma was mystified and asked, "Then why did I hear the voice?"

Harm said, "I guess it wasn't your enemies day to die, like today wasn't yours."
On their way back from the Gulf, AJ ordered Harm & Meg to meet him in Italy to investigate the theft of Stingers missiles while he was there on an inspection. AJ would get involved in the Stinger theft in ways he never imagined.

Monday, November 9, 1998

0800 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

It was Sarah's first day back after her honeymoon. She had a spring in her step that wasn't there before. This was also the first time she was wearing her new rank. When they had arrived home from Hawaii Friday morning, John carried her across their home threshold. The previous night John had Sarah put on her uniform coat and he ceremoniously pinned the new silver oak leaves on. Then she properly removed it and they had made passionate love. Sarah got up early this morning to properly pin them on her coat and blouse. She leaned back to look at how the new rank symbols looked. As she stood there in just her bra and skirt, she was overwhelmed with a wave of emotion.

John saw this and came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. 'What's up honey?' John asked tenderly.

She turned and kissed his cheek, grateful for the comforting touch. She said, "Growing up all I ever heard was that I wouldn't amount to anything. The other girls called me a slut, a drunk and all sorts of other nasty names. My father never expressed any faith in me and my mother was too abused to care about anyone but herself before she left. I started to believe that I would never ever get far from all that. Now look where I am, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marines, a lawyer and married to the most wonderful man ever."

She turned and looked him in the eye. He kissed her gently as he saw her well up with tears of happiness and said, "Don't start crying now or you'll have to redo your eye makeup not that you need it cause your still very beautiful without it."

Sarah kissed him back tenderly and went to dab at her eyes and put on the rest of her make-up.

Now she was walking through the double doors of the bullpen to her office.

Harriet saw her first. "Welcome back, Colonel Marshall." Harriet gushed. Sarah had to smile at the sound of her new rank and name.

"How's married life treating you ma'am?" Harriet asked.

"It's wonderful Harriet. John was so cute this morning. He sent me off with a brown bag lunch of peanut butter & jelly sandwiches." Sarah said as she held up the brown paper bag.

"That's so funny ma'am. Bud did something like that to. How was the honeymoon ma'am?" Harriet asked.

"It was also wonderful Harriet. We lounged at the pool all day except for a couple of days of shopping, horseback riding and scuba diving. The nights in the room were wonderful to," Sarah said. She motioned Harriet closer. "Only Ann Marie and Diane know this. John and I want to have a honeymoon baby. I stopped taking the pill on Labor Day. I may join you and Diane when you have your babies."
"Diane is pregnant also? Commander Rabb didn't mention anything," Harriet said.

"She only told Harm after the wedding. Harm's so thrilled. He says if it's a boy, he'll name him Harm III or Trey. If it's a girl they'll name her Samantha Patricia," Sarah said.

With that Harm walked into the bullpen. He saw his sister in law and greeted her warmly. Good morning colonel," he said as he walked her to her office.

Sarah was delighted to see her nameplate had her new rank and married name imprinted on it. She sighed contently as she went in and put her briefcase and cover away. She sighed again, but this time in exasperation as she saw the pile of messages and work on her desk. She decided to call her husband before she even attempted to sort anything out. She picked up her phone and hit the speed dial for his office. It was answered on the 2nd ring.

"Hello my love. Miss me already?" John joked.

"Yes I did. I also want to know if you had as much work waiting for you today as I did." she asked.

John answered, "Well I have the advantage of having a yeoman assigned to me. Carolyn did a great job of keeping me from getting swamped. Also Admiral Magnum assigned Diane to be acting Assistant Director. So a lot got done when I was gone. Admiral Magnum ordered me not to call at all during our honeymoon so I have a lot of catching up to do. How are you going to handle the first day back?"

"Well I'll let you know when I come up from under this pile." Sarah answered. With that Tiner came to her door.

"Colonel, the admiral wants to see you and Commander Rabb ASAP ma'am," he said.

I'm on my way Tiner. Gotta go my love," Sarah said. "I'll see you tonight. I love you."

"Love you too sweetheart," John answered. Sarah loved being called sweetheart.

When she arrived at AJ's office, she saw Harm was already there. She also saw that AJ had his arm in a sling.

"Have a seat Colonel Marshall, nice to have you back." AJ said pleasantly.

"Good to be back sir." Sarah answered. What happened to your arm sir?"

"I'll tell you after this briefing, as the commander already knows the story. I wanted to get to you before staff call. I know you have a lot on your desk because I put it there. You'll have ample opportunity to get to it. You'll have to do it without Commander Rabb though. We're sending him to Capitol Hill to work with Congresswoman Latham. You remember her from the Sara Gilbert case and the Sigonella Crash case last year, right Colonel?"

"Yes sir. What does she need to stir up now?" Sarah asked with chagrin.

AJ answered, "She is part of a committee formed to judge the validity of a television report that U.S. forces used Sarin gas on fellow Americans during the Gulf War. Norman Delaporte made the report on ZNN. The Commander is being sent to advise her on military legalities, etc. So that's why your desk is flooded with cases Colonel. They're all Commander Rabb's."

"Great sir I'll dive right in after staff call." Sarah said.
"If there is nothing else Commander, you are dismissed. Good luck on the hill," AJ said.

Harm got up with the usual, "Thank you sir" and walked out of the office.

Sarah and AJ waited till Harm was out of the room before he told her about his shoulder.

"Last week while you and John were basking in the Hawaiian Sun, Francesca was kidnapped."

He saw the look of horror on her face and said. "Don't worry she's fine."

Pointing to this shoulder he continued. "This happened when Harm and I went after her. The mafia was holding her. A Warrant Officer named Dillard was caught stealing Stinger Missiles to sell to terrorists in Afghanistan through the Italian Mafia. Harm and Commander Austen were investigating and I was there on an inspection tour and visiting Francesca. I happened right in front of me. They used a sailor being disrespectful to distract me. They took her and then slugged me.

We found out that Francesca was kidnapped as a way to hold the Navy at bay until the missile transaction was completed. Unfortunately, her stepfather Vittorio Paretti was also involved. He was killed when he tried to deliver the missiles in exchange for Francesca's safe return. Harm and I found out that she was being held in a remote cabin. We went in guns blazing. I took a hit. While the last gunman was trying to keep Harm and I at bay, Francesca shot him. We were able to walk away from the whole thing thankfully. She's doing fine since I last spoke with her this morning.

Sarah asked, "Well I'm glad it's over sir. Is there anything I can do to make life easier here for you sir?"

"Yes Colonel there is. You need to change your phone greeting to match your new rank and name. I saw by the nameplate at your office that you are you going to use your married name at work" AJ said.

"Yes sir. Before the wedding I started the name change process with BUPERS. Since John isn't working here there won't be any confusion." Sarah said.

"Also include in your greeting the words 'JAG Chief of Staff' please," AJ added.

"Chief of Staff sir?" Sarah asked.

AJ handed her a copy of the orders that he prepared and signed designating her new position.

He saw the questioning look on her face. "Don't worry I'm not pulling you from trying and investigating cases. You'll still do that. I know you can do Administration and Legal Assistance seeing the good job you did last year when I assigned you there. Now I am combining the three sections under you. I will need you to coordinate all the case assignments and the office operations. You will have assignment authority over the whole JAG staff including Administration, Legal Assistance and Investigation & Trial as well as the office budget. You will also coordinate with of the Navy Yard Building Services commander on the physical plant environment. You may assign whoever you deem fit to cases and to assist you on all matters affecting the running of this office and building. I know I can count on you to do a good job," AJ finished.

"Thank you sir, I'll do my best to live up to your faith in me sir," Sarah said barely holding her excitement in check.

"I know you will Colonel, if there's nothing else, carry on." AJ said pleasantly.

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said as she stood to leave.
Sarah returned to her office and sat down at her desk. She was very excited about her new duties. She couldn't wait to tell John. She decided to go through her messages first. She was sorting them out in order of priority she came upon several that made her pale in horror. She recovered quickly though and reached for her phone and called John's office.
Chapter 35

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 35

0845 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

John saw Sarah's number on his caller ID screen. He was immediately concerned. "Honey, what's the matter?"

Sarah told him, "Chris Ragle is in town. He left several messages at my office. I have no idea what he wants, but it can't be any good. I don't know how he found out where I work."

"Remember when you and Harm were in Yuma on the Blackhorse case and you stopped into your old parish to get copies of your Baptism, Communion and Confirmation certificates so we could get married in the church? Well I bet the church secretary spoke of you to someone and the word got around to Ragle. Also Mom and Dad posted our wedding announcement in the Washington Post. The Yuma papers probably picked it up on the Internet and printed it out there. Besides it's not like he's got a claim on you or anything. You only lived together in Eddie's house when you were, what 19 years old and for what, 6 months?" John asked.

"How do you want to handle him?" Sarah asked

John answered, "Well we don't want to bring him home for supper. Why don't I call him back and ask him to meet us at the Willard Bar. That way he won't have any preconceived notions and he can see that it's not worth his while to hang around."

"Yeah that sounds like a plan. Let's do it around 1900. That will give me time to go home and change. I don't want to confront him in uniform or anything," Sarah said. John agreed then she gave him Ragle's current number.

John then asked, "Do you want to tell him what we discussed with Jordan?"

"I know I want to. I'm very nervous about that, but as long as you're there with me I think I'll be able to do it." Sarah answered nervously.

"Don't worry honey I'll be there beside you all the way." John reassured his wife.

They finalized their plans for the evening before they said goodbye.

1900 Local Time

Willard Hotel Bar

After she got home Sarah changed into a gray executive suit. She sat with John sipping a soda with a twist while John had a ginger ale. Sarah never gave him a hard time about drinking when they were out and told him so on more than one occasion. John just wanted her to be comfortable so he stuck with ginger ale when they were out together. Besides, John was still armed. He was required to carry his weapon when he was away from the office.
They were chatting about how everyone at the office was when they came back. John was very happy and excited for her promotion to Chief of Staff.

"See your stint running Administration and Legal Assistance was beneficial after all," John said.

Sarah was about to respond but she was cut short. She caught her breath as she turned to the bar entrance and saw Ragle walk in.

He was about 6 feet tall with brown close-cropped hair. Sarah remembered him with long hair. He saw Sarah immediately and went over to her smiling. His smile disappeared when he saw Sarah raise her left hand in a wave. That's when he saw the diamond engagement and wedding rings.

Sarah shook his hand instead of kissing him and then made the introductions. "John this Chris Ragle. Chris, this is my husband Captain John Marshall."

The two men shook hands. John noticed that Ragle tried to out grip him. John immediately saw him for what he was, a user who was totally insecure and trying to go through life the easy way by trying to scam or lie. John noticed that his sport jacket and trousers was not in the greatest shape and his shoes were scuffed. He wore a three-button polo shirt without a tie. Even the collar was starting to fray.

They moved to an empty bar table to converse in privacy. Ragle began, "Sarah it's good to see you again. You look good. The Marine life seems to agree with you."

"Yes it has. I'd like to say it's good to see you Chris but I can't seem to get up the enthusiasm. When I knew you, I was more drunk than not. So I was very surprised to hear from you. Besides how did you know where I was working? I know I didn't tell anyone where I was living the last time I was out in Yuma to get my church documents. I didn't even send any wedding notices out to Yuma. Only my family who still lived there knew about my wedding."

"Well after I came out of prison after I served six years for that robbery I was caught up in, I heard you were in the Marines. I didn't know where you were stationed. I knocked around Yuma and the rest of Arizona working different jobs for a few years. Then last week I read your wedding announcement. I heard about the announcement from Charlie Burton. His wife Wilma was working at the rectory of the church when you picked up your church papers. She saw your wedding announcement on the Washington Post Internet page and sent it to the local paper," Ragle explained.

John rolled his eyes at Ragle's description of his participation in the robbery. He and Sarah exchanged nods confirming with each other what John had said earlier that day.

"I'm driving trucks now and I was in town and I thought I'd look you up. See how you were doing, go over some good times, etc," Ragle said.

"Like I told you Chris, when I knew you I was drunk. Right now I'm a recovering alcoholic. I've been sober for over 10 years. Even though I didn't go through a twelve-step program to get that far, I did go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I learned there that one of the processes one like me needs to go through is reconciling with my past and the people I knew while I was drunk. I'm sorry you think I led you on. At the time we were living together I was very dependent back then and I wanted to hang on to someone to live with because I didn't want to live with my father. He used to nag me and verbally abuse me. Living with you and Eddie was just my way out of that."

Sarah paused as she gathered up her courage to say what came next, "What really disappointed me then was that you took advantage of me, of my situation, of my being drunk."
Ragle looked at her in confusion.

Sarah gritted her teeth and lowered her voice so only John and Ragle could hear as she angrily and firmly said, "You stole my virginity, you date-raped me!"

Ragle was about to protest until he saw John reach and move his coat so that he could see John's weapon.

He sputtered his denial, "How do you know it was me if you were drunk?"

"I only knew it was you because Eddie told me it was. And no it wasn't Eddie. He was as drunk as me. You were the only one who was sober. Now that I think of it, you were just living with us because you knew we were in no shape to deny you. You were very satisfied to use me any way you could."

Sarah paused to sip her drink. She continued as Ragle took a breath to protest. She held up her hand and continued, "That night when you took advantage of me I don't even remember consenting to sleeping with you or that it even happened. I just remember the next morning I was achy there and there was a lot of blood on my sheet and on me. I would have reported you if I had the mental wherewithal to pursue anything or to even know how I could prove it. It's amazing that I didn't get pregnant or sick with something. Who knows what I would have got. You were sleeping around with any girl who wanted you, stranger or otherwise"

Ragle didn't know what to say so Sarah continued, "After that when you left I didn't know you were arrested and I didn't even care. I just knew you were gone. I just knew that I was glad you were gone. It took Eddie being killed in the accident to make me realize I needed help. It happened the night after graduation after the prom. That's when my uncle stepped in. It took him a month of drying me out to get me off alcohol.

When we left Red Rock Mesa I only went back to Yuma to collect my things, what little there were from Eddie's house. Then I went to live in Tucson. It was from there I went into the Marines. I became a Marine because of my uncle. The Marines have given me a good life and a law degree. Then I found John to fulfill the rest. We're planning to start a family very soon."

Sarah was visibly shaking and a tear ran down her cheek when she finished her narrative. John reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. She turned to him and gave him a smile to tell him that she was all right.

Sarah sighed and said, "I'm going to the ladies room to fix my face. I'll say goodbye when I come back. So you boys be nice." She gave John a kiss as she left.

Ragle couldn't help but notice this. He turned to John and said, "How long have you known Sarah?"

"Long enough to respect and fall in love with and marry her. Look Chris I help direct a federal law enforcement agency. I have access to criminals' records. When Sarah called me and told me you were asking after her I pulled your record. That line about you being caught up in the event was a load of bull and we both know it. You were driving the getaway car. The only reason you received such a light sentence was because no one was hurt or killed. So don't come here saying you wanted to relive the good times. You want something or some things from Sarah. You can't have the one because that's mine. So what else were you looking for?"

John finished his questions looking at Ragle dangerously. Ragle was properly intimidated and John knew it because he could see it on his face.
Ragle stammered, "I just thought that we could pick up and begin a new life together. I see now that I was wasting my time pursuing that. She's obviously in love with you. What I really need is some seed money to start my own trucking company."

"What do we look like a bank?" John said softly, but with a lot of anger. "You know I don't know which has me angrier, the fact that you raped her and got away with it or the fact that after you did that to her, you have the gall come here and ask her for money and expected her to just give it to you."

John paused and took a breath to better control his anger before he continued.

"I can't touch you for the rape because of the statute of limitations. But I can make your life miserable. I suggest you go back to Yuma and talk to your parole officer."

John saw the surprised look on Ragle's face.

"And don't look so surprised. Remember I'm a federal cop and all. I read your file. I called your parole officer. You only had a 72-hour pass to be out of Arizona. Those 72 hours expired 48 hours ago. You're in violation of parole. I suggest when Sarah gets back you take her advice and tell her goodbye, good luck and leave."

John took a sip of his drink as he studied Ragle's reaction to what he told him.

Ragle was still at a loss for a reply so John continued, "And there is another thing you need to know. When you are a convicted felon, especially one on parole, and you go inquiring after Federal officials and their families, we are authorized to put you under surveillance. Since I became aware of your inquiries, you've had an agent on your tail. So if you're not out of DC and on your way back to Yuma by the morning, I'll know about it. I won't call your parole officer again. I'll just have you arrested and shipped back there myself. All it takes is one phone call." John said with menace.

Ragle had become very pale as John explained the facts to him.

John then asked Ragle "Am I getting through to you?"

Ragle swallowed hard as he answered, "Yeah you are, there's no need to be harsh."

John was about to reply to that but he held his tongue as Sarah returned from the Ladies' Room.

Realizing that he wanted nothing more than to get away from John's intimidating presence Ragle said, "Sarah it was good to see you. I just remembered I have to see someone else tonight. So this is goodbye. I hope you are happy and you stay that way." He kissed her cheek, shook John's hand and walked out.

She watched Ragle walk out of the bar, and then she turned to John, "What did you do? He was pale as a ghost."

John smiled as he sipped his drink then answered, "I just explained the realities of his situation to him. I don't think he'll be bothering us again."

"I'll bet. You probably threatened him in that nice way you have." Sarah said to him with a smirk.

John replied, "What can I say, I can't help it that I'm so persuasive."

"Either way I'm glad you were here. I know if you weren't here, I wouldn't have had the courage to tell him what I told him and to leave us alone," Sarah said.
John kissed her temple as he replied, "You are the most courageous woman I know. To go through the things you went through and come out the way you have is extraordinary. I could tell that you were very scared to remind him what he did to you and then tell him in no uncertain terms that he couldn't get what he was looking for, but you did. I'm glad I was there for you." He sealed that affirmation with a kiss. Then they paid their tab and left the bar.

As they were walking through the lobby hand in hand, they met their wedding planner, Audrey Wilson on her way out of her office to go home. They chatted as they walked across the lobby. Sarah and John thanked her for the good job she did for their wedding. As they approached the front entrance they heard a car screech to a halt and then they heard gunfire. John pushed Sarah and Audrey down to the floor and crouched over them with his weapon drawn. They didn't get up again until they heard more tires screeching as they were peeling out.

"Stay here!" John ordered Sarah.

"You're kidding right," she said as she reached into her purse for her own weapon as her Marine training took over. She followed John out.

John sighed in resignation but still made sure she stayed behind him.

When they came out the front entrance they saw Kate Larkin bending over a body. There was blood pooling out from under it. When they got closer they saw that it was Ragle. "Kate what happened?" John asked.

"I was across the street in my car watching Ragle. He was walking along when a black Town car with darkened windows pulled up. They stuck guns out the windows and pumped some rounds into him and then peeled out. I wasn't in position to return fire. But I did get the license plate number. We'll have the police run it.

Sarah looked on Ragle's body in resignation. "You were right he won't be bothering us anymore."

1950 Local Time

Outside the Willard Hotel

Washington, DC

When the detective who caught the case arrived he had a chip on his shoulder and he made no effort to hide his disdain for federal law enforcement. His name was Lt. Trask and he asked John, "How is it that a person under federal observation is gunned down in downtown DC and no one is in a position to do anything about it?"

John answered him "First of all Lieutenant watch your tongue. Save the sarcasm for the criminals. Secondly the key word to your question is 'observation' not protection. He was a paroled felon and he was making inquiries into my and my wife's lives. We put him under observation. We were unaware of his dealings as we only became aware of him this morning. When you run the plate, I guess you'll find out who killed him."

"How well did you know him?" Trask asked John and Sarah.

"He is a person from my past. I hadn't seen him in over 10 years," Sarah answered. "My husband only met him this evening. He was in town looking to catch up on some old times. We were speaking in the bar for a short time. When we finished, he walked out a few minutes ahead of us. We were still in the hotel when we heard the shots. When we came out, we saw our agent checking Chris." Sarah answered.
"What did you talk about?" Trask asked again.

"He wanted to borrow seed money from us to start a trucking firm. I told him that that wasn't going to happen. At that point he felt there was no need to stick around and he left. Maybe he owed someone money and was trying to borrow from Peter to pay Paul. Also he said that he was driving trucks. Check and see if he was transporting illegal cargo," John suggested.

"I'll do that. Is there anything else you can think of?" Trask asked.

"Nothing at the moment," John answered.

"Where can I reach you if anything else comes up?" Trask asked.

John and Sarah handed him their business cards. Sarah's card still said Mackenzie.

When they walked away Sarah asked John, "You didn't tell me he was asking for money. I mean it sounds like something he would have done."

"I was just about to tell you when we met Audrey," John said. "I'll have my office keep tabs on the investigation to make sure that his friends didn't get the same idea of hitting us up for their vig."

John then said to Sarah, "I don't want you to worry about this anymore. I know you Sarah you'll feel guilty about him. None of this is your fault or mine. He was over 21 and he made his own choices. Unfortunately, they were all bad."

'Don't worry sweetie. Those days are over. I have you with me so I don't ever have to worry or feel guilty about anything ever again," she said as she gave him a kiss and wrapped both her arms around his left arm. She could feel the muscles ripple under his jacket.

"That's good. What do you say we skip dinner and head straight for dessert? You still have that negligee you wore in Russia? John asked seductively putting his arm across her shoulders.

"Why yes I do. You really want to make that baby don't you?" Sarah said as she leaned into his embrace.

"Well I do like the practice," he said mischievously.

Sarah just smiled as they walked to get their car.

Tuesday, November 10, 1998

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm came into Sarah's office to say hello. "Diane told me that you and John were involved in a shooting at the Willard. What happened?" Harm asked concerned.

"It was nothing John and I did. An old acquaintance of mine from Yuma blew into town. He was a paroled felon and someone did a drive by on him. He just happened to be with us just before he was shot. John and I hadn't even left the hotel when it happened."

"Anymore acquaintances out there like that we need to worry about?" Harm asked facetiously.

Sarah looked at him with a half amused half annoyed look saying, "Not that I know of Commander."
"By the way how's Diane, any weird cravings?" Sarah asked.

"No more than the last time. I mean it's not like I'm ordering any weird ice cream flavors," Harm answered.

'How's it working with Congresswoman Latham?"

"Okay I guess she's very thorough as you know. We're looking for a key witness. His name is Sgt. Morrison. He was actually on the mission in question in the Gulf, but he's been missing ever since. I'm going to have Bud do an Internet search on him. That's why I'm here," Harm answered.


"I love hearing you say that," said her husband.

Sarah saw by her Caller I.D. screen that it was John, "How can I help you my love," Sarah asked brightly.

"I have some information about last night's incident," John informed her.

While John said why he was calling, Harm excused himself. Sarah motioned for him to stay. Harm sat down as Sarah put John on the speakerphone.

"John, Harm is sitting here with me and I have you on speaker."

"Good morning Harm," John acknowledged.

"Hey John, what's up,' Harm answered.

John began his brief. "Lt. Trask called to inform me that they have a lead on Chris' killers. They found a card in Chris' wallet belonging to a loan shark named Benny Turpin or as Benny says a 'financial assistance agent'. The police are questioning him now. So far all he is admitting to is lending Chris money. He says that he doesn't make any money from killing the people who owe him money and he doesn't know whom else Chris was involved with.

The black car that the killers shot from was registered to a holding company that is owned by a suspected drug dealer named Luis Salazar. The police say he is a very bad dude. Also Lt. Trask did a search for Chris' vehicle based on a parking garage ticket they found in his jacket. They found it in a garage two blocks from the Willard. It was a panel van. They found traces of cocaine on the floor of the van. It seems that he may have transported illegal substances, maybe for Salazar. Trask is following up on that. Either Chris lost his shipment or they suspected he was talking to L.E.O.s i.e., you and I," John ended.

"What does that mean for us?" Sarah asked pensively.

John answered, "Maybe nothing but we can't be sure. Trask did find JAG's phone number in Chris' wallet but not our home or cell numbers or my office number. Trask is guessing that Salazar was following Chris and saw him go into the hotel. I don't remember seeing anyone unusual coming into the bar after Chris. So I don't believe that anyone knows that he spoke with us. We can't be sure what Chris told anyone. So Admiral Magnum is assigning escorts to us.

Thomas is already calling Admiral Chegwidden. Kate has been assigned to you. She's walking over there now. Tony will be my escort. They will pick us up at home, take us to and be with us at work and then take us back home at the end of the day. Once we get home, we won't need anyone to watch the house as we have our alarm set up to alert NCIS anyway because of my position. Also we
are not to spend our weekends apart until this thing is resolved.

"How long will this go on?" Sarah asked as she was starting to get upset.

"Maybe a week, it's something we need to tolerate for the time being, so be nice. Admiral Chegwidden will authorize Kate to share case information so you can take her out with you for investigations and interviews etc. so she won't cramp your space," John finished.

"I guess I can deal with that. At least it's Kate and not some new agent," Sarah agreed but with a sigh. At that point Kate knocked on the office door. "As we speak here's Kate now,' Sarah said waving her in.

"Hi John," Kate called out toward the phone.

"Hi Kate, you two play nice now. I'll see you later Sarah. I love you," John said.

"I love you to sweetie," Sarah said as they broke the connection.

Kate was touched that they weren't embarrassed to openly express their love over the speaker.

Harm shook Kate's hand and excused himself to go find Bud.

"So what now?" Kate asked.

"Since we're going to be working cases together, let's get you a desk. Harriet!" Sarah called out as she saw the Ensign walk past the door.

"Yes ma'am, hi Kate" Harriet said as she came into the door.

"Good morning Harriet," Kate acknowledged as they shook hands.

"Please find a desk for Agent Larkin to use in the bullpen. We're going to be working together," Sarah ordered.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Harriet acknowledged.

"Come on we'll say hello to the Admiral," Sarah added as she got up.

After the usual amenity chitchat AJ got down to it. "Admiral Magnum called to inform me that you two would be working together for a while and why. I know I don't need to go into detail about confidentiality of cases with you, do I Agent Larkin?" AJ said.

"No sir." Kate answered.

"Good I'm sure we'll put you to good use then. Carry on" AJ said officially.

When they came out of AJ's office, Harriet set up a desk for Kate right outside Sarah's office. Sarah and Kate got right into the first case Sarah was working on when John called. They spent the rest of the day working. They both found that they shared a camaraderie that enabled them to work very well together. They left JAG at about 1730. Kate followed Sarah home from the Navy Yard so she was able to go right home without any inconvenience.

Tuesday, November 17, 1998

0900 Local Time
John was right about the protection detail lasting a short time. On Monday the 16th Trask called John to inform him that they caught up with Salazar; or that his people caught up with him. Trask had received a report from an informant that the gang Salazar was heading was making a change in leadership. They had effected the change in a very gruesome way. Salazar was found dead Saturday night in an apartment in an abandoned building. He was tied to a chair. There were obvious signs of torture. His tongue was cut out of his mouth and was lying on the floor at his feet. He was shot through the back of the head execution style. A note was found. It said, 'this is what happens to those who talk to the wrong people'. The protection detail was pulled and John and Sarah went back to living a normal life.

Also during the previous week, Harm helped debunk Norman Delaporte's ZNN story of Sarin Gas being used by Marines in Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. Harm had found Sgt. Morrison in a bar in Virginia. He was drinking to forget his role in that war.

Morrison was filming the raid and had the original unedited filmed version of the incident. Delaporte only used a portion of the tape that was given to him by the widow of another Marine that was killed. Delaporte edited out the part where the film showed that the gas canisters used were actually labeled as tear gas, not Sarin. Congresswoman Latham was not happy and she promised the fullest prosecution of Delaporte's fraud that the law allowed. Harm returned to JAG a hero for having proven that the Marines were not cold-blooded violators of international law.

Now he, Bud and Sarah were sitting AJ's office receiving orders for their next assignment.

"You three are going to Iran to represent a Navy flier who is being held there. It seems that the Stealth jet he was flying in reconnaissance off the Seahawk went down in Iran due to a mechanical failure. You two will be his counsel at the trial the Iranians will hold. It's possible that you may be able to affect his release."

"Sir, what is the pilot's name?" Harm asked.

"You know him Commander, Lt. Commander Jack Keeter," AJ said.

Harm couldn't hide his dismay. "When do I leave sir," Harm asked with a lump in his throat.

"You and Colonel Marshall and Lt. Roberts leave tonight. The Colonel speaks Farsi and you're going to need her to translate the proceedings. Colonel, I briefed John just before you came in. I told him that I would be briefing you so he didn't have to call you right away. We're doing a full court press here. He sent Webb over there to act as CIA liaison. I also sent Brumby over there to act as liaison to the Australians. Since we no longer have an embassy in Tehran, we will be working out of their embassy. He and Webb took the same flight and they should be over the Atlantic by now. I know your husband almost as well as you do, he does not like to waste time. Too bad he's not still working here," AJ commented.

"Thank you sir, he always appreciates hearing that," Sarah said appreciatively.

"Also John and Thomas are tasking Diane in ATAC to monitor the situation by satellite. So you'll have lots of support. Ok you two know what you need to know. Do what you need to do to get our pilot back, dismissed," AJ said.

"Aye, aye sir," Harm, Bud and Sarah said as they got up and walked out of the office. They left that night after making their personal arrangements with Diane and John. Their mission would not go exactly as they planned.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 36

Sunday, November 22, 1998

1930 Local Time

Andrews Air Force Base

Arrivals Terminal

John and Diane were waiting for their spouses. John was holding his 14 month old goddaughter Sarah Cate to give Diane a break. At two months her pregnancy was starting to show now.

It was a tough four days. John and Diane were almost inseparable during the whole thing. Diane left Sarah Cate to sleep over at Ann Marie's. Being Press Secretary, Ann Marie was privy to the details of the incident and arranged for Secret Service agents to drop off and pick-up Sarah Cate at daycare. She knew that the way John and Diane were working was their way of coping with the idea of that each of their respective spouses was working a dangerous mission together. Diane stayed in the guest room at the Marshall's.

While Bud stayed on the Seahawk, Sarah and Harm went on to Tehran. There a Justice Minister named Nassan met them. He brought them to Bakkar prison where Keeter was being held. Harm was appalled that Keeter was in such a sorry state. Keeter's clothing was ripped and unkempt. He was dirty and his right arm was broken and just laid in a dirty sling.

"Hey Keeter, how are you doing?" Harm asked.

"No Martin Baker" Keeter kept mumbling over and over.

"Minister Nassan, is this how you treat prisoners. He needs immediate medical attention. He has a broken arm and a possible concussion," Harm chastised him

"We were in the process of getting him medical attention when you showed up. If you like we can have a doctor and nurse see him right away and you can come back later to see him. In the meantime he left a letter to be sent to his father," Nassan said oozing oily charm as he gave the letter to Harm.

Harm took the letter and he and Sarah went to the Australian Embassy. They met Brumby and Webb there. The mention of "no Martin Baker" meant that Keeter had not ejected, but had landed the plane. Harm knew Keeter's father was dead. The letter was coded and it spelled out where in the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert the jet was. Webb gave Harm a replacement circuit board for the jet. Webb and Brumby went back to the Seahawk.

Then with the aid of a CIA Operative named Kazzari, Sarah and Harm broke Keeter out of the prison. They set out across the desert. When they came upon the jet, they saw that Bedouins took control of the jet as a shelter. They negotiated with them for $1 Million Dollars in gold, but Sarah had to stay with them as collateral. Going with the Bedouins was also the only way Sarah and Keeter had to get away. They replaced the circuit board but before Harm could take off another complication came up.
Kazzari turned out to be a double agent. He notified the Iranian Army. Only by Harm and Keeter winning the face off in a Western style gunfight were they able to get away. Harm in the jet and Sarah and Keeter across the desert with the Bedouins just ahead of the approaching Iranian Army.

The jet landed on the Seahawk automatically. While Harm was in the simulator Keeter and Sarah arrived. They met in the simulator room with Keeter. Keeter was complaining that Sarah drove him crazy all the way across the desert by her ability to tell the exact time by her "body clock". They flew off the Seahawk to Riyadh and then took a flight to Andrews.

Sarah Cate lit up when she saw her father and her Aunt Sarah followed by Keeter, Bud and Webb. John put her down and she walked to meet Harm. Harm picked his daughter up and spun her around like an airplane. Sarah Cate just giggled in delight. Harm carried her over to Diane and gave his wife a good kiss.

After he shook Bud, Webb and Keeter's hands John embraced his wife. She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him down to her for a deep, deep kiss. It was almost two minutes before they came up for air. "I missed you so much," Sarah told him.

"I missed you to," John said holding her chin up with his thumb. "What do you say we go home where you can try on the present I bought you," John said tenderly.

Sarah smiled brightly. "You bought me a present? When did you have the time? Diane called me in flight. She told me that while Harm and I were away you and she were inseparable, barely out of ATAC for more than an hour at a time during the day and you had Diane over at our place and Sarah Cate stayed at Ann Marie's while you were trying to keep tabs on the mission and us. You never did that while I was away on other cases," Sarah said.

"First of all, you said the magic word – cases. Every other time you were away without me, you were working cases, doing legal work. Harm was the one taking the chances flying or jumping around in a fire. You weren't on dangerous missions. It was easier on me when we were together in Russia and I was with Harm. Remember that Diane was a wreck there and you were the cool one. Well this time we both needed the companionship and the support. Working our end of the mission helped us to keep it together. We felt that we were in some kind of control. It was the only way we could cope and stay focused without over worrying. It's always going to be this way when we are apart on this type of mission. We have in Harm and Diane a great support system. I would expect that you would lean on Diane and Harm if I were the one away on a mission," John finished.

"I can understand that." Sarah said as she kissed him again. "You said first of all. What's second?" Sarah asked.

"Well I was able to relax when I heard that you were back on the Seahawk. Then it took you almost a whole 24 hours to get home after that, plenty of time to pick it up. It's your wedding present. I ordered it before the wedding, but it wouldn't have been ready on time for the wedding. It came in two days ago. You'll find it on the bed when we get home," John said.

"Is it something that you're going to take off me anyway or at least wear outside?" Sarah asked.

"I think you'll be able to wear it for a while, no matter what we do," John said.

"Ooh, I can't wait!" Sarah said in a very girlie way. John loved that about her. Under the tough Marine exterior was a real girl who appreciated all the little things, like the sexy lingerie, jewelry and all the other romantic gifts.

2030 Local Time
When Sarah saw what John bought her, she squealed with delight. It was a ¾ length silver fox fur coat. It was lined in silk and had her name "Sarah Catherine Marshall" embroidered in the lining. She shooed John out of the room telling him she needed time to get ready for him. "Give me 10 minutes, I'll call you," she said as she pushed him out the door.

John went into the extra bathroom and changed into his bathrobe leaving his shorts on. Sarah called him. When he entered he saw what she prepared. Sarah turned off all the lights and lit up aromatic oil candles in wall sconces that she installed all around the room. She turned down the bed and was sitting with her legs curled up seductively under her. All she had on was the fur coat, which she held closed across and just slightly off her shoulders.

"I love the way the silk feels on my bare skin," she purred. "I want you to make love to me while I wear this," she said.

John was only too eager to please. Sarah smiled delightedly as he shed his robe and shorts as his erection stood out proudly. She smiled seductively as she opened her coat giving him a full view of all her attributes. He got on the bed as they both had their way with each other.

2315 Local Time

Marshall Residence
Florida Ave, NW

Sarah still had the coat on as she lay across John's body. It covered the both of them as she had one arm across his chest and her legs entangled in his. "How was that Mrs. Marshall?" John asked as he stroked her hair.

"That was wonderful. You know, I was ovulating. I found out on the Seahawk by using a fertility test kit that I brought with me. I couldn't wait to get home so we could do this. The fur coat made it more enjoyable." Sarah said.

"When will we know for sure?" John asked.

"We'll know in two weeks when my period is due or maybe tomorrow. I'll buy some pregnancy tests after mass." Sarah replied.

"Well we'll say a prayer when we go to church tomorrow morning." John said.

"Yeah I went to mass on the carrier before we left. I knew that I would miss mass here. Going to 7:00 Mass with you tomorrow will be nice." Sarah said.

"It's a date." John said as they fell asleep.

Sarah woke up at about 0130 and put her present away. She put on one of her negligees that John loved so much to see her in and went back to sleep.

Monday, November 30, 1998

0942 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
Sarah and John had spent Thanksgiving Day at the Rabbs. Frank & Trish were there as well as Bud & Harriet. John's parents and sister were up in New York with Matt & Mark at Mark's house.

Sarah told Diane that she might be pregnant. Diane agreed to keep her confidence.

After greeting and telling each other how their holiday weekend time was, Harm & Sarah were receiving orders for their next assignment from AJ.

"The USS Coral Sea is out in the Persian Gulf helping enforce the 'No Fly Zone' in Iraq. It has been experiencing chronic severe power interruptions while in the middle of flight operations. Last night a steam pipe failure with severe injuries was the capper. I am sending you two to investigate. A civilian contractor, name of Yarborrough is working on upgrading the ship's systems. I want you two make sure this isn't sabotage. You leave this afternoon, dismissed," AJ said.

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah and Harm said as they snapped to attention then left.

When they got out to the Coral Sea they met Yarborrough. He told them that the ship had failures for some time, including lock-outs, system crashes, and false alarms.

As they interviewed the crew they found that those who interacted with him described him as a 'smart guy who likes to remind you of it.' They met another civilian contractor, John Newman. He was the hazardous materials expert. Harm and Sarah found him in a storage locker set up to contain the material until it could be disposed of properly. Harm and Sarah donned the protective clothing that covered them from head to toe before they entered the locker. Newman showed Sarah and Harm the failed pipe. He found that acid was applied.

"Why do you use acid?" Sarah asked.

"The acid is a spontaneous metal dissolver (SMD) used as "liquid torch". We use that in those areas of the ship where flames from a torch can't be used, such as fuel storage areas," Newman explained. Sara touched the pipe with the fingertips of her gloved left hand.

"Don't touch that colonel, it's highly corrosive," Newman warned her. She immediately withdrew her hand then they left the locker.

Before they could start to remove the protective clothing, Sarah called "Harm!" The cry had a mixture of surprise and pain. Harm grabbed her and rushed her to the wash down station. Her left glove that she used to touch the corroded pipe began burning from the acid. The acid dissolved the thick latex and was attacking the skin on her fingers.

After ensuring that all the acid was washed off, Harm helped Sarah remove the rest of her protective clothing. Then they rushed up to sickbay to get her burns treated. Her left index finger and middle finger had 2nd degree burns. The corpsman cleaned the wounds with sterile water then applied 1% silver sulfadiazine' or Silverdine burn ointment to the burns. He wrapped each finger separately in surgitube and netting and then wrapped them together.

"You're lucky that your ring finger wasn't affected. Otherwise we would have had to cut your wedding and engagement rings off. You will lose the finger nails on the two burned fingers though, but they'll grow back," the corpsman informed her. He then gave her a jar of the ointment. "Change the bandage once a day applying the "Silverdine" each time as you saw me do it. Keep the bandage dry and clean. You can wash the burns between applying the ointment and bandages, but gently. It's a good thing you're right handed ma'am."
"Thank you corpsman," Sarah said.

While Sarah was being treated in sickbay, Harm went to the bridge during a "rumble" and everyone watched him as he "armchair quarterbacked" the downing of two Iraqi MIGs. Sarah came up and observed the 'rumble'.

Sarah shook her head seeing how engrossed he was watching flight tapes and walked away. Harm saw her as she was walking away and left the bridge to catch up with her.

"You were good weren't you?" she asked him when he caught her.

Harm responded, "I still am, and status current."

Sarah told him, "You'll never be able to go back, because you're too important to JAG and you have a wife and family to take care of. I'm beginning to worry that you're trading one obsession for another. First it was finding your father, then Roscoe, what's next, flying?"

Harm just grinned and said, "You're just afraid you'll lose me."

She merely responded, "Maybe or that you will lose yourself."

"It wasn't my choice if it weren't for my eyes, I would still be doing that," Harm retorted pointing back to the bridge.

"I realize that you crashed because of your eyes. I also realize because you crashed that you were in the hospital where you met my husband who had to remind you that there was more to this life than flying. If he weren't in the hospital with you and he didn't tell you what he told you, would you have realized that alone and married my sister?" Sarah asked him.

Harm had to lower his eyes before he said, "Probably not. But Diane and I discussed this. She confronted me one day right after Sarah Cate was born and asked me if I missed flying. I told her, only when I'm back on board, or see a jet, shaving in the morning, in my dreams, eating pizza, watching a movie. I also told her that I don't regret joining JAG but it would have been nice if I had left flying on my own terms. We both agreed that if there were some way my eyes can be fixed, I would go back just to prove that it wasn't just my eyes. So if that opportunity presented itself, she would support me."

Sarah responded, "You're a lucky guy to be married to such an understanding woman." Sarah said.

"Yeah I am," Harm agreed.

Then they turned to concentrating on the investigation. Harm told the captain the incidents were either sabotage or vandalism. Harm then called JAG and asked Bud to check the names including civilian contractors. One of the injured sailors told Harm that Newman was in the engine room before the break.

"It has to be Newman," Harm said.

Sarah added, "I think its Yarborough."

Harm asked, "Why?"

"Because he's a disgruntled, former-navy geek who tried to prove himself smarter than everyone else by creating problems then fixing them. I can't figure out why though," Sarah answered.
"I'll bet you dinner either at your house or mine on who the culprit is," Harm offered.

"How about this, the loser pays for dinner at your or my favorite restaurant. I don't think I can stand your meatless meatloaf. It should be declared as hazardous material or toxic waste, it tastes so bad," Sarah reminded him.

Harm grinned sarcastically at her but he began thinking about his 'meatless meatloaf'.

While Harm and Sarah were discussing who might be at fault and dinner bets, Yarborough was in the ship's control room. He spilled coffee on the XO. While the XO went to clean himself and change Yarborough installed a clandestine computer program. Yarborough then left the control room and went to his quarters. The program he installed was a virus that went into effect as he turned on his laptop computer and plugged it into the Internet plug in his room. Almost immediately, multiple outages, alarms and failures started occurring throughout the ship; all while two Tomcats were in a holding pattern with "bingo" fuel.

This forced the Captain to shut off all necessary power in an effort to reboot the system.

Right after the captain shut off unnecessary power Yarborough and Newman met up. They went to the disbursing office. They wore masks as they disabled the petty officer on duty there. Then they stole over a million dollars. They planned to take the money off the ship in the hazardous waste. Only there was a falling out between the two thieves. As they were climbing up a ladder near the side of the ship, Newman kicked Yarborough into the sea.

Right around that time, the theft was reported. Harm and Sarah realized that the power outages & fluctuations were just a diversion. They split up. Sarah went looking for Yarborough in his room. She found the laptop in there. When she pulled the Internet plug all the lights and systems (magically?) returned to full use and two "bingo" Tomcats were able to land.

Harm went after and confronted Newman in Hazmat. As they fought, a container containing acidic material was broken. The material spread all over and started a fire. Newman ripped off Harm's mask. Harm fought back and he knocked Newman out and dragged him to the wash down station.

After it was all over, the Captain asked Harm how he figured it out. Harm baffled him with. "It was my meatless meatloaf."

Sarah suggested that Harm could stay aboard for a few days, and that saving a million dollars would probably be worth a ride in a Tomcat. Harm got his ride. They were able to get home in time for the weekend.

Monday, December 7, 1998

0800 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah and Harm returned from their case on the Coral Sea the previous Saturday. Sarah saw how her injured hand worried John and told him, "It's alright; I touched something I shouldn't have that's all."

She did love the care and attention John gave her as he helped her change her bandage every morning after that, including this morning. He was very good at using the Surgitube Dressing he bought at the drug store.
The only thing that bothered her was that having one hand bandaged rendered it semi useless. While she was able to remove the bandage and shower, every other routine task was difficult to perform with one and ½ hands. She couldn't wait for her fingers to heal so that she could get back to normal.

In the meantime it was 2 weeks since John and Sarah had their 'fur coat session'. With the holiday and the urgent need to be on the Coral Sea they hadn't the time to begin testing.

Sarah had that on her mind as she pulled into the parking lot at JAG. She went to 7:00 AM at St. Thomas. While she was there she picked up a brochure about the Big Brothers / Big Sisters program. Keeping in mind what she and John discussed when they first met, she was thinking of passing on her life experiences to someone else besides her child. She knew the value an adult in a child's life, especially one who was troubled, could be. She'd be a good mother to her child and she would teach her what she went through and how to avoid the pitfalls she fell into. She just thought that she had so much more to offer someone who may need her help. She expressed those feelings to John who encouraged her to follow what she thought was right. One of the things she loved about John was his acceptance and encouragement of her dreams, feelings and desires. He once told her, 'I want you to be able to experience all there is in life, our family, friends and colleagues. Just because we're married, I don't want you to feel that you have to isolate yourself." It was one more reason that she was still in love with him.

When she got to her office, she reached into her purse and pulled out the pregnancy test she bought after mass at the Walgreen's near the church. She was thankful that the office was just about empty, though she saw that Tiner came in early. She hurried into the Ladies' Room to use the test. She still had the burn bandages on so she had to hold the box with her ring and pinky fingers on her left hand as she opened the box. She used the test and exited the stall. She didn't need a timer as her internal clock told her the expired time. When it was time she looked at the sign and smiled. She cleaned off the test stick and took it with her to her office. She called Bethesda to make an appointment for her yearly. Then she called John.

John had just come into his office with his coffee when his phone rang. He smiled when he saw JAG's number on his caller ID screen.

"NCIS John speaking," he said answering the phone.

"John, I made an appointment at Bethesda for this afternoon at 1430 hours. Do you think you can be there?" his wife asked.

"I think I can get away, anything the matter?" John asked.

"I think I can get away, anything the matter?" John asked.

"No nothing's wrong. I took an EPT Test to work with me and the little 'plus sign' showed up." Sarah said happily.

"Wow that was fast. We should have used the fur coat sooner." John said. His tone did little to hide the excitement he was feeling. He was going to be a dad. He couldn't wait to tell someone.

"Funny guy, who knows, we certainly were energetic that night. You acted like you was holding a lot back and couldn't wait to release it. The blood test and the examination will tell us more. I'm using Diane's doctor. Everything turned out well with Sarah Cate. I'm going to tell the admiral first thing before Staff Call." Sarah said excitedly.

"I'm sure AJ will be happy for us. We'll meet at my car in the parking lot. Have you told anyone else?" John asked.

"No, I don't want to tell anyone else until I know for sure after today. Could you please hold off
telling Diane and everyone else there until after this afternoon? I'm going to do the same here, except for the admiral." Sarah asked.

John agreed with her, "No problem sweetie. I don't want to jinx it. I'll wait until tomorrow before we let the news out."

"Great, I'll see you later. I love you honey" Sarah said with a catch in her voice. Her emotions got her going.

"I love you to baby. Don't worry everything will be fine." John sweetly said as he caught her emotional tone.

"I know it's just that the idea caught up with me just now. I'll be fine. See you later. I love you," she repeated.

"I love you to," John replied as they ended the call.

Sarah took a deep breath and composed herself. She checked her eyes in her compact mirror to make sure there were no tears, even though they were happy ones. 'This is nothing to be afraid of, everything about this is right.' she said to herself. She went to get some coffee. Then she thought better, no caffeine. She went and prepared herself a cup of non-caffeine tea. She knew that Harriet also being pregnant stocked the break room with some.

While she was there Harriet came in. She saw what Sarah was making for herself.

"No coffee ma'am? Are you pregnant?" Harriet asked in jest.

Sarah dropped the spoon in surprise. Harriet's eyes widened along with her. "You are!" she exclaimed.

"Shhh, not so loud, I only just took an EPT a few minutes ago and it was positive. Only John knows so far. I'm going to ask the admiral for time this afternoon so I can go for my yearly. So keep it to yourself. Don't even tell Bud or Harm, okay Ensign." Sarah said.

"Yes ma'am, my lips are sealed. Is it alright if I just give you a hug then?" Harriet asked happily.

"Yes Harriet its fine." Sarah said with a laugh as Harriet squeezed her with joy.

Right at that moment she heard "Attention on Deck" then the usual "As you were". She gave herself two minutes. Two minutes was just enough time for AJ to cross the bullpen, enter his office, put his briefcase and cover down and sit at this desk. When she knew the two minutes were up, she gave it another 30 seconds. Then she squared her shoulders and made her own way across the bullpen to AJ's office.

Sarah approached Tiner, "May I please see the admiral now Tiner?" Sarah asked in a tone that said 'no' was not an acceptable answer.

"Uh yes ma'am, let me call in," Tiner stammered as he picked up the phone and called in. "Colonel Macken.. er Marshall to see you sir. Yes sir. Go right in ma'am."

Sarah knocked on the door and heard a quick "Enter". "Colonel have a seat, what brings you to me this early?" AJ asked pleasantly.

"Sir I need to go see my doctor this afternoon at 1430," she announced without preamble.
"Is anything wrong?" he asked with some trepidation.

"Oh no sir, it's one of those happy appointments. I took an EPT test this morning. Well let's just say that the plus sign came up." Sarah said happily.

"Well that's great Mac. Does John know? No wait a minute of course he knows. You two jump on the phone to each other so fast with good news it makes my head spin just watching it." AJ said sardonically

Sarah had to laugh at that as she asked, "Is it that obvious? I had no idea."

"Yeah it's that obvious but that's alright. Take the time you need and let me know how everything is tomorrow. Good luck Mac, carry on." AJ said warmly.

"Thank you sir," Sarah said as she got up to leave.

1500 Local Time

Bethesda Navy Medical Center

John was sitting in the waiting room while Sarah went through her examination. They met up in the parking lot and drove to the hospital together. Right about the time he was thinking that he would just bust from the waiting, the nurse came out and asked John to come with her. She escorted him to the examination room where Commander/Dr. Eve Baldwin examined Sarah. Sarah was just buttoning her uniform blouse. John picked up her coat and held it for her. "Thanks sweetie," Sarah said as she shrugged into it. Then they looked toward Eve.

Dr. Baldwin started her brief, "You know I had to look twice when Sarah came in. I thought Diane had switched services. Then I remembered Diane had told me you found each other last year. Anyway Sarah everything looks good. The baby is still very tiny and it's in a good position. According to when you said you were ovulating and when you most likely conceived after that I'd say your due date is right around the end of August beginning of September. Let's call it September 1, 1999. Your only 31, healthy and you don't need to do an amniocentesis so that's good.

Here's your prescription for the prenatal vitamins. No caffeine and cut down on the fat. Your ballet is good as long as there's no jumping or leaping. Go easy on the swing dancing and the tangos and no boxing or kickboxing workouts. Long walks and swimming are good, no running and no heavy lifting. Stay away from the hazardous materials. You were wearing the appropriate protective clothing and the burn to your fingers will not affect the baby. But from now on no more contact with that stuff. Since your Chief of Staff at JAG delegate, delegate, delegate and follow the regulations, 8-hour days only. Dad make sure she adheres to that."

John nodded, "Well my office is only a block away so I'll be there to pull her out or I'll have the admiral kick her out when he has to."

Sarah stuck her tongue out at him.

"Stick to that and everything will be fine. I want to see you once a month until the 8th month and then I will need to see you once a week. Schedule your appointments with Jane my receptionist then go home, be happy and let the world know if you want." Eve said happily.

"Thanks doctor" John and Sarah both said.

"Please call me Eve" Dr. Baldwin said.
"Aye, aye ma'am," they both said. They hurried out the door as Eve waved them out with a shooing motion. They stopped at Jane to schedule their monthly appointments.

"I'll give the schedule to Tiner so that Admiral Chegwidden doesn't send me out of town on those days," Sarah said.

As soon as they got home they called John parents. They were so thrilled to hear they would have another grandchild. Then Sarah called her sister. Harm answered and then gave the phone to his wife.

"Sarah what's up I saw John leave the office early today, is everything alright?" Diane asked.

"Relax everything is fine. I just wanted him with me when I did my yearly and…” Sarah began but she was cut off by a scream of:

"You're pregnant! That is so great." Diane shouted into the phone. Sarah happily confirmed Diane's conclusion.

"When are you due?" Diane asked.

"Well end of August, beginning of September. Eve put down September 1, 99 as the official due date. So that puts me two months behind you and Harriet. Would you please tell Harm that is if he didn't already hear you," Sarah said.

"He was standing right by me. He saw you leaving JAG early, but he didn't know why, now he does," Diane said happily.

"I better call Harriet then and let her know that she can tell Bud. She knew because she saw me making tea for myself instead of coffee. She asked half in jest if I was going off caffeine because I was pregnant. She saw by my surprise that she hit the nail on the head. She promised to keep it secret until I got the chance to tell the office myself. I bet she's ready to burst. Speaking of which, John has to call Ann Marie and let her know to. Let me get off the phone with you so we can do that. I love you sis," Sarah said in conclusion.

"I love you to sweetie," Diane replied as they hung up.

Sarah placed a quick call to Harriet, "You can tell Bud now Harriet, Harm and Diane already know. I'm due September 1, 99. Do me a favor please Harriet; don't go spreading the news tomorrow. I don't mind everyone knowing, but let them hear it from me in my own time, ok?"

"No problem ma'am, I'll see you tomorrow and congratulations again."

"Thank you Harriet. And it's Mac or Sarah when we speak personally." Sarah said.

"Ok Mac, good night then," Harriet said.

"Good night Harriet" Sarah said as they hung up. She gave the phone to John and he called Ann Marie.

"Hey hot stuff, I was just going to call you. I have to tell you something," Ann Marie, said when she answered the phone.

"Hey kiddo, before you do answer this question. Do you think that Andy can stand some company in the playpen next September?" John asked his sister as a preamble.
"Why is Sarah pregnant to?" she asked. She half knew the answer but she wanted John to tell her outright. She knew they were planning a honeymoon baby.

"Yeah she's due September 1st," John confirmed. "And what do you mean 'to?"

"Congratulations 'hot stuff' let me talk to your wife." Ann Marie said happily.

"Congratulations Sarah, guess what?" Ann Marie asked.

It dawned on Sarah right then, "No, not you to! That is so great," Sarah gushed.

"Yeah Peter and I are very happy. It happened just before your wedding. It was a complete surprise. I guess having Andy cleared up a lot of bad stuff. We're due the beginning of August." Ann Marie said happily.

"Have you told Mom & Dad yet?" Sarah asked.

"We called them but their line was busy. Did John tell them yet?" She asked.

"Yes, we called them just before you. Either they are calling Matt and Mark or they can't get through to you because we're talking. Let me get off the phone." Sarah said. They both said goodbye and hung up.

"Boy the phone lines are sure burning tonight," Sarah said to John. "Ann Marie's pregnant to. It happened just before the wedding and they are due early August." Sarah informed John.

"Wow it's amazing that this stuff happens in bunches. It's going to be an interesting summer Tuesday, December 8, 1998

0845 Local Time

JAG Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah went into AJ's office as soon as she saw him come in. "Sir I'm due September 1st. The doctor told me that I am limited to 8-hour days and no strenuous tasks. The phrase she used was delegate, delegate, and delegate."

"That's fine colonel. I was planning to assign a yeoman to you when I made you Chief Of Staff as your position calls for it. I have her file here. Her transfer came through after you told me that you were expecting. Her name is Petty Officer 1st Class Emma Gardner. 26 years old with high grades coming out of Boot Camp, great computer skills, a year in para-legal school and still attending night school working for her bachelor's. She's perfectly suited for this office. Harriet set her up at the desk that Kate Larkin used. Use her as you need to. Don't let the other officers or ranking NCOs pile on. She answers only to you and I sent a memo to all staff stating that in no uncertain terms. If anyone needs assistance from her, they are to go through you. Am I clear?"

"Crystal, sir, you know it's funny. When we came back from our honeymoon, John and I compared our returning workload. He said he had the advantage of having a yeoman to keep him up to date. Now I have the same advantage." Sarah commented.

"You'll find that they are invaluable for your sanity." AJ replied with a grin. "Lean on her for logistical support and have her handle the mundane and tedious work that you should not handle.
You will find that it will be easier on you and the baby. Even during your maternity leave, she'll be available to keep your office going in your absence. And when you come back, you'll find the same conditions that John had upon his return. If there is anything else, carry on," AJ said with a smile.

"Aye, Aye sir," Sarah said as she got up to leave.

As she approached her office, she spied a tall young woman with regulation short light brown hair. She was organizing her desk, putting some personal items on top to make it her own. Sarah stopped and watched her waiting until she was finished. When she opened her large day planner, Sarah approached her.

"Petty Officer Gardner?" Sarah asked.


"Yes, at ease" Sarah said with a reassuring laugh as she extended her hand.

Gardner relaxed and took Sarah's outstretched hand and gripped it firmly. "Good to see you again ma'am. I understand that I will be working for you," she asked.

"Yes Petty Officer. Come into my office and we'll discuss your duties," Sarah replied. Sarah waited at the door for her to walk in before her, followed her and shut the door.

"Admiral Chegwidden informed me that you will assist me in all things JAG. First of all I like to get here by 0800. Please be here before that ready to work. Do not get me coffee or tea unless you're getting some for yourself. Besides I'm not drinking coffee or any caffeine, as I am pregnant. Along those lines, I'll give you my doctor's appointment schedule and my doctor's name and phone number at Bethesda. Any other Navy appointments we'll work together on them. We'll tell each other about them as we go along. The admiral also informed me that you work for me and only for me. Everyone else has been made aware of this. Please work with Ensign Harriet Simms. She has a handle on everything going on in the office. Make sure you can contact the commander of the Navy Yard Building Services for the goings on regarding our building's maintenance, HVAC, and Housekeeping etc."

"HVAC ma'am?" Gardner asked confused.


"Thank you ma'am, my dad just called it the boiler room." Gardner replied warming up to Sarah. "That won't be a problem ma'am. Will I be handling budgets and so forth ma'am?"

"Yes for the JAG Corps and for this building. When that time comes I'll assign an officer, or two, to work with you on that," Sarah said.

"That's fine ma'am. I worked on the budget for NCIS for 3 years. Each year I did it we always got an increase," Gardner replied.

"Really then you know my husband, Assistant Director John Marshall?" Sarah asked.

"Yes ma'am, he Carolyn and I worked on the budget for a week when he came on board. He's nice and he doesn't take any crap."

"Yep that's him. How did you like working for him?" Sarah asked.
"I liked working for him ma'am. He's very professional. He couldn't stop talking about you though. Every time the three of us took a break we would talk about our families and he just wouldn't stop. He is so in love with you. You could see his eyes light up every time your name was mentioned. He couldn't wait for the wedding. It was all Carolyn could do to keep him calm. We were all so happy for the two of you. My husband and I attended your wedding. It was lovely, especially that dance you two did, hubba, hubba. It was so romantic. I wish you and he a lot of luck ma'am," Emma said.

"Thank you Petty Officer, you know I do remember seeing you at our wedding. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," Sarah said.

"Thank you ma'am," Emma replied.

"Also Petty Officer is such a mouth full and calling you Gardner sounds so mean spirited. May I call you Emma while we work?" Sarah asked.

"Of course ma'am that will be fine," Emma replied with a smile.

"Tell me about your self Emma," Sarah asked.

"Well I 'm the oldest of four. I have two younger brothers and my sister is the youngest at 14. We grew up in Kentucky. My father was a horse trainer for a major stable. He trained 4 Derby winners in twenty-five years. Triple Crown time was our busiest time of the year. My brothers and sister went into that business while I joined the Navy out of high school. I'm currently attending night classes at George Washington University. I major in accounting and business management as well as a minor in forensic psychology. I have a year to go till my Bachelor's Degree. The Navy is paying for it. I love the Navy. It's the one place where being a girl doesn't matter. You either do well and advance or you don't.

I've been married for three years. My husband Michael is a gunner's mate on the Vincennes. He was deployed shortly after your wedding. My land duty suits us fine. We have a daughter named Teresa. She's 2. I already have Teresa in the Navy Yard Daycare right down the street so I can see her at lunch time, if that's alright with you ma'am?"

"No that's fine. If a conflict or emergency comes up, we'll work it out," Sarah said amiably.

"Thank you that's all I have ma'am," Emma concluded.

"Well you and I are going to get along fine. First things first, as I told you I'm pregnant. I'm due on September 1st. So forgive any hormone moments. Second here's my doctor's schedule and phone number. Please put it in that date book you have. Please no matter what is going on, even if you need to hit me with a cattle prod don't be afraid to remind me to go."

"No problem ma'am I know how pregnancy goes," Emma said smiling. "Is there anything else ma'am?"

"Yes here are the files of the cases that I am now working on. You'll find court dates and times and interview dates and times. Put these in your date book. We use Group Wise. Would you please copy my whole schedule in that as well as writing it in the date book?" Sarah requested.

"No problem ma'am," Emma said.

"When I am in court I may need you in there to assist me in collating my information so that I have it at hand when I need it. I'm sure your paralegal experience will come in handy then," Sarah said.

"I can do that ma'am. Would you need me to go with you or attend interviews to keep a record?"
"No necessarily, but it's good to know that I can depend on you for that when I need to," Sarah answered. "I don't have anything else that you need to do, I'll let you go then," Sarah said in a gentle dismissal.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Emma said as she got up to work.

When Emma left, Sarah called John, "I have a yeoman," she said in singsong.

"I know its Emma Gardner, Admiral Chegwidden called BUPERS for a yeoman for you. BUPERS called our personnel office. Her name was next up for promotion and I approved the transfer papers. She's very good. I didn't like losing her but when I saw she was going to be assigned to you, I felt better approving the transfer," John said.

"Why thank you sir. She is going to keep me reminded of my doctor's appointments, court dates, and assist me on cases and so forth. The admiral let the word be known that the other officers and ranking NCOs are not to steal her." Sarah said.

"Well I'm sure that she will do very well for you. On another note, what do we want to have for dinner tonight?" John asked.

"Why don't we have something simple pasta and sauce? You can make the meatballs if you want," Sarah said.

"That's fine I can make it while you go to that meeting with the Big Sisters' Mentoring program you have this evening," John said.

"Oh I forgot all about that. Thanks for reminding me. I'll tell Emma to add it to her schedule," Sarah said gratefully.

"See having a yeoman just paid for itself," John teased.

"I'll see you at dinner. I love you John," Sarah said. She heard John say, "I love you too sweetie" before she hung up. Then she buzzed Emma.

"My husband just reminded me that I have an appointment today at 1800 with the DC Big Sisters, Big Brothers Center. Could you please revise the date book?" Sarah asked.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Emma replied.

Sarah sat back and thought to herself, 'Life can't get any better than this'.
Chapter 37

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 37

Thursday, December 24, 1998

1130 Local Time

JAG Headquarters,

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The day started with a mild snowfall. Through the course of the day it worsened into a full-blown blizzard. Admiral Chegwidden left earlier to catch a flight to Italy to see his daughter Francesca. Sarah, as Chief of Staff was acting department head while Chegwidden was gone, let everyone secure early because of the blizzard.

Sarah was working at her desk signing her name to closed cases, waiting to go home. She wasn't worried about the snow becoming too bad as she and John came to work together in the Trailblazer. Harm also came into work with Diane and Sarah Cate in their mini-van.

Even though the four spouses offices were very close together in the Navy Yard they often came to work in each of their own cars because there would be occasions where their schedules and field work prevented them from leaving at the same time. But today they pulled into the parking lot at the same time. They split up and walked to their separate offices, John with Diane and Sarah with Harm. Diane took Sarah Cate straight to the daycare center which was on the block between the JAG and NCIS buildings.

Sarah sat back and had to laugh. She and Harm were in laws, working at JAG while her husband John & Harm's wife and Sarah's sister Diane were in laws and working at NCIS. It made for a very amusing working and familial dynamic. Not that there was conflict the four people made more plans that involved giving rides to home or to meetings and so forth. Through all this, the four became quite close.

There was only one case that Harm volunteered to take to clear up the office docket so that they can properly secure for the day.

When Harm walked into the interview room he met a blonde female Lieutenant Commander. The file's face sheet indicated that she was arrested for DUI.

Harm put his hand out and introduced himself. "Hi, I'm Lt. Commander Harmon Rabb."

She grasped his hand saying, "I'm Jordan Parker. I'm a Navy psychiatrist working at Bethesda."

"Want to tell me what happened?"

"I was going home from our office Christmas party and I skidded on a patch of ice at the hospital exit and wiped out a Nativity Display. I hit Melchior & Baltazar. I missed baby Jesus so I don't believe Mary and Joseph will press charges," Jordan said as a way to lighten the moment.

Harm smiled at the quip and asked, "Did you have anything to drink?" He scanned her file. 'No prior
arrests' he thought to himself.

"I have a cold and had only had one glass of eggnog." Jordan answered.

Harm, jumping to a conclusion, went on an unusual tack. "Would you consider accepting substance abuse counseling?"

Jordan retorted, "Me, you think I need counseling. You should analyze yourself in a mirror. You've been named after a relative (or family pet). You have a family history of naval service. You try to live up to past expectations, looking up to an absent role model. It's painfully 'obvious that you have baggage. You went to JAG from gold wings. That shows that you can't commit to one thing."

She didn't see his wedding ring and went on deducing further.

"You are single with relationships that are few and far between because you're too busy or too picky. You tend to obsess about things and will pursue them to the end if possible."

Harm could see that she was upset at being brought here and being accused of DUI, so he took pity on her and went to stop her rant. He held up his left hand. Jordan paled as he flashed his wedding ring at her.

"I have been happily married almost two years now. In fact our anniversary is in two days. My wife and I have a 15-month-old daughter and are expecting another baby."

Jordan said, "I'm sorry for the rant. I've never been arrested before. This is all so new to me."

Harm replied, "Look why don't you relax. I'm sure we can clear this up. It's almost lunch time. Would you like something to eat?"

Jordan answered, "You know I'm famished. I only had a muffin and coffee before I left the house this morning. I could use something."

Harm told her, "Good, I'll go to the commissary and get us some food. When I come back we'll discuss your case," Harm said as he got up to leave the interview room.

"Thank you commander," Jordan replied.

On his way through the bullpen he stopped at Sarah's office. She asked him, "What's the case you took about?"

Harm answered, "A psychiatrist from Bethesda skidded off the icy road at the hospital exit and wiped out a Nativity scene. She failed the Breathalyzer test and she was arrested. She's in the interview room."

Sarah was immediately concerned and it showed on her face. She asked, "Is her name Jordan Parker?"

Harm looked at her totally surprised as he answered, "Yes, do you know her?"

Sarah answered, "Yeah, she's the counselor John and I are seeing to help us deal with the trauma of his shooting. Didn't you recognize her? She was at our wedding."

Sarah saw the light go on as Harm thought back and remembered her, "Yeah come to think of it, she was with a Marine major."

Sarah nodded and asked, "Where are you going now?"
"To get us some food, do you want some?" Harm answered.

Sarah answered, "No thanks my morning sickness has left my stomach extra queasy today. I'll go in and speak with her. Harm, do what you can for her please."

Harm smiled and said, "Aye, aye ma'am."

Sarah got up and went into the interview room. When she walked in Jordan was totally surprised to see her. They greeted each other with brief hugs. As they both sat back down Sarah asked, "Why didn't you call me and tell me you were in trouble?"

Jordan confessed, "Well your name didn't cross my mind until you walked through the door. What with dealing with the accident and the aftermath and then being arrested, I was only thinking how to resolve the whole mess."

Sarah nodded and asked, "How is Harm treating you?"

"Well at first he jumped to a conclusion that I needed counseling. But then we got past that." Jordan answered.

Sarah smiled sardonically, "Yeah my sister and I are always telling him to think before he speaks. He is an excellent attorney though. He'll do what he needs to do to help you."

Jordan then realized Sarah and Harm's relationship, "That's right he's your brother in law. When he came first came in I thought I recognized him. Now I realize that it was from your wedding. I didn't connect him with your sister because he was partnered with another bride's maid."

Sarah nodded acknowledging Jordan's conclusion. Jordan asked, "How's John doing?"

Sarah answered, "Oh he's fine. He's is so looking forward to being a dad." Sarah saw Jordan's quizzical look and answered the unspoken question, "I'm pregnant. I'm due September 1st."

Jordan got up as well as Sarah and they embraced. Jordan said, "You and John said you two wanted a honeymoon baby. I'm so happy that everything is going so well for the both of you. I don't get to hear many success stories from my patients."

Sarah said, "Well John and I really appreciate the help you gave us. It made it so much easier to deal with stress that the shooting put us under."

Jordan asked, "What happened to the shooter?"

Sarah said, "He's in a maximum security jail in Maryland. He's pleading insanity. So far he's been holding up his case with delays and evaluations. The US Attorney handling the case thinks he has a slam dunk as he has enough to convict him. If everything goes right, his trial should start in March."

Jordan said, "Well when I see the two of you next month at our regular visit, we'll talk about that. That is if I'm not in jail myself."

At that, Harm returned from the commissary with some Chinese food. Sarah got up to leave. She and Jordan embraced again. Sarah said, "Don't worry Harm will think of something."

Jordan thanked Sarah then her and Harm got down to her case.

Harm confessed, "You pretty much had me pegged except for my being single. I can thank my brother in law for kicking my ass. He was the one who pointed out to me that we ply in a dangerous
profession and that we should seize any and all happiness as it comes along. I do look up to someone as a role model and I think of him as I normally spend some time Christmas Eve at the Vietnam Memorial Wall with my family remembering him," Harm explained gently.

"Who do you remember there?" Jordan asked.

"My father, he was shot down Christmas Eve 1969. He was taken prisoner by the Viet Cong and then the Russians. My family and I found him, buried, in Russia. We got some closure. At first I felt a void. I realized that in spite of being married I discovered just how much of 'who I was', was formed by my search for my father. I dropped that notion when I got home and I saw my daughter. It was then that I realized that there is more to life than quixotic quests. Having a family and a child to raise was probably the greatest adventure that one could go through. My goal now is to raise her and our new child to be the best people they can be," Harm said concluding his soliloquy.

At that point Jordan let out a big sneeze. "Bless you" Harm offered.

"Thank you,' Jordan said reaching into her bag. She pulled out a bottle of cold medicine. Harm picked it up and read the label. "Did you take this before the Breathalyzer Test?"

"Yeah I did," Jordan said as she wiped at her nose.

"You know this has alcohol in it. This would have thrown the Breathalyzer test off. Wait here let me make some phone calls. Maybe we can both get out of here with time to enjoy the holiday." Harm got up and left the room.

A short time later Harm came back smiling and told her, "I spoke to the convening authority. I explained about the cold medicine. Being that this is a first offense and that you have a spotless record and responsible position he agreed that you could be released on your own recognizance. You're free to go. We'll meet after the holiday to settle the matter officially."

"Oh thank you Commander. That's really good news," Jordan said. She shook his hand and prepared to leave the room. They stopped by Sarah's office and gave her the good news.

"Have a Merry Christmas Jordan," Sarah wished her with a hug.

"You to Sarah and you as well Harm." Jordan replied. Harm walked her out to the elevators.

Harm went to check for any more cases that he could dispose of. Finding none he went to speak with his sister in law. He was about to knock on her door when he heard:

"What the hell is this?"

It was the admiral and he was upset.

"Sir, I thought you were on your way to Italy?" Harm said.

Sarah heard AJ and came out of her office.

"The airport was closed so I came back here and I find an empty office. Explanations Colonel?" he said as he fixed her with a stare.

"Sir I have been listening to the weather reports. The storm is getting worse and I sent the clerical staff and those people that had families to take care of home at 1230. Commander Rabb, Lt. Roberts and Ensign Simms and I stayed behind to handle whatever came up. Harm just disposed of the only
case we had today. I was just about to totally secure for the holiday," Sarah said.

AJ was about to answer when he heard a mechanical sound behind him. He turned and found a toy robot toddling out of Lt. Roberts' office with Bud following close behind with a remote control. Bud was concentrating on controlling the robot, smiling like a big kid and he didn't notice AJ until the Robot bumped into the admiral's leg.

While there was no more work to be done Bud and Harriet were getting ready to hand out mounds of Christmas gifts at a children's hospital. Bud took the robot out of its box and begun to play with it. He looked up in shock at the admiral's stern face. AJ just picked up the robot, walked over to Bud and took the remote control.

Lt. Roberts, I want you to find me a flight to Italy, tonight!"

"Aye, aye sir," Bud managed to stammer out. Bud walked back into his office and dove on his phone. Sarah walked back into her office.

Before AJ could leave the bullpen a young lady about 11 years old came in and saw Harm. She walked right up to him and said "I'm Chloe I'm looking for my mother."

"Well who is your mother?" Harm asked.


Sarah heard her and came out of her office. "Chloe what are you doing here?"

Seeing Harm's questioning look she answered his unspoken question, "Chloe is the 'little sister' that the Big Sister program assigned me to mentor 3 weeks ago."

After they got to know each other they got along ok but there was an undercurrent of anger and resentment. Chloe had a habit of acting out on her frustrations. The counselors at the program assigned Chloe to Sarah because as a Marine, she wouldn't put up with Chloe's crap. Chloe said that her father Kyle Anderson died on May 17th, 1987, the day she was born. Her birth mother died four years ago with cancer and she was living with her stepfather.

"I ran from my stepfather because he doesn't care about me," Chloe said.

"Chloe, we both know that's not true. We dealt with that before," Sarah said.

Sarah was remembering when Chloe was over to Sarah and John's house one night for supper. She had a bruise on her cheek. Chloe accused her father of being abusive. Chloe asked Sarah, if they took her away from her stepfather, could she live with Sarah. 'I don't think that's possible. John and I are starting a family and I'm having a baby. We aren't able to devote our full attention to you. I can help you report the abuse though and help you any way we can.' Sarah had said at the time. But when Sarah was calling child welfare to report the abuse, Chloe recanted and said, "The bruise was from my father's girlfriend. She lost it when I cut and dyed her hair when she was passed out drunk."

"Your stepfather loves you and wants to take care of you. Does he know you're here?" Sarah asked sternly.

Chloe sniffed derisively then she saw AJ. "You must be the admiral I thought you would have more hair.

Sarah got very angry with her and braced her up with "Just because your life has been hard doesn't give you the right to lie or be rude, offensive and embarrass me and everyone here young lady."
Chloe ran out of the bullpen. Before anyone could think to run and catch her she got into an elevator and it closed.

Harm ran the three floors down to the Lobby. He found the elevator opened on the 1st floor. Chloe was nowhere in sight.

While Harm ran down the stairs Sarah called the Marine Security post in the Lobby and got the gunnery sergeant. "We didn't see the girl come by us here ma'am. I'll send the corporal to search the 1st floor."

"Thank you gunny," Sarah said.

Harriet and Bud joined in the search and called Sarah's office from the 1st floor. "Ma'am we looked in the law library. I don't know where she is ma'am. We looked in the mess room and the surrounding areas. No luck," Harriet said.

Then as she got into the elevator with Bud, she heard a noise from on top. When the elevator stopped on the 3rd floor, she shut it down with the doors open. She whispered into Bud's ear to get the colonel.

When Sarah and Harm arrived Bud told them where Chloe was hiding on top of the elevator. Sarah confided in Bud about the story of Chloe's father. Bud said, "I think I know that date. Let me do some checking," he said as he walked off.

Sarah started talking to Chloe, "Chloe, we know you're up there. It's dangerous up there. We need you to come down. We can work out whatever is bothering you."

"No you'll just send me back to my stepfather and his stinking girlfriend. They don't like me. I wish I had my real father," Chloe cried petulantly.

At that point John and Diane were stepping out of the other elevator. John was holding Sarah Cate for Diane. He handed her to Harm. He saw the gathering at the stalled elevator and as he approached his wife and took her hand he asked, "What's up?"

"Chloe's up there,' Sarah said pointing up on top of the elevator.

"Chloe what's going on?" John said.

"Go away John. This doesn't concern you," said Chloe petulantly.

"You know I thought you were smart. I mean if you were going to run away, you should have gone out the back door. Not up an elevator shaft where we could trap you," John said as he went into the car and leaned against the wall under the hatch.

"I'm not stupid. And you're never going to make me come down if I don't want to," Chloe said.

After a few minutes of fruitless negotiation, Bud returned. "I realized the date she gave as the date the USS Stark was attacked. I found Chloe's father. He's still alive on the USS Cayuga. He didn't know she was born and had just lost his wife and son in a car accident."

Sarah said, "Chloe Lt. Roberts has found out that your real father is not dead. But you have to come down if you want to talk to him."

"I don't believe you," Chloe said with a sniffle
"Okay Chloe, don't believe us stay up there. If you want I'll call Dr. Mallard at NCIS. He'll know what to do with you after you lose your head when the elevator moves again. Only I don't know what we're going to tell your father about how you died. He's already lost one family. I don't think he'll like to know he lost another, even if he doesn't know you, yet. At least we'll know where to ship your body," said John.

"Eeww you're gross," Chloe said as she opened the door climbed down through the hatch.

"I got you down from there didn't I?" John remarked with a smile.

"I'm only down because you said something about my father. I want to talk to him," Chloe said defiantly.

Sarah continued, "We can video call him."

After the $4,000.00 video call, it was decided that Chloe would temporarily go back to her stepfather's after Sarah got on the phone to him. While she had the stepfather on the line Sarah asked him to put his girlfriend on for a "marine to girlfriend" talk. Sarah loved John's label for this type of talk a she detailed the 'realities of the girlfriend's situation' in relation to Chloe, John and her. Sarah apologized to Chegwidden for what Chloe said.

Chegwidden accepted but not without telling her, "There are two sides to duty- doing things we don't want to do- and, resisting the temptation to do things we want to do."

John went into Sarah's office while Diane and Sarah Cate went into Harm's office. "What made you come here my love? We were supposed to meet at 1430." Sarah asked John as she held him in a tender embrace.

"Diane's mini van couldn't start. We have to leave it in the lot because we can't do anything about it in the snow storm. Harm and I will deal with it tomorrow. As soon as we finished loading her baby stuff in our car, she and I picked up the baby and came here. With the snow getting worse I figured we'd have to leave early anyway because we have to go the "Wall' and then to Fairfax and back in the Trailblazer." John concluded.

"That's my man, always thinkin'," Sarah said gratefully as she kissed him soundly.

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Much to everyone's relief the snowstorm had let up some. Upon seeing that Sarah walked across the bullpen to AJ's office.

AJ gave in to the temptation and started playing with Bud's robot. He was caught at it when Sarah came in. He saw Sarah smile as she caught site of the robot beside his chair

She informed him, "Sir the storm is letting up some. There are no more cases pending and we're getting ready to secure the office for the holiday. Is there anything else you may need?"

"No colonel, I'm still waiting to hear if I have a flight though," AJ Said.

"Well Lt. Roberts is still working on that. I have him notify you as soon as he has one before he leaves, sir," Sarah replied.
That's fine Mac. I'm sorry for blasting at you when I came back. My frustrations got the better of me. You were right to look out for the staff," AJ said apologizing.

"That's alright sir. If there is nothing else, have a Merry Christmas sir," Sarah said pleasantly.

"You to Colonel enjoy the holiday," AJ replied.

He reached for his phone and called his daughter Francesca. He got her answering machine.

He hid his disappointment as he left a message. "I was delayed from leaving DC due to the weather. I'm doing everything to try and get to see you. This is the first time I was looking forward to Christmas in a long time. I'll let you know what I accomplished. I love you."

He hung up and walked out of his office. He felt a pang of disappointment when he saw the bullpen was empty and that all the offices were dark. Just as he was about to walk back into his office he heard the elevator open. Bud walked back in and saw him.

Bud and Harriet had finished dressing up in their Santa costumes and having arguments over robot toys as everyone prepared to leave. All the remaining officers and families trooped to the elevators. Just before it closed Sarah said to Bud, "Lt. Roberts aren't you forgetting something?" Bud realized what it was and stopped the elevator door from closing. Bud went back into the bullpen. He saw the admiral standing there alone.

Bud told him, "Sir I almost forgot to tell you. I found you a seat on a military transport plane leaving Andrews in 90 minutes for Italy. I notified them that you'd be joining them. They won't leave without you sir."

"Thank you lieutenant, have a Merry Christmas," AJ said as he went to get his coat and bags.

"You to sir," Bud replied.

Bud rejoined everyone in the elevator and held it as they waited for AJ to join the exodus. They were lucky that it stopped snowing.

1530 Local Time

Vietnam Memorial Wall

After the Rabbs and Marshall's left JAG Headquarters, they went to the Vietnam Memorial wall for Harm's annual visit to honor his father who was shot down on Christmas Eve, 1969. Harm was glad that he had a bigger family with him for this melancholy moment.

At the memorial, they all met a beautiful, but mysterious woman, who claimed she knew Harm, Sr. in Vietnam. Her name was Jenny Lake and she was a singer with Bob Hope's USO tour. She said she met Harm's father shortly before his fateful flight. She told the Rabbs and Marshalls about her 1969 Christmas meeting with him, and how he saved her life just before his last mission.

Lake told of how the group landed on the Ticonderoga and after that Rabb returned from a mission with his plane damaged and had to eject near the ship. Lake, who recently lost her fiancé to the war, watched as Rabb was rescued. Jenny was despondent, and initially had tension with Rabb. But, he could clearly see that she was hurting so he tried to befriend her. He told Lake that being a POW was worse than dying because the family needed closure. And he spoke of "little Harm" back home and his wife. She told him that she really "wanted to have babies with David (her fiancé)."

Les Brown, Hope's band leader, seeing how Jenny was acting, chastised her for not cheering up the
During Jenny's visit Rabb was called away because he was needed to fly a mission. Rabb was to sit second seat to Lt. Garcia in an Intruder on an "Iron Hand" mission. Iron Hand meant to let the enemy S.A.M.s lock onto you so your missiles can follow the radar beams back to them- of course trying to avoid being hit by their missiles while you're doing it.

The mission went off as planned but upon returning Garcia was blinded by a photographer's flashbulb during the landing and got a wave off.

After seeing the near crash Lake went to the fantail, despondent over all the things on the ship which reminded her of her dead fiancé. She was just climbing over the rail when Rabb found her and prevented her from jumping. He comforted her and became close rapidly even sharing a kiss.

Lake gave him a scarf in gratitude and "for luck." He, in turn, gave her his wings. Lake recounted to Harm and his family that on Christmas Eve while she was singing "I'll be home for Christmas" Rabb flew a mission, was hit and punched out and was captured.

Before she left The Wall, Lake gave Harm the wings his father gave her. He took the gift but left them at the wall for his dad.

Immediately upon leaving the wall the families went to Fairfax then the Marshalls went home.

Christmas Day 1998

1330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

After attending early mass John went to pick up the Rabbs. After dropping Diane and little Sarah at Florida Avenue, John and Harm went to the Navy Yard to deal with the minivan. They were able to get one of the Navy Yards on duty motor pool mechanics to fix the malfunction. Harm and John drove back to Florida Avenue to enjoy the rest of the holiday.

Sarah & John had the Matthews, the Rabbs, Roberts and the Millers over for Christmas dinner. Sarah also invited Emma and Teresa since Emma's husband was still deployed on the Vincennes, but Emma was already committed to going to Kentucky to spend the holiday with her family. John Miller's deployment ended the previous week. His squad was now assigned to Quantico. Evie called Sarah to let her know that he and his family were going to be in town for the holiday. Sarah had promptly invited them to Christmas Dinner.

All the adults sat back and watched as Andy, Jimmy, Sarah Cate and Sarah Jo went to work unwrapping the gifts 'Santa' left at the Marshall's for them. At one time little Jimmy, the two Sarahs and Andy buried themselves under a pile of paper. They lay down under the paper and giggled when the adults acted like they were looking for them. Sarah got a great photo of the four babies bursting out from under the paper as they jumped to reveal themselves to the adults.

Sarah and John received Irish Knit sweaters and rugby shirts from his parents. They bought them during their trip to Ireland the previous September.

John gave Sarah a charm bracelet. Sarah gasped in surprise when she opened the jewelry box. The center charm was heart shaped with their two birthstones set in a tree. There were 4 other charms, which were inscribed with certain dates. She dissolved in happy tears at John explained the
significance of each date.

The dates were:

1/6/97, the day they met

3/3/97, the day Sarah and Diane found each other

11/17/97, the day they got engaged and

10/24/98, their Wedding Date.

After the adults exchanged their gifts, Sarah brought her wedding gift out for everyone to see. Evie, Harriet, Ann Marie and Diane oohed and aahhed as they all tried it on.

Right about 1500 there was someone ringing the doorbell. John went to answer it. When he came in he announced, "Sarah, Diane your last Christmas present just arrived. He stepped out of the doorway and let in…"Uncle Matt!" Sarah cried as she ran into his arms. Two burly men dressed in suits and coats followed him into the house. They both wore the badges of the Marines' Military Police on their overcoats.

There were tears in Matt O'Hara's eyes, too, as he embraced his niece. There were more tears as he spied Diane hanging back shyly. O'Hara opened his other arm and brought her into his embrace. Diane burst out into happy tears at finally meeting her long lost uncle.

"Merry Christmas Sarah I've missed you! And now I finally met your sister, Diane," he said happily as he tightly hugged his two nieces.

Then Diane and Sarah looked to Harm and John, who were observing the reunion with very satisfied grins on their faces. "Did you have anything to do with this, Captain, Commander?" Diane asked her husband and brother in law.

"John?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, we did," Harm said looking to John.

John took up the verbal baton. "Well because of what happened last summer, we couldn't get out visiting him. So Admiral Magnum and Admiral Chegwidden, Harm and I petitioned the court for a holiday release. The court agreed stipulating that he was to be in our custody along with corporals Riley and Longley here. He has to go back tonight to Quantico and back to Leavenworth tomorrow," John replied as he showed the two hulking Marines into the house. "Make your selves comfortable gentlemen," John said as he took their coats.

Sarah introduced her uncle to the Matthews, Roberts and Millers, then to the children. Jimmy Miller was the least shy as he approached O'Hara and gave him one of the books that he received for Christmas. It was "The Night Before Christmas". O'Hara opened it up as the children gathered around and sat at his feet, enraptured as he began to read. Sarah took John by the hand and led him into the kitchen. Diane did the same with Harm. When the two couples entered the kitchen, each woman enveloped her husband in a deep and long kiss.

"That was the best Christmas surprise you have ever come up with," Sarah told John.

"Yeah you to dear," Diane told Harm.

At dinner John gave the usual seating assignments seating Evie & Harriet on either side of him. He
sat Uncle Matt at the table so that Sarah and Diane were on either side of him. He gave a very nice holiday toast and they settled in for a pleasant holiday dinner.

2100 Local Time

Marshall Residence

The night ended all too soon as the Corporals got ready to leave with Uncle Matt. "This was the best guard duty we have ever had ma'am. You make an excellent Christmas roast," Corporal Longley said as he and then Corporal Riley shook Sarah's then Diane's hand.

"Thank you Corporal," Sarah said gratefully.

Diane was embracing O'Hara at the door. She moved away and let Sarah get her hug in. They both stood at the door with shining eyes as they watched O'Hara and the corporals drive away.

The rest of the guests soon departed, leaving John & Sarah alone.

"Leave the mess till tomorrow John. We got all the leftover food put away. Come upstairs, I want to show you how I say thank you for the best Christmas ever," Sarah said seductively. She took John's hand and led him into the bedroom where she thanked him very energetically.

New Year's Day 1999

1130 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

Sarah and John were lounging on their living room couch. They were alternating between watching the Rose Parade and the fire burn in the fireplace. They celebrated the New Year at the Rabbs the night before. AJ & Sydney, Bud & Harriet as well as Ann Marie and Pete were there. Ann Marie & Pete stayed overnight at the Rabbs as little Andy and Sarah Cate had fallen asleep in the nursery and there was no point in moving them.

Sarah & John went home and fell right asleep. Sarah was feeling very tired from the long night. They got up at 1030 and dressed comfortably for the day in jeans and the Irish Knit sweaters and rugby shirts they got for Christmas. They had no plans to go anywhere that day or night.

Sarah was nestled spooned in front of John as they lay on the couch. John loved the smell of her still damp hair as he held her close to him with his hands clasped over her belly.

As he kissed the top of her head, John asked her, "Have you thought of a name for our child my love?" He gave her an affectionate squeeze.

"I was thinking of Caroline Faith if it's a girl or Patrick James if it's a boy," Sarah replied. "Caroline was my aunt's name. She was Uncle Matt's wife. She died of cancer while I was in high school. That's why he was able to devote all his time to me when I had my troubles. I promised him to name my first girl after her. Patrick James is named after you and your father. What do you think?" Sarah finished.

"I think that's great," John replied.

"John I need to tell you something," Sarah said.
"Yeah what is it sweetie," John replied.

"Do you remember the Thanksgiving before last when I went down and just kissed you in front of everybody?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'll never forget it. I figured that I must have done something right, but I didn't know what," he replied.

"Well you know for me this is the second set of holidays that I have been truly happy and that kiss last year was to thank you for making that the first holiday in which that happened. You know growing up I never had a great holiday season and this was not my favorite time of year because I was either dealing with my parents fighting and abuse or I was posted with the Marines. I also saw how you light up every year at this time. I am so glad that I'm a major part of that happiness." Sarah said as she leaned back and kissed his cheek.

"You know I'm happier this year's holiday season than last year. I think that's because we're married now and expecting our baby and we came out all right after what we went through last summer. That made me appreciate having you with me even more," John said hugging her close again.

Sarah turned in his embrace and soundly kissed him. During the kiss John reached over for the TV remote and turned it off. When they came up for air, John got up. He took the blankets that lay across the back of the sofa and some throw pillows. He spread the blankets out on the carpet in front of the fire. He placed the pillows where he needed them side by side to support their heads.

He then went back to the sofa, took Sarah's hand and led her to the blankets. They knelt down and started to kiss. They pulled each other's sweaters and shirts off. Sarah was showing a small baby bump. John unhooked the front clasp of her bra and kissed her breasts as they moved to lie down on the blanket. She got on top of him and they lay kissing each other, they each reached to remove their jeans. When they had the last article of clothing removed, Sarah went down and engulfed him with her mouth. She knew that he loved when she did that. When she tasted the first drop of pre-cum, she removed her mouth, mounted him as he penetrated her. She sighed as she sunk down onto him till he was inside her up to his hilt. She felt him throb inside her as she stopped and lay down on him. She told him as they gathered up the blanket to wrap around them "Just lay there and relax. I don't care if we stay here all afternoon. The doctor said gentle love making won't hurt the baby and I want to feel you in me for a while."

She tilted her head to receive his kiss. They both enjoyed a long session of making love before the got up and cleaned each other off in the shower. They went back down to the kitchen to have a light dinner and then went to bed to sleep all night in a tight embrace.
Admiral Chegwidden assigned Sarah and Bud to defend Commander Thomas Risnicki, leader of SEAL team 8, charged with involuntary manslaughter and disobeying orders. He delayed his assigned rescue mission for 2.5 hours due to adiabatic fog, which probably would have killed the team. They found the three NATO hostages hung. An ultra radical faction of the Yugoslav army killed them. They gave NATO a day to leave the country. When the team arrived 37 minutes late the observers were dead and the SECNAV told AJ "you could hear NATO Commander, Major General Richard Plesac's screams all the way to the White House".

After he assigned Sarah to the case, he was informed that he still had a major chunk of unused vacation time that he needed to take. So even though Sarah was Chief of Staff, AJ wanted to keep her focused completely on the case at hand. So he appointed Harm to act as JAG during his "forced" use of vacation time.

While Harm was acting JAG, Brumby asked him about defending a tuba player who struck a "flatulent note" as the president sat down, and Harriet asked about naming their son. When Harm suggested naming the baby after a naval hero they all commented that Harm seemed "different," "older," and "getting taller."

With Plesac on the stand Sarah brought out his previous reprimand for "ignoring intel, being ambushed, and the 14 men who died were not worth another bar on his shoulder." Plesac shouted at Sarah then went to the SECNAV who demanded to see Harm. Sarah said she was going to call Plesac to the stand again because he had a "history of loosing men under fire" and wanted to "contrast his apparent disregard for lives with Risnicki's concern."

When Harm disagreed with Sarah's need to "shift blame" onto Plesac in order to win the case, Sarah told him, "You know as Chief of Staff and I outrank you anyway I don't need your approval on how I try my case. I only need you to run interference for me with the SECNAV."

Harm went to AJ's house to ask his advice. Harm told him of Sarah's pulling rank saying that Sarah did not take his advice and AJ reminded him, "She's right, she doesn't need your approval and she does need you to run interference with the SECNAV. Also remember all the times that you ignored the advice that I gave you. Being that you are in charge of running the office you have to decide what was best for the case: defending your authority or the choices of the people who define it."

Then AJ advised that Harm should "get a handkerchief."

The next day the SECNAV ranted and raved in Harm's face about maligning Plesac and said, "If Colonel Marshall called Plesac to the stand again he would make sure that she is personally responsible for the fall out."

Harm told Sarah that it would be her call. Risnicki found that Bud hadn't taken the bar and
threatened to dismiss him. Sarah told Risnicki that his "best shot was to use his strongest ally" so he didn't fire him. Bud found that the bodies were already cold and stiff so that they must have been killed at least a day before. Risnicki's delay kept them from falling into a trap. He was found Not Guilty of manslaughter but guilty of disobeying an order. Risnicki apologized to Bud; and, when told he didn't need to Risnicki advised Bud to "accept any and all acts of contrition because you don't often see it."

After the case Sarah, Harm, Harriet and Bud met AJ as he returned from his forced vacation. He told everyone that because he couldn't coordinate his down time with Sydney during his forced vacation he was bored out of his skull, unable to find anything to do.

AJ apologized to Harm for constantly calling him. Harm reminded the admiral that he told him to "call or stop by anytime."

After a week of that AJ finally drove to JAG headquarters. After dressing down an actor, thinking he was a disgraceful sailor, AJ found that a woman named Fran Glass was producing a movie, "Wings of Gold" starring an actor named Dan Lander. It was being shot in front of JAG Headquarters. Glass convinced him to work as "technical advisor" for the show. Unfortunately that didn't go well. AJ clashed too many times with the director who eventually fired him from the movie because AJ dressed him down for rudeness.

When he returned he had become used to all the snacks on the set so he told Harriet to see that JAG got some. She and Bud asked him if they could name their baby after him. AJ and he said he was honored. Bud and Harriet were happy until AJ revealed that he expected them to name him "Albert Jethro Roberts."

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

0845 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

John came into the office rather worried. The previous evening he and Sarah arrived home late from having dinner at Ann Marie and Pete's home in Silver Spring. As per usual they checked their answering machine and heard a message from Webb. It was cut short. John couldn't figure out why. He immediately called Webb's cell phone back but got no answer. He alerted the watch officer at NCIS to alert him if Webb should call there during the night. John immediately wondered why Webb didn't call his cell phone.

Webb told him the day before that a friend at the CIA named Paul Candella, called him asking for his help, saying that the CIA suspected a mole was inside who kept funneling information to ex-DSD agents, competing with them as "intelligence beltway bandits". John told Webb to go find out what was going on and to keep him posted. John also added, "Don't get yourself in a jackpot. Use as much back-up as you need." John's thought upon hearing the aborted call was, 'He didn't use the back-up I told him to use. When the hell is he going to learn?'

When he arrived at work the next day John was notified that Webb's burned body was found on a freighter in Baltimore Harbor.

John immediately called Diane in and assigned her to investigate. He then called Admiral Chegwidden to enlist Harm and Sarah's help. Even though the NCIS Forensic Teams were already on the boat doing the crime scene work, he wanted the extra outside help. AJ agreed and he assigned
Sarah and Harm to work with John and Diane to find out who did it. Sarah suggested to AJ that Bud also be assigned to assist in the investigation to work with Tim McGee. AJ agreed.

Later that morning Paul Candella came to John's office. He said he was investigating Webb's one minute call from the night before. John had brought the tape to NCIS to have Abby analyze the noises. After Candella spoke to Abby he left.

Bud found that a Japanese scientist, Shoei Wakita, was one of the bodies found with Webb and he was working on a superconductor. When Wakita found out that the Bradenhurst Corporation was the one funding the research, he disappeared with the prototype.

When Harm heard the words "Bradenhurst," he immediately notified John of his suspicions. Harm then went to Leavenworth to interrogate Clark Palmer. Harm returned from Leavenworth 10 hours later and reported that he found an imposter serving Palmer's sentence.

The bodies were brought to the NCIS autopsy lab. Dr. Mallard had performed the autopsies. The examinations determined that all three was killed with similar weapons but Webb was so burned so he had to be identified by dental records.

Nothing else could be done until the autopsies were finished so the NCIS/JAG team called it a night. They agreed to meet at JAG Headquarters the next morning.

Wednesday, February 10, 1999

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John and Sarah walked into the bullpen with their morning beverages. John had his coffee and Sarah had hot 'green tea'. She was lucky. She only had morning sickness for a very short time after she woke up. The green tea helped tremendously in alleviating the nausea. So far she only had to buy a wider skirt for her uniform. She did not have to wear the maternity uniform smock yet.

John saw Diane sitting at Harm's desk. "Where's Harm?" John asked her.

"He and Bud left about 10 minutes ago and went to Webb's apartment to 'feed his fish'. Also they wanted to find out if he left anything behind to indicate where he was and what he was doing," Diane explained.

"That's good. When he gets back from there he and I will go see his mother and pay our condolences," John said.

1000 Local Time

Webb's Apartment

Alexandria, VA

Harm and Bud were astounded to find Webb was a musician and competed in the 1988 Olympics' modern pentathlon.

"It's amazing the things you find out about people after they die," Bud ruminated.

"Yeah, you're right there Bud,' Harm agreed. Then he stopped as he heard a noise at the front door.
They hid behind the door as it opened. They let out a breath as Candella walked in.
What brings you here Candella?" Harm asked sarcastically.

"Probably the same reason you two are here," Candella replied.


"Also did you know that Clark Palmer isn't in Leavenworth?" Harm asked.

"I didn't know," Candella said seemingly acting surprised.

"I'll bet," said Harm as he and Bud left.

1445 Local Time

Webb Residence

Great Falls, VA

After dropping Bud off at JAG, Harm and John visited Webb's mother.

"I'm sorry for your loss Mrs. Webb. Clay was one of my best agents I could always depend on him to do what was needed to get his job done," John said as he offered his condolences.


She continued, "My husband, Neville and I were both intelligence agents and Clayton went 'into the family business'."

Just then a servant came in. "Ma'am there is a call from a Lt Abby Cowen."

"Thank you, I'll take it in a moment. Is there anything else I can do for you Captain, Commander?" Mrs. Webb said.

"No ma'am. We'll do what we can to catch Clay's killers," John replied.

"Well I have nothing more to offer along those lines. Thank you for coming," she replied. She walked into a study to take her call while the servant showed Harm and John out.

1615 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When John and Harm returned to JAG Harm told Bud, "Check on Lt Abby Cowen, tell me what you find out about him." Harm spelled the name out to him. Bud came back to tell him that the name given didn't exist in military databases.

Sarah was playing with the name on the whiteboard that was set up in her office.

She finished what she was doing and called in Harm, John & Diane in.

"Lt Abby Cowen is an anagram for Clayton Webb. He's still alive," Sarah declared.

"Let's get back to the ship. Maybe he left something there that can tell us where he may be. Before we go let me make another call." John said.

1930 Local time
John and Harm came on the freighter with their weapons drawn. They were prepared for anything. Even still they were startled when they heard a hatch handle being opened behind them. They ducked behind the next bulkhead for cover and watched it swing open. John sighed as he saw who came through.

"Geez Clay, the least you could do is let a guy know you're alive. You could have told ME about Lt Abby Cowen."

"Sorry I've been on the run. I only had time for one phone call from a pay phone as my cell went dead. I didn't have the time to be kept on hold as you were located. I knew that you would hear the name at my mother's house because I figured you would go to see her. When I called I told her to have George say that she had a call from her," Webb replied. He then added, "I have the semiconductor."

"All right then let's get out of here," Harm said.

As they walked out Webb explained further, "I believe Candella was the mole. He called me in to help ferret out the mole to throw suspicion off of him. He wanted my help to get the scientist and the superconductor into the U.S. Once in this country, he was supposed to give Wakita and the semiconductor over to the CIA. But some DSD agents were here waiting for us to take Wakita themselves. That's when I called you. I called your home first hoping you were there, but I got you answering machine. That's when my cell phone battery died."

Just then they heard someone speak up from behind them.

"Very nice story, I'll take the semiconductor"

Webb, John and Harm turned around and came face to face with Clark Palmer.

"Nice to know you did my work for me," Palmer said smugly.

"Palmer you sick bastard…" Harm started to say.

"Shut-up Rabb! Who's your friend?" Palmer asked indicating John.

"My boss" said a voice from behind Palmer. Palmer then felt a gun barrel touch his head then back off.

"Put the gun gently on the deck then step back with your hands up please Mr. Palmer or my agent will put a hole in the back of your head," John said.

Knowing he was covered Palmer did as he was told. Gibbs came up behind Palmer and proceeded to handcuff his hands behind him. Tony joined him and they searched and secured Palmer.

John walked up to stand in front of Palmer. "I heard of you Palmer and how you didn't get to Leavenworth. Well my department will make sure you get there. And if by some chance you do find a way to leave Leavenworth I will know about it. There will be no where you can hide or go where I will not be able to find you," John told him.

"Who are you?" Palmer asked again.

"Like my agent said, his boss," John said flatly. Tony & Gibbs led Palmer off the ship.
After Palmer was escorted away Webb looked at John in wonder. "How did you know to get Gibbs here?" he asked John.

"I called him and told him where we were going. I told him to watch the ship from undercover and come aboard after anyone who followed us onboard. Unlike you Clay I want as much back-up as I can get. When are you going to learn to have back-up when you work a case like this?"

Webb could only shrug. Harm filled the silent void.

"You have to learn Clay that when you work with John he has a habit of knowing more than what is going on in front of you. You have to expect something other than the usual with him as he always has some sort of back-up plan up his sleeve." Harm said.

2330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

Harm and John dropped Webb off at the nearest emergency room then John drove to NCIS and dropped off the semiconductor at Abby's Laboratory. Then they dove to Florida Ave. where Diane was waiting.

Earlier, shortly after John and Harm left JAG Sarah received a call. After she and Diane performed some investigative tasks, they left JAG and went to Sarah's home to wait for John and Harm. When they got to Florida Avenue she told them of what she found out and what she and Diane did with the information.

"Paul Candella was found dead in his car. Sarah and I then had Admiral Chegwidden and Admiral Magnum speak with the CIA Director. The full court press from the two brought us some results. It also got the Gibbs' team as the crime scene investigators. They found fibers in the back seat of Candella's car, which should match the clothing Palmer was wearing. Apparently Palmer was waiting in the backseat of Candella's. Candella probably promised Palmer that he would get it when they found it. Also Ducky's autopsy revealed that Candella inhaled the poison that killed him. Traces of the poison were found in his lungs and trachea. Also Gibbs found a pack of cigarettes laced with the same poison in Palmer's coat pocket. Palmer probably gave him a cigarette from that pack. Then the CIA had their facility security department review the surveillance DVDs. They found that Palmer bluffed his way into CIA headquarters. The interviews with the staff near Candella's office showed that he was there. He may have been looking for records on the superconductor and he was nearly intercepted by Candella. Palmer has an ability to con his way into anywhere he needs to be. I hope he arrives at Leavenworth this time," Diane concluded.

"Don't worry about that. Do you remember the two Marines that came with Uncle Matt last Christmas?" John asked.

"Yeah I do, what were their names? Oh yeah Riley & Longley," Sarah said.

"That's right. Well I asked for those two specifically to escort Mr. Palmer to Leavenworth. Also Gibbs and Dinozzo went along. Palmer isn't going anywhere but to prison."

"By the way, wasn't Bud supposed get his final law school marks today? Sarah, don't you usually open them for good luck?" Harm asked.

"Oh yeah. Harriet got a little twisted by that and he had her open them." Sarah answered.
"Well how did he do?" John asked.

"Harriet called me just before you came home. He was third in law class," Sarah answered.

Monday, February 15, 1999

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The day at JAG began well enough as AJ summoned Harriet, Bud, Sarah, Harm and Meg into his office.

Addressing Harriet AJ said, "You're out of uniform Lieutenant Simms."

"Sir?" Harriet asked in confusion. Then AJ produced the box with her Lieutenant JG Bars.

"Oh my goodness, I totally forgot that two years have gone by already," Harriet said realization dawned on her.

"Lt. Roberts would you please do the honors" AJ said handing the box over.

"With pleasure sir," Bud said enthusiastically as he went to switch the ranks symbols on Harriet's shoulders.

Everyone congratulated Harriet as they filed out of the office.

Later that morning Sarah was looking over her notes of case she was trying. She was sipping a nice warm mug of green tea. Even though she had not gone through any morning sickness the last 2 days, for which she was eternally grateful, she had become fond of the brew. When she dealt with the morning sickness, she drank it plain. Now she had begun to add some sugar and milk and it tasted better than regular tea.

This was also the first day she was wearing her maternity uniform. Her regular uniform coats and skirts became too tight to button or zip up. So instead of wasting money buying bigger and bigger skirts and jackets, she decided that since there was nothing to hide, she'd begin wearing the maternity smock and skirt. She and John went to the Navy Yard Clothing Sales Store and bought 2 sets each of the officer's maternity dress uniforms with skirts and pants as well as a set of maternity BDUs.

As she read the report, Emma knocked on her open door lintel. "Ma'am the Admiral needs to see you, Commander Austen and Commander Rabb in his office ASAP.

"Right away Emma, thank you," Sarah replied.

Harm let the ladies precede him into the office. "Have a seat," AJ instructed. As the three officers settled in AJ's office he began his briefing.

"An old acquaintance of yours is in trouble," AJ began as a preamble.

"Who's that sir?" Harm asked.

"Lt. Curtis Rivers. He was conducting exercises in the George Washington National Forest with a SEAL team. During the exercise a teenager, Brian Yarrow, was shot and killed. Lt. Rivers received gunfire and returned fire. After the shooting stopped he advanced toward the direction from where it
came only to find the dead boy. Colonel because of your condition and the 8-hour day regulations adherent to that, I'm sending Lt. Commander Austen with Lt. Commander Rabb to West Virginia.

"No problem sir," Sarah acknowledged.

Sarah was remembering back to when she and Harm first met Rivers in October 1997 before she got engaged. Even though as a SEAL John may have had a better camaraderie with Rivers, he wasn't assigned to the case because he was out in the Pacific off Korea with Traci Mannetti investigating the downing of a North Korean plane.

She, Harm and Bud were ordered to run a routine background check on Rivers, as he was a candidate for the Medal of Honor for single-handedly rescuing the undersecretary of state from fundamentalist terrorists. The investigation of the case was difficult because of Rivers' lack of cooperation. Despite that she and Harm got to the truth and Rivers received the medal.

It was also the time that Dalton Lowne was recruiting her for Lowell, Hanson & Lowne. She smiled inwardly as she remembered one of the nights out she and Bud were at a Karaoke restaurant and Bud got drunk on Mai-Tais and got up to sing Tom Jones' "Delilah". Sarah remembered that Bud had a really good singing voice.

Sarah came out of her reverie as AJ continued the briefing.

"Also the FBI has been tracking a federal building bombing fugitive in the area named Warren Toobin. His bomb killed a man. Despite that he has become a local "folk hero" for the area's separatists. They leave food and supplies for him in the area near where Rivers' team was traversing through the forest to get to their normal exercise area.

It seems that when he heard that no gun was found where the Yarrow boy's body was Rivers went U.A. He probably intends to track down who shot at him and caused him to maybe kill the boy. You have 48 hours to bring him in before we begin filing charges. Colonel, call your husband please. Advise him of Rivers situation and ask him to assign an agent to accompany the Commanders to West Virginia. They can meet up on the way out. Commanders Austen and Rabb I want reports every two hours. You can call them into our Chief of Staff. That's all, dismissed."

Harm, Meg and Sarah stood at attention saying, "Aye, Aye sir."

1235 Local Time

Hening, West Virginia

Sarah called John, who already knew and assigned Gibbs to go with Meg and Harm.

Having lunch in a small café, Harm revealed to Meg and Gibbs, "I used to wash dishes in the 'Eagle and Key' café in Julian, California during a high school summer break. It taught me to be humble."

"Apparently it didn't hold. You haven't been humble since I met you," Meg retorted. Gibbs just grinned at Harm's indignant face.

Before Harm could add a reply they were interrupted by one of the locals. A local redneck thug, ex-sailor Lewis Beecham, started harassing Meg in the café. Harm and Gibbs stood up in an attempt to back him down.

Trouble was averted when another patron also stood up and told Lewis to knock-it off.

As Lewis left, Harm turned to thank the peacekeeper. "Thank you Mr…..?"
"Yarrow, you're here investigating why that Navy guy killed my son," Yarrow said.

"In a way sir, we found out from the coroner that Brian was shot in the back. Lt. Rivers returned fire in the general direction of where the fire was coming from, just like any of you would do. So unless Brian was running away, there is no way Lt. Rivers shot him. We are still waiting on the ballistics report though," Harm reminded him.

Yarrow was unconvinced. "Brian didn't have his gun in the forest. So there is no way he fired first. Your corrupt government, that has subverted our liberty and undermined the law of the people, was conducting a raid looking to bring us under your thumb and when you saw an unarmed boy, you shot him to cover your invasion."

"Our Navy does not conduct raids or invasions in American territory. The military does not work that way," Harm started to say. He could quickly see that he was getting nowhere with Mr. Yarrow.

"I suggest after you finish your lunch, you better leave Commander. You are not welcome here," Yarrow said as he and the others returned to their tables.

They paid the tab and left the diner. Outside they decided on a plan of action.

"Gibbs, Meg and I will try to talk with those townspeople who want to talk to us. You try to find Rivers. Too bad John isn't working this case he knows Rivers," Harm said

"John told me all about him. I got an idea on where he may go. In the meantime let me do this," Gibbs said.

He took a device from his pocket. He walked to his car and purposely dropped his keys. While he was down retrieving them, he placed the device on the underside of the truck next to his car. Then he got into his car.

Gibbs saw from his table inside that this was the truck in which the Yarrow family arrived at the diner. He placed a tracker on that truck.

Harm and Meg came over to Gibbs' car. Their car was parked on the passenger side of Gibbs'.

"The first one of us to meet Rivers calls the others. Let's try to keep him from doing something stupid," Harm said.

Gibbs agreed wholeheartedly.

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Emma knocked on Sarah's office lintel. "Excuse me ma'am, Admiral Chegwidden would like you to come to his office."

"Thank you Emma," Sarah said as she got up from her desk.

Upon entering AJ's office Sarah encountered FBI Agent Grenin. Before she could say anything in the way of greeting he started in on her. "Who does your husband think he is interfering in an FBI investigation?"

His tone got her ire up. Before AJ could say anything she responded in a low threatening tone. "Agent Grenin you do not have the right to come into this building and jump down my or anyone's
throat because your nose is out of joint. My husband is doing his job. He is preventing a Navy officer from breaking the law. His agency enforces the law among Navy and Marine personnel. You should have gone to his office and asked him. Instead you showed yourself for the coward you are. You came here hoping to intimidate me because I'm 3 months pregnant. Despite that I will make it my life's work to ensure that you never ever hold any position of authority in law enforcement again. To start that process, I will file a formal complaint with your superiors on your conduct here."

With that she turned on her heel and walked out. It was only when she got outside that she realized that the admiral had not dismissed her. Before she could turn and apologize to AJ, she heard him on Tiner's intercom.

"Tiner please tell Colonel Marshall that I will come to her office and see her as soon as I finish with Agent Grenin."

Sarah heard the notice. Then all of a sudden she became nauseous and ran into the Ladies' Room. From her desk Emma saw Sarah running and followed close behind. She made it in time to hear Sarah throw up in the nearest toilet. Emma took some paper towels and wet them in cold water. She went and gave Sarah some to wipe her face. Then she put the rest on the back of her neck. She stayed with Sarah until she calmed down. When Sarah got up Emma led her to the chair in front of the mirror. She sat in the next chair and rubbing Sarah's back. She knew what was coming next. Sarah just started crying in her quiet sobbing way. Emma gathered Sarah into her arms and let her rest her head on her shoulder as she let Sarah cry it out.

When she had Sarah calmed down enough Emma asked gently, "Colonel, what happened?"

Sarah told her what Grenin did.

"He had no right to do that. He is such a coward," Sarah said sobbing again.

Emma knew that Sarah was not the emotional type but she knew that the anger and the stress had caused Sarah's hormones to go crazy right about now.

Harriet, who saw first Sarah then Emma run into the Ladies room, stuck her head into the room. She mouthed asking if Sarah was all right. Emma nodded yes, and then she held up 5 fingers indicating that Harriet should give her five minutes to get her Colonel squared away. Harriet nodded in acknowledgement.

That was how Emma thought of Sarah. It was a Yeoman's job to look out for the officer she was working for.

Eventually Sarah calmed down enough to sip some water that Emma got for her.

"Wow some Colonel I am, crying like that. I've been called a 'broad assed marine', slut and other nasty things, but it has never affected me like that," Sarah said wiping her eyes.

"Sarah I'm going to step out of line here so please forgive me, don't you ever again dare apologize for acting like that. Pregnancy makes you very sensitive to everything. I know. One day my husband was joking around about my waddle when I was 8 months along. I bawled for three days. Agent Grenin had no right to act that way. I'm also sure that Admiral Chegwidden had no idea that that was going to happen."

"I know that the Admiral didn't know. I knew that he wanted an update. Commander Rabb has been keeping me in the loop every two hours," Sarah said sniffling.

"I'm sure that was what the admiral wanted to know ma'am," Emma said. "Agent Grenin was totally
out of line."

"We're back to ma'am now huh?" Sarah said mischievously.

"Yeah warm and fuzzy time is over," Emma said with a smile.

Sarah hugged her back in gratitude. "Come on, let's clean up so we can take on the world again," Sarah said.

"Yes ma'am" Emma said happily.

"Oh and Emma, thank you very, very much. In the future in situations like this and outside the office it's Sarah" Sarah said as she gave Emma a friendly squeeze of her hand.

"You're welcome Sarah," Emma said softly.

While they were rubbing wet towels over their eyes, Harriet came in with their make-up kits.

I thought you two would need these," Harriet said.

"Thanks, Harriet," Sarah said for her and Emma.

After fixing their faces, the two women emerged to do battle.

AJ was standing waiting by Sarah's office. She came in and sat down.

"Colonel I'm very sorry Grenin did that. The only reason I called you in was to have you give us an update of the investigation. I had no idea what his agenda was," AJ said in obvious remorse.

"Thank you sir, I know that you had nothing to do with Grenin's actions. I am going through with that complaint to his superiors though."

"Oh I'm not here to convince you otherwise. I will write a statement that you can attach to your complaint. He was despicable. I only wanted to make sure you were all right. Your husband would kill me if I didn't."

"Thank you sir, I'll be fine. Emma took good care of me," Sarah said appreciatively.

As she said that Emma came in with a fresh mug of green tea.

"Excuse me sir, drink this ma'am. It'll help you feel better," Emma said

Sarah caught her hand before she could leave. She mouthed a quiet 'thank you'. Emma smiled and nodded a silent 'you're welcome'.

"Good. Now that we've gotten that out of the way, what's up with Rabb and Austen?" AJ asked getting back to business.

As Sarah sipped the tea, she told AJ, "The two commanders are working with Jethro Gibbs. John has Gibbs beating the bushes for Rivers. To facilitate that Gibbs put a tracking device on the Yarrow’s truck. Harm and Meg are trying to speak with the locals, without much luck. So far that's all I have. If Harm and Meg encounter any problems, they know to call for help. If I know my husband, he also has Gibbs giving him regular updates. Though judging from experience working with him, Jethro's updates are as regular as Jethro wants them to be."

AJ grinned at that, "Okay, I imagine since it's late in the day the two Commanders and Gibbs will
stay there for the night. That is if nothing comes up between now and night fall."

"Yes sir they already planned for that. They gave me the number of the motel they registered in an hour ago," Sarah acknowledged.

"Good colonel, keep me posted," AJ said as he got up to leave. He waved Sarah back down as she was about to get up.

"Aye sir," Sarah said.

When AJ left, Sarah called Emma in. "What are you doing about dinner tonight?" Sarah asked her.

"Well I don't have class tonight and Teresa and I were going to go to Wendy's. She loves the 'Kids' Meal' from there. I usually get a chicken sandwich and a salad why ma'am?" Emma asked.

"Well it's John's turn to cook and he makes a delicious meatloaf. My sister is coming over as Harm is away for the night. Would you and Teresa like to come over for dinner? Sarah Cate will be there so Teresa won't be lonely." Sarah asked.

"Thank you ma'am that would be lovely, I'm sure the girls will get along fine.

1800 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

John had the meatloaf in the oven and just finished peeling the potatoes when he heard Sarah pull into the driveway. He washed his hands and waited to greet her.

He had left NCIS at 5:00. Normally at the end of the day he and Sarah would meet in the parking lot and follow each other home. But that afternoon Sarah had to sign her closing signature to a few cases that fell behind because she was dealing with the affair in Henning via the phone. She wanted to get them out of the way in case something popped in West Virginia tomorrow. Being that they took different cars to work that morning and the Marshalls only lived 15 minutes from the Navy Yard, John got home first to start dinner. Sarah called him earlier to let him know that they were having one more for dinner.

When Sarah came through the door, she went straight to John as he enveloped her in his arms. They held tight to each other for a few minutes. They pulled away from each other to share a kiss.

John asked, "AJ called me to let me know what Grenin did. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, normally something like that would have been over after I chastised him. But being pregnant, my hormones went into overdrive. Thank God Emma was there. She was a big help in getting me squared away after I tossed my cookies and had a good cry."

"Yeah 'Emms' is very understanding and very devoted to who she works for," John confirmed.

"'Emms'?” Sarah asked raising an eyebrow but with a smile.

"Yeah, you know how informal we are at the office. Jethro and the rest of the team started calling her that. They do the same thing to Abby, calling her Abbs and so forth. Emma liked it. It helped her fit in," John said.

"It's too bad she left NCIS. She was just starting to get the hang of the investigations she was helping
"Well I'll tell you what. When she doesn't need to keep me organized, I'll take her along with me on some investigations or I'll send her with Harm or Bud. That way she'll learn from the best and when she goes back to your company, she'll be all primed and ready to go," Sarah said with a smile.

"Are you saying that I am not the best teacher?" John asked.

Before Sarah could answer, the doorbell rang. "Here's our first guest. You answer it, I'm going up to change," Sarah said. Before she left, she gave John a sweet kiss saying, "Yes my love you are a very good teacher."

When John answered the door she found Emma and Teresa waiting there. Before he could close the door, he saw Diane walking up with Sarah Cate in her stroller. He got both mothers in and settled.

John put in a Thomas the Tank Engine tape that Diane brought with her. Teresa and Sarah Cate hit it off well as they sat and started playing on the blanket spread out in the living room.

Sarah came down dressed in sweats and slippers. She greeted her sister and Yeoman with hugs and kisses. Then she greeted each baby with a good hug and funny kisses each. The two toddlers giggled appreciatively at the attention.

Sarah sat and talked with the two while John set the table and made the meal. Emma brought Teresa's 'Kids Meal' and heated it up in the microwave and set it on the high chair John and Sarah kept at the house for their infant guests. After Teresa finished eating Emma put her in the playpen. Then Diane fed Sarah Cate in the high chair and put her in the playpen with Teresa.

After the potatoes were cooked and mashed, John put them in a baking bowel and then into the oven to brown the top. He heated up beats and string beans in the microwave and sliced the meatloaf. Then he put everything out on the table and called the women in for dinner.

Emma and Diane were appropriately impressed as everyone settled down for dinner.

After dinner and some dessert, the two babies were getting cranky, signaling that it was time to leave.

When Emma got herself and Teresa ready to go, John gave her a hug, "Thanks Emms for watching out for Sarah. I really appreciate that you were there for her."

"John it was no problem. After all we mothers have to stick together against the less understanding members of your gender," Emma said with a twinkle.

"Well I'm glad Sarah's got you in her corner," John said.

Sarah and John cleaned up the kitchen then settled in for the night.

Tuesday, February 16, 1999

0930 Local Time

Henning, West Virginia

Harm, Gibbs and Meg got up with the sun. They had breakfast and set out on their investigation. Gibbs set out to follow the tracking device he put on the Yarrows' truck.

Harm and Meg did not make much progress. While interviewing the townspeople, they found out
that the local people considered Warren Toobin a hero, even though an innocent government worker
died in the bombing.

Gibbs got a line on the tracker on the Yarrows' truck. He set out after it, keeping at a safe distance so
that he was out of sight.

When he saw the Yarrows stopped he stopped his car and set off on foot still using the tracker. He
came over a rise and saw a compound of buildings in a box like valley below. He saw the Yarrows'
truck parked inside with other trucks. He saw several men, women and children gathering about and
talking. He went back to his car to get it closer and to retrieve what he needed. After he set himself
up, he called Harm and gave him directions to his location. Harm and Meg joined him within an
hour. As they were watching the compound they saw a figure moving stealthily through the trees on
the far side from their location.

"Oh shit!" Harm softly exclaimed. "There's Rivers. What is he crazy?"

"No just a SEAL," Gibbs commented wryly.

They saw Rivers sneak up to the building nearest the forest's edge. As he peeked around a corner,
they saw him grab his leg. Harm could see through the binoculars that some sort of snake bit him.
Rivers' cry of pain alerted the people in the compound. Several men ran toward the cry, disarmed
and took him into the largest building in the compound.

"Now what do we do?" Meg asked.

"We go down there and get him, while Jethro here calls in the cavalry," Harm said.

Gibbs agreed with the plan saying, "We're in a spot where we can get a signal out. I'll call John and
have him send help. I'll give you and Meg time to negotiate or until John gets here with help. If I hear
any commotion, I'm coming down myself."

"Sounds like a plan," Harm said as he and Meg went back to their car. They drove down and parked
on the shoulder outside the entrance and then walked right into the compound. Gibbs called John
telling him that he found Rivers but that he was in trouble and Harm and Meg went down to help
him.

John said, "Stay put unless you think the three are in imminent jeopardy. I'm sending the FBI
Hostage Rescue Team and I'll be there to lead it ASAP."

On his end John called Russell Holden; Grenin's superior at the FBI, telling them of the situation at
the 'Separatists Compound'. "Russ send the Hostage Rescue Team to Henning." He gave them
directions. "I'm going to be there to meet them."

Holden said they would be there within a couple hours by chopper. John called the motor pool and
commandeered a Humvee. On the way out he ordered Kate Larkin and Tony Dinozzo to come with
him. Before he left he called Sarah at JAG. She was expecting his call and connected him to Admiral
Chegwidden. AJ said he and Sarah needed to go.

"John I have some information that you may need. Your wife and I will meet you in the parking lot." AJ
told him.

John said, "Aye sir."

AJ let Sarah sit shotgun in the front when they pulled away from the Navy Yard.
On the way out Sarah briefed John and the NCIS agents on the information he had received.

Hearing this John exclaimed, "We have to make sure that Grenin is not influencing of the Hostage Rescue Team. Even though we worked with him on the Konaplonik matter, he rankled being under our control. He's got target fixation"

Sarah and the others agreed. John hit the lights and sirens as they drove onto the interstate to Henning.

1430 Local Time
Separatist Compound
Henning, West Virginia

Harm and Meg drove down and parked their car just outside the entrance to the compound. When they walked into the compound the people swarmed them. Yarrow had to stop them from being hurt. Yarrow escorted them into the large gathering hall where Rivers was taken.

Harm and Meg saw Rivers sitting quietly at a chair being treated for his snakebite. Yarrow's wife was giving the aid.

"What kind of snake bit you Lieutenant?" Harm asked.

"A copperhead sir, I should have been watching for it,' Rivers said.

"You should have stayed home instead you're here among a hostile crowd who want nothing better to do than hang you because they believe you killed Brian Yarrow," Meg chastised him.

"I wasn't going to sit by and be railroaded, ma'am," Rivers retorted.

"Well now we're all in jeopardy lieutenant," Harm said.

Harm turned to Yarrow. "Mr. Yarrow we came out here to determine how your son died. We don't encourage our officers to go rogue. I don't know what the lieutenant's intentions were but you have to let us take him out of here so that he can get the medical attention he needs. After that we'll sit down and determine exactly how your son died."

"Why don't we do that now?" Lewis Beecham shouted from among the people gathered in the hall. "Hell we can have our own trial right here."

Before Harm could protest, Yarrow agreed. "You can defend your client if you want Commanders," Yarrow told Harm and Meg. He moved to another table to act as Prosecutor.

Lewis Beecham and two other men volunteered for the jury. One of the other men set up a table and sat down as the judge.

Harm had no other choice but to go along. He, Meg and Rivers were outnumbered and out gunned.

1530 Local Time
Inside Separatist Compound
Henning, West Virginia

The kangaroo "peoples" court for Rivers went on. Even though Harm was allowed to "defend"
Rivers, he wasn't allowed to adequately state his case. Harm knew that the "verdict" was a far gone conclusion.

Yarrow's daughter testified that Brian had his gun in the forest and that her father retrieved it the next day.

Warren Toobin testified that when Brian brought supplies to him, they saw soldiers coming and assumed they were after Toobin. Brian shot at Rivers, just to scare him and allow time for Toobin to escape. But Brian was shot. Toobin then said that he took the gun, gathered the casings and hid while the soldiers went by.

Rivers tried to say that none of his men were there to go after him. When he tried to say so the judge gagged him.

Yarrow quoted the Declaration of Independence saying that a government that failed to work for the people had to be abolished. He spouted other rhetoric about his opinions of the government.

Harm pointed out, "The founding fathers said the established government shouldn't be abolished for light and trivial reasons so they gave us the Constitution so that it wouldn't be. The separatists ignore the Constitution. Brian had died because of the hate and suspicion his father had planted in his heart. His plea fell on deaf ears.

Lewis' gang on the jury found Rivers guilty without deliberation and the judge sentenced him to be hanged just as a helicopter flew over the building.

Outside the Separatist Compound

Henning, West Virginia

As John ordered him, Gibbs was watching the compound for over two hours. He was about to go down and reconnoiter, when he heard a horn honk from the road. He turned and saw John, Kate, Tony, Sarah and AJ getting out of the Humvee parked behind his car on the shoulder of the road. He walked over to meet them.

When Gibbs got to the Humvee and they gathered beside the car. AJ asked, "What's the situation Agent Gibbs?"

"The commanders Rabb and Austen went to the compound to try and negotiate Rivers release. The separatists brought him into that large building two hours ago. I haven't heard any commotion or shooting. So I can assume that our people are still alive.

John said, "I called Russ Holden. He's bringing the Hostage Rescue Team by chopper. They should be here any time now."

As he said that he heard a chopper fly overhead. They saw the FBI Chopper land at the entrance to the compound.

The NCIS/JAG party went to the back of the Humvee. John took out portable radios for Gibbs, Tony, Kate, AJ and himself.

John then took his suppressed Colt M-16 and gave out orders. "Alright let's take up positions around the compound. Jethro you stay here, Tony you go there", pointing to a rocky outcrop on the other side, "and Kate you go there", pointing to a low cliff to their left, "and I'll go there" pointing to a stand of pine trees to the right. "Stay out of sight from the compound as you move to your positions."
"Honey you and the Admiral take the Humvee to the entrance to the compound and stay with the FBI and tell them where we went. We'll be in contact with them as soon as they are ready," John told Sarah.

John and the other three agents left to assume their planned positions.

As Sarah and AJ got into the car AJ said admiringly to Sarah, "John loves to be in charge. He just totally disregarded the two stars on my shoulder."

"Did you catch the look he gave me when he asked me to go with you?" Sarah asked smiling.

"Yeah what was that about?" AJ asked back.

"It said 'honey I know you want to be in the middle of the action, but as the mother of our child, please stay safely behind with the admiral,'" Sarah said with a smile.

"Well I don't want to face his wrath so let's be extra careful. He's carrying a bigger weapon than me," AJ said sardonically.

She and AJ got into the Humvee as Sarah drove it to the compound entrance. There they met Holden along with Grenin. Grenin gave Sarah a look that was a mix of distaste and fear. Sarah filed her complaint that morning. Holden obviously had Grenin on a short leash.

"Where's John?" Holden asked.

"Here take this radio, John, Gibbs, Larkin and Dinozzo are at the other end," Sarah said giving him the radio.

Holden used the radio to determine where John and the NCIS team were stationed. He then positioned the FBI Team members appropriately.

Then they stood and waited. They didn't have to wait for long as they observed the separatists lead Harm, Meg & Rivers out of the gathering building and lock them in a shed.

Right after that Gibbs saw a man emerge from a culvert grate at the base of the low cliff where Kate was stationed. It was Toobin and he ran away from Kate's position into the woods in Gibbs direction.

"We have a runner?" Kate called over the radio.

"Kate can you see any weapons?" John asked.

"No he's not carrying a rifle. He could be concealing a handgun though."

"I copy Kate. All others hold your positions. He'll cross right in front of you Gibbs and be out of sight of the compound. Then when he's between us we'll bracket him," John called over the radio.

"I copy that," Gibbs said, as he got ready.

AJ and Sarah also heard the exchange over the radio.

Toobin passed right by Gibbs without seeing him. As he neared to cross in front of his position, Gibbs and John stood up.

Gibbs being nearer to Toobin called out, "Stop! Federal Agents!"
Toobin turned around looking in Gibbs direction, totally surprised. He reached to under his coat then he fell in obvious pain as his gun went flying. John shot him in his knee. Gibbs was the first to reach him. He kicked the gun away and went to handcuff him. John walked up to them and helped Gibbs get Toobin up, then they walked him to the edge of the road.

"All units hold your positions. We're bringing a 'guest' to the chopper. He will need medical attention," John called over the radio.

AJ and Sarah smiled at each other at John's use of the word guest.

Gibbs and John loaded Toobin into the back of Gibbs car. They drove back to the compound entrance behind the copter out of sight of the people in the compound. There, two FBI agents took Toobin and placed him lying down in the helicopter.

John said, "Keep him quiet. We have to let the separatists believe that Toobin got away. Otherwise they'll hold our people hostage for his release."

Holden agreed. He ordered the medical corpsman pointing to John, "Do as he said."

In the meantime the separatists, believing Toobin had escaped out the tunnel, had gotten their guns and gathered in the center of the compound to begin the standoff.

Holden said, "Ok let's start negotiations."

AJ came forward, "I second that. Give me that bullhorn!" When he got the bullhorn he started, "Hello in the compound, this Admiral Chegwidden of the US Navy JAG Corps. You are holding three of my people. We don't want anyone hurt. I promise that the one who killed your boy will face the severest penalties that our laws allow."

Yarrow was standing at the front the crowd, called out, "We don't believe your laws. My son was shot in the back defending his land and we have the man who did it." He motioned that Harm, Meg and Rivers be brought out of the shed.

Right at that point AJ advanced further into the compound and reiterated his promise "Someone will pay Mr. Yarrow."

That was to no avail, as Yarrow wasn't swayed. Then Rivers suddenly stood between Yarrow and AJ.

"Go on if you believe I killed your boy, then shoot me," Rivers shouted.

Yarrow raised his rifle and pointed it at Rivers. But he was stopped. Someone came up behind him and gently put her hand on his arm to lower it.

"Daddy stop, I don't want to lose you too," Yarrow's daughter said.

Yarrow brought his rifle down. He turned his back and motioned for the three officers to leave.

As Rivers limped by AJ, he asked Rivers, "What happened to you?"


AJ said, "I hope you bit him back."

Rivers could only smile.
Harm went around the chopper where John and Sarah waited. He saw that Toobin was inside, handcuffed and gagged and his leg wound was being treated by a medical corpsman.

"How did you guys get him? I thought he escaped," Harm said incredulously.

"Harm you forgot with whom you're dealing," Gibbs said motioning to John.

1900 Local Time

On the road back to DC

Gibbs had his car so Tony rode back with him. Meg and Kate rode back in the JAG Staff Car. Harm and Rivers rode back with Sarah, AJ and John.

Harm told the story of their trial and the revelations and questions that it brought forth. He finished with, "So here's what we can almost certainly determine. Brian shot at the lieutenant. The lieutenant returned fire and didn't hit Brian. Toobin said he didn't shoot back at all and if that's the case, then who shot Brian?"

Sarah went on to explain, "Admiral Chegwidden suggested that we check to see if the Forest Service was pressured to close the normal insertion area so the SEALs would need to use the alternative which happened to be near where Toobin was hiding. Bud called and found out that Agent Grenin did just that, though he did not tell them why at the time. It seems Grenin has been after Toobin since the federal building bombing. He figured that if Toobin saw a group of SEALs traversing the forest he would think that the SEALs were after him. Grenin must have been waiting for Toobin to show himself. When Brian started firing, Grenin must have been behind him and shot him. The ballistics report will confirm whose bullets did what."

"In the meantime, what are we going to do with Lt. Rivers here?" Harm asked.

"I think the copperhead bite is enough punishment for him right now, don't you agree lieutenant?" AJ asked Rivers rhetorically.

"Whatever you say sir, whatever you say,' Rivers agreed.

The rest of the occupants just laughed as they rode home.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 39

Friday, February 19, 1999

1000 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Navy Yard, DC

John called Carolyn into his office and asked her, "Are you ladies planning a baby shower for Diane and Sarah?"

"Yes we are we want to include Harriet and Ann Marie. I called Emma to keep open dates for Harriet and Sarah and to find out what they want in the way of gifts. But I don't know who to call at the White House to get Ann Marie involved."

John wrote a phone number down and passed the slip over to her, "Here call that number. It's a dial in direct line for Donna Moss. She's Ann Marie's assistant. She'll let you know what she wants and keep it low profile. Let me know the date after you get organized so all us husbands can get the expectant mothers there."

"Great idea boss, I'll get on it during lunch," Carolyn said.

John then called Sarah at JAG

Same time

JAG Headquarters

Navy Yard, DC

Harm and Sarah sat in Sarah's office discussing the findings that Dr. Mallard obtained from the West Virginia State Medical Examiner's Office with John on her speakerphone.

"We already knew that Brian Yarrow's wound was through and through with the entry wound in the back. The FBI Internal Affairs investigators interviewed Grenin. He confessed that he was in the forest at the time of the shooting. He led them to where he was when the shooting occurred. It was in direct line from where Rivers was and where Brian was found. Grenin said that he fired his handgun only after Brian started firing down at Rivers and that he saw Brian go down after his third shot. The FBI Forensics Team combed the area in Grenin's line of fire. They found a bullet matching his handgun embedded in a tree. They also found blood on the bullet, apparently carried from Brian. Grenin has been suspended pending the investigation. The FBI is charging him with several procedural failures and so forth. The Attorney General's Office will make a decision whether to file criminal charges for manslaughter after the blood analysis comes back. Either way Grenin is looking at a great big hassle for the foreseeable future." John finished.

"Well it's his fault. He should have followed procedure," Sarah said.

"Yeah see what target fixation gets you," Harm said.
"Yeah you're not kidding," John confirmed. "Well that's all I have on the Yarrow case. Harm I'll see you and Diane this weekend. In the meantime can I have some private conversation time with my wife, please?" John said.

Harm got up saying goodbye to John just before Sarah picked up the receiver. "Hold on John," she said. Covering the mouthpiece with her hand she told Harm, "I'll meet you in the conference room about the Morris case after I finish with John." Harm waved in acknowledgement as he closed the door on his way out.

Speaking into the phone Sarah said seductively, "What you don't get enough private time at home sweetie?"

"I can't help it I'm selfish about your time. I want to see you 24/7." John said with love.

"If you weren't my husband I'd call you a stalker," Sarah said with a smile.

"Yeah but would a stalker take care of you the way I do?" John asked back.

"No he would not. You sir, are my rock, my home. The one place where I can lay all my stress away," Sarah said with love and affection.

"Along those lines don't get too stressed over anything. You know what Eve said yesterday about what happened Tuesday. Lean on Emma. If I know her she's probably got up a virtual wall against 'any and all enemies', and don't you discourage her in any way from that," John said.

"Don't worry my love I know that Emma does just that and I don't mind. Even the admiral comes in to me when he needs to speak with me. I also think he has everybody in the office looking out for Harriet and me. I think he wants to be a grandfather. I could get to enjoy this. Too bad after the baby comes, those little things go away," Sarah sighed wistfully.

"Oh I don't know. Maybe we can just keep popping them out," John said facetiously.

"What do you want to do ruin my career?" Sarah said in exasperation, but with a smile.

"I don't know. You'd only trade one career for another," John said with a laugh.

"I love you but I'm hanging up now," Sarah said with a laugh.

"I love you to sweetie," John said. Sarah could hear the smile in his voice.

Sarah hung up on that. She gathered her file on the 'Morris Case' and went to meet Harm and his client in the conference room. Emma was amused as she heard Sarah chuckling. She did a double take when she heard Sarah say under her breath, "Keep popping them out. What does he think I am a rabbit?"

Tuesday, February 23, 1999

JAG Headquarters

1130 Local Time

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Emma met Sarah at her door with a fresh mug of green tea.

"Thanks Emma, you're a life saver," Sarah said gratefully as she landed in her chair to enjoy the tea.
Sarah was just arriving from a meeting at the Pentagon. The day before Admiral Chegwidden asked her to go there straight from home. She was in to see Captain Bob 'Toad' Tarkington and Admiral Grafton. The President was hearing some rumblings from the Russians and how they weren't holding up their end of 'peacekeeping' in Bosnia. The President and Admiral Grafton needed Admiral Chegwidden to assemble a legal team at JAG to formulate a legal plan in getting the Russians to play nice. AJ picked Sarah, his Chief of Staff to head the team. Sarah was glad to have the assignment. It was the chance to sink her teeth into some real research. Even though it was a great deal of work, it was not stressful. She wouldn't be doing all the investigative legwork, but she would be the one gathering all the obtained information and making it coherent enough for presentation.

Admiral Grafton specifically asked for Sarah not only because she was Chief of Staff at JAG but also she was a known quantity to him, as he, Tarkington and John and their wives became close friends. Also Admiral Grafton facetiously said that John stole one Mackenzie sister from him, so he would steal the other from AJ as revenge.

Sarah was happy, for the meeting was productive. Admiral Grafton gave Sarah her assignment saying that since it was legal business anyway she could work out of her office at JAG. As Chief of Staff she could assign the staff that she needed and wanted from JAG and the J2 Office at the Pentagon. Sarah was immensely grateful that AJ assigned Emma as her Yeoman. She would need her more than ever now. Emma would help her ride herd on the officers and NCOs she was going to assign.

As Sarah sipped her tea, Emma told her, "Admiral Chegwidden said that after you've collected yourself, would you please go in and see him. He wants to hear what Admiral Grafton needs JAG to do."

"Okay Emma please call into the admiral and say I will be there in 15 minutes," Sarah said.

"Aye ma'am, I'll keep the other wolves at bay until you at least finish your tea," Emma said.

"Thanks Emma," Sarah said.

Sarah collected her notes into a presentable order. Once she had them the way she wanted she handed them to Emma. She went to use the Ladies' Room. Then she retrieved her notes from Emma and walked confidently into the Admiral's office.

Tiner saw her coming saying, "The Admiral said to go right in ma'am."

"Thanks Tiner," Sarah said as she knocked on AJ's door. She went through when she heard the usual "Enter".

As she entered she saw AJ stand and hold out a chair for her at his 'conference' table.

"Good morning Colonel have a seat, please. I trust the meeting with Jake and Toad was productive?" AJ began.

"Yes sir it was. Though I think Admiral Grafton is still tweaked that John stole my sister from him," Sarah said smiling as she settled at the table.

AJ smiled at that and said, "I always knew that John has a way of accurately evaluating talent and wanting the best people to work with and for him. I saw that when he was here and he had the best young officers working in his section. You were the only one he didn't want working under him in his section."

"Really sir why wouldn't he?" Sarah asked
"It was because he wanted to marry you!" AJ said matter of fact.

"You knew then and here I thought he only let you know when he proposed that day." Sarah said.

AJ sighed, "Mac put your notes aside for a while. I'm going to get personal here."

It took a second for Sarah to sit back to listen.

"What I am about to tell you, John told me just before he left for NCIS. You're right I didn't know he was going to ask until that day. John made me promise I wouldn't tell you until you were ready to hear it and that would be when you were truly satisfied working here. I believe the time is right for you to hear this because I believe you've reached that point. You seem more relaxed and at peace now than when you came here and I know your husband had a lot to do with that."

When you first came here from NIS you were a bundle of nerves. I was Force Judge Advocate COM Pacific at Pearl during your first year at NIS. Tom would tell me of some of the cases you were involved in. He thought then that you would go far.

From Tom's stories and from reading your file I got the impression that you were always trying to prove yourself, not knowing that you already did that at NIS and Bosnia. Those citations on your blouse, especially the Bronze Star, were not given frivolously. You even proved yourself at Duke Law graduating 4th. Hell, just dealing with Juanita Ressler should have earned you the Purple Heart. She's a real bitch. I ought to know. We attended law school together.

Sarah smiled at that, "Diane told me of their encounter while I was on my honeymoon. How Diane stood up to her defending me and telling her that I won the Legion of Merit."

"Speaking of that, of all the things for which you won medals, the case when you and John retrieved the Declaration was the capper. Also when Webb recommended you for that case because of your uncle, he didn't know that I knew you or of you. Did you know John wrote the commendation for your service reward?"

"No I didn't. I mean I assume he wrote his part of the report, but I didn't know he wrote a commendation," Sarah said.

"He recommended that you receive the highest award that was appropriate for your action. He wrote, "Major Sarah Mackenzie is the bravest woman I have ever seen. To go there without regard for her own safety and single handedly deal with her uncle, his fanatics, with the weight of her personal history, and on top of that to totally trust me, a total stranger, to back her up was extraordinarily courageous." He told me that when he wrote that he came to the conclusion of, "I gotta marry that woman". That's why he felt you could not be working under his supervision but as his equal and partner. You would have been subordinate to him since he had more time in rank and was the senior attorney here. He really enjoyed having you as his partner. Did you know he was ready to propose to you after you went to work for Lowell, Hanson & Lowne?"

Sarah shook her head saying, "No I didn't."

"That was one of the things that he told me that day. The day after your last day here and the day before you asked to come back he asked me for some personal afternoon time. He didn't tell me why though. He told me later that on the first afternoon he went to order your engagement ring. The second afternoon two weeks later he went to pick it up and to go home to prepare for that night. That was the night he was going to propose. Then you told him that you were unhappy working there and resigned. So he decided to wait until after that because he wanted you to be happy. Remember the next day when you came back here and you and he asked me for your job back and I pulled out your
resignation and ripped it up?"

Sarah nodded.

"Well right after you left for home we had long talk about his future. He asked me to explore his transferring out to a command position. After that day I saw that his name was on the promotions list and I pushed for fast approval. Then I called Admiral Magnum. Thomas was looking for an assistant and I was happy to direct him to John. Thomas also told me that he knew you were working here and was interested in asking you if you wanted the position. I didn't stop him from asking you because John asked me not to. John's logic was "either way we'll both be happy as we won't be in the same command chain". When you turned it down and Tom offered him the job, John waited until he was sure you were going to be happy with him leaving JAG before he told Tom that he accepted it."

"I had no idea," Sarah said.

"Do you know why I asked you to run the Administrative Law and Legal Assistance Sections and oversee the computer upgrade when you came back from Lowell, Hanson & Lowne?" AJ asked.

Sarah replied with a smile, "At first I thought you were punishing me for leaving. Then I realized I was being immature. John told me that all the projects you gave me at that time had to be done anyway. He said and I quote, 'Do your usual good job and when they're completed, the admiral will put you back into investigations and trials.' He was right. As I think about it now the timing of the Pendry affair was purely a coincidence. All the projects you assigned me were completed or near completion at that time. The office had the new computer system installed, the Administrative Law and Legal Assistance Sections were on track to functioning better than they were and..."

Sarah trailed off at that as an idea crystallized in her mind.

AJ smiled as he saw the realization dawn on her face.

"You were going to have John do those things but he was looking to leave and you couldn't trust anyone else to do that, could you sir?" Sarah asked.

AJ and nodded, "That's right. John and I already discussed his transferring out right before I received the completed evaluation on those two departments. The evaluation showed that they were in need of total command reorganization. The work coming from there was not up to snuff. While we were waiting to hear about his transferring out we sat and had a long discussion on whom to assign there.

John and I went over all the rank qualified officers for quite a long time. After reviewing them all we both came to the conclusion that you were the most qualified to handle the job of getting those sections into the proper shape. Based on what we saw in your file we knew you had more organizational experience. You commanded your own platoon in Bosnia, kept the brigade organized as the aide to the brigade commander in Okinawa, and ran the investigators' office at NIS, Pearl Harbor. John and I both agreed that the other commanders weren't as squared away as you as they did not show the organizational skills that you had.

Rabb was the closest, but John and I got the feeling that he was still getting used to being an attorney. Besides he was never in command of anything besides himself and his Tomcat. He is only now getting organizational skills running his section here.

That's why after the job you did and your high marks from your course at the Command and Staff College you were fast tracked for promotion to Lt. Colonel and I named you Chief of Staff. You earned it. I knew you could handle all the aspects of JAG including Building Operations, Legal
AJ saw the watery smile and tears running down Sarah's cheeks but they were happy tears. He pushed the box of tissues close to her.

As she happily took a few tissues she said. "Even when he's not here he finds a way to make me cry. If I wasn't already pregnant I would jump his bones when we got home and have him make me pregnant."

AJ laughed heartily at her candor. "You two have a very open attitude toward your love don't you?"

Sarah dried her eyes saying, "Yes sir we do. Did he ever tell you that during our first case he told me that I was pretty?"

AJ shook his head no.

"I caught him staring at me as we drove to Red Rock. He was embarrassed. I thought it was so cute. Before that any boy or man who ever told me that, only wanted to get me into bed. I always saw through all that and avoided those types of encounters.

I mean since we're being candid, I lost my virginity at 17 when I was drunk. It was only sheer luck I didn't get pregnant or sick with some STD from Chris Ragle. He was always sleeping around. That's why I didn't want to marry him when he asked. After that first time I was, believe it or not, celibate."

AJ chuckled and motioned for her to go on.

Sarah continued, "When Uncle Matt helped me dry out, he said, 'Don't prostitute yourself to anyone. Find someone that will love and respect you and love that person back the same way. When you find that man, then that's the one you stick with.'

I took his advice to heart. I saw that he loved his wife, my aunt Caroline that way right up until she died of cancer. Throughout my career in the Marines I met man after man that only wanted to seduce me to be nothing more than a notch on his belt or just have a fling or affair while they were away from home. Hell most of them were married. Even the single ones never wanted a lasting relationship.

I never met anyone worth loving or worth giving myself to until John. He was the first man that didn't try to seduce me, never took that next step and never asked. I asked him to make love only after he told me that he fell in love with me."

"Was that the time you two came in to tell me that you were romantically involved?" AJ asked.

"Yes sir, we were so nervous at what you were going to say. You surprised us totally when you said what you did. I mean as our commanding officer you could have right away transferred one of us out of the same chain of command or even charged us with fraternization, but you didn't," Sarah said.

"Well the two of you were very honest about telling me and I didn't want to lose either of you. I saw how well you were doing working with John and I wanted that to continue. You two had a camaraderie that helped the two of you function at another level. John was already confident. That came from surviving his injury in '91 and from being a SEAL. You were confident enough about yourself, but you were very much nervous and afraid of screwing up, not that you ever did, but you still seemed afraid." AJ said.

"As you said I was nervous when I first got here, a new assignment with so much more expected of
me than ever before. As I said before I didn't have a personal life outside the Marines. Well John took me under his wing. Even though I didn't work for him, he showed me that there was more to life than JAG," Sarah confirmed.

"Do you realize that you did the same thing for John? I don't recall ever seeing John out socially. If he wasn't here or away on assignment, he was staying at home working on his house." AJ asked.

"Yes sir I knew that already. Ann Marie and he confided in me why. Without getting too deep and respecting his privacy, they both told me how someone hurt him around the time he was injured in '91. He told me that I pulled him out of his shell," Sarah said.

"Well it seems that the stars aligned just right for the both of you. Watching you and John evolve into the happy state you're in now was very enjoyable," AJ said smiling.

"Yes sir they sure were and it was enjoyable for us as well. There was one other part that confirmed for me that I would be happy being with him."

"What was that?" AJ asked

"Did you also know that after he had to kill those marines, he went looking for a priest?" Sarah said.

"He never confided that in me, but that doesn't surprise me," AJ said.

"As you probably figured out John is devoutly Catholic. He told me that he needed to go to confession for killing those men. He said that SEAL Training taught him to deal with that to avoid PTSD."

"He told you the truth about that. We taught that one should go find a professional in psychotherapy or military clergy after those incidents," AJ said.

"That being the case his attitude puzzled me. Here I saw a guy who had the ability to kill people and do it without hesitation feeling bad about it. That's why I went back to church. Before that I hadn't been to church since I was 14 years old. As a result I never gave religion much thought. I saw how going to church and having a routine life outside the Navy had such a positive effect on John that I said to myself, 'I have to see how this works'. There had to be something here in which he found comfort.

So I called his sister. I asked her where he went to church regularly. She told me and I met him there one day for mass. He just welcomed me into his life like no one ever did before. Going to mass and listening to the gospel made me realize that God did not abandon me and that he was right there with me to help me get through all the bad things I went through. Before that, I believed that all the bad things that happened to me or that I did myself before I joined the Marines was a reflection of the person I really was. John helped me realize that just because something bad happens to you it doesn't make you a bad person. He never preached and he never forced his views on me, never made conditions on loving him. He only told me that all he ever wanted to do was make me happy. As long as I was happy, he was happy. That's when I came to the conclusion of I must marry this guy.

That's why I jumped at working at Lowell, Hanson & Lowne. I thought not being in the same chain of command would bring our relationship out in the open and open the door to marriage. But when I started working there, Dalton Lowne put me on their version of Administrative Law. They had no intention of letting me try cases or even let me sit second chair. The partners just treated me like a glorified law clerk. I was just window dressing.

Also Dalton kept hitting on me, he just wouldn't take no for an answer. After I was there two weeks
he trapped me in their law library. Even after I told him no for the millionth time, he still wasn't convinced. So as he had me trapped between his arms on the shelf, I kneed him in the groin. (AJ chuckled at that.) Right after that I printed my 2nd letter of resignation, cleaned out my desk and left.

When I got home and told John, he didn't express any disappointment. He just told me that he was proud of me. He said to me, "We'll go back to JAG and see if you can go back there. The worst the admiral can say is no. If it comes to that we'll move on. You're a good lawyer and anyone who doesn't see that is a fool." When you took me back, the only time I was happier was when John proposed. Having gone through that experience has made me more appreciative of my career. John was there to show me that and provide the anchor I so desperately needed. If it weren't for him I would not have thought to come back here."

"I'm damn glad you did come back to," AJ said sincerely. He added, "Do you realize that the fact you were getting married was looked on as a favorable factor by the promotion board?"

Sarah shook her head no.

"Besides your impressive record, your devotion to him during his rehab after he was shot was one more thing that showed them you were a stable individual, that you made your decisions with a lot of deliberation. In the military married men and women get promoted faster than single individuals. I was much honored to sign off on your promotion."

Sarah smiled at that and replied, "Thank you sir. Right now John is so excited about being a dad. He restocked the nursery replacing the baby furniture Ann Marie took when she moved out to her own house."

"Do you and he want to know what the sex is?" AJ asked.

"No, we don't need amniocentesis done so we'll wait to be surprised. Though we're both hoping for a boy and we'll be happy for either," Sarah said happily.

"That's great Mac. Now that we got through the personal stuff, tell me what Jake has us doing for him," AJ said signaling that it was back to business.

"Well sir it's like this. The Russians are reluctant to commit forces to the Balkan Peacekeeping until some conditions are met…." Sarah said as she outlined those conditions.

The meeting continued for over an hour. During that time Tiner brought in refreshments for the two of them.

When they concluded, AJ asked Sarah, "Colonel would you like to go to lunch? While we're out we can also discuss who you would like working with you on this project."

"I certainly would sir. Junior here must think I forgot about him," Sarah said patting her belly.

"What would you like?" AJ asked getting his coat.

"Sir, I'll leave it in your hands," Sarah said.

"Would you like Italian food? Giovanni's makes an 'eggplant con risotto' that melts in your mouth."

"That sounds delicious sir. Let me get squared away and get my things and I'll be ready in 10 minutes," Sarah said.

"Fine 10 minutes it is," AJ agreed as they left his office.
They rode in AJ's SUV. He was at the passenger side to assist Sarah as she got in and out of the car. At lunch Sarah started telling him who she would like working the project. "Well Petty Officer Gardiner will be our clerical/organizer. Lt. Simms can pick up some of the slack of Emma's normal duties. She and Harriet work well together. Admiral Grafton told me that I have the pick of three officers from his staff. Then naturally I will need the officer lawyers. Lt. Commander Austen and Lt. Manetti come to mind first. Meg's been studying the Russians as she works to get her masters in International Studies at GW so this would be right up her alley. Traci knows Russian and she has great organizational and analytical skills."

"Well Lt. Commander Austen is a very good choice. She has a case going to the jury today so she'll be available. You're going to have to wait for Lt. Manetti though. I sent her and Harm out this morning to Norway to meet the Watertown," AJ informed her.

"No wonder I didn't see them when I arrived this morning. What happened on the Watertown sir?" Sarah asked.

"The Watertown surfaced in middle of Norwegian sailboats. That happened because they were having some malfunctions. Rabb and Manetti will determine what the problem was. They'll be on the sub for a while as it goes under the icecap then on a long assignment in the Pacific."

"When will they be returning sir?" Sarah asked.

"Probably two to three weeks," AJ said.

"I trust Harm called Diane and told her," Sarah said.

"Oh I made sure he did. I'm sure you and she will hook up for the duration?" AJ said.

"Most definitely sir, I mean what are sisters for?" Sarah said.

"Who else would you like on your team? I can spare three more, but they have to be junior officers," AJ asked.

"Well there's Lt. Loren Singer. She is always very well prepared for her cases but she seems a little too ambitious, always looking higher than where she is. This may be the way to get her looking where she is, not where she wants to be."

AJ replied, "I concur on Lt. Singer. I see the same things in her that you do. But you're right she is very thorough. See if you can get her to mellow out a little. She reminds me of you when you were in Hawaii, so tightly wound, doesn't associate well with the others. I see that her interaction with the rest of the staff is mostly professional. Also like you and John, she does not go out very much or get involved in social situations. I want my staff to have a balanced and stable life. Remember having a career only will not give you comfort or keep you warm late in life."

Sarah smiled, "I'll try sir."

AJ asked, "Anyone else come to mind?"

"Yes sir, there's..." Sarah went about naming the rest of the team she needed to assemble. Then she and AJ finished lunch and returned to JAG.

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
When Sarah returned to her office, she called her sister. "Diane did Harm tell you what was happening on the Watertown?"

"Yeah, I can cope though. Remember I'm limited to the same 8-hour days you are so daycare is not a problem. I will need some adult company though some of the time," Diane said.

"Well you know that our door is always open,' Sarah reassured her.

Diane and Sarah did spend a lot of off duty time together during the next two weeks. When Harm and Traci returned they had some tale to tell.

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm came back to the office somewhat hoarse. He and Traci returned from their stint on the Watertown the previous Sunday. During their stay on the submarine, Harm injured his larynx and Traci was temporarily blinded by ammonia. The injuries were purposely perpetrated by a crewmember.

As Harm sat down in his office and began to outline his case as he got set for the trial of the perpetrator. Because he and Traci were the injured parties, they could only participate as witnesses. Sarah would prosecute and Carolyn Imes would defend.

Harm sat back and remembered the time on the Watertown:

The sub's skipper Flagler gave Traci XO Eustis' Palm Pilot to use while aboard. The boat was ordered to North Korea to find an underwater missile facility so they were stuck for 14 days and had to "hot bunk" in the enlisted barracks. The enlisted thought it was funny to harass Traci with the trash compactor until she faced them down and promised to "haul them out the forward trunk and feed their asses to the crabs."

Harm got a kick out of seeing the petite Asian southern belle' cussing like the sailor she was. As she turned back to get into her bunk she saw Harm looking out from behind the curtain of his bunk with an admiring smile. He stuck his hand out and she gave him a 'high five' just before she got back into her bunk.

The Watertown's Master Chief Basilio said that the boat was "not right having more injuries and illnesses than I'd seen in 7 years." An entire watch got Ecoli dysentery, ruptured eardrum and scabies requiring sterilization of the entire mess. He said the corpsman was the "hardest working squid on the boat." Chief Hodge, corpsman, said the crew had 4 back-to-back patrols without liberty and had "shared stress.

A seaman was killed by a rupturing high pressure valve which lacerated his Vena Cava. It was probably due to a tiny nick in the packing of the valve during maintenance. Flager didn't accept the XOs suggestion for burial at sea and ordered the food cooked and the ice cream eaten so they could use the freezer for a morgue. At dinner Manetti brought up a "cursed boat" and was shot down by Flagler. Hodge announced that seaman Bluestein had "hepatitis A" so everyone had to be tested. Harm deduced that someone was trying to hurt people because the crew hadn't been ashore in four patrols to contract Hepatitis-A. He and Manetti thought it might be the XO due to his lack of empathy for the crew and being the only one on the watch that didn't get sick. He told Harm that he
was the only one who was allergic to wheat and didn't eat the pancakes. Flagler was angry that they woke him up with their accusations and no back-up.

Manetti told Harm that if they pursued the case so aggressively they would "be the most unpopular guests at the party". So Harm asked Bud to check the records of all the crew. While he had Bud on the line Bud asked him what it was like on a submarine. Harm told him, "You can find out by throwing away all your fresh fruit and vegetables, putting lube oil in your humidifier, sleeping on a shelf in the closet and going to work before sunrise."

Harm asked Bud to put Sarah on the line and he asked her how Diane and Sarah Cate were doing. "They come over to our house or John and I go over to your house so they're not getting too lonely," Sarah had told him.

"I really appreciate that we have you and John," Harm said wistfully, obviously missing his family.

"I'll send them your love Harm," Sarah said as she gave the phone over.

Chegwidden came on the line and told him, "Make sure you're operating with the full consent of the skipper and don't do anything irregular, unlawful or ill advised."

Later that day Bud called back and informed Harm that the crew were outstanding and mentioned that Hodge received commendations two times before for outbreaks of Legionnaire's disease and serious bacterial infection - three epidemics in a row on two different boats! That raised Harm's suspicions.

Harm went to the infirmary and found an empty bottle of ipecac (emetic) syrup. So he confronted Hodge. Harm accused Hodge of suffering with Munchausen's By Proxy Syndrome. He called Traci down to the infirmary. Afraid of being found out Hodge struck him in the throat causing the bruised larynx and a spasm then Hodge injected him with a sedative. When Traci came Harm couldn't speak. She told Hodge to accompany her to the bridge to inform the CO. Harm got to the computer and emailed Traci's PDA that it was Hodge.

Hodge splashed ammonia in Traci's eyes but she kicked him to the ground and ran into the infirmary. She and Harm hid in the bulkheads but Hodge came in and tried to inject Harm again. He dropped the syringe when Harm hit him but had the advantage and slammed Harm around. Traci turned on steam jets; but, when Harm was downed, she was choked into unconsciousness by Hodge. Harm stuck him in the back with the syringe to subdue him and rescue Traci. Harm had to resort to emergency mouth to mouth resuscitation to revive Traci.

Harm was still hoarse when they left the ship. Flager was down on himself for hand picking Hodge. Harm and Traci gave him encouragement. He told her that "healthy self-criticism was useful but we should never underestimate our support." He said "you two are quite a team. Do you always work this well together?"

Traci told him "when he lets me do the talking."

Harm sat back and laughed at the last part. When he returned home, Diane said that it was the quietest time she ever had at home while he was there.
Tuesday, March 16, 1999
1030 Local Time

Andrews Air Force Base Naval Annex

NCIS was notified of an unknown girl who was beaten to death on naval property. Her body was
being turned over to the DC coroner's office. John assigned Agent Mary Holland to investigate.
Holland found that although the little girl was not a student, she stowed away on the school bus
touring the base and apparently sneaked away. It seemed that someone from the Navy was chasing
her down. Agent Holland found a Master Chief's insignia in the girl's hand.

AJ assigned Harm and Sarah to coordinate the NCIS investigation with JAG. Sarah knew that wasn't
a problem since John was also running the legal department at NCIS.

While there Harm seemed contemplative and saw the girl in sort of a vision. Sarah could tell that
Harm had the "same look in his eye" as when he was chasing his father and defending Roscoe
Martin. "Be careful that you don't get to drawn in that you forget what's important, like your family"
Sarah advised him.

"Don't worry, I know where my priorities lie," Harm said trying to reassure her.

When they got back to JAG Headquarters he asked AJ to be assigned to stay with NCIS on the case.
AJ agreed saying, "Don't step on your brother in laws toes. I know he'll make sure everything is
done right."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm said as he walked out of AJ's office.

Later when he arrived at NCIS Harm sat with John, "Would you mind if I assist Agent Holland on
this case. There's something about it that's eating at me. I feel that the little girl needs an advocate."

"That's no problem Harm what do you need us to do?" John asked.

"Well the DC coroner seems overwhelmed. I would like Dr. Mallard and Commander Coulter to do
a more thorough autopsy."

"No problem I'll call the DC Coroner and have the body brought here."

Wednesday, March 17, 1999
1230 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters Autopsy Lab

Dr. Coulter and Dr, Mallard did perform a more thorough autopsy. They found that the child died
from severe abuse including being locked away and needing to eat paper to survive.

Harm was so shaken by this news he went to ATAC to get Diane and then they left NCIS and went
to the Navy Yard Day Care Center. Harm took his daughter and Diane to lunch just to see their smiling faces. When they dropped little Sarah back at daycare Harm gave her such a tight hug that Sarah giggled saying, "Daddy squishing me." Harm gave her a kiss and then he and Diane went back to NCIS.

Diane gave Harm a tight hug of her own. Diane told Harm, "Don't worry about us. Finish this case."

Harm walked away wondering how he got so lucky to have such an understanding wife.

Thursday, March 18, 1999

0930 Local Time

Oak Hill Cemetery, NW

Washington, DC

The next day Harm, Diane and Coulter held a burial service and reading from the bible.

Then they went back to NCIS. Harm went to work with Mary Holland. They found out that no one reported a child missing. Harm called Bud and asked him to do some research. Bud found records of a convicted child abuser living in the area with his brother who was a master chief. Harm, Bud and Holland tailed the man, William Hawkins. They approached him when he stopped for a hot dog. They harassed him until he told them where he saw the child and that he was worried she was being abused but was afraid to report that he knew.

1245 Local Time

Tubman Projects

Washington, DC

Harm and Holland took a drawing around to the neighborhood and found a woman who would tell him where she saw the girl if Harm would track down her deadbeat navy husband. Harm agreed. The woman told them that the girl lived with her aunt Marjorie Lewis who moved out with "Charlie" one week prior, in a hurry without notice. She said that the girl never spoke and didn't even say thanks when she was given one of her husband's insignias.

15 45 Local Time

Office of Social Services

North Mountain, Maryland

Given this information Harm and Holland went to Child Services. There a social worker told them that the girl's name was Annie Lewis and her mother died 3 years previously. She was given to her maternal grandmother to raise, but she died 6 months previously and Annie was lost to the records. She said she couldn't legally give Harm the address but left the chart out where he could see it. The address was to an abandoned house.

When Harm and Holland got there Harm said, "The child was here." As they looked around the house, they found a closet. There was a blanket on the floor and some childlike drawings on the walls.

"This where she was locked up," Harm exclaimed.
As they exited the closet Harm and Holland were startled. They saw the dead girl peering at them from around a corner. They followed her and cornered her in a hiding place.

"Please don't hurt me. I'll be good," she said pitifully.

"Don't worry sweetheart no one is going to hurt you," Holland said in a reassuring tone. "What's your name dear?" Mary asked.

"Dar Lin,' Said the girl.

"Dar Lin, do you have a sister?" Harm asked.

"Yes her name is Annie," Dar Lin said.

"What happened to Annie?" Harm asked.

"They grabbed Annie but I got away. Charlie had locked us in the closet. He had told them that he would stomp our head if we weren't good," Dar Lin said with obvious fear.

Harm promised her he would find Charlie and make him pay. Holland and Harm took Dar Lin to Child Services. Dar Lin was placed in a good foster home. Harm and Diane then went to Annie's gravesite. They agreed that Annie should have and paid for a proper gravestone engraved with her name. Harm made the promise that her murderer would be found.

Friday, March 19, 1999

1030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm and Holland reached the point in a case where there seemed to be diminishing returns. John advised Harm, "Return back to JAG. Mary Holland will pursue the case as vigorously as her own case load allowed. You can pursue it independently from NCIS but under the condition that all the information be forwarded to Agent Holland for proper action and Admiral Chegwidden didn't have a problem with it."

Harm reluctantly agreed. He took copies of the case file to JAG. He left it on his desk to follow up with JAG business that he had let pile up while he was pursuing Annie's murder. He inadvertently put some other case files on top of Annie's.

Harriet came in asking for a particular case file. Harm gave her the case file she was looking for. He wasn't paying attention and he also gave Annie's file to Harriet. She bumped into Bud as he brought her a newspaper that AJ gave him. The paper had a list of those officers that passed the Bar exam. Bud's name was on it.

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Harriet accidentally dropped the folders she was carrying. Photographs of Annie's autopsy fell and spread out on the floor. Harm saw that he gave her the wrong file and went to assist her in gathering them up. She freaked out when she saw them and chastised Harm for taking the case when he didn't have to and getting Bud involved. She slugged Harm on his shoulder.

Chegwidden happened to be walking through the bullpen at that time. He saw Harriet's distress and called out gently but sternly to Bud. "Lieutenant, take care of your wife."

Bud gently helped Harriet up and went to lead her away out of the bullpen. Sarah also saw the incident and directed Bud to bring Harriet into her office. Emma got up and brought some water.
Everything then went back to normal in the bullpen.

Later that day after she had calmed down Harriet sat down at her desk and typed a letter. She went into the Admiral's office with it.

"Sir I would like you to consider this," Harriet said as she handed AJ the letter and he read it.

"Lieutenant, this is your resignation," AJ said incredulously.

"Yes sir I know. I struck an officer," Harriet insisted.

"All I saw was you making an exaggerated gesture which by chance struck the commander," AJ said. He tore up her resignation and muttered, "I can't count the number of times I thought about hitting Rabb."

Harriet left his office felling loads better. Right after that Harm swore in Bud as a new Lieutenant.

After Bud took the Officer's Oath he announced, "Harriet and I are having a wet down at McMurphy's tonight starting at 1900." Everyone applauded.

Bud approached Sarah as they walked into her office. "Colonel may I please have Ann Marie Matthews number. I'd like to invite her and Peter. And of course the Captain is invited."

"Of course here's Ann Marie's office number at the White House. I'm sure she and Pete would love to come and I think I can get my husband to come," Sarah said mischievously as she wrote Ann Marie's number down.

As Bud exited Sarah saw Harm passing by her office and called him in.

"What's up with the Dar Lin case? Are you done with it?" Sarah asked.

"I just need to do one more thing with it. I spoke with Diane about it and she's supporting me. You know she majored in psychology at Annapolis. Dar Lin is very withdrawn and Diane thinks that she needs a lot of therapy. So I called in Jordan Parker. I didn't know any other psychiatrist that I could trust to help her. After hearing Dar Lin and Annie's story she volunteered to be the psychiatrist for Dar Lin," Harm informed her.

"Well I hope it helps," Sarah said as Harm left. She called John to tell him about the wet down at McMurphy's.

As she sat down she rubbed her eyes. They were getting very irritated much more frequently since she been pregnant. She got her purse and went into the ladies room. When she got in there she fished out her contact lens case and solution. She took her contacts out and put them away in the case. She wasn't blind without them only slightly over moderately nearsighted. She then got her eyeglasses out of her purse, cleaned them and put them on. They were fashionable looking. Sarah didn't usually wear them at the office because she was somewhat vain about them. She remembered when she was a little girl she wore thick framed glasses and the other kids made fun of her. Her parents couldn't afford the better-looking sets and she was forced to wear the more nerdy looking glasses. As soon as she could afford them she started wearing the contacts. She hated that the Marines made her wear the more sturdy nerdy frames when she was in combat. She enjoyed that she worked in the office and could wear the contacts. John liked how she looked in her 'nice' glasses and she loved that she could relax in them at home. But dealing with the baby made it more tedious to keep up the contact lens maintenance that she took for granted before she was pregnant.

When she emerged from the ladies room, some staff in the bullpen did double takes. They had never
seen her in glasses. When she passed Emma she said, "Eyes bothering you ma'am?"

"Yeah I don't have the time to deal with my contacts right now. I'll clean them at home," Sarah confirmed.

"Yeah I know. I did the same thing when I was pregnant. Sometimes the hassle isn't worth our vanity ma'am," Emma said.

Sarah had to smile at that.

1945 Local Time

McMurphy's Tavern

Harriet was setting up the party at McMurphy's celebrating Bud's passing the Bar and promotion as Harm walked in with Diane. Harriet approached them, "Sir I'm so sorry for hitting you like that. I was just so distressed at seeing those photos of that poor little girl. I know you were only trying to prevent it from happening again to her sister."

"Harriet, please don't worry about it. It was nothing. Besides if everyone who wanted to hit me resigned, we would lose half the Navy," Harm said reassuring her.

"Thank you sir, I do feel much better," Harriet said.

Just then there was a large influx of people as McMurphy's was being filled with the JAG staff. Then John walked in with Sarah. Harriet had to do a double take. Sarah was wearing her glasses and her fur coat. She wasn't in the office when Sarah took her contacts out earlier that day.

"Colonel, I didn't know you needed glasses," Harriet asked.

Sarah explained, "My contacts have been bothering me lately so I just decided to give my eyes a rest for the weekend. Also Harriet, when I'm out of uniform and away from JAG, please call me Sarah or Mac and that's an order."


Ann Marie and Peter showed up a few minutes later. Diane and Ann Marie hired sitters to watch Sarah Cate & Andy at John & Sarah's. Then AJ and Sydney walked in.

John saw a perfect opportunity. John's new hobby was photography. He picked it up working with the investigators at NCIS as they used their cameras extensively at crime scenes and such. Tonight he brought his camera as he hoped Ann Marie would not be tied up in White House business and was able to attend. Now that she was there, John got the four expectant mothers together. He led them over to a nice wall that he would use for a pretty background. He took some photos of them sitting, standing and then he had AJ take a portrait photo of the mothers sitting with their husbands standing behind them singly and then in a group.

"I've been waiting to do that since I found out all four of you were expecting. I'll have some nice portraits ready by Mother's Day," John said.

Everyone was enthusiastic at the plan. The rest of the evening went by very pleasantly.

The men gravitated to the pool table. There they indulged in the usual joking, ribbing and taunting associated with the game.
At one point Sarah, Diane, Harriet, Meg, Traci, Sydney and Ann Marie were sitting with Carolyn Imes and Loren Singer. Loren was asking Ann Marie a lot of questions about working at the White House. Ann Marie was starting to get exasperated at the probing.

"Loren, give it a rest, please. It's a lot of work and a lot of pressure. I don't have any war stories to tell you. When John and I lived in the same house and saw each other for dinner, I didn't even tell him. Besides, here we are at a nice party, and all we're talking about is work. Let's relax and have a good time. Since having Andy, this is my first Friday night out with adult company in a long time."

Carolyn added, "You're right. Besides with you and Mac here we can finally get some dirt on your brother. He was very guarded when he worked at JAG. He would disappear every night and weekend. No one could get him to go out or to do anything non-military. Then you (motioning toward Sarah) show up and it's like a light switch was thrown. We saw him out and about with you more than ever before. What happened on that first mission besides doing what you did to win the 'Legion of Merit'?"

Ann Marie piped up. "Yeah Sarah what happened? I told you when we first met that John never stopped talking about you at home. We all know the details of the mission and what you had to do to accomplish it. But he never specifically said what happened between you two during that mission and then the trial."

Sarah blushed at the memory. Harriet saw it and exclaimed, "I wasn't at JAG yet and Bud told me that something happened between you two. Come on Mac spill."

Sarah was sitting next to Ann Marie and she gave her hand a squeeze and a loving smile. "As we were driving to Red Rock I caught him staring at me. He was so embarrassed and I thought that it was so cute. He apologized then he told me I was pretty or to quote him exactly, 'you're quite pretty you know Major'," Sarah said shyly.

"And then what?" Singer asked.

"And then nothing, the only other thing he said after the apology was to tell me about himself and only after I asked him. It had to be the shortest vocal biography I ever heard. Then he asked me what I had in mind to complete the mission. After we did what we did, we didn't talk personally until we got back to Washington a few weeks later. We had a long talk in my apartment. He left at 0200 that night," Sarah said.

"So he wasn't the one to spend the night was he?" Carolyn asked suggestively.

"Let me tell you something ladies. My husband was the perfect gentleman. He never asked to sleep with me. He never pushed our relationship beyond the parameters of friendship until the day he told me that he was in love with me."

"When was that?" Harriet asked interrupting.

Sarah answered, "Back in August 97. We just finished that case with the SEAL who had his friend step in front of him as he shot some terrorists."

The ladies looked at her in confusion not knowing which one.

"You know when Harm shot holes in the ceiling."

Then the ladies got it. It was the most famous incident in the office.

"Well we were back at his house. We were relaxing waiting for our pizza to arrive. He said he had to
"Tell me something. He seemed real shy about it."

"My brother was shy! He's never been shy about anything," Ann Marie said.

"Well this time he was. It was so cute. So I asked him what? He said simply but definitively, "Sarah I've fallen in love with you."

"And?" Harriet asked again.

Sarah smiled mischievously and said, "Then the pizza came."

"Oooohhhhhhh!" the other five ladies groaned. Sydney, Diane and Ann Marie knew the rest. They all got up smiling and Ann Marie said, "We're going to the pool table to check on our 'significant others'. There are some things that sisters and even her brother's doctor don't need to hear. They fall under the category of "too much information". Sarah, feel free to tell the details and we'll be back in a few minutes."

The other ladies watched as Sydney, Ann Marie and Diane walked away. They waited till they were out of ear shot then descended on Sarah, peppering her with endless questions.

"Alright let me go back to the beginning. I was just as attracted to John as he was to me. Admiral Chegwidden told us that he saw the way we looked at each other when we met in the Rose Garden before that first case. I mean that smile, those green eyes and let me tell you ladies those muscles. I got a good look at him when we left JAG to stop at the house and he had to change into his khakis. After he got his pants changed he told me to come in. That was the first time I saw his…"

"What?" Harriet asked.

"Arms, I mean they were beautiful still are, even after the shooting. He works out religiously. Also his body, oh boy," Sarah said.

That did it for Loren. "Alright Mac cut to the chase. What happened after the pizza? Get back to the real interesting part."

"Well that is when I found that my husband really loved and cherished me. I mean after we got married we had no problem making this baby. John is a very generous, attentive and caring lover. It was the best and still is the best sex I believe any women could have. And that is all I'm going to say about it," Sarah said.

The other ladies just stared back at her with their mouths open. Sydney, Ann Marie and Diane saw their expressions and took that as their cue to return.

"So you all got past the details huh girls," Diane said.

"Yeah we did. But there is still one thing I don't understand. Why did his saying you were pretty turn you on so much? I mean look at yourself Mac, even pregnant you're beautiful," Carolyn said.

Tracy, Meg, Sydney, Harriet and Loren agreed. Again Ann Marie & Diane knew the story.

Sarah blushed at their genuine compliment. She explained, "Well growing up I was a gawky tomboy, I had big ears and as you can see I needed glasses. I've been wearing them since before I could remember. My parents could only afford what the medical insurance said we could have. You know the ones with thick black or brown plastic frames that were too thick and too pointed and so forth. Anyway because I looked so awkward, the boys were only interested in playing ballgames and tag with me. Boys called me four eyes, ugly, big ears and everything that goes with that. The pretty
girl cliques never wanted to have anything to do with me. So I began to think that I was ugly. Even when puberty hit and I grew into my ears and I blossomed, I was still wearing the nerdy glasses, I wasn't into or didn't know about cosmetics or make-up. Then I started drinking and everything bad that could happen along with that happened. Then my uncle took me and dried me out and I joined the Marines. You all know as well as I do that the Drill Instructors never tell you that you're pretty. They call you slut, broad ass marine, skank, whore and such just to break you down to rebuild you.

Well when John said how pretty I was, I went over the moon. It was the first time that a guy ever told me that without the foreplay. I mean right at that point the 'Love At First Sight' theory was firmly confirmed for me. The rest is history. I will say this though. It's because of John and the support and love he gives me that I'm able to sit here in a bar and speak with all of you about myself. Since knowing him I have learned that everything you do in the past, no matter how bad, makes you the person you are today and as long as you make the right choice somewhere along the way, you'll come out alright in the end."

"So that's what the L*A*F*S and the date on your pendent means," Harriet said indicating Sarah's pendent that John gave her a year ago Christmas.

"Yeah it even has pictures of both Baby Sarahs inside,' Sarah said opening it up to show everyone.

All the women oohed and aahed over the babies' pictures. After that night all the other officers, even Singer had a new appreciation for their Colonel and her husband.

Monday, March 22, 1999

1005 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah and Bud were working in her office. Bud was going to prosecute his first case as first chair and Sarah was helping prep him.

When John left for NCIS Sarah took up his role of being the mentor officer to the enlisted and junior officer staff. Growing up she had a burgeoning desire to teach. Now she was really enjoying doing that as the young men and women in the corps unhesitatingly came to her for advice and tutoring. Bud was one of those officers.

Her team's work on organizing the legalities for the Russians to participate in the Balkan Peacekeeping process was also another task that she enjoyed. It was proceeding the way she wanted it to. She even had the team over to her home a few times as John gladly gave up the space in his 'man-cave' for the team to spread out and informally bounce ideas and cite laws and precedents. (The team enjoyed playing pool as they worked. Sarah was very amused that Loren Singer was the best pool player of the team.) Admiral Grafton and Admiral Chegwidden were very satisfied.

To make things even better Sarah had not had any morning sickness for the whole weekend as well as that morning.

She and Bud had just concluded their preparations when Bud heard a gruff but very familiar voice at Sarah’s office door.

"I heard you passed the bar. Think you can win your first case?" His father said. Bud was totally surprised to see him. He was just as surprised to see that his father was in uniform.
"Dad what's going on?" Bud asked skeptically.

"Buddy I need your help. The Navy wants to put me in jail,' Big Bud said solemnly.

He was ordered back to duty to stand court-martial for stealing VCRs and Televisions from the Navy while he was Chief of Stores on his base.

An owner of Dobie Electronics, Glen Dobie, was caught with stolen electronics having altered serial numbers. Dobie, was given immunity when he offered to give them Big Bud's name. All records had disappeared mysteriously.

He asked Bud to defend him and laid it on thick to Chegwidden about being proud of Bud and wanting to get closer to his kids. Chegwidden allowed Bud to defend him and said "God help you both".

Dobie said that Big Bud inspected machines, erroneously claiming that they were faulty. He gave the old machines to Dobie and ordered new ones. When the new VCRs and televisions came Dobie switched serial numbers and gave the old machines back to Big Bud, keeping and selling the new machines with the old serial numbers.

Big Bud met Dobie in the hall and slugged him. Bud had to drag him off and told Big Bud that he would defend him as a lawyer and NOT his son. He was to call him 'sir' from now on and not son or Bud.

Harm was appointed as the prosecutor. He offered to accept a plea until midnight. Big Bud had to give Bud a pep talk because Harm said that there were no holds barred and was psyching him out. Big Bud told Bud to use Harm's strengths against him- let him think he is better and then "Pow."

Mikey returned from boot camp all stiff and military, looking for his dad. He said that he was switching to combat ops (radar) instead of the art program that Bud spent so long getting him in to.

Harm found twenty seven units that had altered serial numbers and Bud had doubts that his dad was innocent so he talked to Mac. She said told him, "Harm's not invincible. I'll help you any way I can."

Harriet talked with Mac and said that Bud didn't have an aggressive bone in his whole body. Little did Harriet know that Bud was ripping into Dobie on the stand calling him a parasite.

Harm offered to drop the larceny charges for one year confinement. Bud turned it down and Mikey said, "Is this where Harm pulls a rabbit out of his hat."

Chegwidden told Harm, "Do not underestimate Bud, remember who his teachers were."

Harm talked to a sailor who worked for Big Bud who said that she saw a civilian come by who Big Bud agitatedly hustled away. He was in a "Dopey electronics" van. Harm got Dobie to tell him the name of the driver of the van- Jerry Kemp; but, he said that only Big Bud knew where he was.

Harm pressured Bud to help find Kemp and was chastised by Mac.

Harm said, "Bud can handle it,"

Mac retorted, "But can he handle being hurt by a friend."

Bud did get Kemp and Harm treated him as a "hostile witness" leading him into testifying damning evidence against Big Bud.
On cross-examination though, Bud got Kemp to believe that he was his father. He had Korsakoff's Syndrome and no short term memory. Kemp agreed with Harm because "he looked honest and figured he must know." The case was dropped and Harm congratulated him for a "brilliant diversionary tactic."

Later Harm confronted Big Bud, "You wanted Bud as your defense counsel for one reason only."

"Oh really what reason was that Commander?" Big Bud asked derisively.

"You did it so that when or if you lost, you could appeal claiming inadequate defense. You were willing to damage his career to get yourself off," Harm said.

All Big Bud could say was, "Are you going to tell him?"

"No and either will you." Harm warned him menacingly.

When Harm got back to his office he had a message from John. He called his brother in law.

"Mary Holland found a match on some fingerprints for Charlie Lynch and Dar Lin identified him from photos. He was dishonorably discharged 6 months ago. We don't have an idea where he is at this time. He's probably going to look for Dar Lin. Harm is she in a safe foster home?" John asked.

"Yeah she is. The only persons with the need to know outside your agency and Mary Holland are me, Diane and Jordan," Harm informed him.

"If that's the case be careful. No telling how dangerous he is," John said.

"Don't worry I'll be careful," Harm told John.

"Okay Harm. Are Sarah and I going to see you for dinner tonight?" John asked.

"For Sarah's seafood platter, you bet," Harm said appreciatively.
Chapter 41

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 41

Tuesday, April 27, 1999

1130 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah was in a good mood. She was in the middle of her second trimester and thus was past the morning sickness stage. She had her monthly exam the previous evening and Eve told her that the baby was fine, "Go home and continue to be happy." Eve said as they left.

Now she was sitting at her desk writing commendations for her team. They all did a great job preparing the legal plan for the Russians to participate fully in the Balkan Peace Process. The meeting presenting the plan was scheduled for right after lunch in the conference room.

She just finished writing the last commendation when her phone rang. She was puzzled as she looked at the caller ID screen and recognized a California area code.

"Lt Colonel Marshall." She said as she answered the phone.

The male voice on the other end said, "Oh I'm sorry, I was looking for Sarah Mackenzie."

"Yes that's me, Marshall is my married name." Sarah replied.

"Well my name is Father Genaro. I am the administrator for the Sacred Heart Hospice in Fresno, CA. Do you know Joseph Mackenzie?" Genaro asked.

Sarah froze as she realized this was not a happy call. "Ah yes he's my father." Sarah replied in a small voice.

"Well your father is a patient here. He was living in an SRO Hotel in Fresno where he was found unconscious in his room. He was brought to the emergency room. The doctors found that he had lung cancer which also spread to his liver which apparently was not in good shape to begin with." Genaro began to explain.

"Father, do you need money?" Sarah asked

"No, no we're set up principally for those who can't pay. Joseph and I have talked. He seems to have accepted his fate. But there seems to be a great deal of psychic pain." Genaro said.

"Father Genaro I haven't seen my father since I was 17, we're estranged," Sarah tried to explain.

"Yes that's been confirmed by him. But he; what do I call you colonel, Mrs.? Genaro asked.

"Mrs. Marshall is fine," Sarah said.

"Mrs. Marshall I think that is the point of my call. I believe it would be a great comfort to him if you
or other members of your family were present. In fact I've been trying to reach your mother. Do you know where I can contact her?” Genaro asked.

"No, I don't. We're also estranged," Sarah said.

"Oh, I believe he would want the both of you here you know to settle things." Genaro explained.

Sarah could not think of anything to say. Father Genaro stepped into the verbal gap.

"Mrs. Marshall would you like directions on how to get here?" he asked.

"Oh of course Father," Sarah stammered in embarrassment. She wrote the address of the hospice and the directions from the airport nearest the hospice.

She thanked Genaro for calling her. "I'll try to be there as soon as I can. I need to make some arrangements," she told him.

When she hung up her phone she called Emma in and asked her, "Do you think that you can run the meeting without me? The only thing I was going to do was introduce our team and what they were each going to speak on. Here's my presentation."

She handed the folder over to Emma.

"I think so Colonel. We did prepare it together and all," Emma said.

Then she took a closer look at Sarah's expression. Something was wrong with her Colonel. She wasn't totally there. The phone call she just got was bad news. She went to close the door and then went closer to Sarah's desk.

"Sarah is everything all right with the baby?" Emma asked showing her concern.

Sarah snapped out of it. She appreciated her yeoman's concern and smiled to show it. "Yes Emma everything there is fine. I just got a call from a hospice in Fresno, California. My father is a patient there and he's dying. He wants to see me. I'm so torn at what to do considering I haven't seen or talked to him in almost 15 years and the problems we had before that. I know John and I tried to find him for our wedding. But I have to confess that I was almost relieved that we didn't."

Emma sat down in the chair in front of Sarah's desk and told her, "Sarah you need to go. You need to tell him that you're all right and at peace. I know if my father was dying, problems or not, I would move heaven and earth to be there. It's a good thing that you're married. John would be great help right about now and you also have Commander Rabb here."

"Thank you Emma I needed to hear that. I was still so surprised and I couldn't think of what to do next. Could you please call Harm and the admiral and ask them to meet me in the admiral's office?"

"Of course ma'am," Emma said as she left the office. Sarah waited until Emma told her that Harm was on his way to AJ's office and AJ would be prepared to speak with her.

Sarah and Harm arrived at the admiral's office at the same time. Sarah insisted that Harm precede her in. When she entered she closed the door behind her. AJ thought something might be wrong. His Chief of Staff was acting totally out of character.

"Sir may I sit down?" Sarah asked.

Now he knew something was wrong. "Of course Colonel, is everything alright with the baby?"
Sarah smiled a sad smile and said, "Why does everyone go there. The baby is fine. I got a phone call from a priest who runs a hospice in Fresno California. It seems that my father is a patient there and is dying. He wants to see me before he dies. I'm not inclined to go because we've been estranged and I remember how abusive he was and...."

Sarah had stopped talking at that point

Harm filled the verbal gap and spoke up, "Sarah you need to go at least to get closure. I know the reason I was so driven to find my father was to see him one more time and I was years too late. You have an opportunity to at least try and set things right. Look at the place you're at now. Don't you think he needs to see that you came out alright?"

AJ spoke up, "Harm's right Mac. You need to go. Don't worry about the presentation I know you and your team were working very hard on it and it can wait until you get back. Take all the time you need. I know you need to call John and Harm you need to call Diane. Let me know if you need anything."

As Harm got up he saw AJ give a look to Sarah. She was just staring straight ahead. Harm touched her shoulder. She looked up startled then looked at AJ. "I'm sorry sir."

"It quite all right Sarah," AJ said. "Why don't you go with Harm and call your husband."

"Ah yes sir thank you sir," Sarah said as she got up.

As she walked out AJ spoke softly to Harm. "Harm, the last time I saw her like this was right after John was shot. I think she's going into shock. I want you to stay close to her. Do not let her drive home and make sure you, her yeoman or Harriet is in her office when she calls John or you call him yourself."

"Aye sir I'm on it," Harm assured him.

He followed Sarah into her office. He signaled Emma and Harriet to follow him in. Sarah sat down at her desk and did nothing else. "Emma, Harriet, stay with Sarah. I'm going to my office to call John and Diane."

The two women were immediately attentive and worried. Harm never used their first names at the office.

He ducked into his office and called NCIS. He got John right away. "John you need to come to JAG. Sarah just heard that her father is dying and she's gone into shut down mode. Could you tell Diane and bring her with you."

"Sure Harm I'm leaving here right now." John stopped at ATAC and told Diane what was up with Sarah and their father.

"I'm going to get Sarah Cate out of Daycare and I'll meet you at JAG," Diane said.

"Okay I'll see you there," John agreed.

It took John just five minutes to walk down the block to JAG. Sarah was still sitting at her desk with her hands across her baby bump. She hadn't done anything except stare out her window. John closed the door and the office blinds and knelt down in front of her chair. Harm, Emma and Harriet stood anxiously by not knowing what else to do.

He took hold of her hand and stroked it gently. "Honey look at me," he said.
Sarah slowly turned her head and looked right at him. It seemed that she saw him for the first time since he walked into the room. Then everyone saw her features collapse and a great wail escape her. John gently pulled her out of her chair and gathered her in his arms holding her tightly against his chest. They both knelt on the floor as she shuddered, crying out her grief in great wracking sobs. As John held on to his wife he motioned that everyone leave.

"We'll be fine now, she needed to do this," John told them.

Every one left the room. John stroked her back and let her have her cry. "Its okay sweetie let it all out."

Sarah did cry for a good long time. Her body shook as she sobbed in her quiet way. After about 10 minutes Sarah calmed down and lifted her head and said, "Can we get off the floor now?"

John looked at her, kissed her forehead and said, "Hey you. Welcome back."

They got up. Sarah was still in need of some comfort and held John in a longer hug.

After another 2 minutes she looked up at her husband with such love that it broke his heart. Without speaking she captured his lips in a deep, slow and loving kiss.

"What was that for?" John asked.

"Just for being there when I needed you," she said sniffling and stroking his cheek.

As she stood in John's embrace she felt the need to explain herself, saying, "Hearing from him after almost 15 years and that he was dying was all such a shock to me I didn't know what to do next. I didn't know how I should feel or to go or whatever. I didn't think about him I haven't even acknowledged his existence in so long, even after we tried to find him."

"I know sweetie, hearing that someone important to you is dying, no matter how you feel about them is always a shock. It's all right that you felt that way. I'm just glad I was here for you when you needed me," John said soothingly.

Sarah had finished crying and took a deep breath. She took some tissues to wipe her eyes and blew her nose before they went out the door.

While John was comforting Sarah; Harm, Emma and Harriet waited outside Harm's office. Their eyes were riveted to Sarah's door. Admiral Chegwidden came over to them and asked, "How's the Colonel?"

"John is in with her sir. You were right. She was in shock and didn't know what to do next. Then John came in and when she recognized him, she just lost it. She had a real good cry," Harm told him.

"Well at times like this, that's the only thing that makes sense," AJ said.

AJ was just about to say something else when he saw Sarah's office door open. Sarah and John emerged holding hands. They saw AJ and the rest standing at Harm's office and walked over to the group.

"Feeling better Colonel?" AJ asked seeing her red-rimmed eyes and nose.

"Yes sir, John helped get me squared away," Sarah said looking at her husband with a smile.

"What do you need to do now Mac?" AJ asked.
"Well I have to make arrangements for John and me to go to Fresno to see my father. Harm could you and Diane please come with us?"

Just then Diane walked up to them. She was holding Sarah Cate. "Auntie Mac!" Sarah Cate said squirming out of her mother's arms and running to her aunt Sarah. Big Sarah picked up little Sarah and held her in a long tight hug.

Diane had heard Sarah ask if she could come with her, "Of course we're coming. What are sisters for?"

AJ said, "I think I can spare the two of you for the rest of the week. Just let me know please if you need more time and I'll make the arrangements. Now go on get out of here."

"Thank you sir," Harm and Sarah said.

1230 Local Time

Marshall Residence

and

White House

John and Sarah went home to fetch their overnight bags. He called Admiral Magnum and asked to use the NCIS Gulfstream. Unfortunately it was unavailable. A team responding to a case in Jacksonville was using it. In the meantime Sarah had called Ann Marie to tell her what was happening with her father. Ann Marie was with the President when she got the news. After Ann Marie got through with the call President Bartlett got on the phone with Sarah.

"Colonel, I'm sorry to hear about your father. Where is he right now?" Bartlett asked.

Sarah said, "At a hospice in Fresno sir."

"Have you made travel arrangements yet?" Bartlett asked.

"Not yet sir," Sarah replied.

"Alright stay at home and I'll call you back," Bartlett said.

Bartlett called out, "Mrs. Landingham."

Delores Landingham walked in and almost indulgently asks, "Yes Mr. President?"

"Place a call the dispatcher at the Executive Air Wing at Andrews please."

"Yes Mr. President."

As Bartlett was on the call Ann Marie heard only his end of the conversation.

"Captain Nuncio this is the President. Do we have any jets going to the West Coast today?" Bartlett asked.

"There's one going to LAX at 1430? Good, do you have room for have five passengers who need to go to Fresno? Good, can you please wait for them and then alter the flight plan to stop there before LAX?"
Good, I have three Navy officers, 1 Marine officer and a small child." He gave the dispatcher their names."

"Is there anyone else? Hold on please."

Holding his hand over the mouthpiece, he asked Ann Marie, "I can spare you if you and Pete need to go. Sam Seaborn can do the Press briefings," Bartlett offered.

"Uh let me talk to Sarah first. There so much I need to do before I can go. Packing and taking care of Andy maybe cutting it a bit too close and they have to get out there quickly," Ann Marie explained.

"Yeah you're right," Bartlett said. He returned to the phone saying, "Okay only the five people I mentioned. Thank you Captain." Bartlett hung up the phone.

"Thank you sir, I'll make arrangements to go in the morning," Ann Marie said.

"Right, tell Sam what's going on and make your arrangements," the President said. Then he called Sarah back and told her about the flight arrangements.

1600 Local Time

Fresno Yosemite International Airport

To

Hospice of the Sacred Heart

Fresno, CA

After hearing about the flight plans, John made reservations at a Fresno Holiday Inn and then made arrangements to rent a minivan for the five adults and child.

On the flight out John, Sarah, Harm and Diane had a long talk.

John was telling Sarah, "Honey you told me that during the times your father was sober, there were times he was nice to be around, even after your mother left. He used to cook for you and keep the house clean and so on. Also he didn't fight with you like he fought with your mother."

"Well he was a very mean drunk. Those were the times that he called me his stupid tramp daughter. But you're right living with him alone was quieter than having my mother there. My grades did go up and it was easier to study. Uncle Matt told me that I started drinking because I wanted to shut off the responsibility of taking care of him," Sarah admitted.

Diane picked it up, "Well yeah that's more responsibility that anybody 15 to 18 years old should have. You have to understand your, or our father, was a very needy man and he needed someone to take care of him. Didn't you tell me that when you left, he went off the deep end? First our mother left him, then you and then the Marines discharged him. He may have been dealing with a lot of abandonment issues. He was probably ashamed at being drunk and admitting that he needed someone to take care of him. Also that's probably why he didn't contact you for almost 15 years."

Sarah sighed, "You're right. I shouldn't go in there angry. He doesn't need that now and either do I." Sarah then went on to tell some of the nicer stories about her father.

When they landed they picked up the rental minivan and drove 30 minutes to the Hospice.

When they pulled up to the Hospice, John and Harm let Sarah and Diane precede them to the front
desk. Father Genaro was there. He was quite surprised to see two sisters. "I didn't know Joseph had another daughter."

"He didn't know either," Sarah said. "Let us see him first and I'll come out and explain."

When Genaro led them to Joe's room, he was asleep.

"He naps on and off during the day and night. If you'd like to wait, he may wake up soon," Genaro offered.

"That's fine, we'll wait," Sarah said as she and Diane pulled up chairs to either side of his bed. John and Harm took little Sarah to a lounge to keep her occupied.

Eventually Joe woke up. He looked at Diane in her Navy uniform and said, "Sarah, I thought you were a Marine?"

Before Diane could correct him, Sarah spoke, "I'm here Daddy." Joe turned to her voice and saw Sarah in her Marine uniform. They could see the confusion on his face.

Sarah took her father's hand and told him, "Daddy this is your other daughter, Diane. We're twins."

"Twins, Deanne didn't have twins," Joe said in confusion.

Sarah told him, "Daddy, think back to when I was born. You were in Viet Nam. Mama hid the fact that she was pregnant with twins from you, even me."

Diane picked up the story, "She gave me up for adoption to one of the obstetric nurses who worked at the hospital in Yuma. Their names were Michael and Ellen Schonke. They died a few years ago. They left me a letter explaining what Deanne did."

Diane pulled the letter out of her purse and gave it to Joe to read. He couldn't focus on the page. He had to hold it very close. Sarah pulled out her glasses and gave them to him to use.

"Just like when you were little and my glasses broke," Joe said. Sarah smiled and nodded yes. He put them on and read Ellen's letter.

Diane looked at Sarah quizzically at the surprisingly tender moment. Sarah explained, "Daddy and I are both nearsighted. Daddy was always losing or breaking his glasses. He would borrow mine for reading the morning paper and such. He never went out of the house with them, they were too girly looking."

Joe finished reading the letter and he was crying. He said, "Why did she do that? Why did she hide one of my babies from me? I would have loved you just the same. I'm so sorry that I didn't tell you that I loved you Sarah I'm so sorry for everything I did, for not loving you enough to stay."

"It's okay Daddy, don't worry about that. We're both here now and we have another surprise for you," Sarah said with a catch in her voice. Then Diane got up and called Harm and John to bring in little Sarah.

Diane introduced them, "Daddy this is my husband Harmon Rabb and our daughter Sarah Catherine Rabb."

Sarah introduced John, "And this is my husband John Marshall." John and Harm walked over to Joe and shook his hand. "Pleased to meet you sir," they both said.
"Also Daddy, we're both going to have more babies," Sarah said patting her belly as Diane did the same.

Sarah Cate then climbed onto Joe's bed and said, "Gintdpia?"

"I guess I am if Diane is my daughter," Joe said.

"Hugs?" Little Sarah crawled up onto his chest and lay down. Joe was crying at that point, he just wrapped his arms around her small body. Sarah and Diane were holding each of their husbands and softly crying.

Little Sarah got off him and stood with her father. Joe looked at Diane and asked, "Tell me all about you. Where did you grow up, how did you meet your husband, everything."

Diane said, "Are you sure you want to hear it all now? It's a long story."

"I need to hear it now. Just start talking I want to get to know my new daughter before I go."

Sarah spoke up, "Daddy, I heard all this before. I'm going to give you and Diane some of the alone time you haven't had. I'm going to talk with Father Genaro." She kissed her father's forehead before she left.

As Diane started her story, Sarah, John and Harm walked out with little Sarah. She suggested that they go the Holiday Inn to register them all. "We'll call you when we're ready to leave here or if anything changes," Sarah told them.

She kissed Harm's cheek and hugged him and then she gave her husband a long hug and loving kiss. "I love you baby," Sarah told John.

"I love you to sweetie," John said.

Sarah found Father Genaro in his office. After telling Genaro Diane's story and what Deanne did she asked him, "Father how long has Daddy been here?"

"He's been here two weeks. The owner of the SRO hotel where your father was living found him unconscious one day and called the police. They brought him to the hospital. As I said on the phone the cancer advanced into his liver, making it terminal. The Chaplain at the hospital arranged for him to come here."

Sarah said, "Father I have to confess when I heard that he was dying I was torn between sadness and gratitude. If it weren't for my family I probably would not have come here or I would have come in an angrier state of mind as I remembered all the abuse he gave me. There are scars there, what's left of my soul is covered with them. Up until now he never said he loved me or was proud of me, he hated my boyfriends. He used to refer to me as his stupid tramp daughter," Sarah said in dismay.

"You came here to find answers right?" Genaro asked.

"Yeah, I guess," Sarah said.

"As you now found out your father loved you very, very much." Genaro explained.

"Then why didn't he say it before now?" Sarah asked.

"He obviously didn't know how to express it. The hostility came from a feeling of inadequacy. He hated your boyfriends because they had your respect. That sent him into a downward spiral his
drinking got worse." Genaro said.

"Much?" Sarah asked incredulously.

"How long did you stay with him after your mother left?"

"Two years my junior year in high school I ran away."

Abandonment is a continuing theme in his life."

"You know Father my family and I had a long talk on the way out here. We came to the same conclusion. What do you know about the rest of it?"

"Well after his discharge from the Corps he played drums with a road house band that traveled around a lot. He was employed mostly as a security guard. He tried opening a frozen yogurt shop in Laughlin, Nevada. It went under. He spent two years in prison for tax evasion. He had girlfriends on and off. Most of them left him at some point except for one and she killed herself.

Sarah cried out, "Oh wait till Saint Peter takes a look at that resume."

"Well that's why he wanted you and your mother here, to acknowledge the presence of God, to apologize for his misspent life and to ask for your forgiveness." Genaro explained again.

Sarah was starting to feel sorry for her father and how he spent his wretched life, "Father, do you think that God was punishing him with all this pain and his suffering for how he treated my mother and what he put her through?"

"Yeah father I would like to hear your answer." said a woman from the door.

Sarah jumped in her chair startled. She recognized the voice. She turned to see her mother Deanne standing in the doorway.

Sarah got up from her chair, "Mama?"

"Yeah it's me honey, more of me than you remembered," Deanne replied.

Before Deanne could continue Genaro suggested, "I can let you use my office if you need to talk in private."

"No father we'll go outside on the porch," Sarah suggested.

After they both walked out to the porch and sat down, Deanne exclaimed, "'Oh my poor feet phlebitis, thank God for disability,"

When she settled Deanne took a good look at Sarah. "My God you're beautiful, even in that uniform and it looks like you're going to have a baby. When did you get married?"

"Last October 24. John my husband and I tried to find you and Daddy to let you know, but we didn't have any address. Where have you been?" Sarah asked in annoyance.

"I've been traveling around I never could settle in one place. I didn't have any real skills to hold a decent job. Whenever I got laid off or fired, I would just move on. It was only sheer luck that Father Genaro found me to tell me about your father," Deanne explained.

Sarah didn't say anything and there was an uncomfortable silence then Deane asked Sarah, "Why did you join the Marines?"
"I didn't join because of him, Uncle Matt inspired me," Sarah explained.

"Oh how is he?" Deanne asked.

He's in Leavenworth for stealing the Declaration of Independence." Sarah said almost proudly.

"Oh" Deanne said not knowing what else to say.

"You know I stayed with him for a while." Sarah said.

I don't know anything honey. The first I heard about you was when I got a message from this priest. I was living in Sacramento I only just settled there last month. He said he searched the Social Security Data base and found where my Social Security checks were going. That's where he called me. He said you'd be here which is why I came. It certainly wasn't because of Joe Mackenzie.

Sarah stared at her mother for a few seconds.

Deanne felt uncomfortable and said, "I don't look too good do I?"

Sarah answered, "No just different."

"I've only been heavy the last two years. I'm an embarrassment." Deanne said.

Sarah took both her hands saying, "Please."

Deanne went on to explain, "You must hate me. The night I left was your fifteenth birthday. You were at a sleep over at Cheryl's house. Remember? Your father came home from the NCO club, puked on the kitchen table and accused me of having an affair. I tried to calm him down like usual but this time he put a paring knife to my throat. He drew some blood and told me he was going to cut me up into little pieces and use me for rabbit food. I took the threat seriously."

"Where did you go?" Sarah asked.

"Portland, I didn't plan it. I just got on a bus and got off when it stopped," Deanne said

Sarah sighed

"What?" Deanne asked.

Sarah said almost crying, "You left me with him."

"Did he hurt you?" Deanne asked frightened of the answer.

"Not physically."

Deanne almost breathed a sigh of relief and then said, "I know he picked on you and gave ya a hard time. But I also knew he never would have hurt you and that's what let me sleep at night."

"Why didn't you try and contact me?" Sarah asked plaintively her anger rising.

"I tried to call on and off for a month after I left but Joe always picked up the phone, and a letter would have never gotten by him. Then later I stopped calling or trying to find you because I was afraid that you would be so angry and that you wouldn't believe me and I was too fragile to handle the rejection." Deanne whined.

"Yeah well I was angry. You left me when I needed your help more than ever. I'm even angrier now
because you left me alone with him knowing he could have turned violent. Thank God he never laid a hand on me. He just got drunk all the time and yelled at me. More times than not I just walked away from him and locked myself in my room. I left him because I got tired of living with the yelling and the abuse." Sarah said almost yelling at Deanne.

"Where did you go?" Deanne asked.

"I went to live with my friend Eddie in his house. He just let me alone and let me drink," Sarah said.

"What happened to him?" Deanne asked.

"On the night of my prom I was in a car with Eddie and we had an accident. I was too drunk to drive and so was he, but he drove anyway. He died from his injuries. I called home from the hospital and got Daddy. He was too drunk to do anything or even care. So I called Uncle Matt. He came and got me then he took me somewhere to dry me out. If it wasn't for Uncle Matt I probably would have ended up like daddy."

"Obviously he did something right. You did well for yourself and you found a husband. Is he in the military? How does he treat you?" Deanne asked.

"Yes he's in the Navy. We met when we were assigned to work a case together. He treats me like I'm the greatest prize he ever won," Sarah answered.

Telling her mother about how good her husband was helped to calm herself down. She knew getting angry wasn't good for her baby. She asked her mother, "Why did you come back this time?" Sarah asked.

"This time I said the hell with it. I'm gonna see my daughter," Deanne said.

"Well momma you're going to see both of us. Wait here," Sarah said as she went inside to get Diane.

When Sarah returned with Diane, Deanne could barely contain herself.

"Hello mother my name is Diane Elizabeth," Diane said as she met her birth mother for the first time.

Deanne approached Diane and touched her cheek and then her baby belly, "Oh my God you're just as beautiful as Sarah. I totally lost track of where that nurse and her husband went to live after they adopted you and I'm going to be a Grandmother twice. Tell me about yourself." Deanne said crying.

Diane looked at Sarah and grinned sadly saying, "Here I go again." She added, "Daddy is sleeping now."

Then Diane proceeded to tell her mother the same story that she told her father.

Sarah went inside. Seeing that Joe was still asleep, she went into the lounge. Father Genaro found her there softly crying.

"Mrs. Marshall I don't know much but I know a soul in torment when I see it," he began.

"Yeah my father is really tormented," Sarah said wiping her tears.

"I'm not talking about him I'm talking about you. If you're looking for closure forgiveness is the only way to shut down the pain."

"It's too late." Sarah said.
"Not for you," Genaro said.

"I'm okay now." Sarah tried to tell him.

"No you're not." Genaro said to her gently but firmly.

Sarah asked "Father you have other patients to care for. Why is this one so important to you?"

"Because it is apparent that he is not important to you. I have his wallet. I know you need to see it."

He handed over the wallet. When Sarah opened it she was totally shocked. It had clippings from the Navy Times and other civilian newspapers detailing all of Sarah's accomplishments. He followed them all including some of her better known cases, her and John winning the Legion of Merit, her & John's wedding right up to her promotion and appointment as JAG Chief of Staff.

"He's been following your career, with pride I should add, but you know what impressed him the most? Genaro asked kindly.

"What was that Father?" Sarah asked.

"That you were able to rise above his failure as a father," Genaro told her.

As Sarah scanned the clippings she became so emotionally overwhelmed that she felt nauseous. She dropped the wallet and clippings on the floor and ran from the room into the nearest lavatory and barely made it to the toilet before she vomited.

1930 Local Time

Hospice of the Sacred Heart

Fresno, CA

After Sarah composed herself she came back to sit in the lounge. Father Genaro gave her a bottle of water. Diane came in to join her. She saw that Sarah was at a loss at what to do next. Without saying a word Diane sat down and opened her arms. Sarah went to her and buried her head in her sister's shoulder and cried softly.

Diane said, "Now we're even. You did this for me in Russia when Harm and John were shot down, remember?"

"Yeah I was the strong one then and now I'm the bowl of Jell-O," Sarah said sniffling.

"Shush, it's okay. No matter what we're trained to do, we're all still human. You got a lot to deal with. I'm just glad I'm here for you," Diane said.

They sat like that for a while. Eventually Sarah showed Diane their father's wallet and the clippings. "If he knew you he would have been just as proud," Sarah lovingly told Diane.

"I know sweetie, he told me that just before he fell asleep." Diane told Sarah.

They sat holding each other for a short while taking comfort in each other's presence. After a while Diane noticed that Sarah hadn't changed her position and that her breathing became very steady. She peeked down and smiled as she saw that her sister fell asleep. Diane just let her nap thinking, 'that's exactly what she needed.'

After another 20 minutes Father Genaro found them like that. He waited till Sarah was fully awake
before he told them, "He slipped into a coma go to him. Did your mother leave?"

Sarah told him, "I just saw her go into the bathroom."

"Maybe you better get her," Genaro advised.

Sarah told Diane, "You go in, I'll get our mother."

Sarah knocked on the bathroom door.

"Yeah what darling," Deanne asked as Sarah came in to check on her.

Sarah told her, "It's time would you come in with us?"

"Honey I can't," Deanne said plaintively.

"I know how you feel.." Sarah started to say but Deanne interrupted her.

"Is your sister is in there?" Deanne asked. Sarah nodded. "Then when you go in you'll have company. I'll wait."

"Are you sure?" Sarah asked her one more time.

Deanne looked at her then changed the subject, "Do you have any hand cream or anything like that?"

Sarah sighed and went in to join Diane. They sat on each side of Joe's bed holding each of his hands. After an hour they felt his hands tighten. Sarah spoke up "His hand tightened before he went."

Genaro told them, "It was a squeeze he was thankful for your forgiveness."

"Yes honey that's what it was," Diane told her. Sarah smiled sadly in understanding and thanking Diane for her comforting presence then she looked up in dismay.

"Oh my God, you're going through this twice. I'm so sorry Diane. It never crossed my mind. I never should have asked you to come." Sarah started to say, but Diane interrupted her.

"Yes you should have. I needed to be here. I needed to be here for you," Diane told her firmly but also lovingly. They reached over Joe's body and took each other's hand. Then they both sat in silence again taking comfort in each other's presence.

Father Genaro spoke an offering, "Beyond the shore and the farther shore, beyond the beyond where there is no beginning and no end, without fear go."

"Is that a Catholic verse?" Sarah asked smiling in gratitude.

"It's Buddhist. Don't tell the monsignor," Genaro said and sadly smiled.

Diane and Sarah returned his smile in sad gratitude.

"I've never seen a priest cry," Sarah said.

"I do it all the time. Are you alright?" he asked Sarah.

"I don't think so,' she said.

"It'll take a while," he told her.
"That's right honey and I'll be here for you the whole way," Diane told her sister.

"I suppose," Sarah said. Then she got up to walk out of the room. Before she completely left the room she stopped and told Father Genaro, "This is a really good thing you're doing here."

"Thank you," he told her.

Sarah found her mother outside.

Upon seeing her Deanne said, "Well that took long enough."

"You don't care, not even a little bit?" Sarah said in amazement.

"I care. I've been waiting for this all my life." Deanne said.

Sarah sighed ready to cry again.

Deanne said, "He got to you didn't he?"

Sarah broke down and turning to her mother asked, "Would you hold me?"

"Oh baby, come here," Sarah knelt and her mother gathered her into her arms. "It's okay shhh."

Diane came out to look for her sister. She found Sarah in their mother's arms as she cried out her grief. Diane stood back in the shadow of the door to give them their moment. They knew Joe much more than she did.

After a few minutes Sarah looked up saying, "Wow I just had deja-vu I was upset and you were holding me. I was crying over losing that big white mutt. What was his name Ruggles yeah Ruggles. That's right he ran away."

Deanne paused holding her.

"No wait it was Dad who was holding me. It was you who ran away and you took the dog with you didn't you?" Sarah asked her.

Deanne answered, "He followed me darlin'. He was running alongside the bus I had to beg the driver to let him in. I mean I couldn't have taken him back."

"No" Sarah asked.

"So I kept him." Deanne said.

Sarah smiled and told her, "He liked you."

"Yeah he did," Deanne said.

Sarah said sniffling "He used to come to you with that rope in his teeth and you used to swing him around."

They both shared a laugh.

Sarah asked, "What happened to him?"

"What?" Deane asked dumfounded.

"Ruggles, did he die?" Sarah asked again.
"Oh I'm sure I mean it's been some 17 odd years," Deanne said.

"You don't know?" Sarah asked bewildered.

"Oh honey I traveled around so much and ahh I don't even know how it happened really one time I was half way to Utah when I realized I left him at a boarding house. He was so big and so hard to travel with. I didn't have a car and they loved him there. I'm sure they took very good care of him." Deanne said.

"What are you talking about?" Sarah asked.

Deanne began, "The dog he was left." Sarah interrupted her saying "Abandoned!"

"Honey?" Deanne whined.

Sarah got up

"You know I've been thinking. Joe Mackenzie was a confused and miserable drunk but I left him. He paid the bills and he tried to cook and he looked at my homework and even cleaned the house. He made a home for me in his own pathetic way. What I'm saying is that almost means more to me than you coming back after all these years. All your life you've only thought of yourself. Why should I care if you were frightened that I might reject you? You rejected my sister when you gave her up because you couldn't handle the added responsibility. You deprived our father of the privilege of loving her. Then you rejected me. You didn't even think of taking me with you because it was too hard to look out for me. I was miserable. I couldn't get angry at you because you weren't there, you abandoned me. So I got angry at my father. Then I turned around and did the same thing you did to my father, I abandoned him.

It's for the best I guess. If I'd been with you I probably would've woken one morning to find you gone again." Sarah said.

Diane heard the whole thing, "Good for you Sarah," she said softly. She could see the steel her sister was made of coming to the surface. Diane stood back and waited some more.

Deanne still didn't see Diane and said in response to Sarah, "You're right I'm sorry I've never been much good to anybody not even myself."

"Stop it!" Sarah knelt in front of her mother and said, "I forgive you."

"Thank you, Thank you" Deanne said.

Sarah got up and walked away.

Deanne asked her, "Where are you going?"

Sarah saw Diane come down the porch steps to meet her. Sarah engulfed Diane in a tight hug before she turned to tell Deanne, "To bury our father."

Wednesday, April 28, 1999

0900 Local Time

Holiday Inn

Fresno, CA
After their father passed away, Sarah and Diane stayed with Father Genaro for a few hours to go over the funeral arrangements. The hospice Social Workers already had the Sterling Funeral Home on call as they were the closest one to the Hospice. The sisters decided for a one-day wake this afternoon and the funeral mass on Thursday at 10:00 AM at St. Helen's Catholic Church. The funeral home and the church were close to each other and the Hospice as well as to the airport. Then they called John to come and get them.

After they had dinner John called Ann Marie and told her of Joe's passing. Ann Marie already made plans to take a 7:00 AM flight out of Dulles that morning with Peter and Andy. Ann Marie also told him that she spoke to their parents and their brothers Matt and Mark about Joe's passing. They were making similar travel arrangements out of New York to arrive that afternoon. Harm also called his mother. She and Frank would be there that evening also and stay in Fresno for the funeral. John made reservations for the whole group at the same Holiday Inn the Rabbs and Marshalls were staying.

Sarah called Admiral Chegwidden and told him of the funeral arrangements. He at first said he couldn't be there but when he told Sydney that, she said, "We have to go. Sarah's almost like the daughter I never had." So AJ booked seats on a flight out of Andrews for him and Sydney to also arrive Wednesday afternoon.

Right now John was at the Fresno arrivals terminal waiting for Ann Marie and her family to debark from their flight. He met them as they came off the jet way. After the usual hugs and kisses, they started walking to the parking lot. They only had the one carry-on bag each and they didn't have to stop at baggage claim. As they walked Ann Marie asked him, "How's Sarah and Diane?"

"Diane's been through this before with her adopted parents but she's okay now. She's been a big help to Sarah. Sarah wasn't doing so hot. She had a good cry at JAG because she was so shocked and didn't know how she should treat the news that he was dying. But she lost it again when she got here and she found out that Joe followed her career. He saved the clippings from the stories that appeared in the Navy Times and other papers. He even had clippings of our wedding announcement and her appointment to JAG Chief of Staff. Thank God Diane was there. After getting over feeling sorry that he missed all that, she then had to deal with the fact that her mother abandoned her as well. She became was so overwhelmed by it all that she didn't eat a lot at dinner and she fell asleep crying. I was up half the night watching her. I fell asleep in the chair. When I came to get you Sarah was still sleeping. I left Diane with her."

Just then his cell phone rang. Ann Marie only heard his end.

"Hi honey."

"Yeah they're here with me now. Did you have breakfast yet?"

"You just got there now with Harm and Diane? Okay we'll be there in 15 minutes."

"Okay I love you."

"Sarah, Harm and Diane are in the restaurant at breakfast." John told Pete and Ann Marie.

"Good we're starving. We didn't eat a lot last night because we were packing and I only had a stale bagel at the airport and some sort of plastic egg bun on the plane," Peter told him.

"We'll relax after breakfast. The wake hours today are 2 to 5 and 7 to 9. You guys will have time to get settled before that. The mass tomorrow is at 10:00 AM. We'll have the repast at a restaurant the Hospice people recommended. We have return tickets for the red eye back tomorrow night and get
"What about Sarah's mom? How are you dealing with her?" Ann Marie asked.

John told her, "It's funny she lived in Sacramento for the last few years. It was only after the Hospice did a Social Security computer search for her that they found where her disability checks were being sent did they find her."

John added. "Do me a favor please? Don't get into the subject of Deanne with Sarah or Diane. They're both upset with her. When Joe died, Deanne was almost relieved. She didn't have the same enthusiasm in following Sarah's career as Joe did. Deanne said that she stopped looking for Sarah because she was afraid of her rejection. Diane was upset that after Deanne gave her up for adoption, she didn't even try to find out about her. Diane told me of the confrontation Sarah had with Deanne over those same things. It was then that Diane realized that Sarah was going to be all right. Deanne said goodbye to them right at the hospice. I don't think she's going to attend the funeral," John said.

"That's awful. No matter how she feels about Joe, at least be there for her daughters," Ann Marie said in dismay.

"Well Sarah and Diane are very grateful that their surrogate parents, our mom and dad, are coming out. Speaking of them, what time are they due in?" John asked.

"They're coming on the same flight with Matt and Mark. Matt and Mark are leaving the wives and kids home. It was too much to put everything together for the whole of the two families. So they'll be arriving about 3:00 PM. They'll all make it to the evening viewing," Ann Marie informed him. "In the meantime let's get some breakfast."

1015 Local Time
Holiday Inn,
Fresno-Airport Restaurant

When they met Sarah, Harm and Diane at the restaurant, little Sarah jumped out of her chair to hug her Aunt Ann Marie and Andy. John was glad that Sarah was in a better frame of mind. He saw that she had a good stack of pancakes on her plate with eggs and bacon and she was attacking it with gusto.

She stopped to wipe her lips and meet them with John's. Then she got up and hugged Ann Marie, Pete and Andy.

"Ann Marie, Pete I'm so glad you came," Sarah said as she brightened a bit.

"Oh Sarah, how could we not come? It's only right that we're here for you and Diane," Ann Marie told her.

"Well it's still good to see you," Sarah said. "After breakfast we'll make some plans. Diane is doing the 1st reading at the funeral, could you please do the 2nd?"

"Of course I will," Ann Marie answered.

"Thank you," Sarah said.

She sat down and resumed eating. "There's the hungry Marine I know," John said as he sat down next to her.
"Well I'm starving and I have another person to take care of now," Sarah said as she patted her baby bump. "I'm not abandoning her, or him, like my mother did me." Sarah finished.

John and everyone else could see that she was still angry with her mother for leaving and they were wise to avoid talking about it.

The group passed the rest of the day planning the mass and making the other arrangements related to the funeral. Trish & Frank, AJ & Sydney, James & Maureen as well as Matt & Mark arrived in Fresno at about the same time. The checked into the Holiday Inn where they all found messages detailing the times and directions to the funeral home and the church from the hotel.

1900 Local Time
Sterling Funeral Home
Fresno, CA

Father Genaro found Joe's old Marine uniform among his possessions so Sarah and Diane decided that they would bury him in it. He was laid out in a half closed casket. Sarah and Diane were amazed that he had so many decorations, even one for the Bronze Star. They both promised each other that they would look up his war record when they returned to DC.

There were also flower arrangements from Sarah & John's extended families, President Bartlett, The Secretary of the Navy, Admiral Chegwidden and Sydney, Admiral Magnum and Maggie, Admiral and Carrie Grafton, Toad and Rita Tarkington and the whole JAG and NCIS staffs.

Sarah and Diane greeted Trish & Frank as well as John's family very warmly. Even Admiral Magnum & Maggie came in with Carolyn Turner. She was especially grateful to see AJ & Sydney come through the chapel door.

"Admiral I'm so grateful that you came. I didn't expect you to be here," Sarah said as she hugged him and Sydney.

"Well it was the least I could do for my Chief of Staff,' AJ said modestly.

Sarah was about to thank him again when she saw over his shoulder the one person that she never expected to see come there.

"Momma?" was all Sarah could get out.

Then Sarah walked over to her and pulled her into a tight hug. They both started to cry softly as the moment overtook them.

Sarah pulled away enough to tell Deanne, "I'm so glad you came."

Diane came over and led them to the front row of chairs. They calmed down enough to accept introductions and condolences from those persons already there. Deanne held her tongue and acknowledged the greetings. The rest of the viewing went without incident.

Thursday, April 29, 1999
1700 Local Time
Fresno Yosemite International Airport

The funeral mass was done without a hitch as the whole retinue, even Deanne, that attended the
viewings attended the mass. After the service at the local veterans’ cemetery, they went to local restaurant for the repast. Now Sarah and Diane were saying goodbye to Deanne as she boarded the shuttle to Sacramento. Deanne hugged them both saying she would keep in touch. They exchanged addresses and phone numbers.

"Please call me when the babies come. I'll try to get out there to see them," Deanne promised them.

"We will momma," Sarah said. Deanne gave each of her daughters and granddaughter a hug and then boarded the plane.

They both went over to their families. They all said goodbye to Harm's parents and John's parents and brothers as they all started to board their respective flights home. Then it came time for Sarah, Diane’s and the three admirals' families to board their flight back to DC.

When they all arrived at Dulles the next morning, the two admirals told their officers they did not want to see them until Monday morning. The Rabbs and Marshalls gladly complied as they went home.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 42

Sunday May 2, 1999

1830 Local Time

Blacksburg Airport

Blacksburg, VA

After sleeping the whole of Friday into Saturday morning away, John and Sarah went to Saturday evening mass and then relaxed the evening away. On Sunday Diane and Sarah got together at Sarah’s house to organize all the mass and condolences cards so they could send out the thank you cards. While the ladies did this, Harm invited John to go flying in the Stearman. John readily complied.

Diane drove herself and Sarah Cate to John's house in the minivan. John met Harm at his place in Fairfax and then they drove Harm's Corvette to Blacksburg. They flew a cross-country route between Norfolk and Blacksburg that took the whole afternoon. The sun was just about to set below the horizon as Harm began his landing approach into Blacksburg.

He called for the runway lights to be put on and settled into his approach. Just before he was about to touch down the image of the runway blurred for him. John felt the momentary loss of control and then the straightening out just before landing.

When they landed and secured the Stearman in the hanger John asked him, "What the heck happened just before we landed?"

Harm replied, "I don't know. My vision just went blurry on me for a second. My night blindness probably acted up. We cut it a little too close to sunset. It cleared enough for me to land, but I was disoriented for that second or two. There was enough time for me to compensate for the blurriness so we could land safely."

How do you feel now?" John asked him.

"I'm good to drive home. It's weird, it never bothers me when I drive at night, only in the air," Harm said in speculation.

"Well whatever it is you better get it checked out fast," John suggested. He added, "I won't tell Sarah so she won't tell Diane. I'll leave that up to you."

"Thanks for that. I promise though I will get it checked out this week," Harm said.

"Well that's good. Let's get home before anything else happens," John said.

"I'm with you," Harm agreed as they got into the Corvette and set off for home.

Monday, May 3, 1999

0930 Local Time
Pentagon J2 Staff Conference room
Arlington, VA

On her first day back to work at JAG, Sarah accepted everyone's condolences. She especially went out of her way to find Loren Singer and called her into her office. As they stood in the office Sarah said, "Loren I really appreciate the 'Mass card' you sent and the message inside. It really touched me, thank you."

Loren smiled and said, "You're welcome Colonel."

Sarah smiled and said, "You know Loren in times like these it's alright to use first names. I'm sure the UCMJ won't turn to dust.

Loren blushed and smiled saying, "Thank you Sarah, I appreciate that."

Sarah hugged her and said, "Okay let's get the team ready to go to the Pentagon."

Loren snapped to and smiling said, "Aye, aye Sarah."

Sarah and Loren just burst out laughing and walked out of the office together sighing to catch their breath.

The staff in the bullpen just looked at them quizzically. After that Sarah and Loren began to get closer as friends.

Their team then got together and went to the Pentagon in Sarah's and Emma's cars. There they presented their plan on getting the Russians to participate fully in the Balkan Peace Keeping Process. Admiral Grafton and the Chief of Naval Operations told Sarah's team that they did a commendable job. They would present the plan to the President for implementation. Sarah treated her team to lunch at the Pentagon's Ground Zero Café. They returned to JAG that afternoon in a very euphoric mood.

1220 Local Time
Hamilton Ophthalmology Center
Georgetown, DC

Harm was as good as his word. He told Diane what happened that Sunday night. She agreed wholeheartedly with John as she strongly urged him to schedule an appointment for an examination as soon as possible. So the next day Harm cleared all his cases and then he asked the admiral for the afternoon off. He explained to AJ what happened the day before while flying with John. AJ readily granted his request. Now he sat with the ophthalmologist, Dr. Margady, and told him how he nearly crashed in his Stearman during a dusk landing and why he decided to have the exam.

After Margady did a thorough examination he told Harm, "The original diagnosis of 'night blindness' was incorrect. You have blurred vision from retinal scaring. The scarring probably came from a bout of toxoplasmosis that you contracted just about when the night blindness was diagnosed. We can probably correct the condition."

"How can you correct it?" Harm asked.

"The surgery can be performed with an ophthalmology laser. The procedure takes only 25 minutes but the recovery time is 2 hours. I can do it in this office." Margady consulted his schedule book and told Harm. "I have an opening tomorrow at 1:00 PM. You will need someone to drive you home
after that."

"That's no problem, my wife works in the Navy Yard and can get me here and then pick me up," Harm told him.

"Good, I'll put you on the schedule," Margady said.

Tuesday, May 4, 1999

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

The next day Harm asked Chegwidden for the afternoon off to have surgery.

At first AJ said no, "You have a video-conference call to a ship for that case you've been working on."

Harm countered, "Sir I have been working closely with Lt. Roberts on the case. He is fully up to speed. He can sit in for me for the call."

Chegwidden pursed his lips considering the request. He then asked Harm, "Does this have career implications?"

Harm answered honestly, "Sir this has nothing to do with my feelings about JAG. It's something that I have had in the back of my mind and it only came to the forefront after the near miss Sunday. No matter what I decide after that, this needed to be done or my vision could get worse. Also if I put this appointment off now, I will have to wait another six weeks for another one."

AJ acquiesced, "Okay take the afternoon. Let me know how it comes out."

"Thank you sir," Harm said gratefully.

1300 to 1700 Local Time

Hamilton Ophthalmology Center

Georgetown, DC

Dr. Margady put drops in Harm's eyes to dilate the pupils then he waited for them to take effect.

When that was done Margady brought Harm into the room with the laser. As Margady set up the argon laser, Harm sat nervously.

To break the tension Harm told the doctor, "You know when this first happened to my eyes, I destroyed a $55 million aircraft and my RIO was killed."

Margady indulged him in replying, "And that is relevant to this because?"

Harm replied, "It was because of that I changed my designator to law. This surgery is probably a 'fool's errand' if I thought I would ever be let back flying."

Margady said to him, "No one can fault you for trying to complete your dream of returning to something you were good at doing."

"Well that makes me feel better. Oh what about music?" Harm asked half in embarrassment.
Margady replied in an amused tone, "Are you going to sing now?"

Harm replied sheepishly, "Ah no I brought a tape. I figured it would help me relax."

"That's fine," Margady said as he put the tape in. He then heard a tapping noise of rubber on metal.

"Are you very nervous?" Margady asked Harm.

"Ah no why?" Harm answered.

"Then can you please stop tapping your foot on the base of the laser. It's a little disconcerting," Margady said with a slight twinkle.

"Ah I'm sorry I wasn't aware I was doing it," Harm said as his foot ceased moving.

That out of the way Margady settled into performing the procedure. "Okay you won't feel anything but you will see flashes of light. That's the laser firing. Just lean into the chin piece and hold very still."

Margady proceeded with the procedure. It was finished in about 25 minutes. He taped bandages over Harm's eyes and had his nurse lead him into the recovery room. Harm sat for the required 2 hours waiting. He napped on and off during the wait. Margady had to wake him to take the bandages off.

As he went to remove the tape he told Harm, "Keep your eyes closed until the entire bandage is removed." Harm waited until Margady told him, "Now slowly open your eyes."

Harm did so. He smiled as he clearly saw Diane smiling at him from across the darkened room. "Hi honey," he said to her.

"How well do you see?" Margady asked him.

"Fine, come to think about it, better than before the procedure," Harm said.

"Okay your wife can take you home now. Because your pupils are dilated there will be some irritation in bright light so wear your sunglasses for the remainder of the day. Your retina will be a little swollen from the procedure, so no reading, TV or computer-work tonight."

"Don't worry doctor, I'll make sure he behaves tonight," Diane assured Margady.

"Alright I will need to see you next week. This time of day is fine. Make your appointment with my receptionist. Good luck you two," Margady said.

"Thank you doctor," Harm said as he shook his hand and walked out with Diane.

Harm and Diane were holding hands as they got off the elevator. When they walked out of the building lobby they looked into the setting sun. Harm stopped to admire it. Diane clung to his arm and asked, "What now honey?"

"Let's stop at JAG on the way home. I want to see how the videoconference went. I promise no work. I only need Bud to tell me how it went," Harm said to reassure his wife.

Harm and Diane rode in his Corvette to the doctor's office. Now as they left that office Diane was getting behind the wheel. Harm taught her how to 'drive a stick' when they first started living together. As they drove away Harm had to grab the side of the windscreen as Diane peeled out of the parking lot.
"You Mackenzie sisters love to drive fast I'll give you that," Harm muttered rhetorically.

Diane was like her sister Sarah in the respect that they loved to drive fast cars very fast. Diane felt bad that Sarah traded in her own 'vette to get the Trailblazer when John needed to have rehab.

As they stopped at a red light Diane said impishly "What was that honey, I couldn't hear you there was too much wind."

As the light changed she glanced at her husband just the same way she saw her boss Admiral Magnum glance at her when he peeled out in his Ferrari.

When they arrived at JAG they saw that all the power was out. They had to take the stairs up. As they walked up they heard someone enter the stairway from the floor above. It was Harriet.

Harm and Diane went up the stairs as Harriet came down. They all went very cautiously as they approached the 3rd floor landing. Despite their caution though Harriet tripped on third step from the landing and let out a cry as she fell. Harm was at the landing and even in the dark saw Harriet fall. He caught her as she fell forward. Just then the lights came on. Bud had heard his wife cry out and came running into the stairs. He was astounded to see Harriet in Harm's arms.

"I fell and he caught me, he caught me," Harriet said joyfully.

Harm did not need any more confirmation that his eyes were going to be all right.

When they came up into the bullpen, Bud explained to him how the lights went out. In trying to do the videoconference they blew a fuse. There were no spare fuses so Tiner, trying to make it happen, by-passed the faulty fuse in a 'stealing power' process that he learned in college. The bypass lasted all of a minute and a half. When it went, it blew out the power in the whole building. It had to be the quickest arraignment or reading of charges and plea-bargaining ever done.

Seeing that the videoconference went off, even with the power problem, Harm went looking for his partner. He found Sarah and John outside her office with Little Sarah.

Diane asked John to pick up little Sarah at daycare and be with her while she took care of Harm and take her home in case they were delayed at the doctor's office. So during his lunch hour John drove Diane's minivan as they went to get some lunch at the Wendy's just outside the Navy Yard gate.

At the end of the day John stopped at JAG to pick up Sarah. If she needed to, Sarah could follow him to Fairfax in the Trailblazer and they would drive home together. Because NCIS and JAG shared the same massive parking lot, John would leave his car there and Sarah and he would ride to work together in the morning. Now that Harm and Diane stopped off at JAG, Harm would leave his Corvette at the Navy Yard and the Rabbs would take their minivan home together and Diane and Harm would also ride together in the morning.

"How's daddy's girl, did you behave for Uncle John and Aunt Sarah," Harm said as he gathered his daughter in his arms.

"Unca John is funny in mommy's car," the toddler said.

"Oh really did he play your Disney music or his 'hard rock'?” Harm asked facetiously.

"Hard rock," Little Sarah said.

Then surprising everyone she squirmed out of her father's arms down to the floor and started dancing and singing Joan Jett. "I wuv wok an woll, I wuv wok an woll, put nutter die in da jube box baby."
"All right Sarah Cate, just like I taught ya," John said as he scrunched down so that his goddaughter could give him a high five, which she gleefully did.

Everyone in the office roared with laughter at the cute spectacle. Even Admiral Chegwidden, who had witnessed the routine as he passed the office, got a good chuckle from Sarah Cate's performance.

Everyone snapped to attention as he came over, but couldn't suppress their smiles. "At ease people." Then turning to Harm and Diane he asked, "Is Mr. Marshall corrupting your daughter Commanders?"

"It appears so sir," Diane said smiling.

Addressing Harm AJ asked, "How did your procedure go Mr. Rabb?"

Harm replied, "It went well sir. I have to go in for a follow up next week after work, but everything looks good. I was able to see Harriet in the dark stairs and kept her from falling. Before the procedure I would not have been able to that."

"Good to hear now go home people. It's been a long day," he told his officers.

Everyone was more than happy to comply.

Friday, May 7, 1999

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm and Sarah walked across the bullpen to AJ's office. Sarah asked Harm, "How are your eyes?"

Harm answered, "They're fine. There hasn't been any blurriness for two days now."

As they entered the admiral's outer office they encountered Bud and Brumby.

Brumby said, "G'day Colonel"

Sarah replied, "Brumby."

Harm extended his hand asking, "Commander, how was your leave." He then asked, "What's going on?"

Bud replied, "Haven't a clue sir."

Brumby added, "The old man said to wait, so we're waiting."

Just then they all heard AJ bellow, "Enter."

As the foursome stepped through the door they saw AJ donning the coat of a dark gray mourning suit. AJ asked, "Well."

Bud responded for them all, "Outstanding sir."

AJ replied, "I don't look like the maître de of the Ritz Carlton?"

Harm, "Not unless he's arguing United States versus Wayne in the Supreme Court sir."
AJ said, "Well I could do without the monkey suit, but tradition is tradition."

Sarah said, "Sir you are aware that you are not required to be there until 1000 Monday Morning."

"Well I know that colonel. I'm just trying to get my head into it, which is by the way why you're all here. When I decided to push this case through the system, I had no idea it would come this far. Now that it has I am..."

"Nervous sir?" Bud asked.

AJ looked at him and smiled saying, "Delighted lieutenant."

Bud just looked befuddled and said, "Yes sir, sorry sir."

AJ continued, "I am admittedly rusty. Now I do feel prepared. I could go for a jog along the course. It is one thing to approximate the size of the barrier, it's another thing to try and scale it." Turning to Bud AJ then asked, "Lieutenant the event."

Bud answered, "Yes sir, the lieutenant was convicted for disobeying an order to inform his civilian girlfriends that he was HIV positive."

AJ then asked, "Commander Brumby, the sentence."

Brumby replied, "The court martial sentenced him to six years imprisonment sir I think sir."

AJ said, "You think correctly." Moving onto Sarah he asked, "Colonel, was that the end of it."

"No sir I believe two years later when a new statute was passed, the Navy dropped him from the ranks which deprived him of pension and medical benefits."

AJ said, "Good, Rabb take her home."

"Sir, the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces reversed sir. The Supreme Court is now considering the issue as a double jeopardy and a possible ex post facto law."

AJ beamed when he said, "Excellent, excellent, you've all qualified for my moot court preparation this weekend. I'll argue you'll be the judges. Is everyone available?"

Harm answered, "Well sir, Diane, Sarah Cate and I were going to Pennsylvania for the weekend to see my Grandma Sarah. She hasn't seen Sarah Cate in quite some time. And we wanted to get up there again before Diane has the latest baby."

AJ smiled at that saying, "Well I don't want to stand between a grandmother and her grandchildren. That will be all Commander."

Harm snapped to and said, "Thank you sir." He turned and walked out.

AJ then asked Sarah, "And you colonel?"

Sarah answered, "Well sir I have the duty tomorrow. So I'll be glad to help."

At that AJ reached behind his desk and brought out a box and presented it to Sarah saying, "Let's try this for size. Let's try and make this as real as possible."

Sarah smiled as she pulled out the black judge's robe and said, "Simple yet elegant."
AJ then asked Brumby, "What are your plans for the weekend?"

Brumby replied, "Well I was going on an inspection of the Georgetown pubs sir." AJ gave him a half amused, half annoyed look to which Brumby said, "Ah but that can wait sir."

AJ gave him a box and said, "Good." Turning to Bud he then, "Lieutenant?"

Bud was his usual flustered self when he asked, "Sir Harriet and I were going to decorate the nursery."

AJ went to put the box away. Bud then recovered from his faux pas saying, "But there is always next week."

AJ asked, "Are you sure?"

Bud replied, "Yes sir."

AJ gave Bud his box and said, "Thank you lieutenant. And I could use Harriet's help as well. By the way you received the Amjour Award for Constitutional Law is that right?"

Bud replied as he opened his box and exclaimed as he pulled out the robe for the, "Chief Justice, sir?" Sarah and Brumby exchanged smiles.

AJ nodded and then began, "And now the ground rules, when we walk into the court room I am no longer your commanding office. You are justices of the Supreme Court and I am a humble litigator."

Bud asked, "But sir?"

AJ walked up to him and said, "Lieutenant, when you ask me a question, I want to hear a chain saw cutting through the floor around my feet. Is that clear?"

Bud replied, "Yes sir."

AJ continued, "Good. We'll begin at 0800 tomorrow. You'll be issued files of the briefs. Please be prepared."

AJ then turned to Sarah and asked, "Colonel, do you think John would like to participate?"

Sarah smiled saying, "I'm sure he'll be thrilled sir."

AJ said, "Good when you leave here, please call him and ask if he can join us." AJ handed her a box with a robe saying, "For your husband."

Sarah said, "Thank you sir."

AJ concluded the session saying, "Dismissed"

The three officers snapped to and replied, "Aye, aye sir."

1130 Local Time

Admiral Chegwidden's House

McLean, VA

AJ was rehearsing his opening statement. He wasn't doing well.
"Mr. Chief Justice., may it please the court. From the time of the ancient Romans until today and the
days of swords and chariots to the era of lasers and radio frequency weapons, there is no more a
fundamental edict in the military than this one. A word from a superior office must be obeyed. Oh
that's stilted."

Throwing his cue cards over his shoulder, AJ began again.

"Mr. Chief Justice., may it please the court. Commander Wayne willfully disobeyed an order." AJ
threw the card over his shoulder and said, "That is the beginning and end of this case and my legal
career."

He continued his rehearsal well into the night.

Saturday, May 8, 1999
0830 Local Time
JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

Saturday opened as stormy and rainy. AJ was in his office preparing for the moot court when the
SECNAV came in. He draped his coat over a chair and said, "Admiral I just wanted to come in and
wish you good luck on your oral argument on Monday."

AJ replied, "I'm looking forward to it Mr. Secretary. Every lawyer wants that quill pen."

Nelson said, "Well that's what I wanted to come here and talk to you about. You don't litigate
anymore and this is your first case before the Supreme Court. It can be intimidating what with nine
ornery judges, big marble courtroom, 200 years staring you in the face. I have heard that some
lawyers actually wet their drawers."

AJ smirked when he replied, "If I was going to lose control of my bodily functions Mr. Secretary it
would have been in Vietnam."

Nelson replied, "I don't doubt your mettle AJ. I'm just letting you know that the Solicitor General is
offering the services of Cabot Foster. Now Mr. Foster didn't serve in Vietnam, but he does have
three quill pens."

AJ thought a second then asked, "So you want me to sit second chair."

Nelson said, "I want you to be comfortable."

AJ folded his arms and looked Nelson in the eye saying, "I was wondering why you would come
down here on a Saturday morning Mr. Secretary. You don't trust me."

Nelson turned away in frustration saying, "AJ..."

AJ explained, "For a lawyer, arguing a case before the Supreme is equivalent to planting the flag on
Suribache. Not only do I believe I can adequately represent the Navy's interests, I damn sure intend
to win, Sir."

Nelson just took his coat and said, "I'll expect that then."

Later on AJ changed into his mourning suit and waited in the courtroom.
Harriet acting as the court martial stood and intoned, "Oyez, oyez, oyez. God save the United States and this honorable court."

With that John, Brumby, Bud and Sarah trooped to the bench and sat.

Bud acting as Chief Justice said, "You may proceed council."

Brumby turned to Bud and said, "Pump up the volume mate you are the chief."

Bud turned an hour glass over and turned on the ready light in front of him.

AJ began, "Mr. Chief Justice may it please the court. The Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces erred in overturning the prison sentence and separation order of Commander Wayne. The proof conclusively established that commander willfully disobeyed a safe sex order. Diagnosed with HIV positive he was ordered to inform all potential sex partners of his condition and to use condoms. He disobeyed both orders."

Sarah asked, "But where was the injury? None of the women who had sexual contact with Commander Wayne contracted the virus."

AJ continued, "That is correct. They were fortunate as so was Commander Wayne, or he might ultimately have been charged with murder."

Brumby asked, "But what business does the military have with interfering with the sex life of this bloke, or with anybody for that matter?"

AJ replied, "The courts have long upheld laws restricting the personal lives of those in the military, restrictions that could not exist in civilian life."

Bud forgetting his role in the moot court added, "And even if the safe sex orders were invalid, the assault charges would still stand."

AJ sighed in exasperation and said, "Lt. Roberts what the hell kind of response was that?"

Bud was as usual befuddled, "Sir?"

AJ continued, "Don't throw me lobs. Don't give me softballs. You're the Chief Justice. Your job is to find flaws in my arguments, not agree with me, challenge, interrupt, attack."

Harriet looked on somewhat scared as Bud said, "Yes sir. Commander Wayne didn't attack any of these women, did he?"

AJ answered, "No he did not."

Bud continued, "And each of these women consented to their sexual contact?"

AJ started, "That is correct, however..."

Bud went ahead with his attack, "Then how can he be charged with assault and battery, which for the last 500 years of common law is required to unconsented to physical contact."

Sarah looked over to Bud and then to AJ approvingly. AJ smirked knowingly. Bud just smiled realizing that he had made the admiral happy.

After 45 minutes of 'rehearsal', the admiral called for a break. John and Sarah went to her office. On the way she decided to remove her contacts and put on her glasses. Her eyes were bothering her
again. So while she went to the ladies room to make the switch, John went to the break room. He brought back a cup of green tea for her, prepared how she liked it and cup of regular coffee for himself.

As they sipped their beverages, John commented, "Bud really gets into his roles doesn't he?"

Sarah agreed, "He just had to remember that he can help the admiral better when he's not helping him."

John agreed with her point. He said, "This coffee sure tastes good on a day like this. I hope Harm and Diane don't have to drive through this all the way to Gram's farm."

Harm's grandmother Sarah had affectionately adopted Sarah and John. They met her shortly after they returned from their honeymoon. Diane told Gram that she found her long lost sister in Sarah. So Gram invited them up to the farm in Beallsville one weekend. When Sarah Marshall got out of the car, Gram enveloped her in a tight familial hug saying, "Welcome to the family."

Sarah never got tired hearing that.

Just as the Marshalls were finishing their coffee and tea, Bud knocked on the door asking, "Ready?"

Sarah gulped the remainder of her tea asking, "Is it that time?"

"Yeah" Bud answered. Then he asked, "This is sort of fun, once you get into it?"

As Sarah she answered, "Yeah it is sort of."

As she got up and zipped her robe, Bud asked, "You don't think I was too hard on the admiral do you?"

Sarah answered, "No he told us not to hold back Bud. If anything you could be tougher on him."

Bud answered, "We would be doing him a favor wouldn't we? After all that's the reason he selected us for this detail. We should be tough."

Sarah added, "Unrelenting."

John smiled at the exchange. Just then his cell phone rang. "Excuse me your honors, I have to take this."

Bud said, "Right sir, ma'am. I'll see you two in there. We start in five minutes." He held up his five fingers.

As Sarah hung back and waited with John, she smiled and said, "Yes Mr. Chief Justice."

As he spoke on the phone John took hold of Sarah's hand and interlaced their fingers. During the time he was listening, he brought her hand up to give it a kiss and silently mouth, 'I love you'.

At that Sarah felt a shiver run down her spine and she turned and sweetly kissed his cheek. She used her thumb to wipe off the lipstick she left there and silently replied, 'I love you too'. She leaned in into John in a sort of half hug and held herself against him there as he finished his call.

Unbeknownst to the two, AJ was walking out of his office through the bullpen and he saw their quiet exchange. He had to smile as he saw the love in their eyes as they gazed at each other. He walked on letting them be.
John smiled at Sarah's close contact and said as he finished his call, "Oh and Tim good luck running the office in Norfolk. I know you'll do well."

There was a pause as McGee spoke. John continued, "You're welcome Tim. See you soon."

He explained, "It was McGee. He was working on a computer fraud case I assigned him. He called to tell me that he connected all the dates and we were ready to charge the Petty Officer involved with online fraud and grand theft. He starts his new posting as the 'agent in place' at Norfolk on Monday."

"Tim is moving up in the world," Sarah said appreciatively.

They followed Bud into the courtroom to resume the moot hearing.

The case rehearsal proceeded just as AJ hoped or maybe better than he hoped. Bud really threw himself into the role. His questioning really was unrelenting. Harriet sat and smiled in admiration as Bud dissected the admiral's argument.

Bud continued, "While incarcerated Commander Wayne was ordered removed from the Navy under a law which was passed after his trial. That sounds like an ex post facto statute."

AJ countered, "I don't believe it is."

Bud interrupted saying, "And what about 'double jeopardy'?"

AJ said, "Dropping an officer from the active duty ranks is an administrative action, not a judicial punishment."

Bud went on, "But the Navy didn't offer a separation hearing, weak response counselor. And I'm still concerned about the Navy's validity in telling an unmarried officer the circumstances under which he may have sex. And doesn't this violate the notion of fairness and due process to punish a man under a law which was passed after his trial? Admiral?"

AJ answered, "Well if it's not criminal punishment for the purposes of the double jeopardy clause, the same holds true for the ex post facto clause."

Bud clicked the timing light off and said, "Counselor, your time is up."

But AJ wanted to continue, "Additionally the court of appeals for the armed forces has no jurisdiction from barring the Navy from calling for the separation of Commander Wayne."

Bud interrupted for the last time, "Admiral kindly take your seat."

AJ tried to go on, "I sorry Mr. Chief Justice I was trying to fully explain."

Bud went on, "Your argument has more holes that a target ship. Your time has expired. Please sit down."

John, Brumby and Sarah looked on in consternation. Harriet looked on from the gallery in horror.

As AJ went to sit down Sarah was the first to speak, "Mr. Chief Justice I would like to extend argument for one moment. Ah admiral what were you saying about jurisdiction?"

AJ sighed and resumed, "Under the authority of Congress, the Court of Appeals is empowered to review court martial convictions, not administrative separations. While not directly on point the case of Hendricks vs. Warden when read in conjunction with Pennsylvania vs. the US Marshall's Service,
makes it relevant."

Bud looked on quizzically. The four leaned in to confer with Sarah beginning. "It's a novel argument, but an interesting one."

John added, "It hadn't occurred to me but it works."

Bud added, "It works, kinda. We would have to reverse the Court of Appeals for the Armed Services."

Sarah waved her hand as if to say 'yeah so'.

Bud added, "But it would set a precedent."

Sarah tipped her head and looked at Bud over her glasses and said sardonically, "Yes lieutenant, it would."

Bud looked back to Mic and John and asked, "Which is okay?"

Mic winked at him and John nodded in agreement.

The four turned back to AJ. Bud intoned, "Admiral thank you for your cogent and illumination arguments. This court is adjourned." Bud banged the gavel for emphasis

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

AJ's office

AJ changed out of his mourning suit and was going over his moot court notes. He felt it was very satisfying. He was especially surprised at Bud. He really threw himself into his role as the chief justice. Just as he thought of him, Bud came knocking at his office door. AJ looked up and bade him to enter.

Bud stood before the desk and asked, "Admiral, I'm sorry I was belligerent and argumentative."

AJ said, "Bud didn't I order you to confront, interrupt and even shoot holes in my arguments?"

Bud answered, "Ah yes sir."

AJ told him, "Lieutenant you have the ability to be a great lawyer. You only need to learn to just let your style develop naturally."

Bud snapped to and said, "Aye, aye sir."

As Bud turned to leave, AJ muttered low, "And try not to fire any weapons in the courtroom."

A few minutes later, AJ got up to leave. He stopped at Sarah's office where she and John were speaking. He waved Sarah down before she got up to attention, but John stood up. AJ shook John's hand and said "Captain thank you for coming in on your day off."

John smiled and replied. "You're welcome sir it was my pleasure. I don't get the opportunity to practice courtroom law very often, this was a treat."

AJ smiled and walked out with the Roberts.
When they pulled up to the house, John turned to Sarah and asked, "You want me to go in and tell him?"

Sarah cupped his cheek and gave him a short kiss, "No I'm the Chief of Staff and I was the duty officer when the call came in. It has to come from me." She got up and walked to AJ's front door

AJ was rehearsing his presentation. He learned a lot from the moot court session. He stopped when he heard a knock on his front door. He went over and he was surprised to see Sarah standing there waiting. As he opened the door he could see John waiting out in his NCIS Crown Victoria.

AJ greeted Sarah warmly saying, "Colonel, that was great work you and the others did today. I feel I'm ready for anything the justices can throw at me."

Sarah tried to begin, "Sir..."

AJ continued, "I mean really Bud was terrific. He saw right through my argument. It gave me a chance to rewrite my arguments into a more concise presentation. I'm going to love receiving that silver quill pen."

Sarah sighed as she broke the news to him, "Which I'm sorry to say sir you won't get."

AJ looked at her in bewilderment so Sara continued, "Sir the Court Clerk called. Commander Wayne resigned his commission. The case is canceled."

AJ sighed in disappointment. Sarah went to comfort him saying, "Sir that's a sign that you won."

AJ looked at her and with his voice dripping with disappointment he said, "I didn't win, the other side retreated, there's no satisfaction in that!"

Sarah sighed as she agreed with him saying, "I suppose sir. I'm sorry sir. I know how much you were looking forward to the case."

AJ looked at her and said, "Thank you Colonel. Enjoy the rest of the weekend."

Sarah said, "Thank you sir." She turned to go. As she got into the car and she and John drove home.
Chapter 43

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 43

Tuesday, May 11, 1999

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Admiral Chegwidden came into Sarah's office on his way out the door. He waved Sarah back down as she was about to stand at attention.

"Colonel, something came up that I need to take care off. I will be gone for the rest of the week. So I need you to be acting JAG. The only thing that I know is coming is the budget hearings on Thursday. Please take care of that. Try to get us a little more money, especially to upgrade the electrical system to better accommodate videoconferences so we don't have a repeat of last week's blackout episode.

"Aye sir, just so you know I already assigned Emma to work out just such a plan for the electrical upgrade. The newly upgraded computer system seems to have put an unexpected strain on our capacity and that's why the system was overloaded when we wanted to do a videoconference. With your permission, I'll setup a separate room just for that," Sarah said.

"That's fine colonel. As Chief of Staff for the Corps and the building, I trust you'll do what needs to be done. Now I really need to go. Good luck with the budget," AJ said as he left.

Sarah wondered what was on the admiral's mind or what was so urgent that he had to leave abruptly. She didn't give it much more thought as she summoned Emma in. "Please ask Commander Rabb and Lt. Roberts to come in," she asked Emma.

"Aye ma'am," Emma said in compliance.

After Harm and Bud came in, she asked Emma to stay. She started her briefing, "The admiral is going to be away for the rest of the week. He assigned me as acting JAG. His priority is getting the budget done. Seeing as you two do not have any pressing cases at the moment, I am assigning you along with Petty Officer Gardiner to organize the budget for presentation at the hearings this coming Thursday. I know she'll do a good job as she did that at NCIS with John and they always got an increase. We already prepared a plan for the electrical upgrade of the building. You two will determine what else we need and can get money for. So for the rest of the day and all day tomorrow, if you need it, that is all you three will be doing. Emma, Tiner will take up your workload as my yeoman, so please get him up to speed on anything that you have pending. I'll be working out of the Admiral's office for the week. If you need anything you will find me there."

The three stood at attention and left the room. Just as she was getting her work ready to take with her into the AJ's office her phone rang. It was her dial in direct line and she recognized her husband's office number.

Sarah picked up the phone and said, "Hello my love, your ears must have been burning. I was just
talking about you with Harm, Bud and Emma."

"Oh really, about what may I ask?" John asked pleasantly.

"About how you and Emma worked on NCIS' budget and always got an increase. I assigned the three of them to work on that for the rest of the day. Admiral Chegwidden had to leave on an urgent matter and made me acting JAG."

"I guess that means you can't get the afternoon off," John said.

"Why would I need the afternoon off?" Sarah asked in happy anticipation.

"Oh I had a surprise planned that's all," John said.

"Well let's see, I'm already pregnant so lingerie is out, you must be getting me something else," Sarah said in an almost girly way.

"Well since you can't leave JAG early, I'll go ahead and make the arrangements I planned and you can meet me where the surprise is at the end of the day. How does that sound?" John asked.

"That sounds wonderful. Am I going to be able to wear this out?" Sarah asked facetiously.

"Oh I think you'll more than wear it out," John said in the same tone. He gave the address to where he wanted her to be after work. As Sarah wrote it down she said to herself, 'Nah, it can't be. What does he have in mind now?'

1230 to 1630 Local Time

JAG Conference Room

As Harm, Bud and Emma were working on the budget, they reached a point of momentum agreed not to stop for lunch. So they ordered in some Chinese. As they ate they bantered back and forth as to what budget line the items they were requesting should fall under. They finally got to the part as to where to put the money needed to repair the courtroom ceiling and roof from the bullet holes Harm made.

Harm started to protest, "I paid half my pay for four months to have the roof fixed."

Bud answered, "Yes sir you did, but when the workers went up to make the repairs, they found all sorts of mold and other nasty stuff caused by the water that penetrated before you shot it up. Being that there was so much mold elsewhere, it was determined that the building was a sick building. So we will put the money for repairs resulting from the bullet holes into the building health budget."

Harm had to grin in both appreciation and chagrin. The other problems in the building would not have been exposed if not for his shooting holes in the roof.

It wasn't until almost 1630 that the trio reached a point where they could stop as Harm said, "We have everything categorized under the right budget line. Let's leave it where it is and tomorrow we'll wrap it up for presentation to the Congressional Budget Committee on Thursday." Harm suggested.

"I'm with you sir. I need to pick up Teresa from daycare, she must feel like I forgot about her seeing as we didn't have lunch like usual," Emma agreed as she put away her calculator and organized her work to leave.

"And I need to go with Harriet to get a new car for the baby. We can't put a baby seat in my old VW
bug,' Bud said as he left.

Emma got up to leave with Harm. As they were walking through the bullpen he told her, "It's funny Diane and I are also going car shopping. The minivan has been acting up. The repairs are getting expensive and we're looking for a newer car. We'll probably get an SUV or something similar."

"Well good luck with that sir," Emma said then stopped short. Harm bumped into her and then turned to look at what made her stop short. They were both astounded at what they saw. Sarah's was walking out of the admiral's office getting ready to leave. She stopped to say goodnight to Harm and her yeoman. "How did the budget go?" she asked the two.

"Ah fine. All we need to do is type it up for presentation. We'll have it ready for your review late tomorrow," Harm told her. Then he looked at his watch.

Sarah usually waited until 1700 because John hardly got out of his office before 1700 himself and they liked going home together.

Sarah saw him do that and then smiled. "In case you're wondering, I'm leaving before my usual 1700 because I am meeting my husband. He has one of his surprises waiting for me," she said happily.

"I wasn't asking," Harm said.

Emma for her part didn't say a word and just went to her desk and got ready to leave.

"I'll see you tomorrow then," Sarah said as she walked out through the bullpen.

Wednesday, May 12, 1999

0745 Local Time

Navy Yard Parking Lot

Harm pulled into the lot in his Corvette. As he stepped out he saw Budd and Harriet pull up in their new minivan. The three stopped to compare car stories.

"Sir I thought you and Diane were getting a new car sir?" Harriet asked.

'We did Harriet. We got a new Lexus SUV. Diane is going to use it." Harm said.

Just as he finished saying that, they saw as Diane pulled the new Lexus into the NCIS Section of the lot.

"We traded in the minivan for that," Harm continued as he pointed in Diane's direction.

Diane waved to everyone as she got Little Sarah out to take her to the daycare center.

"You two look like you did alright though." Harm said to the Roberts.

"Harriet and I went to 5 different car lots before we found this minivan for our baby. She succumbed to a hotshot salesman and wanted this van with all the bells and whistles. It's nice but it costs more than I make in a year."

"Well why didn't you say no and go find a cheaper one?" Harm asked.

"Well this is what Harriet wants. Besides her father gave her the money to buy the van, so it's paid for." Bud said resignedly.
Harriet and Harm were about to comment when they all heard the roar of a high performance engine. They all turned toward the sound and were astounded to see Sarah pull up in the latest model Corvette. It was like her old one cherry red with a stick. As she pulled closer they saw that she was smiling ear to ear.

"Isn't it great?" I forgot what I was missing," Sarah said happily as she saw their astounded looks.

"This is the surprise John got you?" Harm asked.

"Oh yeah. He told me that he was dying to replace the one I traded the Trailblazer for. He's calling it my 1st Mother's Day present. No wonder I love that man," she said as she walked into headquarters.

Later while she was getting her green tea, she explained to Emma, Harriet and Harm. "John used the accident settlement for the Caprice for it. NCIS gives him a Crown Victoria from their pool for his use as Assistant Director. So he doesn't need to buy a car for himself. So he went to the Chevy dealer and got this. They had this one on the showroom floor and it was the last one left from the 1998 model year. So being that it was on the floor, John worked out a good deal and got it for a good rate. When the baby comes, we'll use the Trailblazer to get him or her to and fro'. He still has the Camaro. It's the last model year for that car anyway so it has some collector value as long as he keeps it in good shape. Even with the back seat we can strap the baby seat in the back when we want to go places in the summer."

Saturday, May 15, 1999

1930 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

John, Sarah and Chloe went to Saturday evening mass and went straight to Harm and Diane's for dinner.

Chloe began to stay with them the past week. Sarah helped Chloe petition Child Services as she had asked to be out of her foster home as she waited for her father to come home from deployment. To do that Sarah and John had to register as Foster Parents with the DC & Virginia child welfare agencies. Chloe's stepmother and stepfather acquiesced to the separation, wanting nothing to do more to do with her. John and Sarah were already used to her living there and getting up and going to school that they felt like parents. They set up the third bedroom for her, as the nursery was already set up for the baby. Chloe loved being with the Marshalls. She also became very fond of little Sarah Cate.

When Harm invited them he said that he had something to discuss.

They drove John's Camaro to Fairfax and Diane greeted the three at the door. They were shown to the patio where Sarah Cate was playing on the gym set so Chloe joined her. Diane went inside to get the steaks that were to be cooked on the grill which Harm had going.

Harm began, "Diane and I have discussed this for a good long time. Ever since I got my eyes fixed I've been thinking of going back to flying full time. Sarah it's like we discussed on the Coral Sea. I need to go back to flying so that I don't have any more regrets.

"What part of 'you'll never be able to go back, because you're too important to JAG' didn't you understand?" Sarah asked.
"You forgot the other part," Harm reminded her with a smile.

"I'll left out the last part because that's something between you and your wife that you two apparently resolved," Sarah said.

Diane spoke up, "I saw Harm after he crashed in 91. It was because of his eyes. I wanted nothing more, after him saying that he wanted to be with me and marry me, then to see him fly again. When he got his 'Distinguished Flying Cross' I thought his obsession was over. But a little part of me knew that he wanted to prove that that flight wasn't a fluke. Then when he almost crashed again with you John it scared the crap out of him. He knew that there was something wrong besides the alleged night blindness. He told me that if he lost a family member or a friend crashing because he didn't get his eyes fixed, it would be worse than when he lost his RIO. Now that problem has been rendered moot and I want him to fly so that he can prove that he can still do it. I'm behind him all the way."

Harm took Diane's hand gave it a squeeze and raised it to his lips to give it a kiss.

Harm then asked John, "How was the admiral when you asked him for a transfer?"

"He was fine. You have to understand my situation was a lot different than yours. My primary motivation was to get out of Sarah's chain of command so that I could ask her to marry me. I didn't say that to the admiral at the time, though I think he had a hint. I almost asked Sarah to marry me when she was the first to leave JAG and work in civilian law. I only delayed the proposal when she came home after two weeks at Lowell, Hanson & Lowne to tell me she resigned because they only wanted her for window dressing. So I waited to propose to see if AJ would take her back at JAG. After that happened I was the one looking to transfer out and to move up," John told him.

Sarah took his hand and squeezed it.

John continued, "You Harm would be taking a step back. Who knows if your name is on the promotion's list? I mean Sarah and I advanced as rapidly as we did because of each of us winning the Legion of Merit. Also we didn't leave our positions and our time in position was not affected. You have your DFC and so forth, but your time in position will take a serious hit. This will be due to your lack of flying hours. You may be current, but you don't have enough flying hours to advance into a flying command position. Because of this you'll be waiting a long time to become CAG if at all. There are a lot of flyers that already have the hours they need to advance to get those positions. Can you be subordinate to a nugget or 2-bar in terms of squadron leader?"

"Well Diane and I discussed all that you said. Whether I get a command or not is immaterial. I just need to fly. They won't take my rank away and so forth so that was never a consideration. You know that financially it's not a problem on top of my base salary, I will be receiving flight pay," Harm replied.

"We'll be the most proficient users of e-mail and our long distance phone bills will be high, but that's something we'll be ready for," Diane added.

"Well seeing as you two have thought it all out, what do you need us to do?" Sarah asked.

"Sarah, as you are my immediate supervisor I'm asking for your support in dealing with the admiral. I'm going to wait until Diane has our baby then I'll start the process of changing my designator. That will take a bit of time, enough time for Diane to recover after the birth. I know what Diane was like when you and I got shot down in Russia, John. I'm asking you two to be there for Diane during the time I'm deployed. As long as I know she'll be with you two I know can fly without any reservations," Harm said.
"Well you know we'll back you up all the way with the admiral. He is not going to be happy though. Get everything ready to go. When you're ready after the baby comes, give it to me and I'll submit it to the admiral and try to soften the blow," Sarah told her brother in law.

"Thanks Sarah. I really appreciate all your help," Harm said.

"You're welcome Harm. You know we love you and as long as you two are happy with this that's fine," Sarah said

"In the meantime, where are those steaks?" John asked.

Monday, May 17, 1999

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

AJ returned to his office to find Sarah sitting in his chair giving assignments to Meg and Harm on a new case. The three officers were about to get up but AJ just waved them back down, "Carry on Colonel. It's nice to know that its business as usual when I'm gone. I'll go get some coffee," AJ said smiling as he put his cover and briefcase down on the couch and then walked out of the room.

When he came back in Sarah was gathering her work to take back to her own office. As she moved from behind his desk she started saying, "I'm sorry sir. I had no idea if you were coming in today. It was late and you didn't call and such."

AJ looked at her sternly, "Colonel didn't they teach you about guard duty in the Corps?"

"Ah yes sir," Sarah answered not knowing where he was going.

"Didn't they teach you to keep assuming your duties as ordered until you are relieved?" AJ said revealing a twinkle.

"Yes sir," Sarah said smiling modestly as she saw his twinkle.

"That's why I made you Chief of Staff," AJ said. "Thank you for keeping the place running, carry on."

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said proudly as she snapped to attention, about faced and marched proudly out of the office.

AJ sat down. After the week he had helping Webb getting his friend freed from kidnappers, it was nice to come back to work where all he had to face was a well-run office.

It had all started just before AJ went into Mac's office to tell her she was acting JAG because he would be gone for a time. Webb was on a vacation in Italy. He was with his CIA mentor Tim Fawkes as he was kidnapped in Italy by Teresa Marcello of the Red Brigade. Without telling his bosses at NCIS Webb took a leave to attempt a rescue. The rescue failed, to the consternation of Italian police who were helping him, because the kidnappers seemed to be warned beforehand.

After that Webb requested AJ's help. He reeled AJ in when he showed him a picture of Fawkes knowing that Fawkes saved his life in Vietnam. Fawkes was kidnapped by Marcello who was freelancing for the Serbs in order to work an agent trade with the CIA. But the CIA wouldn't even
acknowledge Fawkes. Webb felt responsible for Fawkes being taken because he hesitated and didn't fire when he was kidnapped.

AJ told Webb, "I'll help you because Fawkes saved my soul."

AJ and Webb needed help from Enrico Amati, a mafia don. He could tell them where Fawkes was being held. But there was a complication. It turned out that AJ killed Amati's nephew while rescuing his daughter Francesca. AJ acknowledged that Amati needed to fulfill his obligation to his family's vendetta but got Amati to delay notifying his sister for 24 hours.

They obtained some satellite surveillance time and found that Marcello was moving Fawkes and kept looking up to the sky. Webb and AJ realized that George Decker, the CIA station chief was telling the terrorists that he was photographing them. Decker was in charge of the CIA's 'non-response'.

Actually he was paying some money each month as "option" until he could get the million dollars that they wanted authorized. AJ coerced him into helping them "pretend" to pay ransom. AJ told Webb that many years previously he was assigned to take out a person who was using drugs to interrogate captive US soldiers and obtain intelligence. Fawkes was the "spotter" who was to call his shot using a baseball analogy code. They decided to use the same analogy to rescue Fawkes. Decker was wired so Webb and AJ could hear his conversation. They were stationed around the money drop point. When Fawkes called the shots based on the baseball analogy they took the two terrorists out before they could detonate the radio controlled explosive vest they made Fawkes wear for the money transfer.

AJ beat it out of Italy before the vendetta could come into effect. He spent the weekend with Sydney and only remembered that he didn't call his Chief of Staff to tell her that he was back when he had walked into his office that morning.

1900 Local Time

Olivia and Juliet's Restaurant

Georgetown, NW

John, Harm, Peter and Bud were working with Emma, Carolyn and Donna Moss since early February to try and get their 4 wives together so that they could throw a baby shower. Being that Diane was new to the DC area and Ann Marie was dealing with such a delicate pregnancy, the two did not have baby showers during their first pregnancies. Pete and Harm wanted to make up for that. They finally set a date where the husbands and yeomen/assistants knew the 4 mothers to be would be available. Tonight was the night. Admiral Magnum recommended "Olivia and Juliet's Restaurant" because it had a very large party room that could accommodate most of the combined JAG, NCIS and White House female staffs.

The four husbands had told their wives that they were going out for a nice evening's dinner. It would be the last time before Harriet and Ann Marie would have before they delivered. Harm and Pete had the Mattonis' 18-year-old daughter and Chloe Madison to baby sit Andy and Sarah Cate at John's house where Ann Marie & Pete then Harm & Diane would meet them. Then the three couples drove in Harm & John's cars to the Roberts' apartment in Georgetown, which was only 3 blocks from the restaurant. When he got there John got the call that the women were all assembled at the restaurant. The plan was that John and Harm would park their cars at the Roberts and walk to the restaurant. The plan was being followed to the letter as the eight people walked to the restaurant.

When they walked in and gave their names to the greeter at the entrance. The husbands walked behind the wives as the greeter walked them through the restaurant past a couple of tables set for 8
people. Sarah was about to voice their bewilderment when the greeter stopped and opened a set of double doors and a cry of "surprise" rang out from the room. Their husbands nudged all four wives into the room. The men took their coats and then headed back into the restaurant where a round table for seven was set up. Admirals Magnum and Chegwidden and Thomas' son Tripp were already there. Maggie, Lilly Catherine and Patricia were in at the shower.

As they moved throughout the room Sarah, Diane, Ann Marie and Harriet were totally stunned as they saw all the women that they all respectively worked with. Harm, John and Harriet's mothers and even Abby Bartlett were there. Trish, Maureen and Lydia led the 4 honorees to a dais of chairs set up for them. There they were lavished with gifts and good wishes.

Out in the restaurant a waiter brought over an extra chair and place setting to husbands' table and set it between John and Bud. Before any of them could ask what the extra setting was for, President Bartlett walked up to the table. The six men and boy stood up to greet him.

Bartlett forestalled the five Navy Officers snapping to attention with a very hearty, "As you were gentlemen. I just thought since our wives are engaged in their party we would have our own out here. I hear the veal here is out of this world."

"Yes it is sir. It's good of you to join us sir," John said as Bartlett shook hands with each man and boy.

"Thank you Captain," said the President.

He then turned to Bud as he saw he still had an awed expression on his face. He put his hand on Bud's shoulder and gave it a squeeze, "Relax Lieutenant, I put my pants on just like you one leg at a time."

Everyone had a good chuckle as Bud relaxed a little chagrined at his discomfiture, "Yes sir thank you sir."

The men had very relaxed dinner and conversation as they whiled away the time until their wives finished the party.

Tuesday, May 18, 1999

0958 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harriet was grousing at Bud for grimacing when she insisted on talking about "breast pumps" in the middle of JAG. Harriet was saying, "My breasts hurt from them being so engorged. I want to pump just relieve the pain."

After listening to Harriet for a time Bud realized that she was just getting antsy at being almost due; certain signs was appearing that she was nervous about the birth. Her nesting tendencies increased three fold, her back was aching and she was snapping at his slightest mistake and so forth. Even Sarah was unable to get her to calm down.

"Just wait ma'am, you'll be feeling the same way next August," Harriet reminded her as they sipped tea in the break room.

Same Time
John had Webb in front of his desk. He was very angry that Webb went on his unauthorized rescue mission.

"Why didn't you call Magnum or me when Fawkes was taken?" John began.

Webb replied, "I didn't think I would get the help I needed. The CIA was not even acknowledging Fawkes existed."

"So what, since when did we start working like the CIA?" John retorted.

"Well I did succeed." Webb replied weekly.

"And you were damned lucky that it was a success. But you still put someone important in jeopardy, namely the Navy's Judge Advocate General. If AJ was taken by the Red Brigade, we really would have had a mess. Even if we succeeded in getting him back, his career would have been over." John shouted back.

John stopped to take a breath and calm himself. Webb was about to step into the verbal gap, but John started again, "I can't have this Clay. We can't have agents going it alone at the drop of a hat. Don't you understand that everything you do reflects back on this agency? We do not hide behind secrecy like the CIA. We're right out there as a national law enforcement agency. Do you know how hard Magnum and I are fighting the perception that our people are cowboys no better than retread cops and MPs? Your rogue rescue did not help."

John stopped at that point as he waited for response from Webb. He wasn't disappointed as Webb then asked, "So what now?"

Before he answered John picked up the lone document on his desk. "This is directly from the SECNAV. He is very upset that you used AJ, putting very high ranking officer jeopardy. Because of that alone he does not want to see your name anywhere on our payroll. So I'm sending you back to the CIA. They seem to tolerate your rogue nature. It's either that or they can disavow you more easily than we can. You're a good agent and you seem to have a knack of getting things done. Your only drawback is that you put too many important people at risk doing it. Instead of outright asking for help, you manipulate people in doing what you want. I hope you learn to plan operations a little better. Otherwise you're going to get too many people or likely yourself killed and I don't want to be there to see it, so good luck."

Webb stuck his hand across the desk and John took it. "It was fun while it lasted John. I hope we have the chance to work together again."

"Only if I'm picked to run the CIA and there is very little chance that will happen." John said sardonically.

All Webb could do is nod his head and walk out. John shook his head in disappointment. Then he called Sarah to tell her the news.

1927 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW
Sarah came home with a somewhat heavy heart. While at work after hearing about Webb's dismissal from NCIS, she received word that Chloe's father Kyle made arrangements for her to go to live with her grandmother at the family horse farm in Marin County, California. She called John to let him know. They sat down in the living room after dinner with Chloe and told her.

"I don't wanna go. I like being with you guys. This is the first time that I felt like I have a normal life with parents. You're just getting rid of me so that you have the room for the baby," Chloe cried as Sarah held her to her chest.

"You know that's not true. It's not like you're going away and never coming back. It's just that your father wants you to get to know his family and for them to get to know you. You can't do that while you're living here. You will always be able to call here, home," Sarah told her as she stroked her head. Just then Chloe lifted her head.

"I just felt the baby move," she told Sarah.

"Yeah she/he does that. Look Chloe you'll be here till the school year ends in three more weeks and your father likes that you've found a good stable place to live and he agreed that you can come back here after the summer. Your father wants you to continue in your present school. You only have one more year after this one until you go into high school. By that time he may be stationed here in DC. After the summer I'm going to need a little help getting acclimated to having the baby here anyway and you can be a big help there. I mean look at how fond of little Sarah Cate you've become," Sarah said.

"Yeah when you put it that way I guess it's all right. I mean it's like you said it's not like I'll be gone forever," Chloe said brightening up.

"I know baby you've become a special part of my life and I'm always going to be there for you and I want you to be a big part of the baby's life. So don't ever say that we're getting rid of you," Sarah told her.

"I'm sorry Mac I was just getting mad. I didn't mean it," Chloe told her.

"Now that we got that settled, why don't we put on a movie or something and get over this crying time," John said.

Sarah and Chloe both agreed to a movie. During the movie John looked over to see Chloe asleep in Sarah's arms and Sarah with a very contented smile and tears of happiness rolling down her cheeks.

Wednesday, May 28, 1999

0430 Local Time

Marshall Residence

John woke from a sound sleep to an insistent chirping. He rolled over to answer the phone.

"Hullo" he mumbled.

"John, it's Harm. I need your help!" John heard his brother in law say.

"Harm what's wrong?" John asked now fully awake.

"It's Diane. She woke this morning bleeding. We're at Fairfax Hospital," Harm explained.
"How is Diane?" John asked.

"Diane is fine they managed to stop the bleeding. It was placenta previa. I have to stay here but Sarah Cate is here with me. I can't leave Diane just now and I need you to come take care of her. Harm recounted the last three hours to John:

Diane went to bed right after getting Sarah Cate into bed. Harm stayed up a little to see the end of a movie that he became invested. After the ending he went into his bedroom. Diane was asleep an hour. He changed and brushed his teeth and went into the bedroom. As he pulled back the covers to lay with her he immediately realized there was something terribly wrong. Even in the dark he could see the dark spot. He reached and turned on the light.

"Blood," he gasped in horror, kneeling beside her. He could see the red liquid was seeping from between her legs onto the bed sheet.

"No, she can't lose this baby," he prayed. "Please Jesus." Immediately picked up the phone and dialed '911'. He spoke to the operator, "I need help-I need an ambulance-my... my wife... I'm afraid my wife is losing our baby."

The operator verified his address asked for Diane's vitals. "ETA ten minutes, sir," she told Harm.

After he hung up he bent over Diane. That she was still sleeping at first mystified him and then alarmed him as he wondered if she could be unconscious. "Diane" he whispered urgently, taking her into his arms and sitting her up in bed.

"Hey, wha... what's all this for?" she shook herself awake, unaccustomed to this sort of display from him.

"Diane, you're..." he attempted and then could only point with a shaky finger to the red stained sheet beneath her.

"My, God, what's happening to me?" The onset of her panic was quick and he held her tightly.

"I don't know," he said, his eyes wide with his own alarm. "But I want you to be still and as calm as you can. The ambulance is on the way."

"Harm, the baby," she sobbed. "I'm losing the baby."

"Not necessarily," he tried to reassure her. "There's something wrong but let's not think of the worst first." He held her and rocked her gently, listening for the scream of the ambulance as it pulled up to the house.

"Just don't leave me. Don't let me go," she begged. "I've ever been this scared before," Diane wailed.

"Don't be scared I'm going to let the EMTs in," Harm told her. Harm went out to lead the EMTs into the bedroom. As they loaded Diane onto the stretcher and took her out, he said, "I'll bundle up the baby and meet you at the hospital."

They went to the Fairfax Hospital ER. Harm arrived seconds after the ambulance. He left Sarah Cate at the Nurses station and went into the examination room.

"I'm losing my baby here, aren't I?" Diane whimpered quietly when the OB resident finally reached her side after interminable waiting.

"Dr. Dana Craddock," she introduced herself. "Are you cramping, Mrs. Rabb?" she asked quietly.
Diane's replied. "No, not at all. In fact, I was asleep when the bleeding started. That's a good sign, isn't it?"

Dr. Craddock smiled slightly and moved aside for the technician who was setting up the ultra sound machine. "It could be and it could also be that the expelling of the fetus hasn't begun yet. But this is going to tell us right here. Thank you, I'll do it," she dismissed the tech and squirted some gel on Diane's belly. "Cold, I'm sorry, designed by a man, no doubt."

Dana passed the transducer across Diane's swollen belly, purposely not turning on the screen. "Okay, now we're listening for the heartbeat." She passed it several times without success and Diane held her breath, gripping Harm's hands tightly.

"Breathe, Mrs. Rabb," Dr. Craddock encouraged and then turned up the volume. A steady lub-drub sound filled the cubicle.

"The baby's okay?" Harm dared to ask.

Dr. Craddock held up her finger and then turned on the screen, praying that she was not about to display a dying infant. For a long moment she studied the image and made a few notes. "The pregnancy is intact." she pronounced. "For the moment at least."

"The baby's okay?" Harm repeated, the lawyer in him requiring the clarification.

"It's called placenta previa," Dana said slowly. "Basically the placenta is attached in an awkward place and as the baby is growing there's a little tearing and bleeding. Have you had a sonogram before?"

"No, this is the first one for this baby. I have an older daughter," Diane answered shakily, her voice still tearful.

"Well, later you'll need to see your own OB right away. A sonogram for bleeding is the method of detection so if you haven't had one- but if there was no reason for it-your doctor wouldn't have known." Dana turned the screen more toward them. "But there's the heart beating, the spinal cord and the..." She paused and then gave a surprised chuckle. "Oh, my," she breathed.
"What is it?" Harm demanded.

Dr. Craddock looked at the two of them and smiled wide. "Harm, Diane, did you know you were having babies?" she asked.

"Babies?" Now it was Harm's turn to gasp. "As in more than one?"

Dr. Craddock nodded and for an instant Harm felt the room tilt. Diane squeezed his hand tight and tugged slightly, bringing his attention back to her.

"How could we have not known there was more than one?" Diane questioned.

"Again you wouldn't unless your OB did a sonogram or listened for the heartbeats. I didn't catch it at first myself because I wasn't looking for it. Let's take a look."

She started to move across Diane's belly again and they all watched the screen. Fuzzy shapes shifted and moved and Dana started pointing them out.

"They're stacked," she grinned. "That makes it harder to see them. But if you'll look here – see there's an arm? And there's another one on the same side and here's…yes, there's a foot and here are the other three.

Congratulations, it looks like you're going to have twins."

Harm and Diane stared at each other, dumbfounded.

"Twins," Harm mumbled.

"I'm a twin!" Diane explained her voice sounding far away as she tried to grasp this new information.

"Well there's your explanation," Dr. Craddock smiled encouragingly.

Diane looked up at Harm with love and the first bit of good news from the crisis.

"So what do we do now?" Harm asked.

"Total bed rest as much as you can," Dr. Craddock answered. "If you were my patient I'd be looking to deliver you as soon as tests showed the babies could survive."

"And that's scary," Harm sighed. "I mean a preemie…"

"A baby's chances of surviving as a preemie are far greater than surviving a total placental abruption...uh separation," Dana said as gently as possible. "Now do you want to know the gender?"

"No," Diane said firmly, making the decision for both of them.

"I'm going to take this off then and put a fetal monitor on you," Dana nodded. "And I'm putting
something to make you relax in your IV. You can leave in about eight hours if all remains normal."

It took but a few minutes to accomplish those details and they were left alone, the room now silent save the beating of the babies' hearts as echoed by the monitor.

"It's going to be okay, sweetie" he said softly, stroking her hair back from her forehead. "God didn't make this happen this way just to have it end. We are going to hold our children."

"Hope so," she murmured, her voice already fading from the sedative's effect.

"Sleep now," he soothed, his fingers still squiggling in her hair.

"Okay, as long as you're not going to leave me." Her last words were barely audible as she was almost out.

"I'm not going anywhere," he answered and she smiled slightly, closing her eyes. Just before sleep claimed her, she was almost sure she heard him finish his sentence with, "Don't you get it, Sailor—I love you."

Harm came out of his reverie to finish speaking to John, "I was really scared John. She was bleeding a lot. When we got to the hospital, they managed to stop it. After she was stabilized they sedated her"

"Where would you like me to meet you and pick up Sarah Cate?" John asked.

"Come to the house and pickup Sarah Cate. Diane is going to be out for the next 5 hours. I'll take the baby home and pack her things. I need her to stay with you for a while. Diane is going to need total bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. I need help taking care of little Sarah as I take care of Diane,"

"Sure Harm, what are godparents for," John reassured him.

Sarah was awakened by John's urgent tone. She asked, "John how's Diane and the baby?" John handed her the phone and went to get dressed.

"Is the baby in distress or is it viable for being born premature?" Sarah asked Harm.

"The babies are not in distress," Harm said

Sarah caught the plural. "What do you mean babies?"

"Diane is having twins," Harm told her.

Sarah just dropped the phone in astonishment. She picked it up as Harm explained further. After he finished she told him, "John is getting dressed now he'll meet you at your house. I'll fix up the nursery for her to stay. Don't worry Harm everything is going to be fine," Sarah reassured him.

0911 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John returned to their house with a sleeping Sarah Cate about 0630. After Sarah prepared the nursery for Sarah Cate, she went back to sleep. She slept until John came home and put Little Sarah in the crib. It was the type that could be dismantled into a low-rise bed. John would take the day off and stay with Sarah for the day. Right now Sarah was entering JAG. As she approached the elevator she called for it to be held.
Mic Brumby held the elevator for Sarah as he saw her come in from the parking lot. While they were in the elevator he said. "You remind me of my mum. She never stopped going even while she was having my younger sister. She was an attorney as well," he told Sarah.

"Really is she still practicing?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah, she's a judge in the New South Wales Supreme Court, Sydney. She loves putting on the robe and wig when she tries a case.

"That's something I'd like to try," Sarah said.

"Maybe you and John can be the next exchange officers. I know she'd like to meet you," Mic said.

"Maybe after the baby comes, we'll see about visiting her. John and I have never been to Australia," Sarah said.

"Well when you decide to go let me know and I'll try to set up something for you two," Mic said.

"That would be nice, thanks Mic," Sarah said sincerely.

"My pleasure," Brumby replied.

When Sarah entered the bullpen with Brumby she saw Bud and asked her, "Is Admiral Chegwidden in yet Bud?"

"Yes ma'am, he came in a few minutes ago," Bud replied.

"Good I need to speak with him about Harm. Diane is in the hospital. She had a problem." Sarah began.

"She didn't lose the baby did she?" Bud asked.

"No she still has the babies but she had a placenta previa episode. She has to stay in bed for the rest of her pregnancy. Harm needs to stay home until some arrangements can be made. Right now John is home with little Sarah as she was too exhausted from being out at the hospital to go to daycare."

"Babies ma'am?" Bud asked.

"Yeah Diane is having twins. That's the one good thing that came out of this episode. While the attending OB did a sonogram, she found another baby."

"Wow what a way to find out." Bud gushed.

"Yeah, if Harm weren't so worried about the overall health of Diane and the babies, he would be doing hand stands now. Right now he only planned for staying home to take care of Diane," Sarah said as she excused herself and walked into her office.

Sarah put her briefcase and cover down and went across to AJ's office. Tiner told her that he was in so she knocked. She entered after his usual "Enter!".

"Colonel what brings you to me this morning," AJ asked.

"Sir it's about Harm and Diane. Diane had to go to the hospital last night," Sarah began.

"Is she alright? Is the baby alright?" AJ asked.
"So far everyone is fine. In fact Diane found out she was having twins. She had a bleeding episode. The bleeding was caused by placenta previa," Sarah explained.

"I'm familiar with the condition. Francesca's mother Marcella had that when she was having Francesca. Marcella had to be confined to bed rest for a month and a half. At which time Francesca was born," AJ explained.

"Right sir, well Diane is still in the hospital under observation with a fetal monitor and she was sedated last night. If everything is normal she should be ready to go home late this afternoon. Harm is still at the hospital. John picked up Sarah Cate and brought her to our house. He stayed at home today as she was too tired to go to daycare today. John had some leave time and there was nothing pressing at NCIS so Admiral Magnum told him to take the day," Sarah finished.

"Are you and the Rabbs making other arrangements for when Diane gets home?" AJ asked.

"Well sir Harm is calling his mom and John is calling his. Maureen has become Diane's surrogate parent and she just adores little Sarah. Between all of us we'll figure out a plan to help Diane and Harm," Sarah said.

"You all have a nice support system worked out," AJ said admiringly.

"Yes sir, we do. The day I found out Diane and I were sisters, then when I married John I entered a big family. It is like nothing I have ever experienced before in my life. The closest thing I had to this growing up was Uncle Matt and there were so few times where he could help being deployed and all and after that only after I was in trouble." Sarah said, but not with sadness or anger. Sarah realized that she was long passed all that.

"Well please let me know two things, one, what personnel decisions you need to make to cover Harm's cases and two, whatever Sydney and I can do to help," AJ said.

"Thank you sir, I know Harm and Diane would like to hear from you and Sydney when she is settled at home. Other than that we'll adapt as we go along," Sarah said gratefully.

"In the meantime what is on the calendar?" AJ asked.

"Well Bud is defending Lance Corporal Edward Carr who's Staff Sergeant, Aileen Morris, allegedly seduced him then distanced him to keep the fact that she was having a baby secret," Sarah said. She then started listing the other activities that were occurring at JAG that day. Right after that AJ left to give a speech.

1611 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Bud was cross-examining the pregnant Staff Sergeant Morris. He was pressing her for an answer as the Lt. Commander Imes, the prosecuting attorney, was objecting saying that Bud was badgering her on the stand. As he forcefully and directly asked if the Staff Sergeant seduced Lance Corporal Carr, Morris grabbed her side and sighed.

"What's the matter Staff Sergeant?" Bud asked.

"My water broke," Morris said.

"Your honor Lt. Roberts has badgered the Staff Sergeant into labor," Imes said in exasperation.
As Morris was assisted off the witness stand to the audience bench she said, "I have no one to take me to the hospital"

Corporal Carr volunteered. Morris said, "That's good because the baby is yours."

Admiral Morris was the presiding judge. Upon hearing Staff Sgt. Morris' admission he turned to Bud and said, "You got your appeal."

At the same time Harriet was walking out to the elevator, but the elevator was being repaired. She was advised that she should use the stairs. Since she was going down any way, she acquiesced. While she was walking down she encountered John who was coming up with Sarah Cate and Chloe. He was stopping in to see his Sarah so the three could go to the hospital to see Diane. John was dressed in his business suit.

"Hey Harriet, how are you feeling?" John asked in way of greeting.

"Like I'm about to explode sir," Harriet said in exasperation.

"Harriet I'm not wearing my uniform so you don't have to…" John was about to say "sir me" but he was cut off by Harriet crying out. "Harriet what's wrong?" John asked as he supported her.

"I think I just had a contraction John. See I didn't call you sir," Harriet said panting.

"Okay, let's get you somewhere comfortable then we'll get Bud and then call an ambulance," John said as they walked out of the stairway.

Just as they entered the bullpen Harriet's water broke. "Oh that's not good," she said in dismay.

Sarah saw Harriet, John, Chloe and Sarah Cate as they crossed into the bullpen and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Harriet's in labor. Let's get her into the Admiral's office," John said.

Sarah supported Harriet as they staggered into the office.

"Tiner get the first aid kit and some towels," John ordered him.

They took the cushions off the couch and laid Harriet down. Sarah supported her head.

Brumby came into the office saying, "I can help I delivered hundreds of kids. Sometimes we have to tie a rope around there legs and just yank them out."

Sarah looked up incredulously and asked, "What are you talking about?"

"Sheep I helped deliver hundreds of sheep." Brumby said.

At that Sarah got up and ushered him from the room. She returned to support Harriet's head.

Tiner came in with the first aid kit and the towels. He said, "I can help my grandmother was a midwife." But when he saw the baby was crowning he fainted dead away.

John called out, "Mic, get back in here." When Brumby came back in John told him, "Get the school boy out of here."

John took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and tucked his tie into his shirt. Then he spread the towels under Harriet. He examined Harriet and said, "Well Harriet it looks like you're ready to
deliver."

Right at that point AJ returned from his speech. "What's going on here?" Realizing that he asked a stupid question he asked John, "Do you know what you're doing Captain?"

"Yes sir, give me your shoe laces." John said.

AJ complied. John said "Now Harriet when I say, I want you to push." He covered his hands with a towel.

"Okay Harriet, push."

Harriet grimaced and started pushing. She gave up though after a few seconds.

AJ shouted at her, "C'mon lieutenant, push! That's an order!"

Harriet grabbed her thighs and pushed. "That's it Harriet. Here comes the head." John said in encouragement.

Harriet pushed some more and the shoulders came. John held the head as Harriet felt the rest of the baby slide out.

"It's a boy Harriet," AJ exclaimed as helped tie off the umbilical cord.

At that moment Bud was heard outside the office. "Harriet?" He burst into the office and saw that she already delivered their baby. His uniform was smudged with grease and oil.

"Come here Lieutenant, cut the cord," John said.

After Bud did so, John wrapped the baby up and handed him to Bud. AJ said, "Welcome to the club son."

Bud then handed his son to his mother. "Harriet we have a son."

Sarah was still kneeling at Harriet's head. "He's so beautiful Harriet. Is that what I have to look forward to?"

"You bet Sarah." Harriet said wearily.

Harriet delivered the placenta and John was packing it in a towel and then he applied a stack of towels to Harriet and he pushed her legs closed and got her ready for transport. He was also been watching the exchange between the two mothers. When Sarah looked up at him with one of her watery smiles, he leaned over and gave his wife a brief sweet kiss.

Harriet looked up at them and said, "Hey you two get a room."

1700 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah had Emma call '911' and had another ambulance come and to take the Roberts family to the hospital.

John cleaned up and he and Sarah were standing on the front steps seeing the Roberts off. Sarah had her arm wrapped around his as she rubbed her own baby belly.
"Oh John I can't wait till we have ours. Harriet looks so happy," Sarah said.

John pulled her closer and gently kissed her temple. "Very soon my love, very soon." he said gently. "In the meantime why don't we take this little one to see her mommy?" John added. Chloe was holding Sarah Cate's hand as they walked to the 'blazer.

"Yeah let's go." Sarah said. John and Sarah received an adaptable infant to toddler to booster seat for a shower gift. Chloe strapped Sarah Cate in and they went to see Diane and Harm at home.

1745 Local Time

Rabb Residence

When they got to the Rabbs they were surprised to see Trish and Maureen both answer the door. Frank was in the living room with Harm. He got up and came to the door when he saw who was there. Sarah Cate went running right to her father. Harm picked her up and spun her around like an airplane. After she had her giggles, he enveloped her in a tight hug and gave her more kisses.

After entering and properly greeting Frank and the two grandmothers John said to Maureen, "So Mom, when did you get here and why didn't you call me to pick you up?"

"First don't take that tone with me. Second I just got here. Third I did call you at your office but Carolyn said you were home for the day. So I tried your number and got no answer. So instead of continuing to play phone tag with you I called here looking for Harm. Frank and Trish arrived this afternoon. They met Harm and Diane at the hospital and they took Diane home. Harm and Trish were getting Diane settled so when I called, Frank volunteered to come and get me," Maureen said.

Chloe giggled as she and Sarah stood by amused at the scolding Maureen gave John. Sarah asked Maureen "Is that how I keep him in line?"

"Yes dear, don't let him get away with anything," Maureen said as she gave Sarah a hug and kiss. 'And who is this beautiful young lady?' Maureen asked as she gave Chloe a big hug and kiss. Trish gave Chloe just as enthusiastic a greeting.

"Maureen, Trish, this is Chloe Madison. We met in the Big Sisters mentoring program. We helped her find her father in the Navy and she's been staying with us a while. Chloe this is Mrs. Marshall, John's mom and this is Mrs. Burnett, Harm's mom," Sarah said making introductions.

Harm came over with little Sarah, "Come on let's see how Diane's doing," he said.

They walked into the bedroom together and found Diane in bed reading a book. She looked up when everyone came into the room. Sarah Cate was anxious to kiss her mommy and almost pulled out of Harm's grip.

As Harm held her back he told her, "Easy there squirt. You can't jump on mommy now. She has to take it easy. Just give her a nice kiss." Sarah Cate complied as Harm set her down and she gave her mommy a quick kiss and then hopped off the bed. She toddled out of the room and into her own room with Chloe right behind her.

"So, how are you doing?" Sarah asked as she bent to give her a kiss then stepped aside to let John give her one as well.

"I'm fine. The sedative wore off hours ago. I have all this energy but if I so much as put a toe on the floor, Harm will strap me down," Diane said teasingly. Harm just rolled his eyes. He did look tired and Diane saw it.
"Honey why don't you go sit or lie down? We have more people here to help so you can relax," Diane suggested.

"Yeah that sounds good," Harm said as he bent to give Diane a brief kiss. Then he walked out with John.

Sarah sat at the edge of the bed and took hold of Diane's hand. She waited till the men were out of earshot and said, "I was so scared for you when Harm called this morning. I just got you I don't want to lose you," she said almost crying.

"C'mere," Diane said, opening her arms. Sarah went to her and they hugged each other fiercely. They both sobbed quietly as they held onto each other.

"It's okay, the babies are fine, I'm fine, and everything will be fine. I just went on maternity leave a little early that's all." Diane said as she stroked the back of Sarah's head. They both sniffled a little more before Sarah sat up.

As they wiped their eyes Sarah said, "By the way Harriet had her baby this afternoon, at JAG. It's a boy."

"Really! What happened?" Diane asked.

"Well she went into abnormal labor. The contractions came so fast there was no time to wait for an ambulance. John delivered him with the admiral looking over his shoulder. Also during the whole process a very pregnant Staff Sergeant went into her own labor. Her water broke on the stand as she was being cross-examined by Bud. Carolyn Imes said that Bud badgered her into labor. Then when Bud got word that Harriet was in labor he jumped into the nearest open elevator. Unfortunately it was being repaired and he got stuck between floors. The repairman got him out just before little AJ was born. He was there to cut the cord. Harriet looked so happy."

"Little AJ? They named the baby after the Admiral?" Diane asked.

Sarah replied, "Yeah sort of. The Admiral is named Albert Jethro. But they were going to name him Anthony Joseph, but they changed the 'J' name to John. We'll still call him AJ for the Admiral's sake, but if he asks, Bud and Harriet thought that since John delivered him, he should be named after him in some way. Anthony is Bud's grandfather's name."

"That's really nice. I just hope that my giving birth this time is not as dramatic. Anyway enough about births and so on, I'm starving. Could you see what everyone's doing about dinner please?" Diane asked Sarah.

As if on cue Harm came in with a bed tray on which there was a bowl of vegetable soup and a steak dinner with fries and string beans. "Maureen and mom made you dinner. Sarah would you like to eat in here with Diane?" Harm asked.

"Sure Harm," Sarah asked.

"Okay great," Harm said with that he waved out the door as John and Frank brought in a long folding table. Then they went out and got chairs for the six adults and Chloe to sit. Then Trish and Maureen set the table and everyone sat down to eat in the bedroom.

"No sense eating alone darling," Trish said. Diane was so touched by the concern that she had to calm herself to keep from crying. The rest of the evening was just as pleasant.

Just before they left John told Diane, "Thomas told me to tell you he doesn't want to see you at the
office until after the twins are born. So you won't go stir crazy I am going to set up a laptop and a secure computer line so that we can communicate vital information for the projects you were working on. I also assigned one of the agents you've been training, Jessica Morgan, to be your aide. Use her for work. Mom and Trish are here for everything else. So you'll be all set up."

He bent over to give her a kiss on her cheek. Diane pulled him into a deep hug of gratitude. Sarah gave her the same hug and kiss and they left for the night saying goodnight to Harm, Trish, Frank and Maureen.

Tuesday, June 1, 1999

0945 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm, Diane, Sarah and John spent the greater part of the Memorial Day weekend together at the Rabbs. Chloe was a big help in helping with Sarah Cate. AJ and Sydney also stopped by to see how Diane was doing.

After the near scare of Diane's health Harm came to a sobering conclusion. He could not leave for any long length of time or multiple deployments to go fly. So he researched ways to get recertified for night flying and to remain at JAG. He brought his plan to Sarah who said that if a fleet was in need of a Staff Judge Advocate he could do that TAD and while there get some flying time while still advising on legal matters. Sarah and he prepared a proposal to be presented to the admiral. This morning they sat patiently as AJ read it. Initially AJ was skeptical. You realize that you will need to be at Oceana for a time. Since your status is still current the overall training will not be needed, just recertification for night carrier landing. When would you like to do this?"

"I'd like to wait until after Diane's recovered from having the twins. By that time the Patrick Henry would have been home at Norfolk and be ready for its next deployment. I can be recertified for night carrier landing in Oceana in two weeks and be deployed on her as the Fleet Staff Judge Advocate for the next deployment. Doing things this way I won't need to change my designator. Besides I haven't done sea duty as a JAG anyway and I need to do that if I want to advance."

"You've done the research on this haven't you?" AJ asked smiling.

"Yes sir I have. I'd appreciate what ever help you can give me." Harm said

I'll talk to the SECNAV about your request. When you need to do this I'll use Brumby to pick up the slack in your absence.

"Brumby sir?" Harm asked.

"Be nice," Sarah chided.

"Yes Brumby. I'm sure I'll have an answer from the SECNAV by the time the twins come. Is there anything else?" AJ asked. Receiving no answer he said "Okay, dismissed."

Sarah and Harm got up to attention and chorused," Aye, aye sir", turned and walked out of the office.

They walked into Sarah's office and closed the door. They both took a good cleansing breath and let it out.

"That was easier than I thought it would be," Harm said.
"That's because you asked to advance your career as a JAG officer. It's what any other officer in this office would have done. The flying would be a bonus that the Navy would be happy to take advantage of," Sarah said.

Harm nodded then a thought came to him. "What's this I hear about Webb being sent back to the CIA? Diane told me the other day."

Sarah sighed at that, "John told me the day it happened. The SECNAV was very upset that Webb used the admiral to save his friend. John wasn't too pleased himself. He was almost as upset as the SECNAV. John had no choice but to let him go. He was so disappointed in Webb. He had some plans for him."

She wasn't really sad about Webb. She knew well enough that Webb had a habit of not adequately planning his operations, going in without back-up and so on. She first saw it in her time in Hawaii while she was in NIS. Even though she didn't work directly with him, NIS agents from her office had. As the office supervisor, reports of Webb's operations came across her desk. She was amazed at what went on, the screw ups, the near misses, the lost intelligence. It was amazing that Webb lasted so long in his job. All during their time in Russia, Sarah was very much afraid that Webb would do something to get them all killed. But John's planning and the assets he put in place there prevented that. Well she didn't need to dwell on him any longer as he was almost certainly out of her life. She went back to work. She met John for lunch and then at the end of the day she went to visit her sister.

Thursday, June 3, 1999

0945 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Navy Yard, DC

Mary Holland came into John's office with a distressed look on her face saying, "I just caught a homicide from Norfolk. A Master Chief was killed. He was Charlie Lynch's master chief. It seems that he's finally surfaced. Lynch's motive for killing his old Master Chief is because he got him discharged. After I left the crime scene my team and I started canvassing the nearby motels to see where Lynch may have stayed. When we got to the third one we found the police had their own crime scene. The owner of that motel was killed. When I went to check the register I found that Charlie stayed there. When I went to notify Dar-Lin's aunt I found that Charlie had already been there and murdered her."

"They all seem to line right up to Lynch. Call Harm and Jordan Parker, then get to the foster family where Dar-Lin is staying. We may have to move her and them to a safer place."

"I'll get right on that," Mary said.

1145 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm was at the office late as he had dropped Diane off at the house. Diane only left the house to see Dr. Baldwin early that morning. Eve wanted to see her every week now and at the earliest appointment of the day. That way if she needed to Eve could deliver the babies at the first sign of trouble. Today Eve said that, "everything looks good. The placenta tear seems to have healed. That's due to the bed rest. Stick to that and no excitement and you can carry the babies full term."

Jessica Morgan was at the house now with Trish staying in residence. She and Maureen agreed that
they would alternate weeks at the Rabbs. Diane really enjoyed the way things were working out for her and the babies.

Harm was happy to hear it. He arrived at the office more relaxed. AJ saw the difference. He called Harm into his office.

"While you were at the doctor's with Diane John called," AJ told him and then the whole trail of murder that Charlie was leaving behind searching for Dar-Lin.

AJ continued, "Since you have to deal with Diane, I do not want you involved. If Diane got nervous I do not want to be responsible for any misfortune. So as your commanding officer, you need to consider my request as an order. John and his staff are looking for Lynch. They already moved Dar-Lin and have Dr. Parker involved with her. So stay out of it."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm acknowledged.

He knew AJ was right and he would adhere to his orders. He only called John to be apprised of any results in the manhunt. John also cautioned him, "If you hear from Lynch you are to call me immediately, is that clear Lt. Commander?" John said pulling rank. John knew Harm's sense of obligation would kick in to actively protect Dar-Lin as if she was his own child.

"Aye, aye sir" Harm said with a chuckle. He was getting exasperated at his higher-ranking friends ganging up on him. He had a feeling when he next saw Sarah, she would do the same.

And he was right. When he went in to see Sarah regarding another case, the first thing she asked was, "Do I have to tell you to stay away from the Dar-Lin & Lynch matter?"

"No ma'am, I have already been ordered by the admiral and your husband to do just that," Harm said sardonically.

"Good, now we can get down to other cases," Sarah said.

1430 Local Time

Navy Yard

Auxiliary Base Housing

Mary Holland's team ascertained that Lynch stole a uniform from the master chief when he killed him. The master chief still had the dry cleaning tag in his pocket. The ticket showed that a pair of dress white longs was cleaned. Also Lynch impersonated a step-brother, trying to get information from Dar-Lin's social worker. The social worker was on to him and reported him to NCIS.

As soon as they were notified Mary and Tony Dinozzo raced over to the safe house in the Navy Yard to move Dar-Lin. There they met Jordan. Mary and Tony got Dar-Lin and the foster family into Jordan's car and watched as they drove away. Just as they were going to get back into their own car, Lynch showed up. Tony and Mary drew their weapons and made Lynch stop his car. Lynch had other ideas. He did stop but when they stepped to the sides, Mary on the passenger and Tony on the driver's he gunned the engine. He just missed them but they fired their guns into the front windows as he passed. They didn't fire into the sides as they were in the same line of fire. The car sped past them and continued for about 25 yards then swerved to the right and crashed headlong into a tree.

When Mary and Tony reached the spot, the front end of the car was wrapped around the tree. Lynch was slumped over the wheel. There were bullet wounds in his right shoulder, chest and head through the side of his left eye. Tony felt for a pulse but didn't find one.
1730 Local Time

NCIS & JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

Tony and Mary notified John that Lynch was dead. John sent Gibbs' team to do the crime scene investigation. Soon Gibbs had more information to report. John called JAG and relayed the information to Harm.

"Lynch stole the car he was driving from the murdered master chief. Tony and Mary found the chief's registration in the glove box. After they got there I sent Mary and Tony to Child Services. They found out that after leaving Child Services Lynch spoke to a loose-lipped policeman who was on duty in the building. The cop was formerly in the Navy and he thought that he was helping out a fellow veteran when he told Lynch everything he wanted to know. Lynch then got some stationary from the SECNAV when he conned his way into the SECNAV's office at the Pentagon and got him to sign a picture as an autograph. Lynch traced the signature onto the stationary. With the 'signed' letter he gained entry to the base. Who knows what he would have done if Mary and Tony weren't there," John said.

What John didn't tell Harm is that Lynch also obtained Harm's name. John didn't want Harm to worry too much and blab it to Diane thereby upsetting her. She didn't need that.

"Wow I'm glad that's over. Now I can relax. I owe you guys," Harm said.

"Yeah, just take care of my sister in law and we'll call it square," John said.

"No problem pal. That's an order I will have no problem obeying," Harm said with a sigh. He was glad this burden was taken from him. "Will I see you at little AJ's christening this Sunday?" Harm asked.

"Oh yeah Sarah is the godmother. She said Bud asked you to be the godfather?" John said.

"Yeah who knew I was godfather material?" Harm said facetiously. "I won't be able to stay for the party though as I have to be home right after the ceremony for Diane."

"Well don't worry about that. With all our wives and my sister pregnant they all got together and decided to have one big christening party after the last baby is baptized. Harriet and Bud said they'll stop by with little AJ so Diane could see him then they'll just have a quiet dinner," John said.

Well that's great idea. So we'll wait until Sarah has her baby in August or September?" Harm asked.

Yeah looks that way. You should be deployed by then though," John reminded him.

"That's okay. Have a party and send me lots of pictures so that I can decorate my quarters," Harm said with a chuckle.

"Anyway I'm keeping my wife waiting so I'll see you this weekend. Take care ace,' John said.

"You to John," Harm said as he hung up.

Sunday, June 6, 1999
1400 Local Time
Chapel of the Seas
Baby AJ was christened with Harm and Sarah as godparents. AJ & Sydney, John, Ann Marie & Pete, as well as Harriet's parents and Big Bud & Mikey were in attendance. John had a handhold of Little Sarah. As promised Harriet brought Little AJ to the Rabbs so that Diane could see the baby. Ann Marie & Pete and AJ & Sydney went along to see how Diane was doing.

Diane was so grateful to hold the little guy that she got choked up. "Oh Harriet, he's so beautiful," she said. Ann Marie, Sydney, Harriet and Sarah sat for a while talking with Diane.

The men left the women to talk their girl talk.

Diane asked Harriet, "Where did you make reservations for dinner?"

"Oh we didn't make reservations for anywhere. We spoke to John and Pete and we thought we would just relax at home. I mean we're all going to have a party this fall when Col. Marshall has her baby," Harriet said.

"Harriet, how many times do I have to tell you to drop the rank and the ma'am's while we're away from the office? If you don't start calling me Sarah or Mac I'll never speak to you outside the office again."

"Geez you and your husband found the right one to marry. He told me the same thing right before I went into labor," Harriet said in playful rebuke. "Give me time I'm only a lowly JG."

"Hey you two, indoor voices you'll wake the baby," Diane said with a whisper and a smile. You two should work with us. We don't use anyone's rank at the office," Diane said. "And furthermore don't argue in my house," she added emphatically but in a whisper and a smile.

"Okay, okay mom we'll hold out tongues," Sarah said.

Diane turned to Ann Marie and asked, "How are you doing, any problems with toxemia this time around?"

"No not this time. I ate very salty food the last time. This time I stayed away from that and ate healthy. Don't tell Harm but I cut down on a lot of red meat. I did stick to chicken and turkey. I used a lot of olive oil in my cooking stuff so I don't have that problem," Ann Marie answered.

The ladies had a good chat fest as AJ and the husbands waited in the back yard.

AJ took the opportunity to pull Harm aside and tell him, "I put your request in to the SECNAV. He checked with the Chief of Aviation. He agrees that your current status only needs to be tweaked for night landings on carriers and general night flying conditions. That should take 2 weeks of practically non-stop 7 nights-a-week training. The next training cycle begins June 21. The next one after that begins July 19. That last one will give you the 2 weeks needed to recertify and still be ready to fly out as Staff Judge Advocate for the Fleet after the Patrick Henry leaves port July 26 for the 'Med.' The cruise will be six months long. You'll be back home on land JAG Duty by February. Do you still want to go that route?"

"Yes sir that sounds very good. If Diane carries the twins full term, she's due around July 4. July 19 will give me time to help her ease into recovery and set up the daycare issues. Let me speak with her and I'll have an answer for you tomorrow," Harm said.

"Very good Harm, that's what I thought you would say, and so did the Secretary," AJ said. "He also added that it will do you some good to be out of Washington and out of his hair. I agree. When you
get back I think you'll have fresh perspective on things. Don't blow this," AJ said.

"Yes sir I will keep that in mind," Harm said sincerely.

After about an hour the ladies said goodbye to Diane and went to collect their partners to leave. Harm said goodbye to everyone in the driveway. He then went into Diane and told her what AJ said.

"That is excellent Harm. That sounds like a doable timetable. I'll end my maternity after you leave that is if the twins wait until July 4th. Also don't forget, Sarah and John will be nearby so you don't have to worry about anything. Sarah and I will be spending a lot of time together anyway when she has her baby. So everything will work out,' Diane said cupping his cheek.

"How did I get so lucky to get you?" Harm asked as Diane used that thumb to wipe a tear falling down his cheek.

"I was there from the beginning. You just had to open your eyes and see me. The timing of the night blindness seemed to be just right. It opened your eyes after all," she said.

Diane had another thought and voiced it, "As a matter of fact the whole timing of yours and John's accidents seemed to be in the stars. If you guys had not met in Bethesda, we wouldn't be sitting like we are. I guess the saying is true, 'timing is everything'."

"Yeah I suppose," Harm acknowledged. He kicked off his shoes and settled Diane into the crook of his arm as she lay down and put her head on his chest and her arm across his body and hugged him close. Just then little Sarah Cate came skipping into the bedroom.

"Can I lie down with you and mommy?" she asked.

"Sure squirt, just don't jump on mommy," Harm said.

Sarah Cate climbed onto the bed from the foot and crawled gently between her parents. Sarah settled into a niche with her head up against her mommy's belly. She stuck her thumb in her mouth and went to sleep.

Her parents settled in around her to relax the day away. Harm had his answer for the admiral and he would let him know tomorrow.
Chapter 45

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 45

Monday, June 28, 1999

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm and Sarah spent the morning and early part of the afternoon in Norfolk concluding a case. Now Harm was in his office and Sarah was in hers. They were each going to call their respective spouses. Harm had his mom and Frank over that week to stay with Diane. Miraculously Diane was able to carry the twins almost full term, as the Placenta Previa condition was not further exacerbated. Harm, Trish, Maureen and even Jessica Morgan really pampered Diane.

Just as Harm was to reach for the phone it rang. He immediately recognized Diane's cell number.

"Diane is everything alright?" Harm said as soon as he picked up.

"Harm, its Mom. Jessica is driving Diane and me to Bethesda. Diane started having contractions. We called Eve and she said to take her to the hospital right away. You can meet us there. Don't worry everything is fine," Trish finished.

Harm could hear a siren wailing in the background. John gave Jessica use of one of the NCIS cars and Jessica was making full use of the lights and siren to get from Fairfax to Bethesda.

"Okay Mom I'm leaving JAG now. I should be there right behind you," Harm practically shouted into the phone. Needless to say he was heard out in the bullpen. As he stopped at Sarah's office he said, "Diane went into labor. Can John please pick up Sarah Cate at daycare? I'll call you at home when the babies come."

Harm and Diane decided to keep Sarah going to daycare because even though Diane was at home fulltime being she was on bed rest orders, she was unable to devote her full attention to her daughter and Sarah would miss all her friends she made at daycare.

"Yes Harm, John will get Sarah and good luck Harm," Sarah called as he ran out the door.

Sarah came to the door and leaned against the lintel and crossed her arms. She turned and saw Emma smiling at her. She smiled back. She was genuinely happy for Harm. She asked Emma, "Do you think John will act the same way when I have mine?"

"Oh definitely I think it's a father thing. It makes them feel needed when all they'll end up doing is acting like Johnny Bench," Emma said smiling and holding her hands like a catcher.

Sarah and every other woman in the bullpen just burst out laughing. The men just smiled indulgently. Sarah went into her office to call the Navy Yard Daycare Center to make arrangements to allow John to pick up Sarah Cate. Then she called John's office to have him do that and meet her outside JAG. Then she started to straighten out her work to get ready to leave.
When Harm got to the hospital he went right up to maternity. When he got there he was astounded at what he found. Diane was sitting on the bed in her labor room smiling broadly. She was already dressed in a hospital gown and had an IV port in her left hand. A fetal monitoring was attached to her stomach. She, Trish, Frank and Jessica were carrying on an animated conversation. Frank followed the women in the Rabbs' Lexus. Frank admired on how Jessica took charge. First putting Diane and Trish into the back seat together and then instructing Frank to follow at his own pace.

Harm took a breath and settled into a chair.

"So what's happening?" he asked.

Diane answered, "First of all I'm fine and the twins are fine." Diane pointed at the monitor that showed two separate heart rates. Then she took a deep breath as the monitor showed a contraction. Harm could see the contraction progress on the graph spooling from the monitor. "My contractions at home were 10 minutes apart now they are 5 minutes apart. We called Eve as soon as I started having them. She's setting up an operating room to do a Caesarian Birth. They will be in shortly to give me an epidural and catheter. Eve didn't want to take any chances and what have you, so you'll be a father again very soon."

"That's good," Harm said as he then asked, "Did anyone call Maureen? I'm sure she'd like to know what's happening."

"I'll take care of calling Maureen darling," Trish said as she got up gave Diane and Harm each a kiss then left the room with Jessica and Frank. Right after they left the anesthesiologist came in to prepare Diane. After the usual things were done a sedative was hooked into the IV.

During the preparations Eve came in. "Alright the OR is set up. Harm, you go with this nice nurse so that you can get gowned up. We don't want to mess up those dress whites. Diane the sedative we're giving you is to keep you calm so that when I start cutting and you feel some tugging and so forth you won't panic. You may smell something burning. That will be the when we cauterize some blood vessels. From the first cut I can have both babies out in 8 minutes. The heart rates look good and they are not in distress so I don't even want you to think of that. Just relax and let me do what I do."

Diane nodded wearily as the sedative took effect. She was transferred to a gurney and wheeled into the OR. They set her up for the operation. After Eve made the first cut, Harm was brought in. They sat him down on a stool at Diane's right shoulder. He was not in a position to see the procedure.

Eve was better than her word as she pulled the first baby out in 6 minutes. It was a boy. He was followed by the next one 45 seconds later, it was a girl. Both babies cried and made the usual healthy noises as Harm cut both cords. They were placed under the heat lamps as they were cleaned up, weighed and measured. After the footprints were taken and the babies were swaddled the nurses brought them over. Harm took hold of first the boy in one arm. He was wrapped in a blue blanket. "Hello Harmon David III or Trey." Then the girl wrapped in a pink blanket was put into his other arm. "And hello to you, Samantha Patricia."

Harm held the twins as all the post delivery procedures were done on Diane. When they had her ready Harm and the nurses handed the babies to her. She marveled at how perfect they were. Trey was weighed at 6 pounds 10 ounces and 20 inches long. Samantha was weighed at 6 pounds and 14 ounces and also 20 inches long.
After a short time the nurses took the babies and put them each into an isolette and wheeled them into the nursery. Harm kissed his wife then followed the babies. After Diane's post op was finished they transferred her to a movable bed and wheeled her into recovery.

After Harm saw that the babies were settled in the nursery and signed the usual papers there, he went to the waiting area. He found Frank & Trish and Jessica as well as Sarah & John with Sarah Cate along with Ann Marie & Peter waiting for him. They all stood up with the usual anticipation of his announcement.

"We had a boy and a girl. The boy we're naming Harmon David III or Trey and the girl we're naming Samantha Patricia. They are both healthy and a very good size each for being twins." He gave the weight and measurements. "Diane is in recovery and the twins are in the nursery." He led the way to the nursery-viewing window. The nurses pushed the twins' isolettes right under the window. Everyone made the usual oohs and ahhs at them.

A nurse came there to tell him that Diane was brought out of recovery to a room. She was the same nurse that took care of Diane when Sarah Cate was born so she recognized the party of visitors. She led the party to Diane's room saying, "I remember you all from the first baby." ("That's me," Sarah Cate said.) The nurse smiled and patted her head and continued. "That's right. After dad has his time then you can all go in but two at a time for 2 minutes each. She's not like the last time. Now we have an incision to deal with and that's a lot more traumatic. You all have to wash your hands and we have to gown and mask all of you up before you go in. So keep the visits short and sweet and no contact except for dad and Sarah Cate."

"Aye, aye ma'am," they all chorused. The nurse just grinned indulgently.

They all stopped in to see Diane and they all made the usual comments on how she looked and that the babies were beautiful. Then they all left with the promise to see everyone later.

John suggested they retreat to their house as he and Sarah made some sauce the night before so they could have a pasta dinner. Sarah, Ann Marie and Trish made the salad. Then they all sat around the table talking and joking about various subjects. After a while Ann Marie and Sarah started feeling tired. Since Frank and Trish were staying at the Rabbs they took Sarah Cate home. Sarah and John settled in for the night.

Monday, July 5, 1999

1300 Local Time

Rabb residence

Fairfax, VA

Diane was lying in a lounge chair in the backyard with the twins in carriages under an awning. Harm installed a built in swimming pool and outdoor kitchen in the backyard the previous spring. This was the first day that Diane could enjoy the backyard since she was put on total bed rest a month and a half ago.

Her family was around her celebrating the holiday. Sarah & John, Ann Marie & Pete, AJ & Sydney and Thomas & Maggie and their three kids and Bud & Harriet and little AJ were there. Even the Graftons and Tarkingtons came over for a short while to see the twins, but left because they were committed to another party. Harm's folks were still there and would go home early the next day. Pete, Bud and AJ were in the pool with Trip, Patricia and Lilly Magnum, little AJ, Sarah Cate and Andy. Everyone was wearing only bathing suits as they were in and out of the pool.
Sarah and Ann Marie were in lounge chairs on either side of Diane. Harriet, Maggie, Sydney and Trish were sitting in lawn chairs completing the circle. "I am just about ready to pop," Ann Marie said as she rubbed her belly.

John brought fruit smoothies over for her and for Sarah. Harm and Frank were being the perfect bartender hosts standing at the combined stone barbeque and bar of the outdoor kitchen mixing them for anyone who wanted them.

"I know the feeling. You're due any day now aren't you," Sarah said.

Ann Marie confirmed Sarah's question saying, "Yeah Cheryl Warner told me that if I don't go into labor by Friday, she will induce on Monday at GW. Toby, Sam and Josh are giving me a hard time at the office. They tell me the podium isn't wide enough, like I have to hide something. It's not like I'm on a TV show and my character isn't pregnant and I have to hide behind scenery. They said it one time too many and Mrs. Bartlett was within earshot. Boy oh boy did she land on them. How's my brother taking the waiting?" she asked Sarah.

Sarah smiled widely as she answered, "He is slowly going nuts. For the last 2 weeks every time I turn in bed he wakes up asking, 'is it time yet?' At home I catch him as he wanders into the nursery and just stands there, looking around and smiling. He so wants to be a dad."

"I see how he is with Andy, Sarah Cate and now with little AJ. He just loves them so much. Every time he comes in the house Sarah just runs to him and I saw how Andy ran to him when you arrived earlier. I can see him now being the pied piper of the family," Diane said to her sister.

Ann Marie and Sarah just chuckled at that. Sarah spoke up as a thought came to her, "You know the Admiral told me once that he was very good with the young officers, especially those that came to JAG as ensigns. I spoke to a few of them just after he left to go to NCIS. They all said it was like their favorite teacher was leaving."

"He's like that at NCIS now. Carolyn says it is standard operating procedure for the newbies or probies to go into his office either singularly or he speaks to them as a group in the meeting room to tell them what is expected of them," Diane confirmed.

Sarah added, "He never gave me 'the talk'. At first I thought it was because we were the same rank and he didn't think I needed it. But Admiral Chegwidden told me it was because he wanted to marry me and he only gave 'the talk' to those people that were working under him in his section or new to the office. Did you know Diane that he was the one who stole you from J2 for NCIS?"

"Yeah Admiral Grafton told me that. After Christmas last year he asked who I thought should be promoted up to my vacant position. I said 'vacant position?' He said that I was permanently assigned to NCIS by my brother in law," Diane answered.

Sarah said, "Admiral Chegwidden told me that he always wanted the brightest people working with or for him. He wants to be able to trust that whoever he works with can do their job. Obviously he saw that you were good at yours and he wanted you working for him."

Diane beamed with pride.

Harriet piped up. "You know I got the same talk when I was first transferred to JAG. He must have it written somewhere or he's given it so many times." She dropped her voice to imitate John, "the only stupid question is the one you don't ask." All the ladies went into giggle fits.

Ann Marie who giggled along with them at Harriet's impression spoke up, "Our father taught us that.
I mean how else are you supposed to learn something? John used to ask so many questions. I mean he would inundate our parents with question after question. He wouldn't stop until he got an answer. I could see him becoming a lawyer. But I never got to see him in court, Sarah what was he like in a trial?"

Sarah was proud to tell them. "First of all as an attorney you never ask a question unless you already know the answer. So he would never go into court until he had all the evidence. To him winning the case was secondary to doing the right thing. As a prosecutor he wouldn't hesitate to put forth at discovery evidence that could exonerate the defendant. As an advocate he defended his client zealously. If he knew that the evidence was totally against his client, he would strike a plea. As he tried a case he would have a whole line of questions jotted down in his short hand on a legal pad. But I never saw him refer to it during his examination. If the witness said something that was pertinent, he would pounce and ask right away if he was examining the witness or he would jot down the question he wanted to ask when he could cross-examine."

Sarah continued. "If he found a witness was lying, that witness was through. Whenever I saw that happen, I would just sit back and watch him dissect that person. I tell you it was a sight to behold. By the time he got finished the witness wouldn't know which way was up until the MPs escorted them off the stand. I don't think our child would stand a chance if he caught him or her doing something wrong," Sarah replied smiling.

Again the ladies giggled.

"I just thought of something. I can see him having the 'birds and the bees' talk with our child," Sarah said with another giggle. The other mothers all laughed along with her.

Frank, Thomas, John and Harm were standing talking at the bar and they looked over at the ladies and their giggle fest. They saw the ladies all look in their direction. John said, "I wonder what we did now to get them giggling and looking our way?" John said.

"I don't know pal, but let's not wait to find out," Harm said.

The foursome went to cool off in the pool. Sarah Cate and Andy were floating in life jackets in the shallow end with Pete. They both swam over to Thomas, John and Harm and started climbing up onto their arms. They loved being picked up and thrown around in the water. All the ladies just sat up and admired the way the fathers doted on the kids.

The two Magnum twins swam over and joined in the fun as their sister Lilly came out to join the ladies. She bent to give Maggie a kiss. Maggie gave her a brief and loving hug. All the other ladies just went "aah".

Maggie asked Lilly, "Had enough of the water?"

"Oui Mama, now that papa is playing with the twins I wanted to take a break. Mr. Rabb told me that he left the smoothie he made for me in the freezer," Lilly said her French accent still coming through.

Sarah knew that Maggie was not Lilly Catherine's biological mother. Lilly's mother was a French Vietnamese woman named Michelle. Sarah admired the way that Maggie just took her in without question when she married Thomas. Lilly also accepted the mothering support that Maggie gave her. Shortly after Maggie and Thomas were married, the two discussed with Lilly about Maggie adopting her. Lilly was very enthusiastic. When Maggie had the twins, Lilly just accepted them as her own siblings, being very protective and loving of them. As Lilly went to get the drink, Sarah had to say, "I can't believe how much she has grown since I left Hawaii."
"Yeah Thomas is giving every boy that comes to the house the third degree. Lilly and I just get them out of the house as soon as possible," Maggie said.

The ladies just laughed along, identifying completely with the sentiment. Lilly came back with her smoothie and pulled up a chair in the women's circle.

After a short while Ann Marie let out a yell of "Peter I think it's time!"

A strong contraction hit her. Peter jumped out of the pool and ran in to change. He came out fairly dry. At least his pants were dry but his shirt was sticking to him. In the warm weather it was inconsequential anyway. John and Sarah told him, "Go we'll take care of Andy." Sydney and Maggie helped Ann Marie get to her car. Peter hopped in and they drove away.

Tuesday, July 6, 1999

0115 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

John was woken out of a sound sleep by the phone, again. Sarah & John with Andy followed Ann Marie and Pete to GW. But as with her first baby Ann Marie was in a protracted course of labor. She had not dilated that quickly so Pete urged them to go home and get some sleep at about 10:00 PM. Andy insisted on going with his 'Aunt Sarah' and sleeping in the same bed as Sarah and John. Sarah was still asleep holding Andy in a loving embrace.

"Hello," John said as he picked up the handset and walked into the bathroom.

"John it's Pete. Ann Marie finally gave birth at 12:45 AM. It's a girl. She weighed in at 7 pounds, 5 ounces and 19 inches long. We're naming her Diane Elizabeth after well you know. Ann Marie and Diane are doing fine."

"That's great congratulations Pete. Do you need us to do anything?" John asked.

"Thanks and yes we do. Annie is still in recovery. Her pressure went up a little and she'll be in there tomorrow. The doctor said no visitors until Wednesday just you, Sarah and Andy only as a precaution. Would you please let everyone know and that Ann Marie just needs some rest," Pete finished.

"Sure Pete, no problem. By the way did you call her office?" John asked.

"No could you do that in the morning. As soon as I get out of here I'm going home to get some sleep," Pete said.

John said, "Again no problem. We'll bring Andy around in the afternoon. Sarah took the day to stay with him. Right now they're both asleep."

"Okay John I'll see you this afternoon then. Thanks for the help," Pete said.

"You're welcome Pete and. Tell Ann Marie we love her and we'll see her later."

"Sure thing John."

When John came back to bed, Andy & Sarah were still asleep. John got into bed and he fell into a restful sleep.
The next morning, he told Sarah the news and the plans. John went to work. When he got into his office he called Ann Marie’s office. He spoke to Donna Moss. He gave her the news and the birth particulars. Before he hung up Donna asked him to hold. John was totally surprised at the next person that got on the line.

"Captain, how is your sister doing?" President Bartlett asked.

"She's good sir. Her pressure was up a bit after the birth and she was held in recovery a bit longer than usual. Cheryl Warner is limiting her visitors just for today. Sarah is taking the day off to take care of Andy and take him to the hospital. I'm going over there after work." John told his Commander in Chief.

"Well when you see her, give her our love. Abby and I will be there to see her tomorrow morning before I do my daily business." Bartlett told him.

"I'll be sure to tell her sir. She'll want to get dolled up and all," John said.

"Like hell she will. She's never one to stand on ceremony when she's away from the office. I'll just have to deal with her as she is," Bartlett said facetiously.

"Yes sir," John laughed in agreement as they said goodbye to each other.

Friday, July 16, 1999

1500 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

AJ put Harm's planned request through on Friday, July 9. It was a week before the SECNAV approved it. He would have Saturday to stay home with his family. He would leave Sunday afternoon and report to Pensacola on Monday morning. Right after re-qualifying for night flying, he would fly a Tomcat out to the Patrick Henry with the rest of the squadron. Then he would assume his official post as the 6th Fleet Staff Judge Advocate based on the Patrick Henry.

Now Harm was finishing clearing his cases. Sarah helped him in reassigning those that were finished in time due to the unforeseen complications. As Harm signed off on the last one he heard a knock on his door. Diane was there, holding Sarah Cate's hand. Even though she was still on maternity leave, she was wearing her dress white uniform. She always wore it whenever she planned to come to JAG. She lost a lot of the pregnancy weight in the two weeks since the twins were born and she looked sharp with the full Commander stripes on her shoulders. Harm mused that after this cruise; maybe his name would be included in the next round of promotions.

Harm asked, "Where are the twins?"

"They're with their godmothers in Sarah's office," Diane replied.

Ann Marie was still on maternity leave as well as Diane. They both planned to meet up at JAG to
wish Harm a good trip. Diane asked Ann Marie & Pete to be Trey's godparents and Bud & Harriett to be Samantha's godparents. Diane was totally touched that Ann Marie named her baby after her and asked her to be the godmother. Ann Marie also asked John to be Diane's godfather as Sarah was Andy's godmother.

As Harm finished his work they chatted a little bit. He stacked all his finished cases and stood up. He didn't pack up his office entirely. He just gathered up his pictures that he wanted to take with him on the carrier. The rest he asked Sarah to keep in her office. He also asked her to hold the model of his Stearman. He was only going to be gone till February. She already cleared a space and had it on the top of her filing cabinet. Harm picked up his briefcase and hat and walked out holding Diane's hand. He stopped when he saw what was in the bullpen.

While Diane kept him in his office Bud and Tiner set up a "Good Luck Lt. Commander Rabb, Hurry Back" banner across the top of the bullpen exit arch. Harriet was wheeling a table with a cake. On the cake was written "Bon Voyage, Lt. Commander Harmon Rabb, 6th Fleet Staff JAG Advocate and the date. As she wheeled it closer to him, the staff was applauding.

Harm was touched. He saw John & Sarah, Ann Marie & Pete. They were holding Sarah Cate and Andy as the twins and little Diane were in their carriages. Admiral Chegwidden was holding Little AJ.

Harriet gave him the cake cutter. He cut the first piece and gave it to his wife. Harriet took over the rest of the slicing and cake distribution. The staff called out "speech, speech". Harm reluctantly acquiesced.

"Thank you for the send-off. I'm really touched at the attention. I'll miss you all but this is only temporary. I'll be back when this cruise is over. Colonel Marshall will keep you apprised of what I'm up to and I know Diane and she will be spending loads of time together. So this not goodbye, but only I'll see you soon. Take care everyone and stay out of trouble."

Everyone gave a good laugh, even the admiral.

Harm walked over and hugged Sarah, Ann Marie and Harriet. He shook Bud and Pete's hands. He surprised everyone when he gave John a tight brotherly hug.

John was a little emotional when he said, "Take care buddy."

As Harm walked out of the bullpen holding Diane and Sarah Cate's hand, AJ was at the entrance arch and he handed little AJ over to Bud. Harm stopped and warmly shook his hand. AJ grasped his hand with both of his. "Good luck Harm, stay safe." Then AJ turned and kissed Diane. "Make sure he writes," he told her.

"Don't worry sir I will," she said kissing him back.

"Thank you, for all your help," Harm said warmly.

"Don't worry Commander, this way you'll owe me when you come back," AJ said with a smirk.

As Harm and Diane and their children entered the elevator, he looked back. He saw Bud and Harriet holding Little AJ and smiling shyly as they gave small waves, Sarah & John and Ann Marie & Pete giving him their thumbs up and Brumby standing there with his arms crossed across his chest nodding his head. The elevator closed and they went off to the next phase of his career.

Friday, August 27, 1999
Sarah was working exclusively at headquarters after Harm left. She did not go out into the field to do interviews. Instead she sent Emma out with Meg, Bud or Brumby. They welcomed her company and her astute investigative mind. The different pairings paid off immensely as the three officers were very pleased with her work. They all sent commendations to Sarah who had approved them and forwarded them to Admiral Chegwidden. Sarah relied more on Harriet to handle the day-to-day operations of the Corps and the Building Services.

Right now she was sitting at the prosecution's side of the courtroom. She just finished a trial where Bud was defending a lance corporal that was arrested for DUI. When he did the breathalyzer test his alcohol level was well beyond any state's legal limit and on top of that he ran over several street signs and wrecked more than a few parked cars in his wild drunken ride through the Quantico Marine Housing Section.

The trial lasted the whole of two days. The panel deliberated for two hours and come back with a guilty verdict. Commander Helfman announced that sentencing would be on Monday and she banged her gavel and called the court adjourned. The lance corporal was handcuffed and led off to confinement. Bud was putting his case paper work away and he turned to leave. Sarah also put her paper work away and she stopped Bud before he left.

"Bud, I'm sorry for your defendant," she told him.

"Thank you ma'am, he didn't give me a lot to work with. Breaking up with your girlfriend was no excuse for his behavior" Would you like to strike a sentencing deal ma'am?" Bud asked.

"Not right now Bud. But there is one thing you can do for me," Sarah asked almost embarrassed.

"What's that ma'am?" Bud asked.

Sarah reached out both her hands to him and said, "Help me up."

Bud had to smile as he took her hands and gently eased her out of her chair. "No problem ma'am."

"And walk slowly," Sarah said as she hooked her hand in his bent elbow as they walked out of the courtroom. Half way to the elevator Sarah had to stop and take a good breath. Bud felt her grip on his elbow tighten. He knowingly asked, "Are you having contractions now ma'am?"

Sarah smiled as she replied, "Yes Bud I am. I've been having them for the last 25 minutes and 30 seconds. They are about eight minutes apart and this was the third one. Get me to my office and we'll call John from there. Don't panic they aren't that strong now."

"No problem ma'am," Bud said.

Emma saw them walk across the bullpen and stood up as they reached her office. Before Bud helped her ease into her chair she leaned over and gave him a sweet kiss on his cheek. Bud turned his head embarrassed.

"Thank you Bud, you've been a rock for me this whole month I really appreciate that."

Bud and Emma took over looking after Sarah after Harm left. Before that Sarah and Harm was
spending their lunch hours together. She made sure he had all his cases in order and ready for his leaving TAD and he made sure that she ate a proper lunch. Since Harm's departure, Bud was including her in his and Harriet's lunch times. He was always ready to go on any errand to keep her from walking or standing too long.

He held her hand as another contraction hit. After she went through it he reached for the phone and called NCIS. He got John right away. Sarah only heard Bud's side of the call,

"John it's Bud. Sarah is having contractions. They're about nine minutes apart. Yes we'll meet you in the parking lot. Emma and I can walk out with her. Right, you're welcome John."

"John's will meet us right outside. Emma, help me with Sarah please." Bud asked.

"Of course Lieutenant," Emma said as she and Bud took hold of each of Sarah's arms and gently eased her back up and out of the office.

"Don't forget my cover," Sarah said still being the correct Marine.

They stopped a couple of times as Sarah had contractions, but they made it out to the entrance where John pulled up with the Trailblazer. They helped Sarah into the front seat and John drove away. Just as Bud walked back inside Harriet showed up. Bud told her that Sarah and John had already left. "We'll see them after work."

Saturday, August 28, 1999

Bethesda Naval Medical Center

Bethesda, MD

Sarah was in labor for seventeen and a half hours. John was with her through it all.

After the first two hours John went out and told Emma, Diane, the Roberts, Matthews and AJ & Sydney to go home. "She's fine but the doctors said she is still not dilated enough to give birth, so we'll be here a while."

Everyone acquiesced to his request and left. John then called his parents and let them know the same thing. James said that he and Maureen would fly the shuttle down the next day.

Sarah went into a protracted course of labor because it was taking her a long time to dilate. In the beginning her contractions lasted from beginning to end for about fifteen seconds with about seven to eight minutes in between. That process had lasted eight hours. As the labor progressed her contractions became shorter in duration and closer together. After five hours Eve checked her and said, "Still not dilated enough, you're only six centimeters. The baby is not in distress because your water hasn't broke yet." (Eve pointed to the fetal monitor.) "I want you to get up and walk around the floor for a while." Eve put on a portable fetal monitor around Sarah's waste and sent her on her way.

So with John supporting her, Sarah did a few laps around the maternity ward. There were more than few mothers doing the same thing.

After about three hours and many slow laps Sarah's contractions began to happen real close. It got to a point that she would walk five steps and she would stop as a contraction would hit and last about thirty seconds. She did this all the way back to the labor room where she was put back into bed. Her water still had not broken, so Eve did that herself.

After another hour of labor Sarah complained about the pain and asked for something. Eve didn't
want to give her anything not even an epidural saying as she checked her, "Okay that's better. I can't give you anything now because you're dilated enough and I can see that the baby is crowning. Let's get you into the delivery room."

Sarah was transferred onto a gurney and wheeled into the delivery room. There Eve gave her a local to her groin and performed an episiotomy. John was gowned and masked and ushered to a stool at Sarah's right shoulder.

John smiled down and said, "Are we ready marine."

Sarah looked at him and said, "What's this 'we' shit? I'm doing all the work. You're never going to touch me again."

John looked at Eve who smiled and said, "All the mothers say that. I can't count how many repeat mothers who've said that and had more than two babies."

Eve set herself up in front of Sarah and said, "Okay Sarah, when I tell you I want you to push." Eve got herself ready and said, "Okay now push."

Sarah strained and pushed, Eve said, "Okay that's great Sarah the head is half way out. Alright take a breath."

Sarah breathed and waited about 10 seconds, then Eve said, "Now push!"

Sarah screamed and pushed. She felt a tearing as she pushed the head out.

Eve said, "Okay the head is out, push again." Sarah gripped her thighs and pushed again. She felt the rest of her baby slide out.

Eve exclaimed, "It's a girl."

Sarah cried with the joy as she heard her daughter cry out as she took her first breath.

Eve pronounced for the medical record, "Time of birth 0900 hours

John bent a kissed Sarah's sweaty forehead, "You done good marine. She's beautiful, all pink and healthy looking. I love you ninja girl."

Sarah looked up at him and smiling said, "I love you to hot stuff."

Eve was busy dealing with the after birth and clamping the umbilical cord. When she was ready she said, "Come over here Captain and cut the cord."

John got up and the nurse handed him the scissors. He cut in between the clamps.

The nurses took the baby and cleaned her under the heat lamp. She was weighed and measured at 7 lbs. & 10 oz. at 21 inches. They swaddled her and gave her to John. After holding and admiring her for a few seconds John bent down and gave her to Sarah.

Sarah put her finger in her mouth and said, "Oh John she's so beautiful. Hello Caroline Faith Marshall."

1130 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Medical Center
Bethesda, MD

After Eve performed the post birth treatment on Sarah, she was wheeled into recovery. During that time John wheeled Caroline's isolette into the nursery. After doing all the required things he had to do there, he went back to sit with Sarah. As he walked into recovery Sarah was lying on her side. Her hair was still damp with sweat and she had a look of 'tired satisfaction' on her face. As John entered the room she smiled up at him. He fell in love with her all over again as he saw the love she had for him radiating from her face. He pulled his chair up so that he was close to her. He reached one hand to hold hers and with the other he stroked her hair from her face. As he tucked a lock behind her ear, he bent to kiss her then leaned his forehead tenderly against hers.

"Hey marine, how're you feeling?" he asked tenderly.

"Achy sailor, but the nurses gave me some Tylenol," Sarah said.

After he visited with Sarah for a while, he set about calling the family. Knowing his parents were already in the air the first person he called was Diane, and then AJ, the Roberts and finally he called Chloe at her family's horse farm in California. Chloe was very happy to hear of the birth.

Diane hurried over with her three children. Then John's parents showed up. They took a cab from the airport. Bud and Harriet came in and finally AJ and Sydney. AJ told John, "Welcome to the club Captain."

After everyone visited with Sarah and saw Caroline, Sarah said she was very tired. She told John, "You have to be very tired to. You've been up all night from all day yesterday. Go home with Diane and let her cook you something." Sarah's tone did not leave any room for argument.

Diane added, "Yeah John, you do look beat and you're certainly in no shape to drive now. Have your dad drive you home. I had some dinner ready to go at your place since you called last night."

John smiled in exhaustion and good natured defeat as he could only agree. "I know arguing with one Mackenzie sister is difficult, but arguing with the two of you when you team up is suicide."

Together Sarah and Diane said, "And don't you forget it." Everyone shared a good laugh and filed out.

2230 Local Time

Marshall Residence

John had the next two weeks off that he set up for whenever Sarah had the baby.

Jim Marshall drove John's car to Florida Ave where Diane and John's mom cooked the dinner Diane prepared. After dinner he said goodbye to Diane and her kids then he set his mom and dad up in the guest room. Then he went back downstairs. He opened a bottle of beer and stayed in the living room to decompress some. On his way upstairs to go to bed, he was going to pass the nursery but he decided to go inside and sit for a while in the rocking chair he bought for the room. He was imagining Sarah sitting in the chair feeding Caroline. He was so happy that he just started crying. He let the happy tears flow for a while as he thought how close he came to not having this. The helicopter crash and the shooting were first and foremost in his mind. Then he thought of the shoot down in Russia. He said a little prayer of thanks that he attained all the happiness that he had. He promised himself that when he went to church the next day, he would light a couple of candles for his wife and daughter.

He changed into sleeping clothes and was about to crawl into bed when the phone rang. He picked it
up and growled a, "Hello".

"Hey 'hot stuff' congratulations, how're you doing?" John heard Harm say.

"Hey ace I'm fine but I'm tired as all hell. Sarah is fine. Caroline is fine. How did you find out?" John asked.

He was too tired to get his questions in any kind of coherent order.

"Diane E-Mailed me the news. I know it's late there but I wanted to call before I go up in a few minutes and tell you how happy I am for you," Harm said happily.

"Thanks buddy. By the way where are you now?" John asked.

"I can't tell you exactly where but we're in the 'Med'. We're going to start flight operations so it's going to start getting hairy here. There are a lot of young guys flying. I'm not that much older than them, but they're calling me 'Pappy'."

John had to chuckle. He was truly touched that Harm took the time to call and congratulate him.

"Listen Harm I really appreciate that you called. I promise I'll send you a lot of pictures. Stay safe shipmate."

"Thanks pal. I promise. Give Sarah and Caroline my love and I'll see you soon," Harm said warmly.

"Take care Harm, see you soon," John said as he hung up.

John went to bed a very happy man.

Monday, October 11, 1999

0745 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The seven weeks after Caroline's birth was a mixture of happiness and exhaustion. The first week was spent in the hospital. Diane visited every day as Sarah gratefully welcomed her offer of all her expertise in childcare. Sarah did just as Diane did in taking care of the baby. Sarah had kept Caroline in the room with her, feeding her and changing her when she woke up and expressing milk for the hospital nurses to feed Caroline when she woke up in the middle of the night.

When they got home that's when the confusion started. Now that she was home, Caroline woke up demanding to be fed. John always got up and brought the baby in to be breastfed. After Sarah professed a total lack of energy during the day, John suggested that she express some breast milk for the night and John would get up and feed Caroline during the night. When the baby slept during the day, Sarah was expressing milk for both the evening and public feeding when it was needed. The refrigerator became the milk storage area for daytime and nighttime feedings. Sarah had Caroline suckle during the morning and evening feedings or during the day when she was home. Sarah really enjoyed the closeness and the intimate pleasure actual breastfeeding gave her.

Chloe came back from her father's farm on September 7, the Tuesday after Labor Day to finish her last year before high school. Chloe was a big help. She volunteered taking care of the baby after she came home from school, giving John and Sarah a break.
Eventually Caroline got the hang of the sleeping routine. This was accomplished by feeding her just before she went to bed. Eventually she started getting up later and later. For the last 1& ½ weeks, Caroline was getting up at 0530. Sarah would breastfeed her, do some low impact exercises for an hour get dressed and then go about her day. She would walk the neighborhood pushing Caroline in the carriage that John's parents got them as she went about her errands. Sometimes she and Ann Marie would arrange to meet and have lunch at the White House. There were a couple of times President Bartlett came upon them as they sat in the commissary or he would hear that Sarah was coming and he would invite Ann Marie and her to have lunch with him in his private office. He was very happy that Sarah had a very healthy baby.

As planned the four mothers had one big christening party the Sunday Caroline was christened. They booked a party room at the Willard. It was the only place large enough to fit all 4 families. There were many pictures taken.

On the 6th week after the birth Sarah was deemed healthy enough to resume exercising and conjugal relations. So even though she lost most of the baby weight from the breast-feeding and long walks with the baby, Sarah spent the 7th week in the gym toning her body. She resumed her tai-bo and kickboxing exercises as well as swimming and running. She established a running routine in the morning and the tai-bo, kickboxing and swimming routine for the late afternoon after work. She made that schedule because in the morning she would get Caroline dressed and take her out in the jogging stroller John got her for a morning run of about 90 minutes.

Some days she and John would meet AJ at the beginning of the Rock Creek Park's running trail. John asked AJ to be a co-godfather along with his brother Mark. AJ was really touched by the gesture. At times during their runs Sarah would let AJ push his god-daughter in her jogging stroller. The adults loved that she giggled as she was sped along.

After the daily runs Sarah would shower and get dressed for the day. The afternoon sessions were scheduled for after the workday for when John would be home from the office or would join her in the gym as they both worked out in the Navy Yard Exercise Center. On those days when they both exercised, Sarah would bring Caroline and Chloe to the gym. On the weekends they all slept in.

In preparation for her returning to work Sarah registered Caroline at the Navy Yard Daycare center. She felt very comfortable having Caroline stay there. She knew the staff from when she went there to visit with Emma & Teresa and Diane & Sarah Cate. She also left a day's supply of breast milk in 8-ounce bottles there.

Now as Sarah walked into the office, she was met by the call of "Attention on deck". She already knew that Admiral Chegwidden was in his office and knew it was for her. She smiled gratefully and called back, "As you were and don't make it a habit".

Everyone chuckled and applauded. She accepted the handshakes and well wishes as she made her way across the bullpen to her office.

Emma met her there and gave her a welcome back hug and then handed her a stack of messages. "I put the personal messages on the bottom for later ma'am.

"Thanks Emma."

As Sarah entered her office, she was astounded to find that the desk was immaculate except for a requisition book. She gave an inquisitive look to Emma.

Emma caught the look and said, "There are some requisitions that need your approval. Commander Austen did a great job as acting Chief of Staff. She was assigning cases as needed from her office."
Right now she's on vacation. I have been keeping up on the status of every case so when you're ready I can sit with you to go over them."

Sarah looked on in wonder and said, "John and the Admiral were right it does feel good to have a yeoman. Thank you very much Emma."

"You're welcome ma'am," Emma said modestly. "By the way Admiral Chegwidden asked that as soon as you're settled, he would like to see you."

"Why don't I get that out of the way now," Sarah said as she put up her cover and briefcase. She reached into her briefcase and pulled out a framed photo of AJ holding Caroline, taken at Caroline's Christening.

She walked over to the Admiral's office and went in after Tiner announced her.

"Lt. Colonel Marshall reporting as ordered sir," Sarah said standing at attention. She had a twinkle in her eye as AJ looked up from his desk and said sardonically, "At ease Colonel. Welcome back and have a seat."

As Sarah sat down she handed AJ the frame. "Thank you sir and here you go sir. John and I thought you would appreciate this."

AJ took the frame and smiled broadly, "Thank you very much Mac. I know exactly where I'll put this." He got up and made a place for it on the windowsill shelf along with other photos of Sydney and Francesca. As he sat down he started telling Sarah what was going on at JAG while she was on maternity leave. "As Petty Officer Gardiner probably told you, Meg Austen was acting Chief of Staff. She received her promotion to full commander the second week you were out.

"Yes sir she stopped by the house to let me know. We had a long talk on what projects were going on and the other routine things I had to do. I couldn't go to the wet down. John and I were still trying to get the hang of being parents. Meg said don't worry about it. Her and Bob were the same way when Cat was born."

AJ added, "It's the same for all new parents. Marcella and I were the same way when Francesca was born. It went downhill from there."

Sarah took that as a signal to get down to business. Well sir I'm ready to get back to work. Emma and I are going to sit down before Staff Call to go over the ongoing cases."

"That's good Colonel. Please bring Mrs. Gardiner into staff call with you. While you were gone she was giving out the assignments. She was very good at not taking no for an answer. She may turn out to be a great Master Chief if she stays in the Navy after graduation."

"I'll make sure I tell her that sir," Sarah said.

"See that you do. Carry on Colonel. I'll see the two of you at staff call," AJ said.

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said pleasantly as she stood at attention to leave.

0945 Local Time

At staff call after Emma finished giving out the case assignments AJ pulled out a paper from the bottom of his stack.

He stood up and said, "Attention to orders." He waited till everyone was standing at attention. "After
proving her dedication to duty and her outstanding work record, it is hereby ordered that Petty Officer First Class Emma Gardiner be promoted to the rank of E-7, Chief Petty Officer effective this date 11 October 1999.

Congratulations Chief, you've earned it; Colonel Marshall would you please do the honors?” AJ said as she gave Sarah the new CPO collar insignias to her.

"With pleasure sir,” Sarah said.

She stepped to one side of Emma and switched the 1st Class Rank with the CPO rank. As Sarah stepped back Emma snapped off a perfectly sharp salute. Sarah returned it then reached to shake her hand. Emma gladly grasped it.

"Thank you ma'am, Emma said smiling brightly.

AJ continued, "We'll have small wet down at lunch time in the conference room. I had it catered so come one and all. In the meantime let's get some work done."

"Aye, aye sir," everyone chorused. Then they all filed out to their cases.

Sarah spent the rest of the day catching up on messages and organizing cases. She and Emma walked out together at 1700 to pick up their babies and go home.

2030 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Avenue, NW

John and Sarah made dinner together as they recounted Sarah's first day back to work. John was very happy to hear of Emma's promotion.

Now they were lying on the bed with Caroline in between them. She was making the usual baby noises as her parents looked on adoringly. As John held out his fingers to her to grasp he felt the need to get something off his chest.

"Sarah I need to tell you something,” he said.

"John you know you don't have to do that preamble every time you need to say something. Just tell me," Sarah said in loving exasperation.

"You know when I got home after Caroline was born I sat in the nursery for a long time before I went to sleep. I thought of how close we came to not having a life together and not having her. Thinking of the two crashes and the shooting just made me realize that we are so lucky to be where we are now. I love you so much and I am so glad that we were able to create our life together and this beautiful baby."

Sarah moved closer to him. She cupped his cheek and after giving him a sweet kiss, she replied, "I love you to and I'm also happy at what we've made. But I want you to do something for me. Don't dredge up the past anymore. I know how close we were also and not only your events but mine also. I know Jordan told us that you're going to be feeling that way and it is very healthy as long as you recognize it and move on from it. I want you to think of right now. Don't worry about anything else. Just promise me that you'll do that for me, okay?"

"Okay sweetie, I promise," John said returning her kiss.
He held it for a little while. They stopped when Caroline started making noises. They both disengaged and looked down at her as she smiled up at them. They started to rain kisses on her head, belly, hands and toes. Caroline just giggled and kicked out drinking in all the attention.

Sarah continued, "Diane told me that Harm had the same thought. If you two were not in crashes at the same time and ended up as hospital roommates we wouldn't all be where we are. Things happen at the time they happen for a reason. God has some sort of plan for us. As long as we make the right choices and live good lives, we'll be fine."

"I know sweetie, I know," John finished as he moved Caroline and Sarah into a comforting embrace. After a time Caroline started to let them know that it was feeding time. Sarah picked her up, pulled down her nightgown straps and put Caroline to her breast. John sat back watching in wonder. He thought that he would never see anything more beautiful than his wife feeding their child. Eventually Caroline had her fill as she drifted off to sleep. Sarah got up and brought her into the nursery. She changed her into a fresh diaper, dressed her in a snuggly sleeper and put her down in her crib.

Sarah came back into the bedroom. She snuggled up to John. She gave him a kiss saying, "I love you hot stuff."

"I love you to ninja girl," John said returning her kiss.

Now John used her nickname in the tender moments such as this as he deepened the kiss. Sarah moved closer into him in response. They made love for the first time since Caroline was born. They did not use any protection by mutual agreement. Sarah did not want to take the pill because she was breastfeeding and she didn't like when John used a condom because she didn't like the dry feeling. They figured if she got pregnant, they would take having another baby in stride.

After they were done they fell asleep in each other's arms.
Sarah was prosecuting a Corporal Winrow, against Brumby for dereliction of duty. Winrow misfired a Brimstone 2000 anti-tank weapon starting a fire. He went out and gotten drunk the night before. Being cocky Brumby bet her lunch on the outcome of the case. Sarah took him up on the bet knowing that Brumby knew better than to come on to her. He was to dinner at her house on more than one occasion with his girlfriend, a lawyer from a prestigious DC law firm.

Brumby was losing until Sarah called her own witness, Gunnery Sergeant Victor Galindez. Galindez was accepting a job with the guns manufacturer.

On the stand, and to her surprise, he disclosed that the weapon had a faulty guidance system when it got over 90 degrees. He revealed that he read into the companies' files at night to research the problem. Winrow was acquitted. Sarah was chagrined that she had to buy lunch on her first case back from maternity leave.

Later on Sarah had a talk with Galindez. She was impressed by his pursuit of truth despite personal convenience. She talked to him about applying with Chegwidden to work in the JAG office. AJ saw how well Emma was doing on investigations he wanted to expand the NCO contingent for investigations.

Sarah was telling him, "If you decide to take the job, you will work with my Yeoman, CPO Gardiner. She helps me run the JAG Corps. She keeps the cases organized and including trial dates and investigations. She participates in investigations and also by being my liaison to NCIS. On top of that she also organizes building services with Navy Yard maintenance."

Sarah paused as Galindez drank in all that Emma did.

Sarah continued. "Admiral Chegwidden and I have an idea to expand that. We would send NCOs out with officers on investigations. Chief Gardiner has been going out on investigations for some time with very favorable results. Would you be interested in doing that Gunny?"

"Well I used to be a sheriff's deputy in Taos, New Mexico after my first stint in the Corps. I came back to the Corps because I was shot during a drug raid on a methamphetamine lab, by one of the other deputies. I want to come back to the Corps because it's a better class of people. The job description sounds right up my alley."

Sarah asked, "So is that a yes?"

"Yes ma'am. Do I report to Chief Gardiner?"
Sara replied, "Yes but only as it concerns with the office operations concerning cases. She will have the final say as to which NCOs go out on cases with the attorney officers. She still will handle the building services section by herself, as usual. You won't be involved with that."

That's fine ma'am. While I can take apart weapons, I am lousy with tools and stuff."

Sarah had to smile at that saying, "That's fine. I'll present your application to the admiral. He should let us know right away."

Admiral Chegwidden was enthusiastic at having the 'gunny' join the staff. During the interview, AJ made a comment on Galindez' prior boxing experience, saying, "How did you do gunny?"

Galindez replied, "I held my own- especially against SEALs sir!"

Chegwidden said, "I know one SEAL you'd have trouble with." AJ stared at him down his nose in a stand off.

Sarah had to remind them in an exasperated tone, "Gentlemen please."

They both backed off a little embarrassed.

AJ told Galindez, "There are navy people in the office that you'd have to deal with."

Galindez replied. "Well except for Chief Gardiner, if I'm the gunny they will have to deal with me."

"Fine, you're hired," AJ said shaking his hand.

After Galindez left, AJ asked Sarah to stay. He asked her, "Can you leave town for a short period of time?"

"Ah sure I can sir. I just need to know for how long so I can express some milk. While I'm gone John can take care of Caroline. Why, do you need me to go somewhere sir?"

"Yes I do. I need you on the Patrick Henry. Because you were instrumental in preparing the Russians in dealing with the Balkan Peacekeeping process, the SECNAV and the President are asking me to send you there to deal with a particularly difficult assignment. I am also sending Lt. Roberts and Lt. Commander Brumby along with you."

"Sir what happened?" Sarah asked.

"While Harm and his wingman Lt. Andy Buxton were flying a recon mission to photograph mass grave sites, Harm was alerted to and went to take care of a spy plane that was watching them and guiding in enemy MIGs. Harm told Buxton to wait but Buxton went ahead to get the photos alone. While Harm flew in front of the Lear and did a fuel dump on it, Buxton saw a caravan of vehicles heading down a road toward some civilians. Again Harm warned him to not engage, but again Buxton ignored him and he strafed the caravan. When they arrived back on board Buxton was boasting that he greased the Serbs before they could interfere with the civilians. The CAG came in to inform Buxton that the caravan Buxton greased was not Serbs but were in fact Russians. Buxton is being charged with killing Russian peacekeepers. The SECNAV is demanding a rushed prosecution of Buxton to appease the Russian sensibility over the death of their peacekeepers."

"Sir how do you want me to handle this?"

"Do what you always do Colonel. Commence a thorough investigation. I want you to prosecute if it comes to a trial. Assign Harm, Brumby or Roberts as you need to but it has to look like we are not
sweeping this under the carpet. You and your team worked damned hard to get the Russians involved in the Peacekeeping Process and I don't want those efforts to go to waste. Am I clear?"

"Crystal clear sir."

"Good take the rest of the day to make whatever personal preparations you need to make. Inform Brumby and Roberts that they are going. You all leave from Andrews at 2300 tonight. That's all Colonel, dismissed."

Sarah got up and left the office to prepare to leave.

Wednesday, October 13, 1999

1716 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

Harm gave Sarah a very warm welcome when she got to the Patrick Henry. "Boy I am so glad you're the one they sent to help sort out this mess. I have to tell you though that Buxton asked me to be his defense council."

"That's fine Harm. I have to tell you that the SECNAV has forced a manslaughter charge."

"I'll do what I need to do in the trial. After that we can sit and talk about home, okay?"

"Okay Harm. Here Diane sent these along."

Sarah gave her brother in law two packages. One was a photo album in a gift bag and the other was gift-wrapped. Pointing to the gift-wrapped package Sarah said conspiratorially "Open this when you're alone after I leave. Diane and I made something for you."

Sarah and Harm parted ways after he showed her the way to her quarters and the JAG Office. Sarah then assigned Brumby to second chair Harm while Bud worked with her.

The trial was a rough affair. While they were conferring before the trial, Buxton complained to Harm, "Sir it just felt right to attack the vehicles driving down the road toward some civilians. They were just in the wrong place when I was in the right place."

Harm's assistant at Fleet JAG, Lt. Alfred Aldridge, testified that, "Buxton disregarded the rules of engagement and ridiculed them when they were explained by asking if he needed to 'ask the president when he had to scratch his six'."

Brumby argued with Harm about everything during the whole case. Then during the cross examination of the CAG, Capt. Pike, Brumby took over and tried to blame the CAG for not recognizing incompetence, but Buxton stopped him.

To add to the pressure the Russian 'liaison' Admiral Takushkin was angry and demanding throughout the trial.

After seeing that the shotgun strategy was not working Harm finally took complete control of his client's defense by taking the offensive. He explained that the Russian and Serbian flags were almost identical; the vehicle shot at was the same as used by hostiles to kill civilians; and standing orders were to protect civilians.
Sarah countered when she pointed to the ROE authorizing "fire only after fired upon" and get "permission" before engaging.

Eventually the jury got the case. They came down with their verdict after three hours. Harm got Buxton acquitted but then recommended reassignment. The CAG sent Buxton TAD to Capodichino as corrosion control officer pending a FNAEB to yank his flight status. Harm said he would testify against Buxton telling him "you're a menace to yourself and us."

Saturday, October 16, 1999

1815 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

It was only after the trial that Sarah and Harm were able to take a breath and sit down as family to go over what was going on at home.

They were the only officers in the wardroom as they ate their dinner. Sarah had her own photo album of the christening and she was showing it to Harm. Harm was totally floored by how beautiful Caroline was. He was really touched when Sarah gave him a framed portrait of the five babies in their car seats with Andy and Sarah Cate standing proudly behind them. He especially loved the photo album that Diane made of the twins and Sarah Cate.

After pouring over the photos and talking about the general events at home, Harm asked his sister in law "So how is it going 'mom'?

"I tell you I've had more sleep on this trip than at home. But with all the exhaustion and confusion, I wouldn't trade it for anything. I just can't wait to get on the COD to get back home to my baby. Harriet told me once that having a baby was like 'Collaborating with God'. When I held Caroline in my arms for the first time, I finally knew what she meant."

"So what is it like for you every morning?" Harm asked her.

"Well most mornings Caroline wakes up at 0530. After I do an hour of running with Caroline in the jogging stroller, I shower and get dressed for the day. We as in John, Caroline, Chloé and I, go to work and school. Oh you know what I forgot to tell you, Emma Gardiner was promoted to E-7. Now everyone is calling her Chief. She is just reveling in it. Even Admiral Chegwidden is having a good time with it. Whenever he comes out into the bullpen, all he says is 'chief' and everyone just turns to look at Emma. It's hysterical."

"How's John doing being a father?" Harm asked.

"He loves being a dad. I'm not violating his privacy telling you this because he told me he's spoken with you about it, but every now and then he gets a little emotional, thinking about how he almost missed out on all the good things he has. He mentions the shooting and the crashes. The good thing that comes out of that is he is so enjoying being a father."

"That's great Sarah. I called him the night you had the baby. One other time he had to call the ship to speak with the NCIS Agent afloat. After he finished he spoke to me and told me that he was truly touched by that. I'm glad we're related. My mom was right. He's the brother I never had."

"Well he really appreciates that you're one of the best friends he has ever had and I am to," Sarah told him sincerely, grasping his hand on the table.
At that point Captain Pike came into the wardroom. Sarah and Harm saw him and they both felt he didn't need to sit alone. So Harm spoke up, "CAG sit with us. No sense eating alone."

Stepping over to their table and sitting down he said, "Thanks for the offer." He ordered dinner from the steward. "Going over what's happening at home?" Pike said motioning toward the albums.

"Yes sir," Sarah said. Putting the christening album in front of him she said. "There're a few photos of Meg and Cat in there.

While they ate dinner, Pike made the usual appreciative comments at the christening album and Harm's family album. He said, "Cat looks like she's grown some since I was last home."

"Meg says she just eats whatever is in front of her. She did a great job as Chief of Staff while I was on maternity leave. I was also glad that she got her promotion." Sarah said.

"Thank you colonel, they're waiting for me in Naples. I'm spending the week with them starting tomorrow. Do you and the Exec think you can ride herd on the air group while I'm gone Harm?" Pike asked.

"You can count on me CAG. I'll tell Lt. Aldrich to pick up the Fleet JAG slack while you're gone. It will be easier now that Buxton isn't here. I'm getting the feeling that with him being gone sent a jolt through the squadron. They seem to be a little more on their toes," Harm said.

"Good, that means they'll think twice before stepping out of line. Just try to keep things on an even keel for the week," Pike said.

"Aye, sir," Harm said. "Oh by the way, how's your sister Cait doing? I haven't heard from her since we and Meg rescued the Daniel Boone from the North Koreans."

Pike said, "Oh she's fine. As a matter of fact I just got an e-mail from her today. She got promoted to Lt. Commander 2 months ago. She's out at Pearl working in the JAG office there. I told her that you were assigned here. She told me not to let you fly from the RIO seat and you'll be fine."

The three officers had a good laugh as they passed the rest of the meal together uneventfully until Bud came in. He had a long look on his face.

"Bud what's wrong?" Harm asked him.

"Harriet and I haven't been well you know, since AJ was born," Bud said morosely. Since coming aboard Bud continually spoke admiringly about shipboard pilot's wonderful life and commiserated over being a "legal weenie".

Sarah didn't have the heart to tell him that she and John did not have their problem. She decided to do something about it.

After dinner she called Harriet and 'fixed it.'

Sunday, October 17, 1999

2002 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

The next day as they were having breakfast in the officers' mess, Harriet called Bud. While they
were on the phone Harm thought he would make him feel better. "Hey Bud I got you a ride in a Tomcat. You can even shoot the guns."

Bud who was trying to listen as Harriet talked dirty to him got annoyed and told him, "Sir would you please go away. I'm talking to my wife." Harm turned away thoroughly chagrined.

Sarah saw the whole thing and just walked away grinning pulling Harm with her and told him, "When you open your package, you'll understand why Bud told you to go away."

In the meantime the COD wasn't scheduled to come in until Monday afternoon and leave Tuesday morning. So they passed the day hanging out in the JAG/NCIS Office. They even played a little poker. They played for lunch money. Brumby was lousy at cards as Harm, Sarah, Bud and even Aldrich beat him almost every hand. Sarah came away the big winner. She owed Brumby lunch for him winning the Winrow case. She won back the lunch date plus a few more before they called it quits.

Wednesday, October 20, 1999
1100 Local Time
Andrews Air Force Base
Arrivals Terminal

John and Harriet were waiting for Sarah and Bud. Caroline was asleep in the stroller he was gently rocking and Harriet was holding little AJ. Chloe was in school. Sarah was gone for a week and John was working from home during that time. The trial aboard the Patrick Henry lasted for a whole 3 days with traveling days bracketing it. Even though he enjoyed taking care of Caroline, he really missed his wife.

Sarah and Bud were walking off the plane behind Mic. As they walked into the terminal, John politely greeted Mic. After Mic moved away to accept Harriet's greeting, John turned to greet his wife. As Sarah rushed over, he enveloped her in his arms, lifted her off the floor and smothered her lips in long deep kiss. Other officers passing by smiled at the exchange.

Sarah broke off to catch her breath. She bent down to the stroller to look at her daughter. Caroline woke up as if she sensed that her mother was home. Sarah immediately picked her up to wrap her in her arms. "Hello my baby. Mommy missed you."

Caroline just giggled in happiness. While Sarah got to know her daughter again, John got her suit carrier and lap top case. He placed them in the stroller and the family walked out to the Trailblazer.

Bud and Harriet just grinned after them. John didn't even see Bud and Sarah didn't even see Harriet. Smiling Bud commented, "Do you think they're still in love?"

"Oh definitely, just like you and I," Harriet replied. She continued, "When we get home I'll show you just how much."

Tuesday, October 19, 1999
1139 Local Time
USS Patrick Henry
In the Adriatic Sea
After Harm saw Sarah and Bud off at the COD, he had to resume flying so he didn't get to open his package from Diane until after he came back. His roommate, Lt. Aldridge was busy in the JAG Office. To keep him there a while Harm told him that he wanted some alone time. Aldridge readily agreed. After he took a shower and changed into some clean gym shorts and tee shirt, he opened the package. He was immediately glad he was alone.

The first picture he saw of Diane standing in their living room wearing a short, black dress with spaghetti straps and a low neckline. Instead of moving on to the next picture, he forced himself to read the letter she included. Setting the photo album on the bed beside him, he leaned back on the pillow and began to read.

"Dear Harm,

I sent this album with Sarah. It's a preview of how I'm going to make your first night back special for you. Have you looked at all of the pictures already? If not, don't. I want to tell you a little story to go along with them.

It's your first night back and you and I have special plans for the evening. You wanted to take me out for dinner, but I managed to talk you into keeping the kids at my sister's so we could be alone for the evening instead. The first picture is the dress I'll be wearing for our evening together. Do you like it? When I tried it on, I could picture the look on your face when you saw it, and I knew I had to buy it.

The next picture is of me sitting at the dinner table."

Harm reached for the album and flipped to reveal Diane sitting at the table in their dining room. The candles in the center of the table provided the only light, and her face was cast in shadows, making her look incredibly sexy and breathtaking. After tracing his finger along the outline of her face, he once again turned back to her letter.

"We're having vegetable stir-fry tonight. Since you refused to allow me to have dinner catered, I figured I'd better stick to something we could both agree on. Don't worry, there's plenty of strawberry cheesecake for later.

The next picture is from our living room."

Harm again reached for the album, this time looking into her smiling face.

"The coffee table has been pushed aside to allow us plenty of room for dancing. I love it when you wrap your arms around me and we lose ourselves in the soft beat of the music. I can feel the heat from your body where it's pressed against mine and I find myself looking up at you, longing for your lips to cover mine. You don't disappoint me and I sigh into the kiss as your tongue slides past my lips and gently glides along my teeth. Sometimes, I think I could spend an entire night just kissing you. I love the way your mouth feels on mine, the gentleness that belies the passion lingering just below the surface.

I feel your desire for me as you shift against me and I step away from you. You offer a groan of protest, but I silence you with a wink over my shoulder as I head towards our bedroom door. You are quick to follow and you stop just inside the door to take note of how I have decorated the bedroom."

Harm turned to the next picture and drew in a sharp breath. Their bedroom was lit with candles and the covers were turned down to reveal the red, satin sheets. The pillowcases were white with little
red hearts all over them and there were rose petals scattered all over the floor.

"I smile at you from across the room and the look in your eyes when you meet mine takes my breath away. I can see the desire burning in your eyes and I long to lose myself in your embrace. However, I still have a couple of surprises in store for you. You slowly make your way over to the foot of the bed, your eyes never leaving me. Knowing that I have your full attention, I reach behind me and lower the zipper on my dress, allowing it to pool at my feet."

Harm reached for the next picture and swore silently. "Diane, are you trying to kill me?" he whispered as his eyes feasted on the strapless, black lace bustier and matching panties she wore. He took several deep, calming breaths before he picked the letter back up.

"You've mentioned the red outfit more than once, and I know you like the white one and the purple one, but you and I both know that black is your favorite, which is exactly why I decided on black for that night. I want you to know how much I love you. I want that night to be about you."

"I assume by now you've looked at the next and last photo. As she probably told you Sarah and I prepared the album for you. I'm sure it's like watching a cliffhanger on TV, but you'll know the outcome anyway as you'll get the full show when you're here to appreciate it in person. Until then, know that I love you.

Diane"

As Harm read the letter he turned to the last photo in the album. It showed a smiling Diane. Her nude body was covered strategically by a piece of oak tag that had 'To Be Continued In January – I love you sailor' printed on it. All Harm could do is groan and go into the head.

When he came back out after a cold shower Harm re-read the last part of the letter. So Sarah was taking all those pictures. In a way, that was comforting. After all, she was Diane's sister. Now all that was left to do was to let Diane know he'd received and appreciated her gift. Tucking the album of Diane under his pillow, he climbed out of bed and booted up the computer. He was going to have a little fun with her.

October 20, 1999

To: Cmdr. Diane Rabb

From: Lt. Cmdr Harmon Rabb

Wow! When you send a first's day preview, you don't pull any punches. First off, make sure to tell Sarah I appreciate the lengths she's willing to go to for her sister. She was so cute when she gave it to me and making sure to tell me to open your gift when I was alone.

Now, about that letter and those pictures...are you trying to give me a heart attack or merely drive me insane? Talk about someone missing their calling in life. I actually had to take a cold shower after reading your letter. I can't wait to resolve our cliffhanger on our first night. I guarantee it would be a night to remember.

I'm saving this letter till then and then I'm going to have you read it to me. As sexy as it was to read, I bet it will be even more so to hear it in your voice.

I can't wait to see you again, Diane. I love you.

Harm
Friday, October 22, 1999

0501 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

When Harm was flying missions he flew with Lt. Elizabeth 'Skates' Hawkes as his RIO. 'Skates was Lt. Issacs' RIO when Issacs flew her Tomcat into the ramp during the crossing the line incident. His flying schedule of twice a week flights coincided nicely with his duties as fleet JAG. He was constantly taking copter or launch rides to the other ships in the fleet to attend to JAG business. Whenever he returned to the Patrick Henry, he would spend time in the office to file his reports and then go into his quarters to e-mail home.

He tried to send an e-mail letter each to Diane and Sarah every day. Those he sent to Diane were the personal husband-to-wife type and the ones he sent to Sarah were the JAG business, how's everyone at the office type. If he wanted to send a personal e-mail to Sarah he sent it to her home e-mail address, which she shared with John.

During the week the CAG was in Naples with his family Harm was flying every day that he was allowed by the fly and rest procedure. One day as he and 'Skates' debarked from their Tomcat, Harm made a comment, "there's a woman coming off the COD."

Not knowing why Harm was making such a comment, Skates said, "There's a woman in your plane."

Harm replied and pointed, "Not like that." He was pointing at an obviously pregnant woman dressed in a flight suit. After Harm finished his after flight report he went to see Lt. Aldrich in the legal office.

Lt. Aldrich reported that PO Sean Curran smuggled the woman Zepa Berisha aboard his COD flight and onto the ship. She was endangered because she was pregnant through Serbian rape and in danger of death by her enraged fiancé. Curran had also gotten his partner drunk so that he would miss movement.

Because Harm was scheduled to fly, he assigned the case to Lt. Aldridge to defend and Lt. Yuen, a JAG officer from the Vincennes, to prosecute.

Even though Lt Aldridge never tried a criminal case Harm figured he could start on this minor non-capital case.

The case was poorly tried from the start by both sides. Lt Yuen charged Curran with non-applicable statutes. Aldridge also adamantly refused Harm's advice. It wasn't until he botched the case so badly that he was losing to the equally inept Yuen that Harm took over and made a deal. In fact he ordered the two lawyers to take the deal. After the closing statements Harm showed how Yuen's charges were non-applicable and that Curran was acting on the overall orders of the peacekeeping mission of protecting civilians when he offered Zepa sanctuary. Curran only did two things wrong. He caused his fellow sailor to miss movement and he did not seek authorization to have Zepa brought aboard ship. Curran's punishment was a reduction in rank and a forfeiture of pay.

It was also determined that Zepa could stay until her baby was born, which was imminent. Harm also pointed out that since any baby born on an American ship and was in fact born on American territory; the baby was automatically an American citizen.
The sky above Bosnia

Harm was assigned to fly a recon mission behind enemy lines. Seeing that they were flying there Skates was developing panic attacks over the danger zone. Harm pulled her aside and had a talk with her.

He told her, "Back in the days when I still thought that they would name an airfield after me, I had a week where all I thought of was of impending death that just would not go away. The only thing I can tell you are that you have to keep flying. Only if you keep flying does it go away."

Skates felt better, but the feeling was still there. It became exacerbated during the mission. They flew through some flack. It missed Harm and Skates' plane and they thought they were fine until they heard Tuna say, "I took a hit, Pappy. I'm shutting down the starboard engine.

Harm went to maneuver his plane as he replied, "Head for the beach, I'll look you over."

"Don't waste your time. This thing is shaking like a Magic Fingers bed. "I'll punch out as low as you want."

"Tuna, your call, but you gotta get out of Indian country. Can you make it feet wet?"

"Negative, we're going down, Harm."

Harm got on the radio to make the distress call, "Mayday, mayday, mayday. Big Mother, this is Badman 1. Badman 2 has battle-damaged aircraft. Cannot maintain flight, attempting to make feet wet."

"Big Mother's been listening, Badman 1. We're en route," was the radio reply.

Harm radioed, "Do you hear that, Tuna? All you gotta do is get there."

"Fat chance, head for the boat, let us eject in peace, would you, Harm?"

"What, into the arms of those maniacs? Forget it."

"We're going down."

"No, you're not, drop your tailhook."

"Why?"

"Just do it, lieutenant. Hold your course, Tuna."

Guessing what Harm had in mind Skates exclaimed "What are you doing?"

"I'm gonna push them someplace they can eject without getting themselves killed," Harm replied tightly

"Are you crazy? If that thing comes through the canopy, we're all dead."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 47

Harm yelled back at Skates "Listen I'll worry about that, just worry about Tuna and Archie. You have to watch the altitude.

"Yes, sir," Skates said with a gulp.

Satisfied that he had Skates head where he needed it, Harm instructed, "Give me the closure rate."

Skates called confidently, "Four knots, three knots, two knots, contact."

The tailhook was in contact with the forward windscreen of Harm & Skates canopy.

Feeling his plane jolt from behind Tuna asked, "What are you doing back there?"

Harm replied, "Pushing you. How are we looking, Skates?"

"Twelve miles to feet wet."

Just then the hook slipped.

"Damn it," Harm cursed.

As he lined up to regain contact he called out, "Skates?"

"We're closing at six knots, four knots, two knots, contact. Here we go again."

"Okay," Harm said.

"Is that thing gonna hold?" Skates asked still not believing that they were doing this. Just then she exclaimed, "Oh, God, there's a ridge coming up."

Harm replied, "The ocean's gotta be on the other side of that." He could still hear the fear in Skates voice. To alleviate it he instructed her, "Tell me about the ridge, Skates."

"It's 3,473 feet high and six miles away."

"What about us?"

"We're passing 6,200 feet. Rate of descent, time to ridge, two minutes."

"We can get them over?"

"Oh, it's gonna be close."

Harm instructed, "Tuna, dump your fuel."

"You got it." Tuna complied.

Harm went back to talking to his RIO, "Keep talking, Skates."
"Rate of descent down to 1,400 feet."

"You gotta help me fly this plane, Skates. I can't look at anything but this damn tailhook. And I don't want us splattered all over that ridge, so keep a clearance of 500 feet. Anything lower than that, we tell them to punch out."

"We're three miles away. Rate of descent 1,200 feet, altitude, 4,800. We're a minute out."

Keep that cushion at 500," Harm instructed.

Skates replied as if to shush her pilot, "I can do the math."

"Stay above 3,900."

Are we gonna make it? Talk to me, Skates."

"Thirty seconds out, forty-two hundred, fifteen seconds out, four thousand."

"Thirty-nine's the limit," Harm needlessly reminded her.

Tuna called over the radio, "Are we punching out?"

It was Skates who replied, "No." She took some time to examine her readings.

Harm said, "Keep talking, Skates."

Skates called out in exultation with, "We're over the ridge at 3,900 feet, yes!"

"Yeah" Harm said with a sigh. He was still concentrating on pushing Tuna's plane.

He was able to ask, "Are you sure about that cushion?"

"You gave me the call, I made it. Three miles to feet wet, two miles, one and a half, coming up on the line, now, now, now."

Harm called over the radio, "Tuna, you are clear for nylon descent."

"Thanks for the lift, Harm," Tuna replied before he pulled their ejection handles.

Harm called over the radio, "Big Mother, this is Badman 1. Badman 2 has ejected with two good chutes, awaiting your arrival. Badman 1 is on-scene, commander."

2146 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

Harm and Hawkes were sitting with Captain Pike in the officers' wardroom. Harm was recounting their latest flight. "Lt. Hawkes was great. I gave her the call and told her to keep us above 500 feet going over the ridge. We cleared it at 350 feet."

"That was some flying Harm. You may get another DFC for it."

Harm just shrugged, "I just did what I had to do. We couldn't afford to lose another pilot."

Pike just chuckled and sipped his coffee.
During Harm and Pike's conversation Hawkes was sitting there thinking. Harm turned to her and asked, "A penny for your thoughts Skates?"

Hawkes just said, "Before this cruise ends I will get you to call me by my name. Say it with me E-liz-a-beth or just Beth. Do you think you can do that?"

Harm smiled and said, "You must be over your fear of flying."

"If I can get through flying with you I can get through anything"

Before Harm could say anything more the other pilots in the squadron came in with Tuna in the lead.

As they all approached Harm's table, Tuna told Harm, "You are too young to be called 'pappy'. So we decided that you needed a new call sign. CAG told us about your father. It sounds like you're as crazy as your old man."

Tuna brought out what he was holding behind his back. Harm was shocked to see his helmet had 'Hammer' stenciled on the front.

"Just like your dad. I don't think he'd mind," Pike said.

Harm took the helmet and just gazed at it reverently. He was rendered speechless. He recovered enough of his manners to offer his hand to Tuna and the rest of the squadron for them to shake.

After Tuna and the rest left, Beth excused herself saying, "If I don't hit the rack, I'm gonna be no good for flying. So I'll say goodnight gentlemen."

"Goodnight Elizabeth," Harm said with a Cheshire cat grin.

Beth just stopped and gave him a smirk, then she just walked away saying "men."

Capt. Pike told Harm, "You know you have nothing further to prove. I'm going to miss you."

Harm said in bewilderment, "Where am I going?"

Pike said, "You have no career flying. You've missed a couple of wars and the guys like Tuna and even Buxton will get a command before you do. Your heart is in the law. That's where you'll advance."

"You know I had that same talk with Diane, Sarah and John. We all came to the same conclusion. You're right my heart IS in the law. That's why I asked to be assigned as the Staff Judge Advocate of the Fleet when it became available. My predecessor has moved on to be Executive Officer Naval Legal Services in Jacksonville, his hometown. I am going back to JAG when this cruise is over. Because I was able to fly in the dark I can walk away from flying full time satisfied. Oh I'll keep flying and I can get my 'quals' in when I need to. But Diane won't be telling me I'm looking out the window. I'll be home and I'll get to know my children as they grow up so I'm a happy man."

That's good to hear Harm," Pike said.

Tuesday, November 9, 1999

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC
Sarah and Brumby were summoned into the admiral's office to be assigned a strange case.

"Believe it or not the Navy is running a research program called 'Star Gazer'. It's a program studying psychic phenomena. A Lieutenant McGrane was the subject of a 'remote viewing' experiment. McGrane experienced 'flashbacks'. He killed himself by escaping his room and jumping off a balcony."

Sarah asked, "Sir were there any drugs involved?"

"Yes colonel, there were. Before he joined the program McGrane was using psychotropic drugs 'Sertraline and Fluoxetine' for "manic-depression and anxiety. McGrane lied in order to join the experiment and Spencer initiated his 'viewing' experience before the drug screen report returned."

"Sir who is the convening authority?" Brumby asked.

"Admiral Linsenmeyer of Naval Intelligence. He's the CO of ONI's Special War Tactics division. He's embarrassed at being connected to the "Star Gazer' program and wants to make it go-away. He's blaming Admiral Harrison Spencer, the director of that program for the death of McGrane."

"What does Admiral Grafton have to say about the program sir?" Sarah asked.

"Jake has an open mind about such things. Still he was thinking of killing the program himself before McGrane's death because Spencer still had not shown quantifiable results. Now he has a stronger reason to kill it."

Sarah and Brumby nodded in agreement.

AJ instructed, "Colonel you will prosecute, Commander you will defend. Get this done, as you need to. That is all, dismissed."

Sarah and Mic stood up at attention and chorused, "Aye, Aye sir."

Later that day they met Admiral Linsenmeyer in the conference room. He was rather surly saying at the start of the interview, "I'm only here because Admiral Grafton wants to let the legal process go through."

"That's fine sir," Sarah said in acknowledgement as she began the interview.

As they spoke it became evident that that Linsenmeyer was a reluctant witness. He answered many questions with "I don't know" or "Spencer didn't tell me."

After the tenth "I don't know." Sarah asked, "Admiral, you give the impression that you had no control over the Star Gazer program. Was there any reporting mechanism set up between you and Admiral Spencer?"

"Somewhat. I only asked Spencer to tell me if there were any problems. Until McGrane died he didn't report any. I don't believe in any of that psychic crap anyway," Linsenmeyer retorted. He continued with, "Just work this out with minimum embarrassment."

To you or the Navy?" Sarah dared to ask.

"Both Colonel," Linsenmeyer replied.

Brumby spoke up at that point. "Sir my sole allegiance is to exonerate my client, Admiral Spencer. Every decision I make is going to that effort."
Linsenmeyer was not happy at that pronouncement, but he knew he had to agree. "Just get the job done." Only protocol prevented him from storming out of the conference room.

Later on Sarah and Brumby were in her office arguing about paranormal belief. Sarah wasn't so sure that it was a real phenomenon

"Come on colonel are you going to tell me that you don't believe in psychic visions? Wouldn't you like to predict the super bowl?" Brumby said, wagging his eyes.

Sarah just stared at him long enough to get him to be quiet.

1135 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Hospital

Bethesda, Maryland

Sarah and Brumby went to Bethesda to inform Spencer of the charges against him. Seeing that there wasn't going to be a deal, Sarah got up and without looking at her watch said, "It's 1148. I need to go to lunch with my daughter at 1200 and I don't want to be late. I'll see you at trial gentlemen."

Spencer looked at her, "Colonel have you always been able to tell the time without looking at your watch?"

"Yes sir I have. I've been able to do that all my life."

Spencer seemed excited, "You know Colonel you have a psychic gift. I'd like to study that."

Sarah said politely but firmly, "No thank you sir."

Wednesday November 10, 1999

To

Friday, November 12, 1999

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The trial began on Wednesday and there was a break for the Veterans Day Holiday. Before the trial began, Spencer told Brumby that he wanted to take the stand and use the trial to publicize his research. Brumby disagreed but allowed him to be examined. On the stand Sarah badgered him into claiming he could bend spoons and trying on the stand. He failed and blamed it on the 'environment' of the courtroom.

Bud was helping Sarah with prosecution even though he was an avid believer in the supernatural. He began badgering professor Pilkinton the prosecutions own know-it-all skeptic witness who was maligning anyone who believed in paranormal activities in general. Bud got so caught up in his own rhetoric that even though he was helping prosecute, his line of questioning was approaching badgering the witness thus defending the Admiral's beliefs. Brumby looked over at Sarah smugly as Bud was arguing his case. Sarah called Bud back to his seat.

"Sit down, Bud and be quiet."

"Yes, ma'am."
On cross-examination, Brumby used Bud's own questions to show Pilkington up for the arrogant bigot he was.

During all this Chloe was going home to her family's farm in Marin County, California for the Veterans Day weekend because her father was going to be home there for the holiday. Her school scheduled Thursday & Friday off for the holiday. John and Sarah drove Chloe to the airport Wednesday evening after school.

Friday, November 12, 1999

1320 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Just before the afternoon recess was over John came into the courtroom. As he went up to Sarah she looked up from the notes she was making for the afternoon session, smiled and accepted his quick kiss.

"Honey I just got a call from Chloe's grandmother. This morning Chloe's went riding. But her horse came back to the corral without Chloe. The Marin County sheriff has organized a search party. What do you want to do?"

"There's nothing I can do now. Why don't you make reservations to fly out to California and I'll continue the trial. Have Gunny and Emma work the phones with the police to help find her. We can leave after the trial. It'll be over this afternoon. We only have a couple of witnesses to go. If we don't have anymore breaks we should be going into closing arguments before the day is over"

"Fine honey I already asked Diane to take care of Caroline while we go out there. I'll work out of your office setting up the travel arrangements."

"Okay John. I love you," Sarah said as she gave him a brief kiss.

"Don't worry honey everything will be alright. I'm sure Chloe's fine." John said to reassure her.

Spencer was passing by on his way to the defense table and he had overheard John's notice. He stopped John from leaving saying, "I couldn't help but hearing. If you want I can 'remote view' in order to find her."

Before John could politely decline Sarah told Spencer unequivocally, "No way. Don't try to work your way into my sympathies."

Before John could leave, the judge, Rear Admiral Scotchel came in to call the court to order. John stood at Sarah's table. Scotchel recognized John from his time a JAG. John stood long enough to wait until it was alright for him to leave discreetly. Scotchel asked John, "Captain, are you going to participate in this case?"

"No your honor, I was just leaving. I needed to relay some important personal information to my boss here." John said pointing his thumb at Sarah.

Sarah and even Scotchel had to smile. John then turned to leave, giving Sarah's hand a quick squeeze.

As the trial proceeded Sarah was cross-examining Spencer. Suddenly he went into a trance.
He said, "I see your friend Chloe under a covered bridge, over a dry stream, by some white rocks."

Even though she was skeptical Sarah sent Bud out to Emma and the Gunny to relay the vision to the search parties looking for Chloe. While they waited, the witness examinations and closing arguments were concluded and the trial was sent to the members.

Sarah met John in her office. Gunny and Emma were working the phones getting all the information they could get about the search for Chloe.

Gunny came in and said, "Colonel, Captain we had the search parties look where Spencer said. They couldn't find any bridge or any dry stream with white rocks anywhere."

Sarah was angrier than dejected, saying, "I hope the jury finds him guilty."

She sat while John worked the phones making the travel reservations. After an hour of waiting Bud came in to notify them that the jury was back.

Spencer was found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter but guilty of disobeying an order (using McGrane before the drug screen came back).

Sarah and John left headquarters immediately to fly out to California. While on the plane, Sarah sat up suddenly startled. John asked her, "What's wrong honey?"

"I had a vision of lightening striking a tree in the forest and Chloe appearing from behind it," Sarah said.

John knew not to argue saying, "You're scared for Chloe. Don't worry we'll find her."

Sarah grasped his arm, grateful for his comforting presence.

Chloe's grandmother Mae met them at the airport. As they turned onto the road that led to the farm they saw a tree that fell on the side of the road. Sarah recognized it from her vision and exclaimed, "Stop the truck."

John asked, "Sarah, what's wrong?"

"This is what I saw in my dream while we were flying out here. We have to look for her."

The three got out of the truck and began searching the area.

After a few minutes they found Chloe. She was sitting in a group of boulders. She was wet and cold.

As Sarah gathered her in her arms Chloe started whining, "I feel like such a dweeb. Scout got scared and threw me. I sprained my ankle so I couldn't walk and he just left me there and then it got dark and there were weird noises coming out of the woods. I thought a bear was going to eat me so I hid in a cave and it was so cold I couldn't sleep and I'm dying for a pizza."

"But you're okay?" John asked.

"I was so scared. I didn't know what to do," Chloe whined again.

"Oh, baby." Sarah said hugging her closely.

John picked her up and they got back to the truck and went back to the farm. Ironically they were only a mile from the farm. Chloe went riding off the regular horse trail area where the search parties were looking. After Sarah and her grandmother got her warm and dry, they took Chloe to the
family's doctor for a check. The sprained ankle was confirmed with no other injuries. Sarah and John stayed until Sunday morning when they and Chloe returned to DC.

Monday, November 15, 1999

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

When Sarah came back to JAG she recommended that the court accept 'mitigating' evidence and retirement with no loss of rank or benefits. Spencer looked at her surprised by her turn-around and declared that she saw a vision. When Sarah admitted she had a vision to Brumby, he asked her who was going to win the super bowl.

Sarah just gave Brumby another one of her silent looks.

Tuesday, November 16, 1999

0030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

John and Sarah walked through the silent and empty bullpen. They had suit carriers slung over their shoulders. They came from Ann Marie's where they had dropped off Caroline and Chloe to stay for the rest of the week. Being that Ann Marie was so involved in the government, she understood completely.

They were on their way to AJ's office to see him and Admiral Magnum and SECNAV Nelson. Earlier in the evening they both received orders from each of their admirals to get ready for this trip.

When they entered the office Nelson spoke up, "Good evening Colonel, Captain. You two know what is at stake. The president doesn't usually ask married couples to go on missions like this, but this is too delicate. He knows how you two function when you're together. We saw the result in Russia. Do the same thing. Get the information without offending the local sensibilities. I know you won't argue about who is in charge."

"Well sir Sarah is usually the one in charge at home so I don't see any reason to change things now," John said.

The three other men just grinned at that. Sarah just looked at him with an indulgent smirk. "Very funny hot stuff but you're right sir. We will have no problem working this case."

Admiral Magnum said, "Now that we got that out of the way, the NCIS jet is waiting at Andrews. Your contact is NCIS Agent Grondyke. He was notified to expect you and what your cover is."

"Okay then we're ready to go to Panama." John said getting up.

The reason they were going to Panama was that DEA Agents at a drug bust in Golden Hill, California found a package with the return address on it of Olivia Dunston, the wife of Marine Colonel Bradley Dunston the man in charge of the Central & South American drug interdiction in Panama. John and Sarah were going in undercover as political consultants, Barret and Mann. In fact
their cover was that of a married couple. They were going to investigate Colonel Dunston and his wife to find out how drugs were shipped in a diplomatic pouch.

1753 Zulu

Panama City, Panama

When they landed at Panama City they met agent Grondyke. He started to speak to John condescendingly. John wasn't going to put up with that so he said, "Agent Grondyke, knock off the sarcasm. I am your boss. I will send you stateside and have you in front of the NCIS review board so fast you won't even have time to change your clothing. So get on with the briefing without the bullshit."

Grondyke was thoroughly chastised as he finished the briefing without the personal flourishes.

1912 Zulu

American Embassy

Panama City, Panama

The first thing Sarah and John did after speaking to Grondyke was to interview Colonel Dunston.

Sarah and John introduced themselves, "Colonel Dunston this is my wife Sharon Mann and I'm Jason Barret. President Bartlett sent us down here to determine the effectiveness of your program."

Dunston replied, "Well since Noriega was ousted we have seen a slowdown of the overt drug business. It's like when you turn on the lights in an apartment, the bugs scatter for cover. We are still digging for the roaches' lair. It's not like we can put out the motels, so to speak. It's a work in progress."

"Well that is all well and good. We are still finding cocaine in packages originating from here, how can you explain that Colonel?" Sarah asked.

Dunston answered, "It's like I said Ms. Mann the dealers are getting more creative. I'll try to give the details in my report to the president."

"That's fine colonel. Thank you for your time. We'll be here a while asking around to get some background for our report to President Bartlett." John said.

He and Sarah got up and left. They went to the hotel to check in.

Wednesday, November 17, 1999

2017 Zulu

Panama City, Panama

The next morning Sarah and John split up. They decided to see as many of the embassy personnel as they could. They saw some in a social setting and some staff where they worked. Sarah met some of the wives as they gathered for lunch at a local restaurant. They both came back with some very interesting information on Olivia Dunston. Knowing that it was her name on the drug package, they decided to really amp up their scrutiny.

0417 Zulu
El Chorillo District
Panama City, Panama

Later that night they followed Olivia to a bar. As Sarah opened her door and to get out, John stopped
her saying, "Wait, if we go in there like a couple of tourists we'll stand out like lamb chops in a lion's
den. I'll go in as a gringo looking for a drink."

Sarah agreed but pulled him to her and gave him a deep kiss. "That's just something to keep you
honest, hot stuff." Sarah said smiling.

John smiled back as she used her thumb to wipe her lipstick off. "Have to maintain your cover." she
said.

He took a good breath to calm himself before he got out of the car and walked into the bar.

They were both wearing earwigs. He spoke just loud enough for Sarah to hear him, "How am I
doing honey?"

"Loud and clear sweetie," Sarah said as she saw him enter the bar.

As he ordered his drink, he turned around and scanned the bar. He saw Olivia at a corner table
talking quietly but urgently to a man. John was also wearing a button camera on his jacket lapel. The
images were relayed to a hand held unit that Sarah was holding. She was instructing him to turn
around so she could snap pictures of the man Olivia was talking to. She got a few good shots

Olivia appeared to get upset and got up to leave. The man got up and grabbed at Olivia. In his haste
the man fell over a local patron. Suddenly a fight broke out. As the man and the other patrons mixed
it up, John turned to go after Olivia. A fighter stepped in front of him. He leveled him with a punch,
but when he did that another went to defend his friend. John ducked his punch and using his
assailant's own momentum, flipped him over a table. He managed to grab hold of Olivia and direct
her out the door.

Out in the street she turned to John, "Thanks whoever you are Mr.?

"Barret, Jason Barret," John said.

"Hmm same initials and the same style." Olivia said.

"Believe me lady I am far from being James Bond. I'm just a politico from Washington."

"Well Mr. Politico, can a rescued lady drive you home?" Olivia asked.

"I don't know about home but my hotel will be fine. The cabbie who dropped me off here told me
that I may have to walk back," John said.

Sarah had to smile as he heard his verbal turn around.

"Well my car is right around here." Olivia said as they walked over and got in.

They drove through town to John and Sarah's hotel. Olivia was very vicarious as she spoke freely
and openly with John. Sarah heard it all through her earwig. When they stopped at his hotel, she put
her hand to his head to pull him to her to kiss him goodnight. John turned his head so that they just
touched cheek to cheek. He got out and waited for her to leave. As Olivia turned a corner Sarah
pulled up.
She got out and gave her key to the valet parker. As she sidled up to John and hooked her arm through his Sarah said, "Interesting investigating technique there, Mr. Barret. Why follow a subject when you can have them give you a ride home and a kiss goodnight. Were you going to strip search her next because that would have really cracked the case."

"Hey she grabbed me. It was all I could do to turn the other cheek." John said.

"I know honey I saw and heard the whole thing. I'm just busting your chops." Sarah said playfully as she kissed that same cheek.

As they walked toward the elevator he said, "So what do you think of what she was saying?"

Sarah said, "She's a little too impulsive. What she said about the life she has here being boring fits with the information I got from the other wives today. They think she's having an affair. The man she met tonight may have been her lover and she was trying to break it off." Sarah said.

"In the morning we'll show the pictures to Grondyke to confirm that. He should know who he is. In the meantime I'm beat. Let's go to bed. I think I'll sleep well tonight." John said.

"Oh we'll go to bed but I don't think you'll get much sleep." Sarah said as they got into the elevator.

When the doors closed John pulled her into a deep kiss. When they came up for air John said, "Other women can kiss my cheek, but only you get my lips."

Sarah shed some happy tears and crushed his lips in another searing kiss. The elevator doors opened and without breaking contact they managed to get down the hall and into their room. John had already taken their room key before he kissed her the first time in the elevator and he managed to open the door and close it still without letting his Sarah go.

Sarah was right they didn't get much sleep that night.

Thursday, November 18, 1999

1530 Zulu

Panama City, Panama

Sarah and John met Grondyke at breakfast and showed him the photos.

"The guy she was speaking to and then running from is Carlos Rojas. He is an import/export dealer but he makes his real money working for the Sauteras drug family. I have a wiretap recording of an affectionate call between Rojas and Dunston and them arranging that meeting last night."

Sarah asked Grondyke, "How do you know about Rojas?"

"I have an informant named Bernado. He has his pulse on the whole street trade in Panama City. Rojas is one of the bigger suppliers."

Does Dunston know about Bernado?" John asked.

"Yeah he does. Dunston has used Bernado himself." Grondyke said.

"Well let's use Bernado ourselves. Set up a meeting with Dunston, Rojas and Olivia. We'll see what happens."

Grondyke agreed.
Sarah, John and Grondyke were standing at three stations around the fountain plaza that Bernado set up for the meeting. They were communicating with earwigs.

John heard Sarah say, "Here comes the colonel." Dunston was walking across the plaza. He stopped and sat on the fountain.

"I see Rojas," Grondyke said. They all watched as Rojas approached Dunston. "I don't see Olivia," John said.

"Either do I" he heard Sarah say in his ear. Then he heard Grondyke say, "But we have some action with Rojas and Dunston."

John turned from looking for Olivia to see Dunston and Rojas in a heated argument. He saw Dunston grab Rojas by his coat, shout into his face and then walk away. The three waited until Rojas left until they met at the café in the plaza.

Grondyke said, "I say we arrest them now."

John had a vision of déjà vu. He remembered telling Webb the same thing last year about Parlovsky. "For what? We didn't see them do anything illegal."

Sarah spoke up, "John's right. The only thing that is obvious is that Dunston and Olivia both know Rojas. We need more evidence."

"I think it's about time that we finally tell Dunston who we are and why we're really down here." John said.

John and Sarah went right to the embassy. They both interviewed Colonel and Mrs. Dunston. John spoke to Dunston and Sarah spoke to Olivia. Their stories fit; namely, that he didn't know about his wife's affair or drug dealings and Dunston had 'unknowingly' mailed drugs when she thought she was mailing cigars for a 'favor'.

After they interviewed the Dunstons they met Grondyke.

"I did some digging and I found that Olivia Dunston has an offshore bank account containing four payments of $80,000."

John and Sarah exchanged confused looks with Grondyke.

Sarah found Olivia at a café and confronted her with the evidence of the offshore account.

Olivia tried to explain saying, "I opened it as a favor for Carlos."

Sarah said, "I don't believe you,"
Olivia then admitted her limited culpability, "I figured out that I was really mailing cocaine. I wanted to quit but Carlos blackmailed me. He said he would expose me and discredit my husband's work. I swear I didn't know that I was mailing coke until after Rojas came to ask me to mail another bunch of 'cigars'. He told me to open the account or he would tell my husband about our affair and that I had knowingly mailed drugs."

Sarah half-believed Olivia. She told that to John. He asked her, "What do we do now?"

Sarah said, "We need to end this love triangle. It's obvious that Rojas was having an affair with Olivia in order to use her to mule drugs in the diplomatic pouch. Rojas figured that if the drugs were found, Olivia would take the blame and Dunston would be discredited. Let's turn the tables on Rojas."

"How do you propose to do that colonel?" Grondyke asked.

Knowing what his wife was thinking John spoke up, "Let's use Bernardo to plant a story that Rojas was planning to run off with Dunston and the Sauteras' money. He'll be too busy running to be able to discredit Dunston or the program. Maybe that will scare Rojas into leading us to the 'big guys'."

Sarah said, "Grondyke you go with Olivia to buy airplane tickets."

Grondyke agreed. He picked up Dunston and went to the airport.

However Sarah's plan backfired. Grondyke and Olivia did go to the airport to buy the tickets. But while Grondyke spoke to the ticket clerk, Olivia ran out. She got through the door and out into the crowd before Grondyke could catch up to her. He called John to report Olivia's bolting.

Friday, November 19, 1999

2047 Zulu

Panama City, Panama

Sarah was with John in their car when he got the call. She only heard him exclaim, "Shit".

Sarah asked him "What?"

John held the phone away and said, "Olivia bolted. She's got to be going to see Rojas," John explained. He got back on the phone with Grondyke.

"Give me Rojas' address." John instructed. Sarah wrote it down and they sped off.

As they were getting out of the car at Rojas' house, they heard shots. They drew their weapons and cautiously advanced into the house. The first thing they saw was Olivia lying on the floor wounded. As they advanced further into the house Rojas shot at John. John saw him bring his gun up and he was already rolling below the line of fire. Sarah was right behind John. She saw that Rojas was going to shoot at John again and she shot Rojas once. John got up and shot him two more times. Only after Rojas fell did they advance toward him. John kicked his gun away. They checked and saw that he was dead. They then went over to Olivia.

As Sarah held her, John tried to apply pressure to her wound. Olivia looked up and said, "It was the only way."

It was the last thing she said. Her head rolled back as she died in Sarah’s arms.
Sarah looked up at John and said, "For her husband?"

"For her husband," John agreed. John then went to the phone to call the embassy. The embassy Security Officer arranged for the police to arrive and take care of the matter.

When Colonel Dunston arrived, Sarah and John took him aside.

Sarah told him, "Colonel, Olivia came here to tell Rojas that the affair was over and that she wasn’t going to ship anymore cocaine. Rojas shot Olivia when she told him that she loved you and not him."

Dunston didn’t say anything. He just turned away and got into the ambulance with his wife’s body.

Sarah and John returned to the embassy to file their report with JAG and NCIS. Admiral Magnum sent the NCIS Jet back down to Panama to take them home.

October 1999 November 1999

Aboard the Patrick Henry

As Harm served out his duty as the Staff Judge Advocate of the Fleet, he did more legal work than flying. He asked Pike to use him when he needed. Pike agreed and used him when he was a pilot short due to illness or other incidences that pulled one or another pilot away from flight duty. There was even a time when Harm served as the catapult shooter.

He received periodic care packages from Diane, but no more photo albums. Harm had to send the ‘lingerie’ album back home to keep the other officers from seeing it. He e-mailed Diane telling her it was coming back and why. He also said that he really appreciated the work she and Sarah had put into it and he couldn’t wait to get to see the next episode of the ‘cliffhanger’ she had left him.

He received all his other photos via the e-mail. Diane sent him at least one photo of his three children with every e-mail letter. It was easier storing them on the hard drive and copying them onto a disc when he needed to.

He was devoting himself to running the legal department of the fleet. He spent a lot of time off the Patrick Henry either in Naples or on board the other ships of the fleet. Just after Thanksgiving while he was off the carrier a mishap occurred that would put him at odds with the Patrick Henry’s skipper Capt Ingles.
Chapter 48

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 48

Monday, November 29, 1999

To

Monday, December 6, 1999

USS Patrick Henry

In the Adriatic Sea

JAG Headquarters

Naples, Italy

While Harm was off the Patrick Henry doing JAG business his Skates was working at times as the Landing Signal Officer (LSO) directing the aircraft as they landed on the deck. On Friday, November 26 while she was working there, Lt Dalton Jonas crashed his Tomcat into the fantail of the Patrick Henry.

Harm was on the Vincennes on JAG business at the time when he was notified. Coincidentally he was speaking with Emma Gardiner's husband Michael on another minor incident that had occurred there. Because of his relationship with Skates he was barred from the investigation. Admiral Chegwidden sent Sarah and Mic Brumby out to investigate the mishap.

During the interview Sarah had with her, Skates admitted she blew it. Afterwards Sarah wrote up her report stating that Skates is culpable of the action. Mic admitted that he didn't believe she is.

Based on Sarah's report though, Capt. Ingles decided to hold a court-martial. AJ assigned Sarah & Brumby prosecute, and being that he was already her friend Harm was assigned to defend her.

When Harm finally sat down with Elizabeth she said to him, "Jonas was a 'deck spotter'. He doesn't fly the ball. When he eased the gun on final, he made a play for the deck, but then he panicked. I didn't want to send him around because I knew he probably couldn't keep it together."

However Elizabeth kept second-guessing and blaming herself. Harm reminded her, "Remember when I grabbed your chute and kept you from going into the ocean?" Elizabeth nodded. "Well I didn't drop you then and I won't drop you now. I won't let you go to prison for this."

Harm then interviewed Commander Bates. He said, "Skates should have given Jonas a 'wave off' sooner. I was on my way to the LSO Platform and I ordered her to send him around again."

When Harm finally arrived in Naples he met with Sarah and Mic to try a plea bargain. Harm suggests, "We'll accept non-judicial punishment and a letter of admonition."

Sarah took a breath to reply but before she had a chance to answer Mic spoke up, "No way. We'll let the jury decide."
Harm sighed then looked between them and then asked, "Who do I talk to here?"

Sarah told Harm, "I'll talk it over with the judge." Harm picked up his briefcase and left. When he was gone, Sarah confronted Mic about his loose lips.

Bracing him up she proceeded to tell him in no uncertain terms her opinion of his offending lack of rank protocol. Shouting in his face she said, "First of all the last time I looked, I out rank you by one grade. I don't know what level of authority your stripes allow you to take in Australia, but in this Navy you will know that what I say goes and only Admiral Chegwidden can override that. Second my husband, MY HUS-BAND, never did that to me, even when I was sitting second chair to him and he outranked me. He always asked me of what I thought before we announced our decision. John never had the idea that a woman can't make judicial decisions. I had to teach Harm that. I broke him. I can break you."

As she turned and walked out Mic said very arrogantly, "Sure you will."

Sarah heard him and turned on her heel, and keeping him braced told him in a very low threatening tone, "Mister one of these days you and I are going to have a difference of opinion that will not be resolved. At which time I will ensure that you will regret ever knowing me."

Mic had no reply because he very much wanted this session to end.

In the meantime while Harm was preparing his defense 'Tuna' came to talk to him. Tuna said, "Skates is getting railroaded. Even though you were flying with us during this cruise, you are more involved in JAG business throughout the fleet. There were a lot of accidents due to ship not being completely combat ready.

"Could you elaborate?"

"That's the problem Harm, I can't help you. You need to find the evidence on your own."

Based on that information Harm went and asked Captain Ingles for the ship's records.

Ingles became incensed saying, "I can't throw you off the ship because you're the Fleet JAG but I will send a complaint to Chegwidden. I will not be blackmailed to drop this case."

The XO, Commander Cameron piled on as he tried to face down Harm saying, "You have badly misjudged the caliber of officers on this ship."

Harm replied back "If you think you can intimidate me you've badly misjudged, period... sir."

When Harm spoke with Chegwidden from Naples he told Harm, "Don't worry Commander I'll put the complaint with all the others."

Later on when Harm told Sarah of the encounter with Ingles and Cameron she suggested to him, "I think you're turning this into a personal battle with Ingles. Remember when you were running JAG and you told me not to shift blame or wrestle with two stars?"

"Yes I do. But this time I see it from your point of view. You needed to defend your client with everything you had. I'm doing the same for Elizabeth."

Sarah had to yield that point to him. "Well do what you need to but make sure your six is covered."

"Aye, aye colonel," Harm said. Sarah shooed him out with a smile.
Harm had to use a subpoena to get the records. During the trial he used them point out that a lot of things were going wrong when the mishap happened. People were out sick, parts were unavailable, and people were exhausted. He even called Bud back in Virginia to have him bring a subpoena to Congresswoman Bobbi Latham. Harm had her testify about the condition of many of the crew and boats on the sea stating that there was evidence of misallocation of funds and short staff. He went on to show that aircraft radios were repaired with cannibalized parts. There was a loss of catapult pressure on some occasions of gun-decking readiness checks.

On the stand as Sarah questioned Elizabeth, "Isn't it true Lieutenant that as you were working as the LSO you were thinking like a RIO and not thinking about landing and the ship. Didn't the thought of 'just get me down' cross your mind?"

Elizabeth answered, "Actually ma'am what I was thinking was 'please God get me down'. I knew Lt. Jonas' weaknesses. I flew RIO with him a few times. I knew he was having problems. Because of how I was thinking I believed that if he listened to me he would have landed safely."

Then surprising everyone in the courtroom she turned to the jury and said, "No matter what your verdict is I am resigning my commission as a Naval Officer. I will not be a part of an organization that punishes me for carrying out my duties."

Sarah looked like she was slapped in the face. Harm looked up at Skates and smiled. He was proud of her for saying that.

Harm gave an eloquent closing saying, "Our defense at first was to blame others but they were just honest, hardworking people doing their jobs the best they could." He finished his address saying, "Please don't accept her resignation."

They didn't have to wait very long for the jury to decide. The verdict was not guilty. Mic and Sarah congratulated her and Harm. Mic said, "That was some strategy Skates, telling the members to go to hell."

Capt. Ingles approached the group as he exited the building. He asked Harm. "Commander did you mean what you said in your closing or if it was just a lawyers trick."

Harm says, "Captain, I always means what I say."

Ingles then said, "Do you remember that you still have to return to duty under my command?"

Harm replied, "Yes sir I do."

"Good then my first order for you is to prepare a preliminary report detailing your recommendations to solve the problems that caused this mishap." Ingles said with a grin.

"I look forward to it Captain." Harm said.

Monday, December 6, 1999

1930 Local Time

Naples, Italy

Harm had until the next morning to report back to the Patrick Henry and Sarah and Mic's flight wouldn't be leaving until the next morning also. So Sarah and Harm went to dinner at a local restaurant.
They sat down and talked of home. Sarah gave him his Christmas present early. It was DVD of Diane and the kids that Sarah and Harriet filmed that he could play it on his computer.

"So how is Caroline doing? What are you two doing for her first Christmas?" Harm asked his sister in law.

"John and I are getting her small stuff. She's too young to understand what the whole holiday is about. He called me yesterday and told me that he took her Christmas portrait. We're going to make cards of the picture and send them out to everyone. Maureen and James are coming to stay for the holiday, so we'll have a crowded house as usual."

Harm chuckled at that as Sarah continued in happy exasperation, "I tell you Harm John has not put down the camera. Every day there's a new picture of her hanging on the wall or stuck to the refrigerator or he sends one to my work computer at least once a day. I just opened one today on my lap top. I can't wait to get on the plane and get back to her. She's my whole life now."

They finished dinner and went back to the hotel. Sarah passed the night away in her hotel rooms talking on the phone to John. Needless to say she didn't sleep at all.

**Tuesday, December 7, 1999**

**Alitalia Flight**

**From**

Aeroporto Capodichino, Naples Italy

**To**

Dulles International Airport

During the flight home, Mic and Sarah were in first class but in different rows. Sarah was also lucky enough to have an empty seat next to her. She took off her uniform jacket and put it on the empty seat. She then loosened her blouse top by two buttons. She took out a laminated photo of her family to gaze at it. It was a close up of her and John holding Caroline that Harriet took at Caroline's christening. It was her favorite. She put her seat as far back as she could, slipped one side of the photo into a piece of molding around the window. She gathered her blanket around her and fell asleep looking at it.

The flight attendants were touched to see a Marine Lt. Colonel sound asleep facing a picture of her family. To ensure that Sarah wasn't disturbed they all took turns watching out for her. They made sure her blanket didn't fall off or put an extra one over her, closing her window shade to the sun and generally keeping the noise around her down. They didn't wake her until the flight was ready to land.

Sarah waited until the last passenger was out then she walked out with the attendants, thanking each one of them for their hospitality.

She went through customs and found John and Caroline waiting for him. John had Caroline in her stroller. He always tried to have the baby with him when he met Sarah returning from her business trips. He knew that it always made Sarah feel that she was finally home when she could hold her baby.

Sarah gave John a long kiss and she held Caroline so that she could look at her. "Hello my baby mommy missed you!"
Caroline just giggled at the attention. Sarah carried Caroline as John put Sarah's suit carrier, briefcase and laptop case in the stroller and they walked out to the car.

That night they had dinner, put Chloe and Caroline to bed early and had their way with each other in the bedroom. Needless to say Sarah felt very good when she arrived at JAG the next morning.

December 7, 1999

To

January 27, 2000

USS Patrick Henry at sea

After Skates' trial Harm returned to the Patrick Henry to finish out his tour and tie up any loose ends that came unraveled during the week he was trying the case. He sat down with Captain Ingles and they started to list the problems that were brought forth in Skates' trial. Ingles instructed him to prepare a report that would be presented to the Chief of Naval Operations at the end of the cruise. That and the rest of the JAG business he had to administer severely curtailed his flying time. Harm didn't mind though. He already proved to himself what he wanted to prove.

That didn't mean though that Elizabeth wasn't lacking a pilot to fly with. Tuna's regular RIO had to take an emergency family leave that would keep him away for the remainder of the cruise so she was assigned as his RIO and they flew together for the rest of the cruise.

Harm especially enjoyed the Christmas photos that Diane sent. Right after the New Year Harm started marking off the days on his calendar till the cruise was scheduled to dock.

In mid-January, the Seahawk and its fleet relieved the Patrick Henry in the Adriatic. As the Patrick Henry sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar the sailors were all on the deck cheering.

By the time the cruise was finished most of the JAG Officers in the fleet progressed to being top-level attorneys. He had very few that he wouldn't recommend for duty at either JAG Headquarters or other JAG Offices around the country. He didn't give any officer attorney a bad fit-rep. Only the young or very new officers were recommended for further training or lower level assignments.

Friday, January 28, 2000

1430 Local Time

Norfolk Naval Base

Norfolk, VA

Earlier in the day the Patrick Henry looked very impressive as it went through the Chesapeake channel and coming up to the dock. The docking procedures were completed and Captain Ingles gave the order for the sailors to disembark. A cheer rose from the sailors and the families waiting when the order was given. Harm came down the gangplank with his sea bag over his shoulder to see Diane waiting for him in her own uniform holding Sarah Cate's hand and pushing the twins in their double stroller. John and Sarah were a few feet behind them holding Caroline. There were also wearing their own uniforms.

Sarah Cate broke away from her mother and ran the ten quickest steps she ever ran in her short life to reach her daddy. Harm picked her up and swung her up as he closed the space between them and Diane. He brought Diane and their daughter into a smothering hug. He delivered a deep kiss to
Diane.

As they came up for air, Harm tipped his head back and cupped her chin so they could look in each other's eyes.

"I missed you so much. I hope you have immediate plans to resolve that cliffhanger you sent me," Harm said seductively.

She kept her arms around his neck and pulled him closer so she could whisper in his ear. "Why do you think my sister and her husband are here? Someone has to watch the kids. And by the way I'm not wearing any panties." He looked at her startled. She just smirked knowingly and cocked an eye at him.

To occupy his mind for the immediate future he bent down to look at the twins. He picked up Trey and Diane picked up Samantha. He settled them on each of his arms. He bent to give each a kiss. "They've gotten so much bigger," he said in wonder. As he held them he approached his in-laws.

"How're you doing ace?" John asked taking Trey and shaking Harm's hand.

"I'm just fine John, glad to be home. It's nice to know I'm home to stay.

Harm then turned to Sarah and gave her a warm hug. "Welcome back sailor."

"Good to be back marine," Harm said.

Harm put the twins back in the stroller and then stowed his sea bag under the stroller as he pushed it. Diane came over and hooked her arm in his as she held Sarah Cate's hand.

When they got to the parking lot, they all piled into their cars. Harm and Diane buckled their children in as John and Sarah did the same for Caroline. They all drove to the Marshall's house. Chloe was already home and she took Sarah Cate downstairs. The twins and Caroline were put in the playpen in the living room.

To give Harm and Diane the 'alone' time they craved the Marshalls agreed to keep the Rabb Children at Florida Avenue for two nights into Sunday. Sarah Cate would sleep with Chloe in her double bed and there were two portable cribs set up in Caroline's nursery. During the six months that Harm was away, Diane and Sarah spent a lot of weekend nights between their houses, so the children's sleeping arrangements became very comfortable.

Harm and Diane bid their children and in-laws goodnight. Then they set off to their home as Diane set it up as she wrote. Suffice to say they didn't waste any time resolving their cliffhanger.

Monday, January 31, 2000

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm's first day back to JAG was somewhat disconcerting. The first thing he did when he arrived was to find his office. As he got off the elevator and walked across the bullpen to where his old office was, he wasn't paying attention. He stopped a half step in the door when he looked up and saw that Mic Brumby was sitting in his chair.
"Oops, sorry Mic, even after six months, it's still muscle memory." Harm said.

"No worries mate. Welcome back," Mic said extending his hand.

As Harm shook his hand he looked around in wonder. "You got it painted. I couldn't get it painted before I left."

Mic responded, "Actually Harm, it was painted the week after you left. In fact all the offices were painted. It was part of the sick building repair work that you got put into the budget. Or so Colonel Marshall said when she announced the project."

"Uh huh," Harm said as he walked out. He found his new office to be right next to Sarah's. Coincidentally it was John Marshall's office. It was assigned to Brumby after John left. After Harm left, it was determined it was easier to leave at least one office vacant to facilitate the moving of personnel. The entire repair and paint project took the whole of the 6 months Harm was stationed overseas. Harm's old office was the first one done and his present office was the second one done and was then each officer's interim office while his or her office was being done. When Brumby moved into Harm's old office, he agreed to stay there.

When he entered his new office he saw that Sarah already placed his model Steerman on the credenza behind his chair, just where Harm had it in his old office. He had his photos and other personal office items in his box and he placed the box on the extra chair in his office. He started to place his things where he wanted them. Just as he finished he heard "attention on deck" signaling the admiral's arrival. He gave AJ time to get into his office and settle in then he walked over to officially report for duty.

Tiner called in to AJ, "Commander Rabb is here sir."

Harm heard AJ on intercom, "Send him in."

Harm knocked and entered when AJ called out "Enter".

Harm went to stand at attention the required distance from AJ's desk and said, "Lt. Commander Rabb reporting for duty sir."

AJ got up from his desk and went around his desk. He put his hand out and said, "At ease Commander. Welcome back."

Harm grasped his hand and smiled when he said, "Thank you sir, it's good to be back."

"Have a seat commander."

As Harm sat down he said in jest, "I expect I'll be doing 'scut work' like Sarah did after she left then returned?"

Chegwidden was a bit offended when he responded, "Do you think I would be so petty? For your information the work that the colonel was assigned was not 'scut work' but very essential projects that this office needed to get done. If you paid attention while she was doing it you would have seen that. It was the primary reason she achieved her two promotions to Lt. Colonel and my Chief of Staff. I suggest you speak to her husband. As the senior officer and attorney here at that time he was instrumental in her being assigned that work. If he weren't looking to transfer out so that he could ask Sarah to marry him, he would have done it."

"I had no idea sir," Harm answered thoroughly chastised. In order to salvage himself, he asked, "What case do I get to swim in the deep end?"
AJ smirked when he answered, "Oh I gave you a good one. You get to defend the SECNAV's son. Try to keep him out of jail."

Harm straightened to attention saying, "Aye, aye sir." He then about faced and marched out of AJ's office.

Lt. Brian Nelson was being court martialed for standing up to his arrogant vindictive C.O. Cmdr. Wallace Burke who was treating him like his father had done all his life. After a mistake at the helm, quickly corrected by Nelson, Seaman Rivera was unjustly and summarily sentenced to bread and water in the brig. When Nelson pointed out lack of due process and refused to escort Rivera to the brig Burke relieved him of duties for court-martial.

The SECNAV spoke with Harm telling him "for the good of the Navy' this shouldn't go to trial. He said he and Brian were alienated, having expected perfection from him during childhood to the point of taking him off his baseball team for not getting straight 'As'.

Harm got Burke to agree to drop charges if Nelson would publicly admit he was wrong and apologize.

Nelson wouldn't accept the plea bargain saying, "He subjected me to verbal abuse, constant fault finding, rebukes in front of the crew."

Brumby maligned Harm in front of Chegwidden for not making Nelson apologize to which Harm responded, "As usual Cdr. Brumby has hit the nail squarely on his thumb."

Bud who was sitting second chair to Harm, asked Nelson why he wouldn't take the plea, he told him, "Why does any tyrant abuse his power- because he can."

Bud responded, "My own father also made me feel like a loser."

Because of Nelson's stubbornness, the day ended with Harm and Bud preparing to go to trial.

Tuesday, February 1, 2000

1130 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The Nelson case became so big that it engulfed practically the whole office. Sarah assigned Gunny Galindez to assist the investigation. He found no official complaints about Burke. But he reported to Harm, "There are plenty of people who said he was a real hard ass. He would choose one junior officer each cruise. He'd make their life a living hell until they broke."

On the side Gunny reported to Sarah, "Ma'am one of the names that was listed as having served under Commander Burke was an Ensign John Marshall. Is that your husband ma'am?"

Gunny met John as he was over to the JAG side of the Navy Yard many times.

Sarah was startled that John's name came up, "I think so. John served on a destroyer before he was a SEAL. He never mentioned who his Commanding Officers were at that time. I can ask him. I'll let you know what I find out."

"Thank you ma'am, I think that would be best," Galindez said.
When the trial began Bud began his standard defense to show that Burke's order wasn't lawful. But he was thwarted in that process when Judge Sebring protected Burke with his rulings to the point of being similarly tyrannical to Harm.

Harm told Bud to back off on their defense.

Sarah was observing the case from the gallery. After Sebring called it a day Sarah asked Harm to stop by her office. When Harm came in she asked him, "What's going on?"

Harm responded, "I have a client who doesn't understand that he is up against a system that will overwhelm him. He can't get the idea that he has to show some sort of remorse. I get the distinct impression that he doesn't want to stay in the Navy. It's either that or he wants to stick it to his father."

Sarah asked him, "Can you handle having a losing case? If this goes wrong it could ruin your career. I could advise the admiral to have you removed from the case."

Harm responded, "That won't be necessary. The day I get scared of ruining my career is the day I really hang up my uniform. Don't worry I'll be fine."

On his way out he ran into Brumby, "Remember Harm if you lose this case, the SECNAV's son may go to prison."

Harm retorted, "Well Mic you better not forget, that you will have put him there."

Harm just finished clearing the table and loaded the last dish in the dishwasher when he heard the doorbell. Diane was giving Sarah a bath and the twins were in the playpen in the living room waiting for their turn in the bath, so he went to get the door. He was totally surprised to see SECNAV Nelson waiting there. He came in his private car and he was dressed casually. Harmed showed him into the living room.

"Commander, I'm sorry to disturb your evening," Nelson Sr. said as he sat on the couch.

Before Harm could answer Diane called from the bedroom side of the house, "Harm who's at the door?"

Harm smiled and looked at the secretary, "Oh just the Secretary of the Navy honey."

Harm heard Diane approaching from down the hall saying, "Oh very funny. The next thing you're going to tell me that the President is right behind him and they're here for a drinks and poker."

Diane appeared at the living room archway holding Sarah Cate. She was wrapped in a towel as Diane had just taken her out of the bath. Diane stopped short when Secretary Nelson stood up from the couch to greet her.

"Good evening Mrs. Rabb," he said.
Diane recovered enough to get past her embarrassment to get to 'this is my house and you're my guest, not my boss'. "Good evening Mr. Secretary. Let me get Sarah dressed and ready for bed and I'll join you," Diane said coolly.

"That's alright Mrs. Rabb. I won't be long. I just want to discuss my son's case with the commander."

"In that case I'll say goodnight sir. Harm we still have to deal with the twins," Diane reminded him.

"Yes dear" Harm said. Then he asked Nelson, "Can I get you anything sir?"

"Do you have a beer? I'm parched," Nelson said.

Harm got the beer for Nelson and one for himself. Harm waited till Nelson was ready to speak. Nelson took a long pull on his beer and then he asked, "How is my son handling the case?"

Harm answered, "Well sir ethics prevent me from discussing the case except to ask you if you have something to offer."

"Well in that vein I have something that I don't know if it will help or hinder your case," Nelson said.

"What's that sir?" Harm asked in response.

"When I found out where Brian was being assigned I called his captain, who happened to be Burke. I knew of his reputation for being tough on his officers, but not to the extent that has been revealed. At that time I told Burke to not treat my son any differently than any other officer. I told him to see what my son had in him."

"That's some admission Mr. Secretary," Harm said.

"Well in retrospect, I realize that that was a mistake. I should have just let Brian find his own way. He didn't need me adding to his lot in life. I can testify to what I told Burke."

"Well sir you were right. It's tough to see the benefit or the detriment of this information. I'll have to talk with your son about this," Harm said.

Nelson responded, "That's fine Commander. I just needed you to know that Burke and I had that conversation. Thank you for the beer. I'll say goodnight then."

"Goodnight sir," Harm said as he walked him to the door.

2030 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, DC, NW

Sarah and John just finished cleaning up after their dinner and they were sitting in the living room watching some TV. Chloe was up in her room working on an essay for school. Sarah had Caroline on her lap as she read 'Green Eggs and Ham' to her. John was paying more attention to his girls then he was to the TV.

Sarah had her glasses on and was dressed in a tank top tee shirt and sweat pants. After she finished reading the story, she pulled down the straps so Caroline could feed. John always wondered at the sight. As the baby suckled John asked, "So how is Harm doing on his first case back?"

Sarah saw the opening she needed and answered, "Without violating ethics his client is the
SECNAV's son Brian. He is on trial for violating a direct order from his CO, Commander Burke. I sent Gunny to investigate if Burke had similar encounters with other junior officers. Gunny told me that...

John picked up the sentence, "I had served under him at one time. He probably also told you that Burke picks a young officer every cruise and rides him until he or she breaks or fights back."

Sarah asked, "So you know how he works?"

"Oh yeah, when I was an ensign, fresh out of ROTC and before I was accepted to SEAL School my first cruise was on a destroyer that Burke was the XO. I was the young officer he picked to ride during that cruise. He would find any little fault in what I was doing even though I was doing everything right, for the most part. I mean let's face it everyone makes mistakes. And you know me I try not to make the same one twice."

Sarah nodded saying, "Go on."

"Finally three quarters of the way into the cruise I had enough. I went to his office and asked him for a written 'fit rep'. He asked me why. I said to him 'you are in my way. I would appreciate that you give your orders and then get out of my way to let me do my job.' I told him that his constant badgering was interfering with my performance. The reason I wanted something in writing was because then I would have something I could either dispute or learn from. Needless to say he wasn't too pleased at my demanding tone and he let me know that, but the next day he gave me my written 'fit rep'. It was glowing I mean it was probably what got me accepted to SEAL School."

"So you agreed with his methods?" Sarah asked.

"Hell no, I mean you've seen how I am with the young officers. Burke's example is the one I use as the way not to go. I don't know if this will help Harm's case or not."

"Probably not but I am obligated to inform both Harm and Mic. I'll let them decide if they want to use you on the stand."

Well they know where to find me." John said.

Wednesday, February 2, 2000

1030 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah did tell Harm and Mic of her conversation with John. They both walked over to NCIS to interview him. They found him in the bullpen outside his office speaking with Gibbs. John saw them enter and directed them into his office. On his way in he told Carolyn, "We'll be in conference for the next 'however long it takes'.

"Gotcha boss," Carolyn confirmed.

As they sat down Mic said, "A little lax on the military courtesy here are ya John."

"Well Mic even though we investigate the military, we're a little out of the military here. It fits the way we need to do our work. That's why we don't wear uniforms." Changing subjects John said, "But you two are not here to discuss the lack of protocol. This has to do with Commander Burke and
Lt. Nelson, right?"

"Yes John it does. Please tell us about your experience serving under Commander Burke." Harm said.

John started with, "When I was an ensign.." And he told the same story he told Sarah ending with what Burke wrote for his fit rep.

Mic asked, "So you don't agree with his command style?"

John answered, "It's not a matter of whether I agree or disagree with his style. His style works for him. It is just not mine. I prefer to let my people perform their jobs without the constant scrutiny.

"So what do you think about his style?" Brumby asked.

"I believe it lacks trust. You have to have trust in your people or you as a commander will just end up doing the job yourself. At that point you cease being a commander." John said succinctly.

Harm spoke up, "I think we both heard what we needed to hear. Thanks John. See you this weekend?"

"If not sooner" John said as he shook each officer's hand.

Harm and Mic both decided that what John said would not favor either side of the case. So they decided to not call him as a witness. They both felt they had enough to try the case without his testimony.

1330 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

After consulting with Brian, Harm also decided not to have the SECNAV testify. Instead he recalled Burke. Harm tried to list the points that showed lack of due process, but judge Sebring stopped him. Harm was able to trip Burke into admitting that he intentionally provoked Nelson into disobeying your order for the sole purpose of punishing him later- making the order unlawful.

Harm pressed that point in his closing remarks. Harm and Bud were confident in their case. They were very surprised when the members found Nelson guilty anyway.

As they were leaving the courtroom, they met Burke in the hallway. Burke wanted an apology to reverse the charges but Nelson said, "I still believe I was right and that I would have made a good officer."

Burke just turned and walked away.

Nelson told Harm, "So he wins."

Harm responded, "No, you lose."

After he dealt with Nelson and the post mortem of the case he went to knock on Sara's office door. He entered after Sarah called, "Enter."

"You got a few minutes?" Harm asked.
"Sure have a seat," she offered. She asked him, "How have your first three days back been?"

Harm answered, "It feels like I left yesterday and been gone 100 years. There are some people I don't even know. Also I found that I have to catch up with most of the office 'inside' joking around. It's going to take me a little while until I'm finally caught up."

"Well Admiral Chegwidden just handed me some news that will make you feel much, much better," Sarah said handing him a memo with the SECNAV's letterhead.

Harm read the memo when he finished it he looked up at Sarah in surprise.

Sarah spoke up, "Admiral Nash has nominated you for a second Distinguished Flying Cross for pushing Tuna's F14 by its tail hook. You are coming to our house tonight so that we can celebrate. Besides you and Diane went away to resolve your cliffhanger so fast, we haven't sat down as a family to hear about the cruise. We'll have the lasagna we made last night. Don't worry it's meatless. We made it with marinara sauce. He already told Diane. She and the kids will meet us there."

Harm smiled when he said, "You make it sound like an order."

"I can make it one if you want?" Sarah said with a smile.

Harm said, "That won't be necessary. I like your cooking."

Sarah smiled at that. "Oh Diane said leave your car here. You know parking is at a premium on our block with the snow and all so you can ride with me."

Later on they all met at the Marshalls. They all sat and listened to Harm tell the funny stories from the cruise. The Rabbs departed at about 10:30 PM. Sarah and John fed and got Caroline ready for bed and then they went to bed.
The cadets were trying gunners mate Gregory Riordan, posthumously, for 29 counts of 1st degree murder when he blew up a gun turret to get even with his shipmates for hazing him. Billy played the part of Riordan and Luisa (and Sarah) his defense council. Steve (and Harm) was prosecuting.

As they delved deeper into the original investigation they found that the original investigators believed that Riordan filled his boda bag with accelerant and placed it in the turret. The cadets dug a little deeper and they found a real witness that would testify so Haglan said, "Lets have the trial that the Navy never had."

Terence Connor testified that he had filled Riordan's boda bag with grease and saw him throw it overboard. As a result of this found knowledge Harm and Sarah went back to JAG and asked AJ to re-open the case? AJ said no and to just finish the case and get back to work.

Tuesday, February 8, 2000

1230 Local time

Iron Force Naval Academy

Harm and Sarah told the kids of Chegwidden's decision. However, they all said no because they didn't work for Chegwidden. After they made that decision they broke for lunch.

While they were chatting, Harm told Sarah, "You know sometimes I think I missed out on being a kid, trying to be the man of the house, I should have gone to a disco."

Sarah said, "I know what you mean, I've seen you dance."

Harm smiled and then asked Sarah, "Are you and John still taking dancing lessons?"

"Oh sure we are. We stopped when I got too big with Caroline to be graceful or even stay upright."
Now we go every other Friday night. Ann Marie and I still meet up on Tuesdays with our three kids to dance ballet. We six should go out one night. Leave the kids with a sitter and try it."

"Ballet?" Harm said surprised.

"No silly, partner or ballroom dancing," Sarah said.

Harm added, "You know Diane may go for that. Even though we couldn't get enough of each other when I came home and still can't, I'm kind of envious of what you and John have. You two always seem to find the time to get out of the house. With the three kids it's tough to get out."

Sarah felt the need to really lecture her partner and brother in law, "Listen to me Lt. Commander you have a wonderful life and a wonderful wife. Diane and I may be sisters and twins, but we are not alike. She told me once that even though she likes to dance, she is not into it like John and I are. It's also hard work. John and I had to do some major practicing to dance the tango at our wedding. What with the trip to Russia and his rehabilitation it was a miracle that we were able to go to the lessons we did to pull off that performance. The instructors worked really hard with us. After all the work they did, we just had to invite them to the wedding. I think they were happier that we pulled it off than we were."

Harm added, "I remember you guys were good.

Sarah added, "To get back to Diane and me, growing up she had all the nice things that her adoptive parents could get her. You know what I went through. Believe me she doesn't think she is missing out on anything. You are all she ever wanted from the time she first saw you when you both started at Annapolis 15 years ago. She doesn't care whether she stays home with you every night for the rest of her life or goes out with you dancing every night. She is happy any way she can get you. So please don't tell me you're envious. What John and I have works for us."

Besides like I said John and I go out every other week. When we do go out on Friday, we take Chloe and Caroline with us. You should see how they giggle when they see us dance and twirl around. So we can give up dancing any time, but we enjoy it so much because it's another way for us to be intimate and have fun. We also enjoy just sitting at home relaxing, looking at our baby and enjoying each other's company."

Harm asked, "Why did you two decide to take dance lessons?"

"It began as a way for him to get closer to me after I told him I liked ballet. After the shooting it turned into being part of his therapy. He still doesn't have full feeling in his left foot almost a year and a half after he was shot. We found out about that before we left G.W. During our time up in Plattsburgh he had to re-learn how to recognize how his foot felt when he walked, ran or danced. He may never get the full feeling back there again, at least not the way it used to feel. That's why we dance. If you tell him you know that, I will never confide anything with you again."

Harm was completely surprised at that saying, "Don't worry my lips are sealed. You would never know it the way he moves."

"That's from the dancing." Sarah replied.

"What about when he was running with the Giants?"

"The running he was told to do at Giants camp helped him along in the process of learning how his foot felt when he was running." Sara said.

"Well I appreciate that you told me what you did. It made me think a little more about what I have"
and to appreciate it more. Thanks Sarah," Harm said.

"You're welcome Harm. Now let's get this case finished so the admiral doesn't blow a gasket." Sarah said as they got up from lunch.

1430 Local Time

Iron Force Naval Academy Gym

The mock court let out early so Louisa asked Sarah if she would show her some workout techniques. Sarah agreed as she had her gym gear in her car for joining John later. Sarah called John saying that she was working out with Louisa and that she would see him at home after his workout. "I'll be out of here by 1630 and I'll be able to pick up Caroline on time by 1730 as usual."

John had no problem with the arrangement.

During the workout Louisa told Sarah, "Steve is trying to hit on me. He actually chastised me for hanging out with Billy. He thinks Billy is a loser."

Sarah counseled her saying, "Guys like Steve have an ego the size of a football. He's one of the handsome kids who think they're smarter than anyone else. He also thinks girls are there to be wives and mothers only. He'll find that he still has a lot of learning to do. As for you, you have to be better than the men but don't rub their noses in it. Think like a woman but act like a man."

Wednesday, February 9, 2000

1140 Local Time

Iron Force Naval Academy

The kids found another witness, a Seaman named Shepard Carmine. He testified that he saw a man come out of the turret with a bloody nose 15 minutes before the explosion. Shepard turned out to be a sort of nut saying that the Soviets had used a rail gun to blow the turret up. Despite that though Harm and Sarah had Bud check the sick bay records. He found that PO Michael Saunders lied about how he got his bloody nose.

Gunny helped Bud find Saunders through his ex-wife, Kathy. Harm went to the tavern Saunders worked at and got him to admit he had thrown Riordan a blanket party and held him upside down by the ankles over the rail above the screw until he cried.

When Harm bought the finding back to the kids Louisa was so happy about the findings, she hugged Billy. Steve had become so jealous of that he and a couple of his friends beat up Billy in the showers. They threw a blanket over Billy and punched him Louisa found out when she saw Billy's shiner. She said, "Billy you have to report this.

Billy declined saying, "He's not worth the trouble. I'll beat him in court."

Billy remembered a letter written to Riordan by Kathy "with love'. Sarah and Harm went to talk to Saunders "ex" again. This time she admitted that the two were fighting over her and she chose Riordan. When he died she was four months pregnant with her son, now named Greg Riordan after his father.

Harm went back to Saunders and shamed him into testifying to prevent Greg from being embarrassed when he found out.
Thursday February 10, 2000

1130 Local Time

Iron Force Naval Academy

Chegwidden attended the final day of trial to correct any possible miscarriages.

Saunders said he went into Riordan's turret and picked a fight over Kathy. While Riordan's back was turned he saw someone load an extra bag of propellant but didn't say anything about it. Riordan was acquitted in the mock trial and Chegwidden said he would take care of the real case.

On the way out he stopped Harm & Sarah. He asked them, "I seem to recall that I ordered you two to drop this case."

Sarah replied for the two of them, "Well sir it wasn't our case to drop. The cadets saw something was done wrong and they used their own initiative to set about correcting it."

AJ just smirked at them and said, "Uh huh. Either way nice job."

Sarah and Harm both replied, "Thank you sir."

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

When they returned to headquarters later that afternoon Chegwidden tried to help Renee with her commercial.

AJ gave a masterfully powerful speech. "Miss Peterson, you have to understand that we are trained in the art of war, but the profession of peace."

At that point Renee paused and told him, "You have great presence, but that was too hokey and will never sell."

She still continued to malign what she saw at JAG. She called Bud the Pillsbury Dough Boy. She said Sarah was too masculine or severe looking in her uniform. (Sarah wanted to punch her lights out.) She thought Tiner's dissertation on his filing was achingly boring.

Then when she saw Harm she went back to AJ, "Admiral, what I'm seeing here is not very exciting. The closest person I see that may do well on camera is the tall one with the dark hair with the wings over his ribbons. What's his name?"

"You mean Lt. Commander Rabb?" AJ asked.

"Yes that's him. He almost works. Does he do anything else besides being a lawyer?" Renee asked.

"Well he just returned from a cruise in the Adriatic on board the aircraft carrier Patrick Henry. He was assigned as the Staff Judge Advocate of that fleet, but he did some flying."

Before AJ could continue Renee spoke up, "Ooh that sounds interesting. Could you please arrange a meeting?"

AJ told Renee that he would. She gave AJ her business card and left the office. After she left he
summoned Harm to his office. "Miss Peterson seems to think that you would do well in her commercial. I want you to speak with her. Tell her about all, and I mean all the things you do in this Navy. Why don't you try the Washington Monument during 'magic hour' that you told me about when you and Diane were dating."

Harm grimaced at that. He didn't want to take another woman to one of his and his wife's favorite places. So he thought of another plan saying, "Sir, why don't I just ask her to come to dinner at the house? It would be a lot easier on Diane and me. It's a little more relaxing than sitting out in the open or at a crowded restaurant."

"That's a good idea commander. Do that. Let me know what the results are. I want this commercial done, dismissed" AJ said.

Harm snapped to attention saying, "Aye, aye sir."

When Harm returned to his office he first called Diane and told her of what the admiral has him doing, then he called Renee. Both women were enthusiastic to the arrangement. They all made dinner plans for 6:30 the following evening.

Friday, February 11, 2000

1830 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Diane fed the twins and gotten Sarah ready for bed early in anticipation of having Renee over for dinner. Diane knew Harm wasn't very enthused about the commercial and she wanted to make the evening easier for him.

Renee showed up right on time. When Diane answered the door she was taken aback. "Colonel Marshall, I didn't know you were going to join us."

Diane smiled at the usual mistake. As she shook Renee's hand and took her coat she said, "Good evening Miss Peterson, I'm Sarah's sister Diane Rabb. Harm told me all about you."

"Not all bad I hope," Renee said modestly.

"Oh not at all, he did say that you seemed to be very high energy." Diane said.

"Well in my business you have to seem to be that way when all it really is, is hurry up and wait" Renee replied.

Harm came out at that time with Sarah Cate, "Miss Peterson good of you to come" he said shaking her hand.

"Please call me Renee. And who is this lovely young lady?" Renee asked bending down to look Sarah in the eye.

Sarah put her hand out to shake which Renee gladly took. "I'm Sarah Catherine Rabb and I'm 2 & ½ years old."

Renee shook her hand in a very gently exaggerated motion saying, "Well I'm very pleased to meet you Sarah. Tell me girl to girl do you think your daddy will look good in a commercial on TV?"
Sarah giggled at the question and said, "Will daddy have to wear his uniform?"

"Yes he will. I am making a commercial about what he does in the Navy. Would that be alright?"

"Then I guess it's alright as long as mommy says it's alright." Sarah said.

The adults all laughed at that.

Sarah Cate took Renee by the hand saying, "C'mon I'll show you my baby brother and sister." The twins were in playpen in the living room. Harm had put in a Thomas the Tank Engine tape in the VCR.

Renee was totally enchanted by the two asking Diane, "May I hold one they are so beautiful."

Diane readily agreed and picked up Trey and put him into Renee's arms. "Trey is the easier going of the two. He'll let anyone hold him. Samantha is a little picky. She needs to get to know you before she lets anyone but Harm and I pick her up. She was like that to Harm when he first came home after his cruise on the Patrick Henry. It took him a week of caring for her before she would stop crying when he would pick her up."

"Oh tell me about the cruise. How long was it? What did you do? Did you see any action?"

Harm picked up Samantha and they all sat down. Harm told Renee of the cruise. What his duty station was, his flying and so forth. Diane went in to set up for dinner. After a time Diane called everyone into dinner. She put the twins in their high chairs and Sarah Cate in her booster seat.

Renee asked, "So including doing your work as the Staff Judge Advocate for the fleet, you flew missions."

"Yes, I started out of the academy as a pilot. Back in 1991 during the Gulf War, I was involved in a ramp strike or a crash on the carrier 'Patrick Henry'." Harm told Renee of his vision problem and that he got it treated and that he need to prove he could still fly before he felt that he could walk away from it and dedicate himself totally to the law.

Diane spoke up, "What Harm so modestly didn't tell you was that he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for what he did in 1997 and he has been nominated to receive a second one for what he did on this last cruise." Diane went on to tell Renee of how he received both DFCs.

The rest of dinner went very well. Harm and Diane described their meeting at the Academy and their own romance. Renee came away from the evening with a renewed enthusiasm to the project.

As she prepared to leave Renee said, "Let me take the weekend to map out how we can do the commercial, write a script and all. I'll call you at your office by Monday or Tuesday the latest. I'm sure we'll work well together." Renee had another idea, "Diane would you like to be in the commercial. We can show that women can go as far as the men in the Navy and it would add another recruiting hook to the project.

Diane was totally surprised to be asked. She looked at Harm as he said, "You know that sounds like a good idea. Let's take the weekend to think about it Renee. I'll let you know when you call next week."

"Oh good I hope you say yes Diane I think it will be so great." She shook Harm's hand and then pulled Diane into a hug saying, "I had a wonderful evening and your children are beautiful. Good night."
"Thank you and good night Renee. Good luck with everything." Diane said hugging her back.

When they closed the door Diane turned to Harm and said, "I like her. She seems to be a very genuine person. Not at all like what you described. She reminds me of you, totally dedicated to her work."

Harm could only shrug saying, "Well that will make it easier to work with her then, knowing that you like her. Do you think you would like to be in the commercial?"

"You know I have to check with John and the NCIS Legal Department. Being that I work with classified information there are some restrictions on what I can and can't do. After I speak with him, I'll be better equipped to make a decision. I would really like to do it. It'd be nice for us to finally do a Navy project together."

Harm pulled her into a tight hug and gave her quick kiss. Then they went to clean up and get the kids ready for bed.

Monday, February 14, 2000

1815 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

John and Sarah enjoyed a good weekend. They went out dancing on Friday night. They took Chloe with them to the dance studio. She held Caroline on her lap and giggled along with her they watched Sarah & John move across the floor. John even took Chloe out onto the dance floor and danced with her. On Saturday they all relaxed and went to mass. On Sunday they all sat around at home and relaxed all day. Then it snowed again Monday morning. Sarah took the Trailblazer with Caroline to the Navy Yard Daycare center and John drove his 'company' car to work. He dropped Chloe off at school to save her the trouble trudging to the Metro Station in the snow.

When Sarah came home with Caroline there were two surprises waiting for her. Sarah found a bouquet of two dozen roses in a vase waiting on the kitchen table. There was a roast in the oven and potatoes on the boil and John was nowhere in sight. Sarah had Caroline in her arms and she took off her snowsuit and put her down in her playpen before she read the note attached to the bouquet. ('To the only girl that gets my lips, all my love, Your Hot Stuff'.) Sarah smiled at the gesture sniffing at the roses. Other than dealing with Caroline at the beginning, middle and the end of her workday, it was the first time that she smiled all day.

John came up from the basement with a few pieces of firewood. "I thought I heard you come in, Happy Valentine's Day sweetie."

As they hugged each other and shared a long kiss. Caroline just squealed from her playpen at her parents wanting some of her father's attention. John picked his daughter up and raised her high and brought her close for a good hug and many kisses, Caroline just giggled and squealed some more. Sarah sat down and enjoyed the happy scene

Sarah told John, "You know other than Caroline this is the first nice moment I've had today."

John was immediately concerned. As he settled Caroline on his arm he asked, "Why what happened?"

Sarah told him about the case she was assigned earlier that day. After Staff Call, Admiral
Chegwidden asked Sarah and Mic Brumby to come into his office. When they came in and closed the door, AJ told the two officers, "Have a seat."

Turning to Sarah AJ asked her, "How do you feel about Capital Punishment Colonel?"

Sarah said, "I'm in total agreement with capital punishment sir."

Turning to Brumby AJ asked his opinion.

Mic replied, "Well in Australia we don't have capital punishment so my opinion is moot."

"Well I have a case here that you two will handle." AJ said then he opened the file that was on his desk and read the details.

"A Corporal Caleb Farmer received the death sentence for shooting at a marine squad doing calisthenics, killing three and wounding three in July 1987. Now the case is coming up for an appeal."

Sarah finished describing the briefing to John saying, "And Chegwidden assigned me to the defense and Brumby got the prosecution."

"How are you going to deal with it?" John asked.

"Well I'm going to go to Leavenworth to interview Farmer." Sarah said. "Can you get off tomorrow and stay with Caroline?"

"Sure sweetie or better yet I'll take her to NCIS with me. Everyone has been nagging me to see her. You know how I can't stop talking about her." John said. He then surprised Sarah when he leaned over and gave her a quick kiss and added, "and you."

Sarah smiled her special watery smile that she brought out for John's unexpectedly tender moments.

"I love you hot stuff," Sarah said.

"I love you to Ninja Girl." John replied. "Go up and change and I'll start a fire in the living room. Dinner should be ready in about an hour. Afterwards you can pack for your trip."

She said slyly, "You forget I always have a bag packed. You know 'U.S. Marine first to fight' and all.

As she got up John reached for her and got her in a hug around her waist and gave a passionate kiss. Then she walked upstairs. She changed into jeans, slippers and zip up sweatshirt and came down to meet John and Caroline in the living room. John had a roaring fire going. The furniture in the living room was oriented to face the fireplace in one direction and the TV just off to the side. He had Caroline in his lap. Sarah took her to her lap and opened her shirt and put Caroline to her breast.

John was about to say that it may be too early to feed the baby but sensing that he was going to comment Sarah said, "I know it's a little early, but I want to get her ready for bed early so that we can have dinner and get to bed early ourselves. Tell me Captain Marshall; are you up for some bedroom calisthenics?"

John put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. He reached for her sweatshirt zipper and pulled it the rest of the way down. He whispered in her ear, "Why wait for later? Chloe's at her friend's house for a science project sleepover so we have the whole house to ourselves tonight."
Sarah was immediately up for the idea. "Let me put the baby in the playpen."

John gently stopped her and said, "No leave her feeding, as we make love. Just sit there and let me do all the work."

Sarah had read about women making love while a baby suckled at the breast but had never had a desire to try it until now.

First John dashed into the kitchen and turned down the oven and turned off the fire under the potatoes. Then he dashed back into the living room.

John sat back down and started to kiss Sarah's neck and shoulders. She sat back and let John undress her. She switched arms as he pulled off her sweatshirt and unbuttoned and zipped her jeans open. Then she adjusted her hips as John pulled the jeans down along with her lace panties.

John loved that all her underwear was the pretty kind. He loved to look at her as she walked around in the morning getting dressed.

John then got himself undressed. He led Sarah over to the end of the sofa where it was an extended chaise. He sat down and maneuvered himself until he was completely seated. He held onto Sarah as she shimmied on her knees till she was over him. Through all the jostling and unexpected movements Caroline still hadn't unlatched from feeding. This and the fact that John's erection was standing proudly, waiting for her to engulf it made her very wet. John held his hands on her hips and guided her down. Sarah let go of Caroline with one hand and took hold of him to guide him right into her. She let him go as she felt his tip go right where it belonged. She held fast to Caroline as she sank lower, drawing him deeper into her. She felt him pump his hips into her till he was in her up to his hilt. Then she felt him withdraw just a little bit then push back into her. This stroking became more leisurely but still intense. She knew he was trying to prolong the experience. Through it all Caroline just continued to suckle.

John held his hands on her hips to hold her up. As he got closer to his climax he moved them until he had his fingers splayed across the front of her pelvis. He moved his thumbs so that they were stroking her clit from both sides. The feeling of him caressing her most intimate part and her baby suckling hard on her breast sent Sarah right through the roof. She came in very intense orgasm as she pushed down and held her hips down onto John. John felt it as she came and this sent him right to his own climax. They stiffened as they expended themselves then they both collapsed. John had a hold of both Sarah and Caroline.

It was at this point that Caroline unlatched herself as she became sated. She stayed asleep in her mother's arms.

Sarah sat on John's hips as she felt him withdraw from her. As she held onto her daughter she looked down as her husband gazed back at her. She sank further into the love she saw in his eyes and said, "That was something navy."

"No marine that was something else." John said as he sat up and pulled her to sit next to him to give her a deep kiss.

As they got up Sarah raced upstairs still nude to put Caroline in her crib. She came down and put her sweats back on. John cleaned himself off and got dressed. He turned the potatoes back on to warm them for a time. He and Sarah then worked on getting their dinner ready. Every time they passed each other they caressed, kissed and generally rubbed themselves lovingly against each other. They were still making love.
When the roast was ready and John sliced the meat as Sarah mashed the potatoes put the vegetables in the microwave to heat up. They sat down to enjoy the meal, casting loving glances at each other. Through the whole meal preparation, they didn't speak as in conversation only to ask for items and so forth. After a couple of helpings, they wrapped up and put away the leftovers and put the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. As they walked hand in hand into the bedroom they stopped in to check on Caroline. She was still asleep. Sarah changed her diaper and put a sleeper on her. They left the door open as they went into their bedroom and made love again.

2345 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah and John lay in the afterglow of their lovemaking. They brought each other to climax a couple of times. Sarah was resting her head on his chest. She turned and told John, "You know John I was ovulating. Caroline may have sibling in nine months."

John rolled over until he could cup Sarah's face as he let her see the big smile that graced his face. "I am so glad to hear that. I hope it's true. I love you Sarah Catherine Marshall."

"And I love you John Patrick Marshall." She settled into his embrace as they fell into a restful sleep.

Tuesday, February 15, 2000

1100 Local Time

U.S. Disciplinary Barracks

Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas

Sarah waited in the interview room at the prison. She took the 0730 Flight out of Reagan National. John drove her to the terminal and then took Caroline with him to work. As she waited she patted her belly hoping that there was a new baby there.

She got up as she heard the door being unlocked. Two guards escorted Caleb Farmer in. He was chained at his waist where his wrists handcuffs were connected. He also had leg irons on. Her idea of this man before she saw him was strong and tall, but as she would tell John that night that he was 'smaller than she imagined. Now she needed to hear why he did what he did.

Sarah introduced herself saying, "Mr. Caleb I'm Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall. I've been assigned as your defense for your appeal. I need to know some things, first of all why?"

"Colonel I have no excuses the rest of the squad made my life hell. They all thought they were better than me, better marines. I was always the slowest, the smallest. I'd ask for help but they would turn me down. They just wouldn't let up. I was driven to drink and lost my mind." Caleb whined.

"Why not just resign or quit? Why did you feel you had to shoot them?" Sarah asked.

"That was the only area where I was at least keeping up with them. But they just weren't impressed. So I thought that I could show them. I picked the spot. I got some liquid courage and then just started popping off shots at them. If anything it made them listen." Farmer said.

Sarah looked at him with a mixture of disgust and pity. She said, "I'll work on your case the best I can. But it does not look good. I'll be in touch." She got up and started to put her things away and got ready to leave.
Arrivals terminal
Dulles International Airport, VA

She was lucky there was a flight out of Kansas City to Dulles later that afternoon. She called John to let him know her arrival time at Dulles. On the flight she examined the case file, especially the trial transcripts. She was a bit dismayed at what she found, but she now had a starting point for the appeal.

She put the case file away as she sat back to relax for the rest of the flight. She was a bit amused when her seat neighbor, a salesman named Reed tried to hit on her when he saw her put the file away. She got him to back down when she flashed her wedding and engagement ring at him and told him, "My husband is a SEAL and a Navy law enforcement director. The last man that bothered us ended up in a federal prison. Also see these two badges. They signify that I am an expert in pistol and rifle marksmanship. So if you don't want to end up in prison or shot up Mr. Reed, I suggest you sit there quietly and leave me alone."

Needless to say being adequately intimidated Mr. Reed sat back and left her alone for the rest of the flight.

As she came through the jet way she saw John holding Caroline. She practically ran into his embrace. After they shared a kiss, John took her briefcase and travel bag. Sarah settled Caroline on her hip as they walked through the terminal. John asked her about the interview.

"He was such a pathetic person. I thought he was strong and tall, but he was 'smaller than I imagined. He reminded me of a broken down one-eyed cat, a bird killer. You loathe him but felt sorry for him at the same time. He said that he shot at his platoon because they made fun of him, tried to make him quit. They hazed him unmercifully. He is a hard person to defend. I did find a way to gain his appeal, but it's not going to make me very popular with the admiral." Sarah said.

"Why would he have a problem?" John asked.

He whistled in amazement when Sarah told him. "I can see how that wouldn't go over very well." He replied.

To change the subject to something more upbeat, Sarah asked, "So how was 'take your daughter to work day'?"

"Caroline was a hit. Kate, Carolyn and Abby just fell in love with her. Thomas was totally enchanted. Gibbs gave her a miniature special agent badge. McGee got her giggling when he showed her photos of you and I that he took at our wedding that he had on his computer. You should have seen it, he had her on his lap and when your picture came up she said mama. Dinozzo asked me if she liked older men because I quote 'she was just so beautiful he may wait the 20 years for her to come of age."

"Yeah that sounds like Tony. He's such a charmer." Sarah said with a chuckle.

"Oh I almost forgot. Diane is going to do a recruiting commercial with Harm. A producer named..." John began.

Sarah finished, "Renee Peterson. I met her on Friday. She said that my uniform was too severe to be appealing. I wanted to punch her lights out."
John smiled at that saying, "Well it seems that your sister likes her since Renee asked her to do the commercial with Harm. Diane asked me if she was allowed to do it seeing that she works with classified material. We checked with legal and they said as long as she only mentions that she is in the Navy and why she wants to serve and such its fine. She and Harm are going to do the commercial with Renee tonight. We're stopping at their house to pick the kids up so they can stay over our house tonight."

"Well I can't wait to see how that commercial comes out." Sarah said sardonically.

They got to their car and went home. They stopped to pick up the Rabb children. There was a fun and noisy production of switching and strapping the baby seats in the Marshall's Trailblazer before they pulled away. On the way home they bought a few pregnancy tests.

1900 Local Time

Capitol Studios

Constitution Ave, NW

After John and Sarah picked up the children Harm and Diane went to their appointment to perform their speaking parts for the recruiting commercial with Renee. Renee faxed them a copy of the script as soon as Diane told her that she was approved to do the commercial.

"Diane I'm so glad you got approval to do the commercial. I hear your bother in law is your boss. How did that happen?" Renee asked.

Diane explained, "Well without revealing what it was for, the four of us, Harm, Sarah, John and I got involved with a fact finding mission. My assignment at NCIS was only supposed to be temporary to facilitate the job we were doing. After we accomplished what we did John put in a formal request to keep me on at NCIS to continue the work that I was doing. My original superiors at the Pentagon approved and there I went. It's the same job I was doing at the Pentagon and I really enjoy working there. It's a very relaxed atmosphere and John is a big part of that. He has a way of getting the people that work with him feel at ease."

Renee asked Harm, "So Harm how did Sarah get to work with you at JAG?"

Harm explained, "Well to begin with John was working at JAG a few months before I got there and almost 3 years before Sarah got there. When I met Diane, we didn't know she had a sister. Diane only found out she had a sister after her mother and father died. A year after I got there, John and Sarah met at JAG. They were assigned to retrieve the Declaration of Independence when, oddly enough, Sarah's uncle stole it. They were each awarded the Legion of Merit Medal for that. When Sarah and John returned to JAG after her uncle's trial, I met her and I was totally floored by how much she looked like Diane. When they came to dinner that night Diane gave Sarah this letter."

Diane extracted her mother's letter explaining her and Sarah's birth details.

Renee read it and even she started crying. "That is so romantic. So John and Sarah met at JAG and John didn't stay in JAG because?"

"Well regulations do not allow spouses to serve in the same unit or chain of command. John was promoted and offered his position at NCIS, which he accepted. Being that he and Sarah would no longer be in the same chain of command, he asked her to marry him." Harm then described John's proposal to Sarah in AJ's office.

"Wow romance just runs through that office." Renee commented.
"Yeah we've all found our own little islands of happiness. So Rene what do you need Diane and I to do for this commercial?" Harm asked.

Renee began to outline how the commercial would go, "Well I'll use some stock footage the Navy has provided of Tomcats being launched and flown, sailors working on them, ships sailing, working on the ship and in what do you call that darkened room?" ("CIC" Harm provided) "Yes that's it. We'll have you saying how rewarding it is for the two of you. We'll end it by having the two of you saying together 'it's a pleasure to serve.' First let's do a quick rehearsal. Try to remember the words the other says that precede the beginnings of your line. It'll make it easier to do your lines."

Diane and Harm rehearsed the script a couple times with Renee. Renee instructed them on the inflections of what they were saying. They figured they were ready to go.

"Now you two will be in front of the green screen. We're going to CGI the file footage behind and around you. When you look into the monitor in front of you, you can see what is going on behind you so you won't get disoriented. So if you're ready to begin we can get your speaking parts in tonight and we'll edit everything over the next few weeks. But first let's get your make up done. Without it you will appear green as you stand under the bright lights. Go with Jason here. He and his minions will take care of you."

Harm and Diane went with Jason to the makeup room. When they came out Renee had them set up in front of the green screen. Then they started. The director had them turn and stand every which way and speak their lines in close up, wide shot, singly and together. They were at it for 2&½ hours. There were many line flubs, giggling, hearty laughter and forgotten lines, equipment glitches and microphones falling or dropping into the shot. All through it all Harm and Diane were having fun because Renee was a constant comforting and encouraging presence. She was the reason Harm and Diane did not become impatient and short tempered. They finished with a streak of three perfect takes.

It was 2345 when they walked out of the studio with Renee. "Well that was fun. We'll edit it down to the best-performed lines and fill in the visual effects. I think we have a good commercial here." Renee said.

Harm and Diane agreed as they walked to the parking garage. They handed their parking tickets to the valet. The Rabbs car came first. Diane and Harm warmly embraced Renee as they said goodbye. As Diane embraced her she said, "It was fun Renee you were great. We would never have gotten through this without you."

"No you guys were great. You two were the heart of the commercial. I'll let you know when we have the finished product. Let's do dinner tomorrow. Is that Australian Commander seeing anyone? What's his name Mike or Nick?"

"Mic Brumby and no he's not. He was seeing a Washington lawyer, but he's not now. Why don't you give him a call at JAG tomorrow?" Harm suggested. "You can come to our place."

"Oh no dinner is my treat. After all, the Navy is paying for it. I mean what's a transaction without a meal?"

Harm and Diane could only agree. They made promises to call and arrange dinner for Thursday night and said goodnight.

Wednesday, February 16, 2000, JAG HQ

Washington Navy Yard, DC
Sarah came in early to prepare her brief for Farmer's appeal. She asked Gunny to do some research for her.

When Gunny brought her the old case files, she asked him, "What do you think?"

"Ma'am I was there the day of the killings. One of my friends, Sgt. Kryler was shot and is now a quadriplegic. No disrespect ma'am but I hope you lose your appeal."

Harm stopped in and asked, "How are you doing with the case?"

"Well the basis of my appeal is that Farmers previous attorney did not give an adequate defense."

Harm said, "Then his counsel should fry for not giving him the right defense."

"Harm you don't understand. Farmer's defense attorney then was Commander AJ Chegwidden."

Harm whistled in astonishment and said, "Good luck with that marine."

Sarah could only smirk at his hasty retreat.

After Sarah prepared her appellate brief she submitted it to the Admiral.

He read it and handed it back to her saying, "Its fine."

"Sir I'm sorry that I have to go this way." Sarah said in apology.

"Don't worry about it Colonel."

"But, sir, I'm arguing inefficient defense counsel, your counsel." Sarah said in dismay.

AJ had enough. He braced her to attention and stared her down saying, "Lock it up, marine. You didn't join this office to protect my damn reputation. Do the job you were assigned to do. Dismissed!"

Sarah turned about faced and marched from the office.

2030 Local Time

Marshall Residence

When she got home she started to feel much better. John had dinner ready as he stayed home to watch the Rabb children and Caroline. Diane and Harm followed Sarah home to pick up their kids. While John and Harm were switching the car seats Sarah changed out of her uniform. When she came down, the Rabbs were ready to leave. She kissed Diane, the kids and Harm goodnight and then she settled in for the evening with her family.

After dinner everyone was in the living room. Chloe was sitting on the couch feeding Caroline from a bottle. The TV was on a comedy that everyone liked. Sarah then told John of her encounter with the admiral.

John told her, "As I have observed AJ, he likes to go against the grain. He wants to put his lawyers into positions out of their comfort zones. I know you. You'd like nothing better than to prosecute Farmer. But AJ knows how good an attorney you are. That's why he assigned you the way he did. Also don't worry about his reputation. He's already a "two star". Do you really think they didn't look at Farmer's case when he was being selected to be the JAG?"
"Yeah I suppose your right. Thank you sweetie, you always make me feel better." She gave John a look that said, 'Let's get the kids to bed early.'

Chloe caught the look. She finished feeding Caroline and was burping her on her shoulder. "Look guys, why don't I put Caroline to bed. I'll change her and get her settled. After that I'll be in my room talking to Carrie on my cell phone."

Without another word she got up with Caroline and bent to give a kiss first to John and then to Sarah. Sarah pulled her into a brief hug and gave her a good kiss in silent gratitude.

John waited a few minutes until he heard that Chloe was finished with Caroline and gone into her room and closed the door. He then took Sarah's hand and led her to the basement. He closed the basement door. When they got down to the bottom of the stairs, Sarah turned and wrapped herself around her husband. They managed to settle onto the couch where they proceeded to make out like teenagers. They managed to get all their clothes off and wrap themselves up in the throw blankets that were on the couch as they coupled.

After they climaxed, they spooned each other as John lay with his back against the back of the couch as he encircled his arms around his Sarah as they napped for a while. About 0200 Sarah woke up. At first she was disoriented, but then she recognized where they were. She smiled as she shook John awake. John got up and put on his shorts and pants. He gathered up the rest of his and all of Sarah's clothing. Sarah just wrapped a blanket around herself and they walked silently to the 2nd floor. They weren't embarrassed or afraid that Chloe would come out and see them. Chloe was a mature thirteen year old and she knew that John and Sarah were just acting like a normal married couple that couldn't get enough of each other. They had also told Chloe of their desire to have another baby.

They got into their room and put on their bedclothes. Sarah then peeked in at Chloe. She bent to tuck the covers a little more snugly around the sleeping teenager and plant a soft kiss on her cheek. Chloe just turned over and mumbled, "Goodnight mom".

Sarah's heart just leaped for joy at the endearment. She then went into the nursery to check on Caroline who was sleeping as peacefully as could be. Sarah stood and looked down as she lay on her back. She wondered what her baby was dreaming as she saw her kick her feet and clench her tiny fingers into tiny fists. Sarah thought to herself, "I am so lucky to have this life and these children. Knowing I have this makes it easier to deal with people like Farmer."

She went back into her bedroom and snuggled up against John as she fell into a restful sleep.
Chapter 50

Timing is Everything

Chapter 50

Thursday, February 17, 2000

1000 Local Time

JAG HQ

Washington Navy Yard, DC

When Sarah arrived at the office she was definitely in a better mood than when she left the prior evening.

At Staff Call after all the cases were handed out, the Admiral announced, "I have an announcement to make. It is my displeasure to say that Lt. Commander Brumby has been recalled. Mic is leaving to go back to Australia to help with the peacekeeping in East Timor."

Mic piped up, "That's right it's all hands on deck. I'll miss you all and the friendships that I have made here."

AJ continued turning to Sarah saying, "Colonel this affects you most of all."

Sarah innocently looks up at him and says, "Sir?"

AJ explained, "As Chief of Staff, you colonel will get most of his cases and what you don't want, give out to the other attorneys. Mr. Brumby will be here till the end of the week so he can brief you on them."

"Aye, aye sir", Sarah said in understanding.

"There is one last thing." Turing to Emma he said, "Chief you can ask our guests to step in now." AJ said.

Everyone stood as SECNAV Nelson walked in. Closely following him was Diane in full uniform. She was carrying a bible and one other thing, a garment bag.

AJ announced, "Attention to orders. It is hereby noticed that after showing unwavering dedication to duty and performing that duty in an outstanding manner it is hereby ordered by the United States Congress and the US Navy that Lt. Commander Harmon David Rabb be promoted to full Commander effective this date, 17 February 2000. Mr. Secretary the floor is yours."

"Commander Rabb please step forward to take the oath of your new office." As Harm stepped up he gave Diane a look that said, 'you knew and still didn't give me a hint this morning'. Diane just smiled brightly at him as she held the bible for him where he placed his left hand. As he raised his right hand the Secretary said, Please repeat after me;"

Harm repeated the oath, "I Harmon David Rabb solemnly swear that I will honestly and faithfully discharge the duties of Commander in the United States Navy. Bearing this duty freely and willingly in true faith and allegiance I will faithfully honor, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America from all enemies. So help me God."
Secretary Nelson held out his hand for Harm to firmly grasp. "Congratulations Commander Rabb."

At that the whole retinue in the conference room applauded. Turning to Diane, Nelson said, "Mrs. Rabb I believe the next part is your honor."

"Aye, aye sir" Diane said seductively. "It's a good thing I applied the extra lipstick." As chuckles were heard she wrapped her arms around her husband and gave him a deep kiss. After the requisite 20 seconds Nelson coughed extravagantly. AJ held out a tissue for each of them to wipe the smeared lipstick.

AJ said, "Mr. Commander Rabb you're out of uniform. Mrs. Commander Rabb I believe you can solve his malfunction."

"I can sir." Diane said as she opened the garment bag. It had his extra uniform coat, now festooned with the sleeve bars of a full Commander. Even all his ribbons were in place. As Harm shucked his old coat, he gave it to Sarah as she stepped up to help. Diane held up his coat with the new rank for him to put on. "I feel like I'm at the Masters, but the jacket's not green." Everyone laughed appreciatively as he buttoned it up.

Diane then announced, "We're having a wet down at McMurphy's tomorrow night at 2000. As I now found out, we'll also be saying goodbye to Mr. Brumby. So everyone including your spouses and sweethearts are invited. Just remember to keep them apart."

Everyone laughed at the old Navy joke.

AJ spoke up one more time, "If that's all we have work to do."

Before they could all leave, Tiner came in. "Sir I have a document for Colonel Marshall."

Sarah took the legal document and opened it. She then read it out loud, "It's Farmer's appeal. The punishment still stands, but Farmer has been given a new trial due to inefficient counsel."

Harm glanced between the Admiral and Sarah to see both their expressions.

Sarah was neutral as well as AJ. AJ then said, "In that case Commander Rabb, you will prosecute as the colonel defends."

"Aye sir," Sarah and Harm say in unison.

After staff call Sarah sat down with Harm and tried to get him to agree to life in prison. Harm declined saying, "We should let the jury decide."

Sarah said resignedly, "Fine I'll see you in court."

The trial was scheduled for later that morning.

1130 Local Time

JAG HQ

Even before the trial began, Sarah felt like she was fighting against a stacked deck.

During the trial Sarah showed that Farmer had 0.14% blood alcohol level, that his platoon wanted him out of the service and harassed him, that he had sought help but the sociologist who saw him told him to "pretend he was a duck and let it roll off him," refusing to refer him to a psychiatrist. Later, after his arrest, a psychiatrist diagnosed him as "a marked personality disorder with paranoid
tendencies."

Harm called two witnesses. One was the widow of one Marine and the other was a quadriplegic victim of Farmer's shooting rampage. Sarah can't look at either of them as they were talking. When she ended her questioning, both of them rambled on in hatred to Farmer. Sarah is allowed to object to stop them, but she doesn't. Harm sees that.

To take a break from the gloominess of the trial Sarah went right to see Caroline at the daycare center. Emma came with her as usual. During their time there Sarah was notified that Farmer had attempted suicide by cutting his wrists. Fortunately he was stopped without serious injury.

When Sarah went to see him in Bethesda she urged him to try to keep fighting asking, "Is there any witness that we can use, anyone that can come to your defense?"

He couldn't give Sarah even one witness for his defense.

Due to his injury, the remainder of the trial was postponed until the next morning.

1945 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Harm and Diane had gotten Traci Manetti, of all people, to baby sit the kids at home. She volunteered when she accidentally overheard Harm talk to Mic talking in the break room about them going out that night with Diane and Renee. Harm had said, "I hate to keep asking John and Ann Marie or Bud to watch the kids. They all have kids of their own. And it's such a hassle to get them all dressed and buckled in the car to go and then to unbuckle them."

Traci stepped over at that moment, "Excuse me sirs. Commander Rabb I couldn't help overhearing, but I can watch your children tonight if you like. I'm the oldest of seven. I have 4 brothers and two sisters. By the time I was 8, I was helping my parents change and feed my infant siblings. So watching a toddler and two infant twins is no stretch for me."

Harm said, "Thank you Lieutenant. Are you sure you won't mind?"

"It's no trouble at all sir. I was just going to stay home tonight anyway and do some prep work for a trial Commander Austen and I are prosecuting. I can get that done after the twins and Sarah are in bed, also no charge."

"Well okay. Say 1900 tonight then?" Traci nodded. "Come into the office and let me write directions to the house. This will really help a lot. Thank you again lieutenant."

"Your welcome sir, it will be my pleasure." Traci said smiling.

Now as she and Harm were walking out of the house Diane was saying, "The twins have been fed, changed and are in their cribs. They should be asleep anytime now. Sarah is bathed and she has her pajamas on. She likes her milk in a sippy cup and..."

"Ma'am, I got it, have a good time. I'll see you later." Traci said as she closed the door. She turned and saw Sarah standing there with her blanket. Bending down to look at her Traci said, "Now young lady what do you want to do?"

Sarah held out the book "Hop on Pop". "Can you read this to me?"
"I sure can." Traci said enthusiastically. She picked up the toddler and carried her into the living room. They both sat down in the easy chair. As Sarah got comfortable in Traci's lap with her 'blankey' Traci opened the book. She made funny noises and tickled Sarah as she read the story. Before she reached the end, Sarah had fallen asleep. Traci got up carefully and slowly and carried Sarah into her room. She laid her on the bed and pulled the comforter over her. Traci bent down and gave her a gentle kiss on the temple. She checked the twins and then went into the living room. She had the baby monitor next to her as she started her work.

At 12:30, Harm and Diane came home. They had to smile as they found Traci asleep on the couch with the baby monitor turned up to full volume. Traci had a novel across her chest and a blanket around her legs.

As Diane bent to wake her, Traci woke up startled. "Oh Commanders, what time is it?"

"It's after1230 Traci." Diane answered. "Listen it's late, would you like to spend the night? It's a long drive back to DC."

Traci answered, "Uh you know ma'am that sounds like a good idea. I always have my uniform and my overnight kit in my car. You never know when the admiral will send us out on an overnight trip. I've been listening to your sister about always being prepared."

Diane smiled at that saying, "Great, go get your things and I'll have Harm set up the sofa bed in the study. That's pretty comfortable and warm."

When Traci came in from her car, she went right into the study. Harm said, "You can use the shower in the extra bathroom in the morning. Also here's an extra terry robe. We usually wake up at 0545 when the twins start fussing to be fed."

"That's fine sir. Thank you for the hospitality." Traci said.

"No thank you Traci. Diane and I had a great time tonight and we wouldn't have if you weren't here." Harm said appreciatively.

"Your welcome sir and good night." Traci said.

Harm left the room and Traci closed the door. As she went to sleep she thought that she worked with a pretty nice bunch of people.

Friday, February 18, 2000

0930 Local Time

JAG HQ

The next morning at the resumption of the trial Farmer asked to speak to the jury. He promised that he would spend rest of his life seeking redemption, saying, "I hope that a man is more than just the worst thing he's ever done."

Right before closing arguments, Farmer asked Sarah, "I want you to be there for my execution."

Sarah somberly said "I will."

There was a short break during which AJ had both Harm and Sarah in his office. He gave them each some advice for closing arguments: to Sarah- "don't look at the widow", and to Harm- "don't look at the defendant."
After the closing arguments they only had to wait 90 minutes for the jury to come back. The jury upheld the death sentence and Farmer called out for Sarah to "remember her promise to him."

1930 Local Time

Mc Murphy's Tavern

John and Sarah walked into the tavern with Ann Marie and Pete. They saw Harm and Diane right away. There were the usual hugs, kisses and handshakes. The Marshalls and Matthews arranged for a sitter to stay at the Marshalls to watch the three babies and Chloe. The sitter was named Marianne and she was one of Chloe's tutors. The Rabbs had gotten their next-door neighbor's 17-year-old daughter to baby-sit for them.

"Congratulations Commander. It's about time." John said sincerely.

"Thanks John. It feels good to finally get it." Harm replied.

John saw behind Harm that Mic was standing at the bar with Renee. They went over and Mic introduced John, Ann Marie and Pete. "Renee this is Sarah's husband, Captain John Marshall, his sister Ann Marie and her husband Pete."

Renee said, "Please to meet all of you."

"I'm sorry to hear that you're leaving Mic." John told him.

"Well I always knew this assignment was temporary. I'll still be glad to arrange for you and Sarah to come down under whenever you're ready. Maybe if a case comes up that she'll be eligible to try."

Mic said.

"That would be something to look forward to." John said. Sarah agreed.

Renee went on to apologize to Sarah at her comment to her uniform when they first met. "I was frustrated that the Navy gave me the lawyer part of their recruitment campaign, then I met your brother in law. The marines don't offer as flattering uniforms as the Navy."

"Forget about it Renee it's not a problem." Sarah said offering the olive branch.

Renee turned to John. "So this is your husband. Diane and Harm told me so much about you. How you two met, how you proposed and that dance you two did at your wedding. If I had known all that, green uniform or not I would have asked you two to do the commercial." That made Sarah smile.

Just then Bud and Harriet came in. They were closely followed by AJ & Sydney.

Then Loren Singer came into the bar. Harm saw her and said, "Buy you a drink sailor?"

"Thank you sir," she said.

Harm told her, "You know Loren you are allowed to call me Harm, out of uniform."

"Blame it on the constant training I got in boot camp and then ROTC for that 'Harm'." Loren said.

Harm had to smile at that. She toasted his promotion. Then she went and greeted Sarah and John warmly.

AJ went up to Harm saying, "Congratulations Commander, it was a long time coming. Your stint on
the Patrick Henry was the tipping stone. The SECNAV got nothing but good evaluations from the skippers you dealt with, even Captain Ingles. That report you made after Lt. Hawkes' mishap was greeted with, well let's just say mixed reviews. Despite that it was thorough and it outlined many things that at least everyone agreed, need to be corrected. So when your name came up on the promotions list, I pushed for fast action. You're a good officer Harm. Keep it real and honest and maybe you'll be JAG."

"Well that's real good to hear admiral." Harm said shaking his hand.

AJ had a twinkle, "Didn't I just hear you say to Singer that she was allowed to call you Harm out of uniform?"

Harm smiled wryly at him, "Yes AJ as a matter of fact you did."

Just then there was a commotion at the door. A man and a woman walked in and proceeded to check the bar out. They entered and exited the lavatories and then they went back outside. Then President and Mrs. Bartlett walked in. Before the assembled officers could even think of standing at attention, Bartlett called out a hearty "As you were ladies and gentlemen". Bartlett went right up to Harm and grasped his hand. "Congratulations on your promotion Commander."

"Thank you sir. It's good of you to come. I'm glad Diane and Ann Marie were able to get through to you in California."

"Thank you for inviting me. I've never been to a military promotion wet-down and I haven't had a Friday night out at a normal non-state-non-diplomatic party in a long time. It gives a chance to do this." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his credit card. Slapping it on the bar he let out the famous call, "The drinks are on me!"

There were hoots, whistles, cheers and applause to the announcement. Renee was totally shocked. She was standing next to Sarah and asked her. "I know he is your boss, but I didn't know you all were personal friends with the President."

"Well John's sister Ann Marie is his Press Secretary. Also he's been closely associated with us personally since John's shooting almost two years ago. It was only right that Harm invited him." Sarah said.

"John was shot?" Renee asked.

Sarah began to explain, "Without going into details on motive and such, John was seriously injured. It happened the spring before we were married. You should have seen how hard he worked in rehab to get ready to go to Russia to find Harm's father and then to practice our dance."

"To find Harm's father? In Russia?" Renee asked.

Sarah explained, "That's a story for Harm to tell in more detail. Suffice to say Harm's father was in Vietnam, he was shot down, declared MIA. The communists took him to Russia. He was held there for many years. Harm never stopped looking for him. We had obtained some evidence that he was taken there so we, Diane, Harm, John and I, went to Russia and found that he had escaped from where they were keeping him but still couldn't get out of the country. He lived there for a time. He was killed when he went to save the woman he was living with from being raped by soldiers."

"And here I thought that what you all did was dull. Your office is like the still water on the top of a deep, deep ocean." Renee rightly observed.

"That we are," Sarah acknowledged.
The party continued for a time. As it started to wind down, Mic started to make the rounds saying "goodbye, don't be strangers, let me know if you're coming down under and so on. When he got to the Rabbs, Roberts and Marshalls he said, "I'm gonna miss you all the most. You've been nothing but my best friends here," he said sincerely. Bud, John and Harm gave him the handshake hug and Harriet, Sarah and Diane kissed Mic goodbye. As he started to walk out with Renee, Bud started singing…

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

The group picked it up at the second line.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tuckerbag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

Waltzing matilda, waltzing matilda
You'll come a waltzing matilda with me
And he sang as he shoved jumbuck in his tuckerbag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

Up rode the squatter, mounted on his thoroughbred.
Down came the troopers, one, two, and three.
"Where's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Waltzing matilda, waltzing matilda
You'll come a waltzing matilda with me
Where's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Up jumped the swagman and sprang into the billabong.
"You'll never catch me alive!" said he
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

Mic heard the song wind down as he and Renee walked away from the tavern. "They're a good bunch of people. It was a pleasure working with them. I'm gonna miss them." Mic said.

Renee could only nod in agreement as they got into their car and drove away.
Chapter 51

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 51

Saturday, February 19, 2000

Sarah was holding Caroline as she Chloe and John saw Mic off at Dulles. Mic had a special goodbye for Caroline. He held her and said to her, "Make sure your mum and dad find a way to get down under young lady." Caroline could only giggle as her parents looked on. Mic gave her a big kiss and one each to Sarah and Chloe, shook John's hand then he walked down the jet way.

After the airport they went to the International Place Shopping Center in Arlington for bigger clothes for Caroline. She was really growing like a weed. John always commented, "We grows em big in my family." Sarah just hooked her arm into his and rolled her eyes. As they walked through Sarah and Chloe debated what they wanted Caroline to wear, holding up outfits in front of her as she sat in the stroller.

They finally settled on some bigger snuglies, dresses and girlie sweat outfits. They even indulged John as they bought a girl's N.Y. Giants sweat outfit for her to wear, which they were lucky to find the rare outfit as they were in Washington Redskins territory after all.

They went right to 5:00 mass at St. Thomas, Apostle then settled in at home. While Caroline was in the playpen, Sarah showed Chloe the finer points of making a pasta red sauce. Sarah and John's cooking class was a success as they completed the course with excellent grades. One thing Sarah learned was not to strictly adhere to any recipe. She was always eager to add her own touches to her dishes. Sarah became adept at putting in her ingredients by hand, instead of measuring and so forth. As a result her meals were always delicious.

They finished their dinner and cleaned the kitchen and settled in for the night.

On Sunday they relaxed the day away as it had begun to snow late in the day. They went to bed early because they knew they would have to get up early to shovel. That was also a concern of Sarah's as she was responsible for the JAG HQ Building Services, which included snow removal from the parking lot & walkways.

Monday, February 21, 2000

1330 - 1800 Local Time

USS Suribache

Off the Virginia Capes

Just as they thought there was about 6 inches of snow for John to shovel. He left his and Sarah's cars lined up at the edge of the driveway so that he only had to shovel the front walk and the part of the driveway where the cars were parked. John took Chloe straight to school in his car and Sarah took Caroline to the Navy Yard in the Trailblazer. Coincidentally they both pulled into the JAG / NCIS Parking Lot at the same time. They waved to each other as they went to their respective buildings.

When Sarah arrived at headquarters, she saw that the snow removal was well underway. She spoke to Lt. Josh McDaniels, the head of the JAG Headquarters Building Services Department.
He told her, "I had the sailors and marines that were assigned to the snow crew on duty since 0500. When it started to snow last night I called the crew members each at home and informed them of their reporting time."

Sarah said, "Thank you lieutenant, good job."

"You're welcome ma'am." McDaniels replied.

Sarah settled into her office and then went to Staff Call. During the Staff Call Admiral Chegwidden assigned her and Harm to investigate the murder of a Petty Officer Chinick aboard the USS Suribache. The Suribache was a destroyer at sea off the Virginia Capes. They had to take a helicopter out from Andrews. Before she left she called John to tell him that he would have to pick up Caroline at the daycare center. Sarah also asked Emma to wait at the daycare center in case John was running late.

AJ was also going to fly to the USS Manassas for a retirement party for Vice Admiral Richard Kern. Admiral Kern was the last other member of their SEAL team on active duty.

Out on the Suribache, Petty Officer De Mara was accused of killing Chinick. DeMara was seen leaving the machinery room, where Chinick was found with a rope around his neck. DeMara was immediately locked in the brig.

While Sarah went about the ship gathering more information and all possible evidence, Harm was interrogating DeMara with the Master at Arms, Chief Sturdevant.

After a while Sarah called to the brig and told Harm, "Chinick was a one man black market for booze, drugs, and porn. The captain became suspicious and he called NCIS. Chinick was going to be arrested when they docked. I called John and he confirmed that Chris Pocchi was assigned to do that as soon as the Suribache was to dock. Also I had Bud doing some research on DeMara's record. He found that DeMara had a Captain's Mast on his last ship for having a habit of falling asleep on watch."

Harm said in reply, "There's your motive. DeMara was scoring speed from Chinick. Chinick was extorting him for charging more and more. They had a falling out and DeMara killed him over it."

Before Sarah could debate or reply the ship was severely jolted. The sudden impact toppled equipment racks onto the brig hatch thus blocking it and trapping them all below. To top it all off DeMara started to freak. He became very angry and loud, banging chairs against the cell door, tearing up his mattress and threatening Harm and Sturdevant.

Harm finally got to the point where he couldn't take it anymore and told De Mara, "If you want something just ask for it."

Just then the lights went out.

"Could you turn the lights back on please, sir?" De Mara asked seriously.

Harm called up to Sarah and asked her what happened.

She told him, "The ship hit an uncharted reef and grounded." Then Sarah heard DeMara's commotion in the background of Harm's extension. "What's going on down there?" She asked.

"DeMara is going nuts. To call him unstable would be an insult to unstable people." Just before he hung up water began to flood into the brig.
DeMara said, "The next compartment must be flooding and the bilge outlet pipe must not be capped. You have to let me out of here I don't want to drown in a cage." DeMara shouted.

Sturdevant relented and went in to get him. But when Sturdevant opened the cage, he tripped. Even though he was in handcuffs, DeMara still managed to grab the gun that the Chief had on his belt. Now he and Harm were DeMara's hostages. Their only problem was they had nowhere to go, being trapped by the debris over the hatch.

On the Manassas, Chegwidden was speaking to Admiral Kern. They were commiserating about getting old. AJ was saying, "I'm worried about slowing down in my abilities. My Chief of Staff sends me memos with the larger font. I'm godfather to her daughter, but sometimes I feel like a grandfather."

Kern's reply to AJ was the old military saying about old soldiers, "If we couldn't be out front we'd rather be out of sight."

He and AJ shared a good laugh.

As they were talking the skipper of the Manassas called down to Kern, "Admiral we just received a message from the Suribache that they need assistance. They grounded on an uncharted reef. They are going to need to be towed."

Kern replied, "Alright skipper do what you need to do. Keep me informed please."

Back on board the Suribache Harm and Sturtevant were trying to keep DeMara calm. DeMara forced Harm to continue to talk about the murder. Harm deduced that DeMara was having withdrawals from drugs. DeMara admitted, "Chinick was my supplier of speed, so I could stay awake. But he continued to raise the prices, claiming that he had 'increased overhead'. I admit we argued but then, later, I got a note from Chinick to meet him in the mechanical room. The note is still in the sweatband of my cap in my locker. You can lift his fingerprints from it because someone may be trying to frame me."

Harm agreed but said, "That won't do you any good if you kill us. Why don't you give me the gun?"

Just then the ship shifted toppling a heavy steel cage with oxygen tanks. DeMara was directly under it and he was trapped against the wall as the water rose. The gun fell into the water. Harm and the Chief went to move the cage, but it was too heavy even for the two of them and DeMara pushing from underneath.

Harm went over and tried the phone, but he found it went dead. What he didn't know was that as the floodwater rose, it came in contact with the auxiliary batteries causing a short. The short caused a rupture in the batteries, which caused Chlorine gas to leak. The gas was starting to fill the space above the brig.

When the Manassas arrived AJ came over with the boarding party. As he and Sarah were waiting for news of Harm in the dining room, he asks her. "I have noticed lately Colonel that when you send me e-mails, you set them in a larger font? Am I slowing down?"

"Sir, as we age our physical skills diminishes." Sarah replied.

"That's the wrong answer." AJ replied.

"But our hearts grow stronger." Sarah said saving herself.

Sarah could only reply, "Yes, sir."

"Glad you agree. Thanks colonel." AJ replied.

"Don't mention it sir." Sarah replied again.

"I won't." AJ said. Then he turned to Sarah with a serious look on his face. "And, incidentally, if you do to anyone I'll be on your six faster than a surface-to-air missile."

Sarah straightened up saying, "Understood, sir."

AJ softened when he saw that Sarah was worried about Harm. He said to her, "Don't worry, your brother in law is too pig headed to leave this world, he'll find a way out."

Sarah asked, "Even if they offer him wings, sir?" AJ could only nod in acknowledgement.

It took a while for the rescue crew to move the toppled debris before Lt. Jenarette finally opened the hatch.

Sturdevant was the first up the ladder. Jenarette asked him, "What about Commander Rabb and DeMara?"

Sturdevant replied, "They're dead. They drowned I couldn't save them."

Jenarette resealed the hatch and went to report to the skipper and the admiral.

Jenarette tried to persuade the skipper to go back in and verify that Harm and DeMara were really dead. The Captain wouldn't let Jenarette go back even with breathing equipment.

In the meantime Sarah and AJ interrogated Sturdevant in the infirmary. Neither of them believed his story and they went to the bridge to speak to the Captain.

The Captain told the Admiral, "I can't afford to let anyone go down there and get the bodies, it's too dangerous."

Outranking the captain, AJ said, "Maybe you can't afford it, but I can." He left the bridge and got Lieutenant Jenarette and they both went down to the rescue locker to get dressed and into breathing equipment. When the Admiral checked his air supply gauge and saw that had fifteen minutes air left.

Down in the brig, Harm and DeMara were still trying to get DeMara from under the cage that was pinning him down. The water was still rising. Just as the water was passing DeMara's mouth, the ship shifted again and the tank cage shifted along with it and he was released.

"How did you do that, sir?" De Mara asked Harm as they're wading through the water to the hatch.

"Faith" Harm replies. "Now how are we going to get the hatch open?"

"Faith" De Mara says. Just then the hatch opens and brilliant light streamed down on them. A hand reached down to them with two oxygen masks. The Admiral's face appeared through the gas and Harm and De Mara just stared up at him with amazed looks on their faces.

Sturdevant was in his quarters reading a magazine. He didn't look up as he heard squeaky shoes. As he lowered his magazine he saw Harm's soggy shoes and then he looked up to his wet face.

"Got a towel I can borrow, Chief?" Harm said with menace.
There were two marines following close behind Harm. They took Sturdevant into custody.

After Harm had a chance to change into a dry coverall they all convened in the dining area to listen to Harm's explanation of the murder.

"Sturdevant was on the take with Chinick. When Sturdevant found Chinick was going to be arrested, he killed him so he wouldn't talk. He then framed DeMara and when DeMara said he had a note in his locker that proved his innocence Sturdevant decided to kill us to."

The captain asked AJ and Sarah, "How did you know the Commander and DeMara were alive?"

"We didn't, sir. Our experience with the Commander told us he was alive." Sarah explained.

"Are you a tenacious man, Commander?"

"Ever try getting gum off the sole of your shoe." The Admiral remarked coolly. All of them laughed including Harm.

While they were still laughing, Lieutenant Jenarette came in and asked to speak to the Admiral alone. The Admiral told him to go ahead and speak.

Jenarette took a breath and said, "Sir instead of fifteen minutes of air, you had fifteen seconds. You must have read the gauge wrong."

The Admiral took a sip of his coffee.

"I say you nailed it, sir." Harm replied smiling. They all laughed except for Sarah. She wasn't taking any chances in saying or doing anything because she knew the Admiral would go through with his word.

1930 Local Time

Andrews Arrival Terminal

John was beginning to think that this terminal was his and Sarah's second home. They were always planning to meet there. Now he was waiting for her and Harm's chopper from the Suribache to land. Chris Pocchi was standing with him to take Sturdevant into custody.

John picked up Chloe at school then they went to get Caroline at day care at 1800. They went with Emma and Teresa to Wendy's then John, Chloe and Caroline went to Andrews to meet Sarah. Chloe was holding Caroline on her lap feeding her from a bottle.

John saw the chopper land on the far side of the field and a Humvee take the passengers across to the terminal. Harm came through first with Sturdevant and handed him over to Pocchi. Then he stood aside to let John greet Sarah. Sarah gave John a quick kiss and then went to check on Chloe and Caroline.

Chloe stood up and received a kiss from Sarah as she said, "Hi mom."

Sarah looked down at her with arched eyebrows, "Chloe as much as I appreciate the sentiment, you shouldn't call me that."

"I know Mac, but you've been a better mother to me that my real mom and then my step mother ever were. I didn't know my real mom because she died when I was three and my step mother was a real bitch." Chloe said in explanation.
"I know baby but you won't be staying with us forever and I want to save you from as much disappointment as possible." Sarah said.

Chloe brightened and said, "Don't worry about me Mac you'll always be mom to me no matter who my father marries, if he does get married. If that happens, I'll just have two women to call mom."

Sarah gave her the watery smile as she pulled her and Caroline into a tight hug. Caroline began to fuss a little and Sarah took her and put her on her shoulder. They all walked out with John to the Trailblazer to go home.

Tuesday, February 22, 2000

To

Wednesday, February 23, 2000

Submarine Base

New London, Connecticut

Starting on Thursday, February 15, the previous week Bud, as the lowest ranking lawyer at JAG, was assigned to serve as the JAG liaison to ex-SEAL Jack Raglan who was hired by the Pentagon to test security at military bases. They went to the U.S. Army Garrison at Fort Morrow, Virginia and successfully invaded and 'captured' the base commander General Otis Flannick arrogantly ignored Raglan's breaking into and blowing up his base until Raglan added "believability" by adding public humiliation and "capturing" his wife from her shower.

Bud hoped that would end his assignment but Chegwidden told him that he still had more to do.

Bud told Harm that he didn't think the sentries, with live ammunition, knew it was a game so Harm went to talk with Raglan. During a manly hug Raglan stole Harm's wallet- to teach him a lesson about security but Harm had already taken out his ID cards and lifted Raglan's wallet as well. He said, "fake left, go right" and reminded him of their football days together.

Admiral Tom Kly told Raglan that his program was ended but gave him one last mission: 'to sink a submarine.' Instead, Raglan stole the San Pedro, which was loaded with 60-mile range missiles.

AJ took Harm with him to investigate and left Sarah in charge and to tell Harriet at her own discretion. Harm told Kly, "Raglan had done it to prove you made a mistake in pulling the plug and he would tell you in a big and out-in-the-open way."

Raglan had Bud, who injured his knee during the takeover, read a prepared statement asking for $100 million or they would blow up a civilian target. The frigate USS Ellyson went to intercept the San Pedro so Harm joined it because he knew Raglan best. The skipper CDR Wallace Burke, the malicious, know-it-all, who court-martialed the Secretary's son in Harm's first case back from his cruise started with bullying and abusing Harm.

Raglan hid the submarine below a thermo cline then fired a water slug to confuse Burke and get away. Bud tried to signal but was tied up until he promised to behave.

Harm told Burke that Raglan would go west, down the coast and Burke said east. A sensor was tripped east so Burke chased and ordered "sub bombs" dropped over Harm's vehement objections, baiting him as he had done the Secretary's son. They turned out to be low energy charges to Harm's relief and said it was "payback" for Harm's cross-examination, which had embarrassed him. Raglan radioed saying, "You blew up a decoy, you return to base."
Kly and AJ discussed philosophical issues about evacuating New York and that it had become personal. Finally Kly offered to consider it a 'misinterpretation of orders' if Raglan would give up. Raglan gave the order to blow up the Statue of Liberty then let Bud think that he had swayed one of the crew by letting him use the radio to "tattle" to Harm about the target. This gave Raglan time enough to leave the ship.

Burke was enthused about "killing" the sub and had ordered to "fire" just as it surfaced and gave up.

Harm figured out that Raglan wasn’t on board and surmised that he was going after Kly's wife just as he had done with General Flannick. Harm was ready to intercept him. Kly was going to court-martial Raglan but Harm intervened saying it was a legal minefield having been deceived and defeated by a security exercise he had authorized himself. Chegwidden asked him if he really wanted the public to know he was ready to blow up a $600 million sub. Kly relented.

Harriett, who went home to be with little AJ upset that Bud was in danger, came back and hugged him.

Harm asked, "Hey don't I get a hug, I helped"

To which Bud replied, "Just as soon as I'm done with my wife."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 52

Thursday, February 24, 2000

0740 Local Time

JAG HQ

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The day was bitterly cold. Sarah and John had Chloe and Caroline bundled extra warm when they went out to work and school. Sarah walked into the office sneezing. She had a bad cold. She felt it coming on during the previous workday. She started sneezing and coughing late in the day and all evening at home. She probably caught it from someone on the Suribache. She was very worried that Caroline would catch it, so she had John and Chloe take care of her as she took a long hot shower, rubbed her chest with Vicks Vapor Rub and climbed into bed. She slept through the night, but she woke up with sweat soaked sheets and a nose that was running like a faucet.

Now she greeted Emma as they walked into the elevator.

Emma saw the red nose and heard Sarah's nasally tone and said, "Bad cold ma'am?"

"Yeah I must have washed my hands a dozen times between last night and this morning so Caroline and Chloe won't get it." Sarah said wiping her nose with a tissue.

"I can relate. Once it's in the house it's always difficult to keep the kids from getting it. Are you taking anything for it?" Emma asked.

Sarah waited to answer as they walked through the bullpen to her office. As she got there Sarah let go with a good sneeze into the tissue she was holding. She heard a chorus of "bless you" from the staff in the bullpen. Sarah waved her thanks.

When they walked into her office Sarah asked, "Close the door Emma."

Emma complied with Sarah's wish. "I don't want to take anything because I'm still breast feeding also I think I'm pregnant again. John and I are trying to have another baby." Sarah said with a slight smile.

Emma was all of a sudden very happy for Sarah. Only the fact that the blinds were open kept her from embracing her colonel. She did grasp both of Sarah's hands.

Sarah smiled back and refrained herself as well saying, "Keep it to yourself Emma. It will be our secret. I mean John knows I may be pregnant but we haven't tested yet. Later on I'll take a test. Besides that and my cold is there anything pending today?"

"No ma'am. The only case of interest is the Sturdevant case. Commander Austen says she is ready to go to trial. Lt. Singer is defending, but it's a slam-dunk. I think she'll look to make a plea."

"Oh that's good I can really use an easy day. Maybe I can get out of here early and take tomorrow off to knock this cold out." Sarah said as she sneezed again. Maybe John and I can plan that trip to
Emma smiled at the joke and said, "Well maybe you should go down under. You and the Captain must have enough leave time. I mean I haven't seen you take a vacation in some time ma'am."

"You know you're right. Caroline is 6 months old and thriving. When I was on maternity leave, we just stayed home so we could get used to the baby being there, setting a schedule. Maybe I'll ask the admiral for some leave time and call Mic."

Right at that point Tiner knocked on the door. Sarah called out, "Enter"

Tiner poked his head in saying, "Excuse me Chief, Colonel Marshall the Admiral would like to see you, Commander Rabb and Lt. Roberts."

Harm allowed Sarah and Bud to precede him into the Admiral's office. After standing at attention Sarah let go with another good sneeze.

"Bless you," AJ, Harm and Bud chorused.

"Dank you" Sarah said wiping her nose with a tissue from the box AJ pushed to her.

AJ started, "I just got a call from Commander Brumby. First of all they promoted him to full Commander. Second of all he is asking for our help."

"Why does he need our help sir?" Sarah asked becoming intrigued at where she thought the conversation was going.

AJ began the story, "He has a particularly cold case."

The three officers looked at him anticipating more.

AJ began the story. "During Vietnam, an Australian Sailor and an American sailor were involved in a fight over a girl. The American was 'supposedly' killed by the Australian and left for dead. His body was sent home to the US and the Australian sailor was never caught for many years. Mic now says that he has that man in custody for the murder and he won't speak with anyone but an American JAG officer. Mic has asked for someone from this office to go to Australia to help with the investigation. Seems that the person they believed was the Australian sailor is now claiming to be the dead American sailor who was murdered. Seems he and the girl he was fighting over took off after the murder and took on another identity. The Aussies would like to try him for the murder but they can't begin the trial until they determine man's correct identity. That's where we come in. I want you to go down there and expedite the matter."

Sarah spoke up, "Sir who is Commander Brumby asking to be sent down there?"

AJ replied, "You, Commander Rabb and Lt Roberts." Addressing Sarah specifically AJ continued, "Mic said something about owing you a trial in front of his mom, Colonel."

Sarah brightened. Her vacation problems were solved. She asked AJ, "Sir is there any chance I can take my family along?"

"I thought you might ask so I took the liberty and called Tom. He is now talking with John as well as Diane. Lt. Roberts, after the harrowing week you just had I think you and Harriet need a good time off. So if she wishes to go I think I can spare her to." AJ said warmly.
He continued, "Commander Austen can run the office as acting Chief of Staff with Chief Gardiner and you three do not have any other cases pending. I can spare you for a couple of weeks. So go home and get packed."

Sarah, Bud and Harm all stood up to attention and chorused, "Aye, aye sir."

2030 Local Time

Qantas Airlines Terminal

Dulles International Airport

Right after AJ's announcement Sarah called John and then went to pick up Caroline at the daycare center and hurried home to pack. They each had an overnight bag packed with a uniform or business suit of the season. They switched their winter for the summer uniforms and then packed the rest of their civilian clothes including their bathing suits and summer wear. They still had not yet bought any summer wear for Caroline so they figured they would buy her some outfits down under. In all they only had two suitcases and one suit hanger packed and ready to be checked in. Caroline would be in a portable stroller that could be folded and stowed in the first class closet.

Chloe was scheduled to go on Winter Break on Monday and would spend it with Sarah and John, as her father would still be deployed. So they asked her if she wanted to go to Australia with them. Chloe was enthusiastic. John called her father and he gave his permission. Her father had applied for a passport for Chloe after he found out about her so that she would be able to travel to meet his ship while it was in Italy during the last Memorial Day Weekend. Chloe gleefully went to get it and pack her bag. She learned from Sarah to pack lightly.

Emma and Carolyn coordinated with each other to book the entourage in first class on the next Qantas flight for 2200 that night.

John pushed the luggage cart and Chloe pushed the stroller, as Sarah was ready to check everyone in as she held the tickets and passports. As they waited on the end of the check in line Harm came in with his three suitcases on an airport cart. He had Sarah Cate in his arms and Diane was pushing a foldable double stroller with Trey and Samantha. They joined the Marshalls in the line.

Harm was looking around and he said, "I hope Bud makes it. He didn't call me to carpool."

John said, "Don't underestimate Bud. You know as well as I do that he is able to pull things together out of some situations some people would consider total chaos. He'll make it." Harm could only nod, still looking worried.

He shouldn't have even bothered to be concerned. When they walked into the 1st class passenger lounge, they found the Roberts family waving them over to a couple of tables that they held for them.

John was the first to get there. He shook Bud's hand and went and embraced and kissed Harriet. She was just starting to pop at two and ½ months pregnant. "It's been a while Harriet." John told her.

"Yes it has Captain. And shame on you. Your mother calls me more often than you." Harriet chided him but with a twinkle.

Smiling, Sarah came to her husband's defense saying, "Well Harriet he is helping to run a vast law enforcement agency. I keep him up to date and it's only been a week since we all last had dinner."

Just as she finished speaking she let go with a gigantic sneeze.

"Bless you." Everyone in the lounge called out.
As Sarah turned to thank everyone she saw the last person she expected to see coming into the lounge.

Renee Peterson caught sight of everyone and rushed over. She got to Diane first and embraced her.

She saw everyone's questioning looks and said, "Mic called me yesterday and invited me to come down. I didn't know you all were going to Australia to. What's the occasion?"

Harm spoke up for the rest. "Sarah, Bud and I are going down on a legal matter. The admiral suggested that we bring our families so here we are."

"Well it's a good thing we're all going 1st class." Renee said.

Soon they boarded and set off on their 22-hour flight to Sydney.

Friday, February 25, 2000
1200 Local Time
Sydney International Airport
Sydney, Australia

Mic Brumby was at the arrivals terminal to meet the entire JAG entourage. He was in touch with Carolyn and Emma and he was told the size of the party. He arranged for a private bus to get everyone to the hotel.

He greeted everyone as they came through customs. He said in jest when he saw all the uniforms coming through, "We haven't seen this many uniforms coming into this airport at one time since the last world war."

John had to laugh at the humor. "You said you wanted to get us down here. What did your bosses do wait for you to get back then throw the case at you?"

"Well John you've just about hit it on the head. When I reported for duty last Monday, I was barely over the jet lag. They had already arrested the bloke the week before. As soon as that happened he started saying he wanted to see a US JAG attorney. But that can wait. It's late in the day on a Friday. Let's get you all to the hotel so you can get over your own jet lag.

Just then Sarah let go with another sneeze. She was sneezing and coughing during the whole flight except when she was sleeping. John tried to let her sleep the whole flight. She had expressed some breast milk at home and they also made some bottles with formula so John and Chloe were able to feed Caroline through most of the flight.

Mic spoke up and said, "Tomorrow we'll go to the beach and we'll bake that cold right out of ya Mac."

Sarah could only nod in agreement.

"On Monday we'll sit down and go over the case. Tonight and this weekend everyone relaxes."

Everyone was very enthusiastic of the plan. For the next two days they would be in Mic's capable hands.

1500 Local Time
Park Hyatt Sydney Hotel

The Australian Navy spared no expense for their guests. The three families were booked into the Park Hyatt Sydney Hotel. It was uniquely positioned right on the water's edge of Sydney Harbor. It had spectacular views of the famous Harbor Bridge and the Sydney Opera House and was situated in the historic Rocks District, which was just five minutes from the central business, cultural and shopping districts of Sydney.

The Marshalls, Rabbs and Roberts were booked into a three-bedroom suite. Each bedroom had two queen-sized beds. Sarah Cate and Chloe could sleep in the extra beds in their 'parents' room. The common bathroom had a large walk in tub and a spacious shower.

The hotel also had provided portable cribs for all 4 babies for them to sleep in the same room with their parents.

As soon as they got to their room, Sarah said to John, "I am going to take a nice warm bath and try to steam this cold out. Do you think you can take care of Caroline?"

John kissed her forehead and said, "Sure Harm, Bud and I will go with the babies down to the pool for a quick swim. I saw a shop with baby bathing suits. I'll pick one up for Caroline. We'll give you an hour then we'll think about dinner."

Diane said, "Why don't we do room service. We're in no shape to go anywhere."

Harm spoke up and said, "Diane's right. Let's just sit in tonight and relax. Tomorrow we'll let Mic take us to the beach."

Diane added, "Before we do go to the beach we have get some summer clothes for the babies. Harriet, Sarah and I will go to the stores we saw on the way in first thing after breakfast tomorrow morning."

"Sounds like a plan," Harm said.

They all left Sarah to take her long bath. After they all came back, Sarah felt much better as the Roberts, Rabbs and Marshalls settled in the suite's living room to have a pleasant room service dinner and then slept off the jet lag.

Saturday, February 26, 2000

Manly Beach

Sydney, Australia

Renee stayed at Mic's place in Sydney. Now she joined Mic, the Rabbs, Marshalls and Roberts on their excursion to Manly Beach. The three moms bought some nice summer and beach clothes for the babies. Now they were all on the ferry to Manly Beach. Harriet was holding little AJ, John had Caroline in her harness, Chloe was holding Sarah Cate's hand, Harm had Trey and Diane was holding Samantha. Sarah was wary at holding Caroline as she was still sniffling. The warm bath had helped a lot and John had spread some Vicks Vapor Rub on her back and front (which he had particularly enjoyed) and Sarah had sweated out a lot of the cold during the night.

Now the whole retinue was looking forward to their time at the beach.

When they got off the ferry they all trekked to the sand. They stopped at the lifeguard station to take some photos. Diane, Harriet and Sarah each stood alone and in a group for different poses. Sarah and
Diane each shed their sundresses so Mic could take a couple cheesecake photos of the two sisters together then each alone.

Diane asked Mic, "When you get these developed, send them to us so we can give them to Harm and John.

Mic said, "No problem." He then took a photo of the whole group in front of the lifeguard station.

After the pictures were taken, they found a suitable place in the sand where John set up a little tent like shelter for the babies to lie under. Harriet, Diane and Sarah were marveling that all the ladies, young and old were all topless. Renee was here already and she was getting into the spirit of the scene as she unabashedly shed her sundress and then her bikini top.

Harriet was fretting at shedding her top saying, "I'm 2 months gone, I'm gonna look very fat

Bud was busy carrying AJ and had the good grace to not stare at the other woman as they walked across the sand told Harriet, "Sweetie I wouldn't worry I saw more than a few women further along than you topless. I think you look beautiful with or without a top. You are not going to stand out."

"Well when you put it that way, Harriet shed her top. Seeing that Harriet had shed not only her top but also her inhibitions, Diane, and Sarah followed suit as they shed their bikini tops. Chloe was shy and had brought a one-piece bathing suit.

John was putting sunscreen on Caroline and didn't listened to Bud and Harriet's conversation. He looked up as he saw his Sarah shed her pale blue bikini top. He could only stare in admiration.

Sarah smiled as she saw how he was staring at her and said with a smile, "This reminds me of the first time I caught you staring at me. You had that same look on your face."

"And what I said then still goes, except other nice adjectives go along with pretty." John said as he got up and pulled her into a loose hug. "If I get any closer I'm gonna need a swim to cool off."

Sarah smiled at him. She was very happy that he only had eyes for her assets. She put her arms loosely around his neck and gave him a quick kiss and said, "I'd go with you but I still have more defrosting to do. Why don't you and the boys go for that swim? We girls are going to sit and chat all about you."

With that John, Mic, Harm and Bud walked down to the water. Mic was saying, "I found out that my mom may be the trial judge for this case. She's the next judge scheduled to hear one. If that happens I won't be able to try it, as there would be an appearance of favoritism. Do you think there would be any problem if the US JAG attorneys opposed each other for the trial?"

Harm and Bud looked to John as the ranking officer. He said, "What are you looking at me for. I'm only along for the ride. Admiral Chegwidden runs JAG you have to run it by him."

Mic spoke up, "Let's wait until Monday morning. By then it will be confirmed that mom is the trial judge."

"Sounds good to me," Harm said.

The guys dove in to the water and swam for a while. The wives were just basking in the sun. They had to giggle when they smeared sun block on those parts that were not usually exposed to the sun.

Diane said, "I hope I don't get sunburned here. That would be painful."
Renee piped up, "You girls should get out more. I've been to Brazil a few times and let me tell you Rio is much more risqué than this. And Mac I saw how John was staring at you. He looked like he never saw you naked before. Was Caroline conceived in the dark?"

Sarah smiled wryly at her before she told Renee, "He has been staring at me like that ever since we met. It started in the Rose Garden at the White House and continued in the desert on our way to Red Rock Mesa. When we were working together at JAG everyone and I mean everyone, who was in the room at Staff Call saw how he would light up when I entered. By the way Harriet, who won that pool you set up as to when John would pop the question?"

"Umm, ah, what pool are you referring to Mac?" Harriet stammered.

"Oh Come on Harriet even I put some money in the pool and I was working at the Pentagon." Diane said.

Harriet asked her, "How did you find out?"

Diane answered, "Harm told me about it."

Sarah added nodding to Diane, "That's how I heard there was a pool in the office as to when John would pop the question, my sister told me. I never told John about it. And I have to hand to you; you were very good at not letting him in on it."

Harriet spoke up, "Oh he knew about it. He found out about it accidentally after the fact. Loren Singer and I were standing in the break room when she asked me who won the pool after you guys came out of the admiral's office. Let me tell you he was pissed. At least he pretended to be. He braced us to attention then in that quiet way of his raked us up and down for intruding into his personal life saying what he did in his private time was none of our business and so on. Then he stopped and smiled that smile of his and asked me quite cheerfully, "So who won?" I tell you he should have gone into acting he can turn it on and off anytime he wants."

Sarah smiled and told them, "Well that comes from being a lawyer. I've seen him use that technique when he's cross-examining a witness. Gibbs tells me that he has interviewed some suspects and gotten confessions from them before they knew what they were saying. So I'll ask again, who won the pool?"

Harriet answered, "Admiral Chegwidden. He put in a date right after Admiral Magnum called him to say that he was offering John the job. He was the closest being only three days off. He told me that he already knew John was leaving before you two walked into his office because Admiral Magnum called him before that to say that John accepted the job."

"How much was in the pool?" John asked from behind them. He kissed Sarah on the top of her head.

The other ladies jumped at the sound of his voice. "Uh umm $500.00, Admiral Chegwidden donated it to the Marines Toys-For-Tots." Harriet said.

Renee and Chloe just went into a giggle fit at Harriet's discomfiture. Sarah and Diane just turned and smiled indulgently at her.

John took Sarah's hand and pulled her up. He told her, "Come into the water and cool off some. I think the sun has baked out your cold." Sarah gladly complied.

Harriet said, "I'll stay behind this shift and watch the kids." Sarah Cate was playing with a sand bucket and shovel. She was showing the babies the finer points at building a sand castle.
Renee also said, "Me to, I'm not one for the water."

Seeing that the kids would be watched Diane got up and took Chloe's hand and said, "Let's go join the boys in water for a while." Chloe was enthusiastic about going in the water. But when they got to the water's edge and Chloe saw how big the waves were, she was at first reluctant to go right into the water. "You know I know how to swim, but this is the first time I've ever been to an ocean. Those waves look pretty big."

To help her out Sarah and Diane stood on either side of her and took her hands. Diane said, "We don't have to go in that far, just hip deep. On the count of three we take off running, okay?"

Chloe nodded. Sarah started the count, "One"

Diane, "Two"

Chloe, "Three."

The three raced into the water and tumbled into a good wave. When they came up for air Chloe said, "That was fantastic."

Sarah and Diane stayed close to Chloe and the men came over as they all swam in a group.

Eventually the day at the beach ended and the retinue went back to the Hyatt. On the way back to the hotel John told her of Mic's mother and what they may need to do. Sarah welcomed the chance to try a case in an Australian Court.

"Thanks Mic. I would be much honored to try the case. I hope Admiral Chegwidden give his okay."

Mic said, "That's great Mac. If you do get the approval, you have to get your wigs." Sarah looked at him bewildered.

Mic saw her look and he said, "You know the white wigs. The ones that look like George Washington wore them. All attorneys have to wear them in court and don't forget the robes."

Sarah understood and smiled as she imagined how she would look.

After they all showered the salt and the sand away, Sarah, John & Chloe found out that St. Patrick's Church was nearby. They went to the Saturday Evening Mass and then went out to dinner with the Rabbs, Roberts, and Mic & Renee while Chloe and a hotel baby sitter stayed in the hotel suite minding the babies.

All through the meal Harriet kept fretting about Chloe and a hotel baby sitter with the 5 babies. When they arrived back at the hotel they were all pleasantly surprised to find that Chloe and Sarah Cate were asleep in each other arms in the Marshalls' room and the babies were all asleep in their cribs.

Monday, February 28, 2000

0330 Zulu

Long Bay Correctional Complex

Sydney, Australia

On Sunday Sarah and Harm called Admiral Chegwidden and informed him of the eventuality of the US JAGs opposing each other in a foreign court. They spoke to AJ on the speakerphone in their
AJ said, "I have no problem with that colonel as long as the Aussies allow it. If it comes to that Colonel you will prosecute and Commander Rabb will defend with Lt. Roberts sitting as his second chair. Mac do you think your husband can stand sitting as your second chair?"

Sarah smiled and looked over to John as he was sitting in the background playing with Caroline and said, "I'm sure he'll have no problem with that sir. I'll just have to shake the rust off his legal skills."

John said, "Very funny dear. That will be no problem sir. Do you want me to call Admiral Magnum?"

AJ said, "No need Captain. I'll call him as soon as we hang up. I don't think he'll have a problem. If there is nothing else, keep me apprised of any new developments. Carry on."

They all said "Aye, aye sir".

While Mic took Diane, Harriet, Chloe and even Rene back to the beach with the kids, the four officers spent the rest of Sunday in the hotel room working. They scanned the Internet researching Australian Legal Procedures. On Monday Harm, Bud and Mic went to the Long Bay Correctional Complex to interview the prisoner at the crux of the case. While they were there the accused told Harm that he's not the Australian Navy man, Ian Dunsmore, but, in fact, the reportedly deceased, US Navy Petty Officer Kevin Lee.

As Harm and Mic interrogated Lee, he told his story.

At the end of the story Harm didn't know what to think. He became very angry. Harm voiced his disrespect of Lee saying, "You deserted your country at a time of war when so many others died for their country including my dad. My father died while doing his duty and you lived running from yours."

Lee asked Harm, "Then how can I trust that you won't let them hang me?"

Harm responded, "Because, like my father, I do my duty."

As they left, Bud piped up and said, "I didn't realize how well you two play good cop/bad cop."

"Who's playing?" They both asked in unison.

Turning to each other the two Commanders smiled. Mic spoke up, "I'm sorry about that Harm. I didn't realize what he had done until just now. Remember he didn't want to speak until you got here."

Harm said, "That' okay Mic. I shouldn't have gotten angry, that was unprofessional of me. I've had to defend deserters before. He's just another client. But now we have to call Washington to verify if Lee or Kingsley is telling the truth. They have to show his picture to his wife in Tennessee to verify his identity. If that's the case, we may have to transfer the body they buried in 1972 down to here."

2020 Zulu

Garden Island

RAN Naval Base

They decided to use Mic's office as their base of operations. Sarah was already there. John was with
Caroline sightseeing with Chloe, Diane and Harriet while he waited on word if he was going to be allowed to sit second chair. Harm related Kingsley or Lee's story to her.

Sarah whistled in amazement saying, "This just gets better and better. We may have to add the desertion charge if his story checks out."

"Yeah let's call the admiral." Harm said.

They had to wait a while though due to the time difference. When they did call, AJ put the investigative wheels in motion and sent Gunny Galindez to Tennessee with Kingsley/Lee's photo.

Before he hung up AJ told Sarah, "Tell John that Tom doesn't have any problem with him going back to JAG for this case. Hell even the SECNAV became aware of this. He told me it would do well for American and Australian relations."

"Thank you sir, I'll be sure to tell him tonight when we meet up for dinner." Sarah said as they said goodbye to each other.

While they waited for word from Washington, they stopped at the New South Wales Supreme Court building to borrow the procedural law books. They all still needed to go over the case and the procedures. Then they all went to relax and study back at the hotel.

John, Chloe and the other two mothers were wiped out from their day of sightseeing. They did all the shopping and sightseeing, including walking to the top of the Harbor Bridge, which was a thrill. But carrying Caroline in her harness all day took a toll on John's back. He was careful on how he took care of his back because of the damage his accident and the shooting had wrought. Now he was in agony.

Sarah admonished him, "Why did we spend money on a stroller? For goodness sake and the sake of your back use it."

"Yes dear," John said in surrender as Sarah led him into the bedroom.

So while Diane and Harm watched Caroline, Sarah administered a therapeutic massage. The rehab therapists at Plattsburgh trained her on exactly how she needed to do it and where to apply the pressure, especially in the area at his incisions. They even instructed John on how to administer one to Sarah, which he did throughout her pregnancy.

Sarah straddled his thighs and began the process. After about 10 minutes she asked John, "You know love of my life, what makes you forget that you've had two major injuries to your back?"

John's answer was muffled by the ring of pillows he had his head in. "Caroline is such a small child. Who would have thought she would wreak such havoc on my back."

Sarah continued her massage, grinned and told him, "Now you know how I felt for 7 months when I got big. What did you think I was carrying, a pillow?"

"Well at least one that kicked a little." John said. He yelped as Sarah playfully poked his shoulder.

Then Sarah leaned over near his ear and said; "Well you're going to get to feel another pillow kick in about 2 months' time."

John forgot about his pain and rolled over until he was facing up at her. Smiling up at her he asked, "The plus sign came up?"
Smiling brightly she nodded and said, "Yeah."

John sat up, cupped her face tenderly in his hands and kissed her gently. She wrapped her arms around him and deepened the kiss. They rolled over on the bed and continued to kiss more passionately. When they came up for air he let out a good cheer. Sarah just giggled at his enthusiasm.

Cupping his wife's face John told her, "If our family and friends weren't awake out there, we'd make passionate love."

Sarah replied with a seductive smile, "If you didn't cheer so loud we could have had a quickie and no one would have known." Then she added, "Maybe we can get Chloe to share little Sarah's bed in Harm & Diane's room. If we can arrange that and if you promise to not cheer like Tarzan, you can have me as long as you want tonight."

John smiled and said, "I can hardly wait." Then he kissed her soundly again. After that they both got up to give everyone outside the news.

Out in the living room Diane and Harriet heard John yell and looked at each other. Smiling, they both said to each other, "She told him."

Harm had to ask, "How did you know? We all know Sarah doesn't tell anyone about good news before she tells John."

Diane answered, "It's a mother thing. We both saw all the signs, especially the fact that she didn't take anything for her cold, which she usually does. So we knew all along."

Chloe was sitting giving Caroline a bottle piped up saying, "Back home they were always giving each other looks, putting us kids to bed early and so on. They didn't think I saw the looks but I knew they were trying to make another baby."

The adults just looked at her in wonder at her maturity. Chloe just smiled and shrugged nonchalantly. Just then the bedroom door opened as John led Sarah by the hand he practically yelled, "We're going to have another baby!"

Diane took Caroline as Chloe jumped up into Sarah's embrace and hugged her fiercely. Everyone in the room congratulated the happy couple.

"We have to tell Admiral Chegwidden when he arrives tomorrow." Sarah said.

"Yeah I'm sure he'll be thrilled." John said with trepidation.

"Oh please it's not like I'm going into combat or doing anything unbecoming," Sarah said smiling in exasperation. They all had a good laugh.

They ordered dinner from room service. After dinner Diane and Harriet put their children to bed and turned in early. John and Sarah didn't have to ask if Chloe could sleep with Sarah as the younger girl took hold of Chloe's hand and pulled her into Harm & Diane's room on her own.

After Diane, Harriet and the kids were in bed the 4 attorneys settled in for studying the Australian Law procedures. They didn't pull an all 'nighter' like they were in college but they did turn into bed rather late at 0100.

Sarah and John didn't get much sleep though as they kept their passionate promise. They were very glad that they didn't have to go anywhere early the next morning.
Chapter 53

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 53

Tuesday, February 29, 2000

1330 Local Time

Strand Arcade

Sydney, Australia

Earlier in the day Admiral Chegwidden called Harm to inform him that Galindez brought back word from Tennessee that Lee's widow had identified Kingsley as Lee and that the deceased was actually Dunsmore. It was decided that Dunsmore's body had to be brought back to Australia.

After being informed of the identity verification Harm told him, "Sir I believe that Lee should be prosecuted in America for the desertion."

The Admiral denied Harm's defense telling him, "Lee is accused of murdering an Australian. It's better that he be prosecuted in Australia and the SECNAV and even the President have decided that that's what is going to happen. In the mean time I will be accompanying the 'real' Dunsmore's body back to Australia. I'm not going to let my senior officers have all the fun down under."

Harm sighed, "Aye sir the seven of us will meet you at the airport for an honor guard."

"That's a good idea Commander. Get it organized with the rest of your entourage."

"Aye, aye sir." Harm said. He took AJ's flight information then he hung up. He called Sarah and John about the new developments.

Now Sarah, John, Harm and Bud were all at the wig shop. Diane, Harriet, Chloe and even Renee had taken the kids and gone shopping in the rest of the mall.

Sarah was the one to go first. The shopkeeper commented, "I must say colonel that the whole ensemble suits you. It's as if you were born to it."

Sarah blushed at the compliment, "Why thank you Mr. Cooper."

John still couldn't get over that Sarah always took compliments unexpectedly. Then it was his and Harm's turn to try on the wigs and robes. Mr. Cooper made the same complimentary remarks until Bud tried a wig on. It was the largest size in the shop and it was still too small for Bud's head.

Mr. Cooper spoke up, "You lieutenant I'm afraid were not born into it. We would need more hair."

Bud added, "Or a bigger horse."

Sarah, Harm and John smiled in sympathy as they paid for their purchases. Then they went to find their families.

Wednesday, March 1, 2000
0900 Local Time

Garden Island Naval Base

Sydney, Australia

The next morning after leaving the families at the hotel, Harm, Sarah, Bud and John went to Mic's office at the naval base. They told Mic of the information on Lee and Dunsmore. John suggested to Mic, "The charge sheet needs to be revised to say Lee's name instead of Kingsley. Also we have to have a new death certificate drawn up for Dunsmore. The old one had Lee's name on it. Without that we won't have a murder charge."

Mic picked up the phone and set that procedure in motion with the chief prosecutor.

Harm rolled his eyes and said to John, "Thanks Captain you just shot one of my arguments down."

John smiled sarcastically at him, "Anytime Harm. I just want to keep the wheels of Justice moving."

Sarah looked at Bud and smiled saying, "I'm glad John is sitting as my second chair."

"Yes ma'am," Bud replied. He thought this is going to be an interesting trial.

1230 Local Time

Manly Beach

Sydney, Australia

Sarah wanted to get to the hotel to be with Caroline and Bud went to spend the rest of the afternoon with his family before they met the admiral. So Mic took Harm and John to lunch at the Uluru restaurant in Manly Beach. From speaking with Kevin they knew this was where his wife Jenny was working. When they got to their table they started discussing the case. But unknowingly Jenny was their waitress who as she came to take their order, overheard them talking about the case. She ran off crying while they're still sitting there. Cursing at their stupidity the three officers got up to speak with her. They found Jenny in the restaurant's office. They agreed to speak outside away from the customers.

As they walked along the boardwalk by the beach Harm began asking her, "What can you tell us about the night Dunsmore and Lee had their fight?"

"Dunsmore came upon us on the ferry dock, still wanting to pick a fight. Kevin and I tried to avoid him. Dunsmore pulled a knife. He and Kevin struggled. Dunsmore tripped over a cleat and fell on his knife."

"Lee told us the exact same story." Harm replied.

Jenny countered with, "You don't want to know what I really remember, because it would hang him." She then ran off crying.

Harm and Mic wanted to go after her to ask her what she meant but John stopped them. "We know where to find her. We'll subpoena her to testify in court if we need to. Let's get some lunch somewhere else. We still have to meet Admiral Chegwidden later this afternoon"

Mic and Harm agreed.

1740 Local Time
After lunch the three officers went to the hotel to organize the honor guard. Mic called and had the Australian Military Honor guard scheduled to be at the airport as well. Renee agreed to stay at the hotel with Chloe to mind the kids while the Roberts, Rabbs & Marshalls went to the airport to meet the admiral.

They were pleasantly surprised to see Sydney Walden debark with him. After a quick greeting all the officers assembled at the cargo unloading area. The coffin containing the mortal remains of Royal Australian Navy Petty Officer Ian Dunsmore was unloaded. All the appropriate military honors were rendered and the RAN took possession of the remains.

Then they got into the shuttle bus to the hotel. When they arrived at the hotel they went up to the suite to confer on the case. AJ asked, "Where are we on this case?"

Sarah took up the briefing, "Well sir we still have to investigate some parts of the story. Despite that we are ready to go to trial tomorrow. The four of us have read up on proper Australian trial rules and we have our wigs and robes ready to go. Commander Brumby's mother is indeed the trial judge, so he will not be able to participate in the trial. He has been the lead investigator for the case and we have all been apprised of his findings"

"Good I'm looking forward to seeing you all in action together for the first time in the same trial." AJ said with some pride.

"Also sir we, that is John and I, have some personal news that you need to be apprised of," Sarah said almost in embarrassment.

AJ stopped and turned to look right at her, smiled and said, "You're pregnant."

Sarah nodded then smiled brightly as AJ smiled himself and said, "That's great Mac I'm very happy for you." He took both her hands and gave her a fatherly kiss on her cheek. Sydney just went and embraced her tightly.

AJ asked, "How far along are you?"

Sarah answered. "Not very far sir, I only just got a positive on the EPT a couple of mornings ago. I called Eve to make an appointment for as soon as we return to the states."

AJ added, "So we're back to eight hours days and no long trips or deployments. We'll set up the schedule when we get back to the states. In the meantime Sydney and I are exhausted. We will be dining alone tonight and catching up on the jet lag. We'll convene tomorrow in court."

"Aye, aye sir" the officers chorused.

After AJ & Sydney left, Bud and Harriet agreed to stay with the Rabb and Marshall children, as their parents went to do some investigating of their own.

2030 Local Time
Ferry to Luna Park
Sydney, Australia

Harm & Diane and John & Sarah were on the ferry to check out where the murder took place some 28 years ago to find out if the story Kevin told the attorneys was possible.
While Sarah and Diane were in the ladies room, Harm was with John at the side rail chatting about the impending addition to John's family saying, "So what are you hoping for this time another girl or a boy?"

John answered, "Well you know you hope for healthy and happy. After that everything else is a bonus. But for me I'd really like a boy."

Sarah and Diane came out to meet them. Their dresses were matches in style if not in color. The tops were off the shoulders held by elastic over their busts with balloon sleeves and tops and skirts that showed each woman's form. Sarah's outfit was two shades of green while Diane's was two shades of pink. Each with the skirt being lighter that the top.

The men were wearing khaki slacks with 3 button polo shirts and light color blazers. Each woman went over and melded into her husband's arms to ward off the chill of the harbor breeze.

As they approached and passed under the Harbor Bridge Harm commented, "You know they wrote 'ETERNITY' in lights on this bridge for last New Year's."

Diane looked up at him and said, "I'm glad we didn't wait an eternity before we got together." Turning to John she said a very sincere, "and we are still thanking you for that Mr. Marshall."

John just smiled and said, "Glad to be of service Diane." He gave up deflecting praise from the Rabbs about their union.

Sarah gave him her own kiss saying, "I'm also glad we didn't wait an eternity. Now we are having our second baby." John hugged her a little tighter as she tried to burrow deeper into his embrace.

The four of them stood like that without another word as they enjoyed the serenity as well as the view of the harbor. Soon they were pulling up to the dock at Luna Park. They waited until they were the last to debark. As the ferry pulled away they hung back on the dock until the last person in front of them was well away into the park.

John and Harm started to examine the dock. They saw immediately that Lee and Jenny lied. "There were no cleats for anyone to trip over," Harm said. He had 4"x6" photos of the crime scene that were taken all those years ago. He scanned them as he went on, "Even these show that there were no cleats then"

John started to say, "Well one part of their story was false. One thing still bothers me. A fight like that and Jenny's screams and cries should have attracted some attention."

No sooner were those words out of his mouth then Sarah let go with a long, loud, blood curdling scream that even made John jump, and he saw her take a deep breath in preparation to screaming.

John playfully stuck his fingers in his ears and made like he was clearing them out. He said, "Geez honey I thought you only screamed like that when we had sex."

Diane and Harm snorted into uncontrollable laughter as Sarah's eyes widened in surprise and embarrassment as she turned on him with a devilish smile and smacked him on his chest.

"Red light Captain. You weren't supposed to tell anyone that." Sarah said through gritted teeth.

She mellowed as he wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed the top of her head.

John looked around and saw that no one was coming in response to Sarah's scream. "That explains
how they were left to fight undisturbed. I wonder what else Lee is lying about."

Diane spoke up, "Careful counselor, yet to be proven."

Harm smiled at her and said, "Thank you dear, but John's right Bud and I have to talk to our client."

They all set forth to at least salvage some pleasure from the evening as they waited for the ferry to take them back.

Thursday, March 2, 2000

0900 Local Time

Garden Island Navy Brig

Sydney, Australia

As Lee was brought into the interview room, Harm turned to him almost enraged and said, "You lied to me. You didn't trip over a cleat on the dock because there were no cleats on the dock." Harm produced the photos as proof of his statement.

Lee was totally aghast at being found a liar. He turned to Harm and said, "I've been nothing but straight with you since you were assigned to me."

Harm turned to him and with a look of disgust said, "You've been nothing but a liar throughout this whole affair, starting 28 years ago." Harm began ticking off his fingers, "One, you took another man's identity and deserted, two you lived that lie for all those years and three you lied about the circumstances of the fight. Do you want to go to prison?"

Lee looked up in fear, "No I don't. He came after me. When he fell on his knife and died, I was young and scared. I did the first thing that came to my mind, I ran."

Harm said to him, "Well keep that to yourself. Saying that just makes you look more guilty." Then he turned to Bud and said, "We have to establish that Dunsmore came after Lee. Lee defended himself and in the struggle for control of the knife, Dunsmore was stabbed."

1000 Local Time

New South Wales Supreme Court

Sydney

Sydney, Harriet and Rene took Chloe and the babies back to Manly beach for the day as AJ, Diane and Mic accompanied the attorney spouses to court. Sarah and John preceded Harm and Bud into court. Kevin Lee was brought into the courtroom and set into the defendant's dock.

The bailiff called the court to order, "All having business before this court please rise. The Honorable Judge Jennifer Brumby presiding."

Judge Brumby took her place. She was a tall woman at about 5'8" of about 60 years with a pretty face. She had medium length salt and pepper hair. She had the long black robe and the longer wig of a judge. She surveyed the court and saw her son sitting in the rear with Diane and AJ. She didn't reveal anything on her face as she began the proceedings.

"Good morning everyone, this morning we have unusual circumstances taking place in this court. We are pleased to welcome U.S. Military attorneys trying both sides of the case before an Australian
Court. Will the attorney representing the crown please stand and identify herself for the record."

"Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall United States Marine Corps, representing the Crown, Your Honor."

Sarah spoke confidently.

John stood up and stated, "Captain John Marshall, United States Navy assisting the prosecution, your honor."

Judge Brumby turned and said, "And for the defense?"

Harm stood up, "Commander Harmon Rabb United States Navy, for the defense, your honor."

Bud stood up and said, "Lt. Bud J. Roberts United States Navy assisting the defense your honor."

She saw Bud was at least wearing the robe and knew he had a problem obtaining a properly fitting wig and didn't comment on it. She opened the proceedings by saying, "Very well. Will the bailiff please read the charges?"

The bailiff began, "The people of New South Wales hereby charge that on the night of January 29, 1972 the defendant, Kevin Lee did murder Australian Navy Seaman Ian Dunsmore."

Judge Brumby asked, "How does the defendant plead?"

Harm stood up and said. "Not guilty your Honor."

"Very well we will now begin jury selection." Judge Brumby announced.

The bailiff brought in the first set of jurors to be voir dired as the process began. It took the whole morning to seat the jury.

Judge Brumby declared a recess for lunch. "We will reconvene after lunch at 1:00."

AJ and Diane waited in the back and followed the foursome out of the courtroom.

Sarah and John were leading the way out the courtroom door with Mic in front of Harm as he and Bud flanked Lee. Harm and Bud were going to confer with Lee before going to lunch. AJ and Diane took up the rear. They were all out in the hall when unexpectedly a large man ran forward and pushed Sarah aside into John's arms as he advanced toward Lee. John managed to keep Sarah on top of him as he landed on his back but with a cry of pain.

The man's name was Barry Toohey and he shouted, "You sepo bastard" he shouted as he swung at Lee. Toohey was the friend of Dunsmore. It was Toohey who was keeping watch when Dunsmore and Lee fought in 1972.

He didn't connect with his intended target though. Bud was in the wrong place at the wrong time as he stepped forward to try and block Toohey. Unfortunately Bud was carrying a heavy brief case, which prevented him from properly defending himself. As he went forward he was too slow getting the briefcase up and Toohey connected with the left side of Bud's jaw. Bud went down in a good daze.

Toohey saw that he didn't punch whom he wanted and turned to try and run away. He didn't get far as Lee hauled off and hit Toohey. Lee was grabbed by the back of his shirt and jerked back. Mic managed to wrap his arms around him. In the middle of all this Harm grabbed onto Toohey.

As Mic held onto Lee, he looked over to Harm and asked, "You got him?"
Harm answered, "Yeah I got him. You got him?"

"Yeah" Mic said.

Being behind the group of lawyers, AJ and Diane saw the whole thing. They turned and called some nearby court officers to intervene. The officers took charge of Lee and Toohey and escorted them off to the nearest holding room. AJ saw that two of his friends were injured and he ordered one of the officers to call an ambulance. Seeing his uniform the officer didn't argue about him being out of his country's jurisdiction.

Diane bent to check on Bud. He had a large red bruise that was beginning to swell and turn purple on the left side of his jaw. Sarah went over to check on John as he writhed in pain on the floor. She was visibly worried.

John looked up and saw her face. He gritted his teeth as he said, "Leave me alone a minute. The pain is getting better."

Sarah got mad at him and said, "You stay there." She heard sirens and then she saw EMTs come through the door. "Let the medics come and check on you to make sure."

John saw the look on her face and knew better than to argue when he saw how worried she was and was determined to get her way.

Diane had Bud sitting up and he was moaning in pain unable to speak. The medics came and strapped John onto a backboard and Bud onto an ambulance chair and take them to the hospital.

The men were assessed in the emergency room. X-rays ascertained the diagnosis for them. Bud's jaw was broken where he was hit and his teeth were wired shut. John had sustained a deep bruise to his lower back. He was fitted with a brace that he had to wear for 24 hours in complete bed rest. He was also given some strong painkillers.

Mic called the courthouse and informed his mom of the injuries. She ordered that court be adjourned for the rest of the day as well as the next day and reconvene on Monday, March 6 at 9:00 AM

John was particularly grateful he went right back to the hotel to lie down. He spent the rest of the day and all day Friday in bed as his pain decreased. To help the process along he only took the painkillers just before he went to sleep. On Saturday and Sunday he went for a comforting swim in the hotel pool as Sarah gave him regular massages every night. When he awoke Monday morning, his back was better but still bruised. He wore the brace under his uniform.

Bud was relegated to sitting in the hotel room with a bottle of liquid painkillers. His jaw pain also took the whole weekend to go away. Harriet ordered a blender from room service and prepared his meals to liquid form.

John helped her out with that as he had his jaw wired shut from corrective surgery on the lower half of his face many years ago right after he graduated high school.

He told Harriet, "You half to get everything in liquid form. The mashed baby food is good because you don't have to spend time preparing it. Also lots of milkshakes and malts will help keep him from losing too much weight. Beer will help with that to. My mom insisted on doing that stuff for me when my jaw was wired, but I quickly took over from her because then I could prepare the food to how I liked it. Bud will do the same thing."

Bud could only nod his head in agreement. Before they returned to the states he was very good at preparing his liquid meals himself.
Also on Friday, they found that Toohey was charged with aggravated assault on John and Bud. He was in the Long Bay Correctional Complex. He would be made available to testify in court when needed.

Monday, March 6, 2000

0900 Local Time

New South Wales Supreme Court

Sydney, Australia

Sarah got up to give her opening statement. John sat back to watch. It was all he could do to keep the smile off his face he was so damned proud of her. To hide any smile he sat back and kept his hand in front of his lips as he listened to her. Sarah for her part did not look at him all during her opening address. She knew she would smile when she saw the love in his eyes.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, 28 years ago during the Vietnam War the United States Ship, Chicago docked in Sydney. The defendant, Petty Officer Kevin Lee was on shore leave off that ship. While here he went to Luna Amusement Park where he met a local girl named Jenny Brooker. But her old boyfriend, Ian Dunsmore of the Australian Navy came looking for her. Jealous, Dunsmore, with his buddies wanted to start a fight with Lee. But Jenny pulled Lee away to get to the ferry. Dunsmore followed them and confronted them at the ferry dock. A switchblade was pulled. Both sides will contend that the other person pulled it. There was a tussle as they both fell onto the dock. Only Lee got up. Dunsmore had the knife in him. To cover the incident, Jenny and Lee switched uniforms and then rolled Dunsmore's body into the water. There, sharks took bites out of his face, thus rendering it unidentifiable. Lee, having been forced to marry a girl who was pregnant in Tennessee decided to switch identities with Dunsmore and unlawfully married Jenny under the name Tom Kingsley. After living in Woolgoolga, in the bush, they eventually moved to Sydney and opened a restaurant. When their home was burgled, a policeman recognized Jenny then eventually arrested "Dunsmore" a.k.a. Lee a.k.a. Kingsley.

We will prove that Lee conspired to kill Dunsmore, to take on a new identity in order to get out of his obligations in America. We will present evidence proving that theory. After we do that you will find it very easy to reach a verdict of guilty. Thank you."

In the back of court, Mic and Chegwidden sat together on either side of Diane. They compared their ratings over the speech. After Sarah was done, the Admiral leaned over to Diane and said, "I give it an 8."

Diane countered, "9, sir. That's my sister and she is really good."

Harm was up next. He gave an equally convincing opening statement.

"Tie." The Admiral said. Diane said, "Again the same that's my husband and he's really good," Mic and AJ turned toward her and smirked indulgently. Diane just smiled sweetly and shrugged her shoulders.

After Sarah had obtained testimony from the police and coroner representatives she called Barry Toohey to the stand. "Mr. Toohey where were you on the night of January 29, 1972?"

"I was at Luna Park Amusement Park with my mate Ian Dunsmore. He was trying to get his girlfriend Jenny Brooker back."
"What happened when Dunsmore confronted Lee?"

Pointing to Lee Toohey said, "That sepo bastard pulled a knife."

Judge Brumby spoke up, "Watch your mouth Mr. Toohey. You are in enough trouble as it is. Don't add contempt to your list."

"Sorry your honor." Toohey said in remorse

Sarah continued her examination, "Where exactly were you when the fight started?"

"I was up the dock a little to keep any bystanders from interfering. It was a private thing."

"Were you in a position to see the fight?"

"No I was not."

"Then how do you know what happened?"

"I know that Ian didn't own a knife. He wasn't carrying one. He just wanted to get Jenny back."

"How long did you wait until you went back to the scene?"

"About 20 minutes."

"What did you see when you got there?"

"I saw a body in a US Navy suit floating in the water. I also saw that a shark had a hold of his head."

"Did you see anyone else?"

"No I didn't."

"What did you do next?"

"I called the police then I called my unit to report Ian as missing."

Sarah concluded her examination of Toohey saying, "I have no more questions your honor."

"Commander" Judge Brumby said.

"No questions your honor." He knew that Toohey was only testifying that Dunsmore didn't own a knife and was not the aggressor. Harm didn't have defense for that.

Sarah then said, "The crown calls Jenny Brooker to the stand."

Harm stood up immediately saying, "Objection your honor. The witness is the defendant's wife and cannot testify against him."

"Colonel?" Judge Brumby said looking at Sarah.

"Your honor we have documents stating to Mr. Lee's previous marriage. It was never dissolved by divorce or annulment." Sarah countered.

Harm countered, "We have documents that Mr. Lee had married Jenny after being declared dead in Tennessee."
"Which makes that marriage fraudulent your honor since Mr. Lee is alive," Sarah countered.

"Quite right Colonel and since this isn't Tennessee and the authorities there were mistaken through no fault of their own, the court finds that Ms. Brooker is indeed not lawfully married to Mr. Lee and we will allow her testimony."

Jenny was called and she took her place in the witness stand.

Sarah stood to speak, "Your honor Captain Marshall will question Ms. Brooker."

"Very well, Captain please proceed," Judge Brumby said.

"Thank you Your Honor," John said as he got up and walked over to the witness stand.

Harm stood up to say, "Your honor would you please admonish counsel to keep a respectable distance from the witness?"

John turned and smirked at Harm. But he stopped advancing to the witness stand and asked, "Ms. Brooker what happened on the night of the incident in question?"

"Kevin and I were at Luna Park enjoying ourselves when my old boyfriend confronted us. He started a fight."

"What happened next?"

"Ian pulled a knife and they struggled. When it was over Ian was dead from falling on his knife."

John walked over to his table and reached under a paper and brought out a rubber knife. He demonstrated that it was rubber and harmless and asked, "Ms. Brooker would you please demonstrate how the defendant and Ian fought. I'll be Ian."

Harm jumped up to saying, "Objection your honor!"

"I'll allow it Commander. Ms. Brooker please step down as the Captain requested."

Jenny stepped down from the witness stand timidly. Holding the knife underhand John slowly stabbed at her. Jenny countered by moving to one side and grabbed his wrist with both her hands. John tried to pull away from her but she held on tightly. Jenny then pushed back at him and he walked her back till his back was up against the defendant's table. At that point Jenny had the upper hand and she was able to turn the knife and force it till the blade was bent so that the hilt was up against his stomach.

"So Jenny from what you just demonstrated Dunsmore couldn't have fallen on his knife could he?" John asked.

She said, "No he couldn't have." Then she surprised everyone by saying, "I can't lie anymore. Kevin pulled the knife and stabbed Ian. We switched uniforms and rolled Ian's body into the water when we saw that sharks were swimming around. Then we ran away."

Harm just sat in shock. John turned to Sarah and she said, "Your honor the prosecution rests."

Judge Brumby said, "Very well this court is in recess until tomorrow morning where the defense will present its case." Then she banged her gavel.

1500 Local Time
New South Wales Supreme Court

Sydney,

After the bombshell Jenny dropped in court Harm and Bud sat with Lee to try and regroup.

Lee told them, "Jenny is lying. It didn't happen like she said. Yeah we fell with Ian on his back, but it was like she demonstrated. Ian pulled the knife."

Harm asked, "But why would Jenny lie?"

Lee told Harm, "We had put everything they owned into Jenny's name when I was arrested. It was Jenny's idea. She didn't want to lose anything if I was convicted. Maybe she thinks I'll be convicted anyway and wants to start all over again"

Bud spoke up or tried to, "Sir we need to investigate Jenny some more."

When Harm professed to not understanding him, Bud wrote it down.

Harm nodded and told Lee, "We have to tail Jenny and see what she may be doing."

Lee could only nod his acquiescence. "She takes an art class twice a week. As a matter of fact, tonight is one of those nights."

Harm and Bud made a plan to follow Jenny.

2115 Local Time

The Rocks in Sydney

That night Harm and Bud left the JAG party at the hotel and began tailing Jenny. They got videotape of her leaving her home for her art class. Only Jenny didn't go to any art class. The followed her to a marina and saw her board a boat named the 'Uluru' docked at the marina. Then they taped Jenny acting amorously with a man later identified as her art teacher Harold.

Harm said, "We may have something here Bud. Let's go talk with them." Bud only nodded as they went aboard the Uluru. Jenny acted very surprised to see them. They interviewed her and told her that she still needed to testify. To ensure her presence, they issued her a subpoena.

Tuesday, March 7, 2000

1000 Local Time

New South Wales Supreme Court

Sydney, Australia

When Harm and Budd returned to the hotel, they apprised Sarah and John of their activities.

Sarah asked him, "What did you find out."

Harm said, "You'll have to wait until we're in court tomorrow."

Sarah just nodded and went to bed.

Harm and Bud had the court officers set the TV and tape player up in court and they presented the
video they had shot the previous evening.

Confronted with the video evidence Jenny recanted. She said, "I lied because I wanted Harold and Harold wanted money. It started after we moved to Sydney. I knew that eventually Kevin would be found out and that he would have to leave. So I started seeing Harold. I was trying to set Kevin up to look guilty so that Harold and I could have the money and everything else while Kevin sat in jail."

Harm asked, "And the night of the fight all those years ago?"

Jenny said, "It was Ian who pulled the knife. As they struggled, Kevin just fell on top as Ian held the knife."

Sarah and John had no questions for Jenny. They knew the evidence that was presented was damaging to their case. Despite that Sarah gave an impassioned argument in her closing address.

Harm just spoke of the evidence in his closing address.

The case was given to the jury. Lee was found not guilty by reason of self-defense.

Talking with Lee, Harm said, "Congratulations, but we still need to go to America to address the desertion charges."

Bud said through his wired teeth, "Usually desertion charges were dropped. Given your circumstances and all the years that have gone by that is probably what may happen."

Hearing this Lee asks, "I need to see Jenny. I have to save our marriage. I promise I'll meet you at the airport tomorrow for your flight to the states to face those charges."

Harm reluctantly acquiesced saying, "If you don't show tomorrow, I will personally accompany the Australian Police in searching for you."

Lee smiled and said, "Don't worry Commander I'll be there."

2230 Zulu

Sydney Harbor

That night the JAG Team along Mic & Renee finally got to formally meet Judge Brumby. They were sitting at a private area in the outdoor restaurant of the Hyatt. The area was right at the rail offering an excellent view of the Harbor. The evening began as Judge Brumby (Jen) oohed and aahhed over the JAG children as they lay in their strollers. Sarah Cate was particularly charming as she introduced all the other children.

Then Jen asked John and Sarah, "Captain and Colonel, do you usually team up in court?"

John answered, "No ma'am, I am the Assistant Director for the Naval Criminal Investigation Service, though I did start at JAG where Sarah and I were partnered on many cases. Sometimes we even opposed each other. I had to transfer out of JAG if I wanted to marry her as the regulations prohibited spouses from serving in the same chain of command."

Jennifer asked, "So you met at JAG?"

Sarah answered, "Yes ma'am we."

Sarah didn't finish as Jen sternly told her, "Sarah we are not wearing the wigs and robes anymore so let us drop the formalities. This is a celebration of your impending motherhood. Please call me Jen."
Sarah smiled and said, "Right Jen. We met in the White House Rose Garden when Admiral Chegwidded assigned us to our first case together." Sarah went on to describe the case and the proposal event in AJ's office.

"So did opposing each other put any strain on your relationship?" Jen asked mischievously.

AJ came over and answered for them, "Not so you would notice. Whenever one won a case over the other, they just went out to dinner together. I believe the loser paid."

Everyone had a good laugh. Just then they heard a speedboat as it passed close by. It was close enough to hear the occupants laughing in celebration. The boat also came close enough for the JAG party to clearly see the occupants. Harm and Bud immediately recognized the boat and its occupants and so did all the others.

They were Lee, Jenny and Harold all celebrating their deception sailing by on the 'Uluru'.

Mic spoke up first, "Son of a bitch. They all lied to us."

John added, "And we can't do anything about it because of," Harm and he said it together, "Double Jeopardy""

AJ spoke up then, "Oh I wouldn't worry about that. We can get him another way, remember?"

All the JAG personnel as well as Mic and his mom smiled as they all recognized how to get Lee. Then they all set back to enjoying the evening.

Wednesday, March 8, 2000

1115 Local Time

Qantas Departure Gate

Sydney International Airport

The next day they were all at the airport waiting for Lee to show up. He walked into the terminal smiling. He fully expected just to return to the states for his perfunctory separation. He was quickly dissuaded of that notion though as AJ was the first to confront him.

He said, "Petty Officer Lee did you straighten out everything with your wife?"

Lee still smiled as he said, "Yes sir. Jen and I came to an understanding. She said she would be waiting for me when I returned."

AJ smiled wickedly and said, "Well she'll have to wait a long, long time. You are under arrest for desertion."

Lee's smile vanished instantly as he stammered, "I, I don't understand. I thought we were only going back as a formality?"

Harm answered him, "We were. That is before you lied to us. We saw you in your boat last night. Jenny wasn't having an affair. It was all a ploy to get you off the murder charge. I can't do anything about that because of double jeopardy, but I will nail you to the wall on the desertion charge."

AJ added, "Commander Rabb wants to go for the death penalty for desertion in a time of war. That might not happen but life in prison is a slam-dunk. Mr. Roberts cuff this deserter please and escort him on board."
Bud produced the cuffs and took Lee on board the plane. He already said his goodbyes to Mic and his mom. The rest of the JAG party was doing that now.

Sarah said to Jen, "I'm so happy that Mic was able to arrange this. It was a great honor for me to try the case."

Jen said, "Next time you come down, let's make it a non-working holiday. Still it was my honor to preside."

John said, "I look forward to that. We'll keep in touch and let you know when the baby comes. It would be our honor if you and Mic came up for the christening."

Jen said, "We'd love to come. But still don't wait for that. Send us a letter now and then." Then embracing the Marshalls one last time and then the Rabbs, Roberts, Renee and AJ & Sydney, she waved goodbye as they all boarded for their return flight to DC.
Timing Is Everything

Monday, March 13, 2000

To

Friday, March 17, 2000

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

The JAG party landed rather late on Thursday so AJ ordered that they take Friday off so that they could start fresh on Monday.

Sarah took Friday the 10th off to see Eve and set up her prenatal visits. Eve set the due date saying, "Judging by what you told me when you were ovulating, I'm setting your due date in the middle of November, let's say November 15. You were a week early with Caroline but that's no indication that the same thing will happen here. Do what you did during the last pregnancy and everything should be fine. Calm down on the exercises and stick to the pregnancy regimen. Get your prenatal vitamin prescription from my receptionist and I'll see you next month."

Before she went home Sarah stopped by JAG to give her schedule to Emma. She worked at her desk for an hour to clear it off for the weekend and to get the latest from Meg on what went on during her time in Australia then she went home. When she got home she called AJ at his home to tell him of the due date and then she and John sat down to call the family. The rest of the weekend went by as usual with Mass on Saturday and relaxation on Sunday.

Now she was sitting at her desk summarizing the cases for the week. One of those cases involved Gunnery Sergeant Galindez and Tiner. He was through two court appearances stemming from a fight outside a gay bar.

As Gunny and his friend Manny exited a cab in front of the gay bar the Pony Express Lounge, a gay man Ed Proxy bumped into Manny, as he ridiculed gays. Proxy insulted right back and Manny pressed him against the wall. Gunny broke it up and held Manny's arms so Proxy slugged Manny and kicked him in the groin. Gunny was defending Manny slugged Proxy when Tiner came out of the bar and took a swing at Gunny who turned and decked him before recognizing him.

Detective Wanda Shilling, Baltimore PD, who originally caught the complaint came after Gunny for gay bashing. He told her what happened and she seemed to believe him until he refused to give her Manny's identity. Proxy had a broken nose and cracked rib and had lied that Gunny just beat him up "for no reason at all." Gunny asked Tiner to get Proxy to drop charges. He said, "He's your boyfriend." Tiner denied that he was so Gunny asked if he "wanted to be outed" to which Tiner flew off the handle. He said, "You're the one who misunderstood." Gunny talked to Manny who offered to talk with the cops but Gunny refused because with only nine months to go it might affect his retirement benefits. Shilling came back with warrant for Gunny's arrest because Tiner went to them and offered to be a witness against Gunny. AJ intervened and took jurisdiction of the investigation. Harm and Sarah investigated and Gunny said while Manny was doubled over from the kick to his privates he tried to stop the attack on him. Tiner said Ed was Gay and they were in the gay bar. They
agreed it should go to a hearing and recommended Mattoni for defense and Aldridge for prosecution.

Gunny had first been through a hearing at JAG which proved that there was no crime committed as Judge Sebring decided that the only evidence against Gunny was the un-corroborated complaint by Proxy so it was dismissed.

Not being satisfied with that, Baxter Stark, the Baltimore District Attorney took up the case as he had Gunny re-arrested for a civil trial. He accused the entire military of bias insinuated that the Navy was incapable of prosecuting hate crimes. Stark pointed out, "How else could you explain Mattoni’s pitiful defense and Aldridge's inept prosecution?" Sebring pointed out to AJ that Stark was running for states attorney.

AJ was very restrained as he told Stark, "We all know your only intent is to bolster your campaign. You're nothing but a hypocrite and opportunist and I'll be damned if I'm going to let a bottom feeder like you further your personal ambition trampling the integrity of this office."

So as Stark acted as the prosecuting attorney, AJ defended Gunny himself, despite Gunny's magnanimous act of refusing to reveal the identification of Manny, who was a true bigot.

To further complicate matters Manny called JAG at night and left a message designed to get rid of Tiner. He claimed to Sarah, who answered the phone, that he was Josh, Tiner's lover and wanted him to come home because he loved him.

AJ gave Tiner the benefit of the doubt and told Sarah to advise him to keep his domestic life under control. Then, at long last, Tiner admitted to Sarah that Proxy was his gay half-brother. Sarah told AJ.

AJ then called Tiner back on stand and asked him, "Tiner are you gay?"

Tiner said, "No, no one asked me. I just wanted to see how it felt. I saw that suddenly everything took on a double meaning. Some people bent over backward not to be offensive, others pulled away like I was contagious."

Even through all this AJ won Gunny's acquittal.

Despite that Stark still gloated, "What defeat, they the gays see me as their protector. I just picked up a few thousand votes!"

The case was closed when AJ gave Gunny a letter of admonishment and forfeiture of half months pay for disobedience.

Friday, March 17, 2000

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Gunny's case took the whole week. While AJ dealt with that one, Sarah as the Chief of Staff ran the daily Staff Call delegating the cases as needed. As she sat to get ready to go home for the weekend her phone rang.

She recognized her husband's private line. She picked up the receiver and she had a smile in her voice as she answered "Lt. Colonel Marshall."
"Sarah." John said in a monotone.

She was immediately alarmed. This was not a happy call. She replied, "John what's the matter?"

John answered, "Honey, a couple of hours ago our Alameda office notified me that last night they went to a riding stable in Hill Valley on a report of a Navy Seaman being killed along with his elderly mother in a fire in their barn. Sarah it was Kyle Anderson and his mother Mae Anderson, Chloe's dad and grandmother. When the police found out that Kyle was in the Navy, they notified the nearest NCIS Office, which was Alameda. Kyle had his mother's number and all our numbers listed in the 'next of kin section' of his file as Chloe's.

"Oh my God, what happened?" Sarah asked obviously dismayed.

"I just got off the phone with the lead investigator Tom McDonald. He gave me the details of the arson investigation. It seems that there was a leak in the barn roof right over a ceiling light. It rained and the water shorted the light causing a fire. Kyle and Mae went out to the barn when the workers saw the fire and sounded the alarm. While they were waiting for the fire department, some workers tried to keep the fire from spreading while Kyle & Mae tried to evacuate the horses. Apparently one horse was stubborn and the two were working together to get it out when the ceiling collapsed and they were trapped inside the stall as the fallen debris blocked their way out and the fire was too intense for the other workers to reach them.

It took the local fire department 15 minutes to get there. By the time they got there it was too late to save them. They found their bodies inside the stall. Amazingly they weren't burned. They succumbed to smoke inhalation.

Sarah was crying at the horrible news. She took a breath to calm down and asked, "Does Chloe know yet?"

"No, she's still at school. We have to tell her tonight. After I spoke with Tom I called the Andersons' attorney, Martin Adams. I told Martin that we would tell her and let him know when we do. She doesn't have any more living relatives. Remember Kyle lost his wife and son in a car accident before he knew about Chloe and he didn't remarry. We're all she has left." John finished.

Sarah took a deep breath and said, "Okay I'm going in to notify the admiral of this then I'm going to pick up Caroline so I can be there with you when Chloe comes home from school."

John replied, "Okay sweetie, I'll see you at home. I love you."

"I love you to." Sarah replied. She hung up the phone and went in to see the admiral.

1730 Local Time
Marshall Residence

When Chloe came through the back door she was met with the sight of Sarah and John sitting at the kitchen table with grim expressions. Chloe was immediately concerned.

Trying to keep a cheerful attitude, she asked, "What's up with you guys?"

Sarah replied, "Chloe honey, please sit down."

Chloe was immediately alarmed. As she sat down she asked, "Is anything wrong with the baby?"

"No honey it's your dad and grandmother." John answered.
"What happened to them?" Chloe said cautiously as she stood up.

John said, "Your dad was home at the stable with Mae when there was a fire and…"

He didn't get to finish as Chloe let go with a long "Noooooooo" She held her balled fists at her head and backed into the counter.

Sarah got up and reached for her and tried embrace her. At first Chloe fought pounding her fists on Sarah's shoulders. But Sarah just held on tighter. Eventually Chloe calmed down, wrapped her arms around Sarah and cried into her chest. Shedding her own tears, Sarah led Chloe into the living room. As they sat on the couch Chloe cried and cried in her deep grief. Sarah just rocked her gently.

John got on the phone and called Martin Adams. "Martin, this is John Marshall. Sarah and I told Chloe of Kyle's and Mae's deaths."

Adams said, "Thanks John. I didn't envy you that task. We're still working on the funeral arrangements. They'll probably be sometime next week. The Marin County Sheriff says that they don't have any evidence contradicting the workers' story and are preliminarily ruling the deaths as accidental. That being said they may not complete the autopsies for a few days. The County Coroner is putting this case after some more notable homicides."

John spoke up asking, "Give me his number. I think my Forensic Pathologist, Dr. Mallard may know him. I'll see if the bodies can be transferred to our morgue in Alameda and we can get the autopsies done there."

Adams said, "That sounds like a good idea." He gave John the number.

John added, "One more thing Martin. Kyle drew up a new will with the Navy JAG Legal Assistance out there in Alameda after he found out about Chloe. Kyle told us that he furnished you with a copy."

Adams replied, "Yes I have it in front of me now. It still has the Navy Legal SEAL intact. We'll open it as well as Mae's after the funerals. I'm sure everything is in order for Chloe."

John said, "That's fine Martin. I'll call you when I've spoken with Dr. Mallard. Good night and thank you for your help."

"You're welcome Captain. I'm sorry for your loss. Goodnight to you."

John hung up and immediately dialed NCIS. He was lucky Dr. Mallard was still there. "Ducky do you know the Marin County Coroner?"

Ducky replied, "Yes I do. I send him some crabs cakes every year. What do you need him to do for us?"

John went on to explain of the Andersons' deaths and their relation to Chloe.

Ducky was immediately consoling "Oh dear. I'll get right on it. I'll call him as well as my opposite number in the NCIS Office in Alameda soon as we hang up. I'm sure he'll be able to expedite the autopsies."

"Thanks Ducky, you're the best." John said as he hung up. He went into the living room where he found Chloe asleep in Sarah's arms. John told Sarah what he had going with Ducky. Then they all settled into dealing with the aftermath. John ordered dinner from the new diner around the corner.
Wednesday, March 22, 2000

1100 Local Time

Anderson Farm

Hill Valley, CA

When Sarah notified AJ of Chloe's tragedy, he told her to take the week to do what she needed to do. Admiral Magnum was just as generous to John. John called all their family and friends to tell them what had happened. AJ & Sydney, Harm & Diane, Ann Marie & Peter and John's whole family sent mass and condolence cards. Chloe said that she didn't want flowers. They flew out to San Francisco on Sunday. John rented a car and they went to stay at the Anderson's Farm in Mill Valley.

Ducky was true to his word. He called the Marin County Coroner and arranged for the Alameda NCIS Pathologist to perform the Andersons' autopsies at the Alameda NCIS morgue. There were no findings of foul play and the deaths were officially ruled as accidental. Then the bodies were released on Sunday. Martin Adams then came in and made the funeral arrangements. The Anderson's were Methodists and the wake would be one day, Tuesday and the funeral would be on Wednesday.

All during the wake and funeral Chloe was very quiet. She was still in shock. Sarah kept a close eye on her, as the two had not been out of arm's reach during the whole time. John took up the major chores of caring for Caroline. They brought the baby with them instead of leaving her with the relatives because Caroline was a source of comfort for Chloe. Caroline had sensed that something was wrong with her 'big sister' and gravitated to her. Chloe welcomed her and had repeatedly wrapped her in close hugs throughout the whole ordeal.

Now they were sitting in the living room of the Anderson home waiting for Martin Adams to read the wills. They read Mae's will first. It was simple and straightforward. She listed all her assets stating that Kyle, as her sole living relative at the time the will was made, would be the sole beneficiary of them upon her death.

Next Kyle's will was read. It basically said the same thing adding that Chloe would be his sole beneficiary of his assets as well as Mae's if she died before him.

After the part detailing the dispersal of his assets there was a codicil expressing Kyle's wish that if his death and the possible simultaneous or prior death of his mother Mae occurred before Chloe reached 18 years, Sarah and John adopt her.

John and Sarah were taken totally by surprise. Sarah asked, "When did Kyle put that in his will?"

Adams answered, "He came into my office last summer while Chloe was here and told me that he went to the local JAG Office and added it. We both agreed that it was a viable plan. He didn't tell Chloe because he wanted to spare her the conflict. He was touched by Chloe's description of how nice it was living with you two."

John asked, "So what happens now?"

Adams answered, "Knowing that the wish was in the will, I set up an appointment with the Marin County Family Court for this Friday. We'll present that you were already taking care of Chloe at the behest of her father while he served in the Navy. Kyle told me when he added the codicil that he knew that Mae was a bit too elderly to keep up with a teenager and run the riding stable. Besides she had a staff for that. Kyle also said more than once that he considered you as part of his family and that if anything happened to him or Mae, he was glad that Chloe had the Marshalls. Here's the
affidavit I drew up attesting to that. I'm sure the court will see things that way as well. So I do not see any problems."

After they absorbed the unexpected news, they thanked Adams. Sarah added, "Can you also set up a trust fund for Chloe. With the insurance that is sure to come her way, her college is already paid for. John and I don't want anything from that. We're financially secure enough as it is."

"What about the riding stable?" John asked.

Adams answered, "Well Jim Wells is the manager and he's demonstrated a desire to keep it open as well as willingness to buy it. If he can arrange the financing to buy it we can put all the proceeds into Chloe's trust fund."

John, Sarah and Chloe were very glad to hear that as well. Then they went about the rest of Wednesday and Thursday arranging Chloe's affairs. They went to a branch of their DC bank in San Francisco to set up Chloe's Trust Fund. They held off signing until the court recognized them as Chloe's guardians allowing them to proceed with the adoption process. On Thursday Sarah called AJ and John called Thomas to apprise them of the situation. They both expressed their condolences and support for the adoption.

Friday, March 24, 2000

1000 Local Time

Marin County Family Court

The Family Court Judge, named Marjorie Wallace, was a severe looking woman who didn't hold the opinion that Kyle's wishes were final and therefore had to bear up under scrutiny. Martin Adams, acting as both Chloe and the Marshall's advocate was surprised by her attitude. After all, his three clients were all in agreement with Kyle's wishes.

After he presented Kyle's wishes Judge Wallace asked Martin, "As the Marshalls are both in the military, how does the court know that they won't be deployed at the same time?"

Even though they anticipated an easy decision, all three lawyers were prepared for this question as John got up to address the court. "Your honor my wife Sarah and I are both attorneys living in Washington. We have a 9-month-old daughter and are expecting another child. At present Sarah is the Chief of Staff of the Navy's Judge Advocate General Corps. While it is possible she may be deployed overseas to serve 'Sea Duty', I on the other hand am the Assistant Director of the law enforcement arm of the Navy, NCIS, which is a desk command position based in Washington. That being said, I have reached a level of rank that will only promote me to another desk command job, or allow me to retire. So the idea that we will be deployed away from home simultaneously is rendered moot. Also being that our two branches work arm-in-arm, in the event that we may be called out of town to work the same case, we both have siblings and friends with their own families also living in or around Washington ready to render child care assistance when that becomes necessary."

Smiling for the first time Wallace had to agree saying, "Mr. & Mrs. Marshall I see that you have answered all the child care questions that were needed to be answered. Thus as there are no objections from the parties involved, this court grants that the Marshalls are the legal guardians of the child Chloe Madison and they may proceed with the adoption process. I will have the brief detailing my position ready within the hour." Banging her gavel she announced, "This court is adjourned."

As the judge stood up to leave, Chloe turned to Sarah and John and hugged them tightly. She looked up at Sarah and asked, "Is it alright to call you 'Mom' for real now?"
Sarah had her patented watery smile as she hugged her new daughter closer saying, "Yes baby, now it's alright to call me 'mom, mommy, momma, anything with the letters 'm-o-m."

They all went out that night to a family style restaurant in Sausalito with Martin and his wife and family to celebrate. They flew back to Washington Saturday afternoon.

When John called his family to tell them of Chloe's pending adoption, they were all overjoyed to have another addition to the family, even if their joy was dampened by how it occurred.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 55

Monday, March 27, 2000

1257 Zulu

Dulles International Airport

Washington, DC

That morning Sarah and John filed the required papers with the DC Courts to start Chloe's adoption process. When Sarah was called into AJ's office along with Harm to receive an assignment, she informed AJ of her changing family situation. AJ was very happy to hear despite the tragedy, Chloe would have a somewhat happy ending.

That evening the Marshalls' alternate childcare situations were put into play. Sarah went to the daycare center early to pick up Caroline so that later that evening she and Harm could board a flight for Korea. AJ was sending them to Korea to investigate charges that American GIs shot and killed civilians during the Korean War. Army General Wolfe accompanied them. As they settled into their first class seats, Harm looked up in surprise when Renee Peterson boarded and sat down in the seat across the aisle from him and Sarah.

Harm asked her, "Why are you going to Korea?"

She said, "I'm doing a ZNN interview with Mr. Charley Hoskins here." Rene introduced him to Harm & Sarah.

Rene continued, "Charlie is a former Marine Corporal who claims to have participated in the shootings."

"Well good luck with that." Harm said as he sat back to relax.

0040 Zulu

Over the Pacific

The flight was to be 13 hours long as it flew non-stop to Seoul, South Korea. Halfway through Sarah switched seats with General Wolfe so that he and Harm could talk. Sarah, sighting her pregnancy, curled up under a blanket to sleep in the seat that Gen. Wolfe vacated. After a couple of hours, Sarah got up to use the lavatory.

While she was in there, Rene decided to interview Wolfe & Hoskins on camera.

Hoskins stated, "My unit had orders not to let anyone cross the bridge at Kang So Ri. When a whole bunch of what looked like civilians tried crossing and kept coming after warning shots were fired they were fired upon when one of them put his hand inside his jacket."

Wolfe told Renee, "Two days before the bridge incident soldiers let civilians pass with pregnant women who were actually soldiers with grenades in belly packs and killed 11 soldiers."
Just then there was a commotion as a woman and two men came forward from Business class brandishing weapons. The weapons were smuggled onto the plane in meal trays. They effectively took over the plane.

The woman identified herself as Solla Jong. Her gun was disassembled into pieces disguised as cosmetic holders and a hairdryer. She claimed that Hoskins had killed two of her grandparents at Kang So Ri. She, with her two male companions, shot the co-pilot and ordered the plane to North Korea. She said she was going to have a trial of Wolfe and Hoskins for murder. Sarah came out of the lavatory and masqueraded as a flight attendant by putting on an attendant's smock over her uniform. She managed to get hold of a fire extinguisher and hid it under the seat she slid into.

The North Korean men obtained the passenger manifest and gave it to Solla. They did a quick head count and saw the first class passengers was one short.

Solla waved the gun and said, "Where is Lt. Colonel S. Marshall?"

Harm saw Sarah slip out of the lavatory and hide the fire extinguisher spoke up, "He didn't make it. He had bronchitis and didn't make the flight."

Solla sensed correctly that he was lying. She pointed her gun at Rene and threatened to shoot her if Harm didn't tell the location of Sarah.

Before Harm could utter another word, Sarah stood up and shed the flight attendant's smock, saying, "I'm Lt. Colonel Marshall."

Solla looked on surprised, "A woman soldier."

Sarah replied neutrally, "Yeah just like you."

They all sat and proceeded with the trial.

Same time

JAG Headquarters

NCIS Headquarters

Back in Washington, Magnum & AJ found out about it via a news alert. He promptly called John and Diane at home. Magnum had them coordinate information out of ATAC. AJ sent Bud and John sent Kate Larkin to the CIA to get information.

AJ and Secretary Nelson monitored the flight and communications from AJ's office. Nelson refused to scramble fighters saying that the North Koreans would help because they wanted the US aid dollars. But the North Korea launched MIGs saying the terrorists were counter revolutionary anarchists adventurers and would deny them entrance into air space.

Nelson still refused to put up fighters but he finally admitted that Wolfe was in intelligence and knew all the North Koreans who had turned spy.

0430 Zulu Time

Over the Pacific

Solla wanted Renee to film their mock trial with Harm and Sarah as attorneys and her as judge.

After going through the motions of listening to everyone, Solla announced, "As judge I find you
Corporal Charles Hoskins guilty of murder."

Just as Solla raised her gun to shoot Hoskins, one of the hijackers came up to her to tell her, "Solla the general is working with the South Korea intelligence. He is carrying this agenda for a meeting tomorrow."

Solla read the document he gave her, "Current state of counterintelligence versus the DPRK attending Major General Zachary Wolfe US Army Intelligence Liaison. Are you a spy master General Wolfe?"

Wolfe disdainfully replied, "If you're going to shoot me, shoot me."

Solla continued, "Penetration of the North Korean general intelligence bureau. This is why you covered the massacre, because you are still fighting the war. Kwan, North Korea may let us in after all."

JAG Headquarters

AJ and Nelson were arguing over whether to scramble fighters. Nelson claimed that he had info from the CIA that the North Koreans wouldn't fire so AJ called John. "John who do you have going over to the CIA?"

"I sent Kate Larkin over. She met Bud there and they are talking to Webb of all people. He didn't tell them directly, but he believes that the CIA knows the flight would be shot down. They didn't tell him that directly because they don't want to compromise their agents. Admiral we have to tell the president. He has to scramble fighters to scare the MIGs away."

"That's not going to do any good if the hijackers still have control of the plane."

"AJ we have to trust that Harm and Sarah will think of something."

"Thanks John. I know how to give them that chance. I'll call you back."

As AJ disconnected his call to John he called out to Tiner, "Tiner get me the President."

0515 Zulu Time

Over the Pacific

Solla was on the radio trying to convince the North Koreans to let them land. "We have an American spy master on board. He is very valuable to your intelligence agency. He can tell you who is spying on you."

The North Koreans just kept repeating the same message. "You are not permitted to land. If you do not turn away you will be shot down."

The pilot Michael Ryan said to Solla, "Lady these people do not play around."

Solla poked his shoulder with her gun, "Stay on your course."

Just then two MIGs came right at the plane passing on either side. Almost on instinct Ryan turned the plane. Without even thinking of the consequences Solla shot him. The plane dove toward the ocean.

Back in the first class cabin, as he felt the plane pitch forward Harm scrambled forward. One hijacker went after Harm. Rene was sitting on the aisle and she managed to trip him. As he went down, Sarah grabbed the fire extinguisher and butted his face. She then sprayed him with the fire extinguisher.
Wolfe punched him and knocked him out. He grabbed his gun and turned looking for the third hijacker. The third man was at the top of the spiral stairway behind the screen. As he took aim at Wolfe, Hoskins stood up to warn Wolfe, "General look out."

The hijacker shot Hoskins in the back. As Hoskins went down Wolfe saw the hijacker trying to take cover behind the screen. He shot through it three times scoring hits. The hijacker fell at the top of the stairs dead.

After spraying the hijacker Sarah rushed into the cockpit. In the copilot's seat, Harm had managed to pull the 747 out of its dive. Solla still insisted on giving orders, "Go back on course to Pyongyang" pointing her gun at Harm. As Sarah came through the door Solla turned to look. As she did that Harm grabbed the gun. Seeing her advantage Sarah threw a solid left and knocked her out. Sarah took the gun. She heard gunfire out in the passenger compartment. She cracked the door open and saw that General Wolfe had shot one of the hijackers. Sarah opened the cockpit door and called him over.

"General get this woman out of here, then come back and move the pilot. She killed him. I'm going to help Harm." Sarah asked in a commanding tone. Wolfe smirked at her moxie and removed Solla from the cockpit then came back in to remove the dead pilot.

As she slid into the pilot's seat, Harm turned to her and said, Thanks sis." Sarah smiled and put the headset on.

Harm had complete control of the jet, but before he could relax, the two MIGs were flying directly toward him again as they passed on either side as before. Harm banked the jet to the south on a heading to get into South Korean airspace as soon as he could. Just then Harm heard an alarm warning him that the starboard outer engine caught fire. Harm looked for and found the fire extinguisher handle for that engine and pulled it. He watched for a few tense moments as the fire was extinguished. As this happened he heard over his earphones, "Oceanic 747 you must leave North Korean airspace or be shot down. Our jets are locking on with missiles."

Before Harm could reply to tell them that he was doing what they asked he heard another voice come over the radio, "Oceanic 747, this US Air Force Eagle Flight Delta One out of Kimpo Field. We have you in sight. Steer south to heading 180 and hold. We'll keep those MIGs off you."

After receiving AJ's call and the information he needed, President Bartlett finally scrambled fighters. Harm was never so relieved to hear a voice in his life. He radioed his reply, "Roger Eagle Delta U.S. Navy at the controls."

"Roger Navy we'll talk slow so you can understand us." One Eagle pilot acknowledged drollly.

Sarah had to smile at that saying, "Boys will be boys."

She saw that the MIGs turned tail and ran when it was a fair fight.

Harm landed the 747 with reminders from the tower. Sarah, in the pilots chair, said, "Next time we should take a boat." Harm could only grin in reply.

Monday, April 10, 2000

1930 Local Time

Armed Forces Museum

Washington, DC
Harm and Sarah returned from Korea the previous Saturday morning. They were met at the airport by their families and went to their separate homes to relax the remainder of the weekend away.

Because the subject of her documentary, Charlie Hoskins, was shot and would not have been able to participate until after he recovered, Rene returned from Korea only two days after landing. She had put her energy into completing the Navy's recruiting commercial. Now it was being premiered at a reception at the museum.

The Marshalls came to celebrate the debut of the Rabbs in the commercial. To commemorate the occasion Sarah was wearing her Marine Dress Blue uniform. John loved that she looked magnificent in that uniform. He was wearing his full Captain's uniform. As they stood in the back of the milling crowd Sarah was rocking the stroller in which Caroline was dressed in her own lace fringed dark blue dress and white tights and shoes contently sucking on her bottle. A smartly dressed Chloe was lovingly holding her arm. Chloe insisted on looking like Sarah so on Sunday they bought a dark blue dress suit in her size and designed similar to Sarah's uniform along with an extra small Marine Dress Blouse and red tie for her. They made quite the good portrait of a military family.

Bud and Harriet were also there with little AJ in his stroller. Even Peter was there, rocking Andy & little Diane Elizabeth in a double stroller. Ann Marie was being held up by business at the White House.

In addition to minding their own children the Marshalls were also minding the Rabb Children. John had a hold of Little Sarah Rabb's hand while he rocked Trey & Samantha in their double stroller.

As they were standing in the back of the milling crowd Congresswoman Bobbi Latham came up to greet them. Bobbi already knew the Roberts from her visits to JAG Headquarters but she never met John so Sarah made the introductions. "Congresswoman, I'd like to introduce my husband, Captain John Marshall. John, Congresswoman Roberta Latham."

As she shook John's hand she said, "Bobbi please. I'm very pleased to meet you Captain. What do you do for the Navy?"

"I'm the Assistant Director of NCIS." John replied.

"So you arrest them and Sarah tries them. Nice arrangement." Bobbi joked.

Sarah and John shared a laugh at the usual joke. Bobbi turned to Chloe and Caroline and asked, "And these beautiful young ladies are?"

Sarah replied, "These are our daughters Chloe and Caroline."

Chloe beamed with pride at being called 'daughter'. Earlier in the evening when Chloe came home from school, she found Sarah and John standing in the kitchen waiting for her. But unlike the last time she found them waiting for her, they were smiling. On the table were two envelopes with her name written on them in Sarah's familiar script. One was a greeting card envelope and the other was a business envelope with the DC Family Court return address. When she came through the door John and Sarah gave them to Chloe.

John explained, "We were going to show you this after the commercial but 'your mother' didn't want to wait. It was handed down this afternoon. Judge Reynolds notified your mother and me just before the end of the workday. I went to the Family Court to get her ruling. Due to the extenuating circumstances of the events that transpired and that you was living with us under our 'foster care' for most of the past year anyway, the usual 6-month waiting period was waived and the adoption was finalized and the name change was expedited. You're officially a Marshall."
Chloe didn't wait to open the letter. She just leaped into John's arms crying for joy. John held onto her for all he was worth. Sarah saw the tears of joy falling from his eyes as she shed some of her own. Chloe let go of John and then embraced Sarah. After she let Sarah go Chloe opened the envelopes. After smiling and kissing her 'parents' for the greeting card with a $100.00 American Express Gift Card, she opened the Family Court Envelope. She found the letter detailing Judge Reynolds ruling, the officially written and notarized document stating the adoption, a Social Security card and a Military Dependent's Identification Card both with her new last name. She just hugged John and Sarah some more. Then they got ready to go to the museum. The Marshalls and Matthews planned a surprise family celebration that also included the Rabbs, Roberts and AJ & Sydney for after the debut of the commercial.

As they spoke with Bobbi & the Roberts, Sarah spotted Ann Marie as she walked into the museum. After kissing Peter, Ann Marie came up to John and hugged him fiercely saying, "I have always liked how you looked in that uniform 'hot stuff'."

John just replied, "Well hi to you to kiddo. Did the President keep you late for being bad?"

"No he just wanted to go over some last minute questions on the budget with me. That's all." Ann Marie replied. She then asked, "Have they started the commercial?"

"No not yet. They just finished setting up the microphones. I saw Rene going about checking things with the museum's sound techs. Harm and Diane are over there speaking to AJ & Sydney and the Secretary & Mrs. Nelson." John said pointing toward the stage.

Ann Marie then turned and embraced Sarah and Chloe.

Ann Marie whispered to Chloe as she embraced her, "I hear that you and I are related now. Welcome to the family sweetie." Chloe hugged her back and showed Ann Marie her new ID Cards.

As Ann Marie greeted Bud & Harriet, who had looked on in surprised delight, Sarah said to them, "Let's keep it a low profile and wait to tell everyone else until after the commercial. After all this is Harm and Diane's moment and I haven't told them or the Admiral and Sydney yet."

Everyone calmed down some, but they still couldn't keep the smiles off their faces.

Bobbi was surprised at the effusive greeting Ann Marie gave John. She knew Ann Marie from when she visited the White House. After doting on the Rabbs and Roberts children she asked Ann Marie, "How do you know Captain Marshall?"

"He's my brother Congresswoman." Ann Marie said as she removed her glasses. It was then that Bobbi saw the family resemblance.

Just then the lights dimmed and a spotlight shown on the podium. Behind the podium was a large TV screen. Rene came to the podium and introduced herself.

After giving her opening comments, she said, "I'm very glad to have done this commercial for the Navy and I would like to acknowledge the great work our two stars did. We had so much fun doing the commercial. They did such a great job that if they weren't already working for the Navy I could promote them in Hollywood."

Everyone chuckled and applauded as the spotlight was shown on Harm and Diane. They smiled and waved modestly at the applause.

Rene ended the applause as she said, "Without further ado, here is the Navy's new commercial that will start airing next week in prime time."
The lights dimmed as the commercial was shown. It had the usual elements with Harm and Diane doing their part admirably. When it was over, the lights shown on the Rabbs as they accepted the waves of applause that flowed over them.

As they made their way through the crowd they accepted the congratulatory comments from all the people they encountered. Eventually they got to the Marshalls. Chloe smiled sweetly as she went to greet Harm & Diane, saying, "Hi Uncle Harm, hi Aunt Diane."

Looking at Sarah in surprise Diane asked, "Is the adoption final already?"

Sarah answered, "Judge Reynolds called us this afternoon to tell us it was."

Harm and Diane each enveloped Chloe in a good hug. AJ & Sydney came over after leaving the Secretary.

AJ asked, "What's with this unauthorized celebration?"

John answered, "We just told Harm & Diane that Chloe's adoption was finalized this afternoon. We are going to Olivia & Juliet's to celebrate. You and Sydney are included in the reservations Admiral."

After being told the good news and the corresponding plans, AJ commented, "Well what are waiting for? Let's get this celebration on the road." Everyone shared a good laugh as they left for the restaurant.

Tuesday, April 11, 2000

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm and Sarah were assigned to oppose each other again in a case. Seaman Andrea Granato walked off the USS Hartung after continually being given grunt work by an apparently sexist chief. Then her equally sexist female CO, Commander Samantha Woodling, charged her with desertion for missing ships deployment. Harm was assigned defense and Sarah prosecution. Singer volunteered to help Harm but AJ denied and instead gave her the prosecution of a "joyriding" Petty Officer.

During their interview Woodling told Sarah, "Granato was a whiner. She was always complaining about her assignments, saying that this was not what she signed up for."

Sarah asked her, "Commander is your attitude toward Seaman Granato personal?"

Sarah had to sit back as Woodling launched into rhetoric. "I'm surprised at you colonel. You saw it yourself about how hard it was when females were discriminated against in the military. You'd had better understand that if you were going to prosecute this case."

Harm interviewed Granato. She said, "My recruiter lied to me about air traffic controller positions being available."

Harm made the mistake in showing his skepticism.

Granato got angry and told him, "If you can't get your head around this, then you shouldn't be my lawyer. I saw your recruiting commercial. To me you're just another recruiter."

Harm answered her, "When I'm assigned to defend someone I do so very diligently. I will defend
you to the utmost. So I don't want you to worry about that."

Granato was appeased by his declaration and they settled into trying the case.

Harm went to interview Granato's recruiter, Roger Pearson. He denied that he had promised her anything. He did let slip that his quota of 1.5/month was doable where the former requirement of 4/month was not.

On top of everything, Bobbi Latham came to Sarah to interject herself into the women's issue wanting Granato to testify to her retention subcommittee.

In their interview Granato's mother told Harm, "The recruiter filled her head with exciting stuff. I didn't know she was unhappy until she got home."

Sarah found that Granato went directly to boyfriend Peter Skowron's house and on the stand Skowron claimed Granato wanted to get back together with him. Harm shot down his ego trip to that he only had a casual relationship with her.

As the trial progressed the Hartung's Chief Rowe complained how angry he was that Granato quit because everyone else was working like plow horses. Harm had him admit that he was singling her out for drudgework. Woodling claimed that Granato's absence made life harder for everyone else. Harm showed that her absence hadn't hurt the ship's readiness and that Woodling had basically let off 3 men for U/A under her command but charged the one female with desertion, basically to prove that she was a tough commander.

In a surprise Sarah then called Renee as a witness. Sarah asked her, "Are you a recruiting expert?"

Rene answered, "No I was chosen to produce the commercial with the caveat of portraying the Navy in a fair and positive way. The Navy liked me for my edge, my honesty, and my independence. They also knew that I could produce a quality presentation."

When Harm came up to cross examine her he asked, "Do you believe what the Navy portrays?"

Rene answered, "Yes I do. I have seen that there are people who do well in the Navy, you and your wife Diane for example."

Harm smiled at that then asked, "Did the Navy provide you with recruiting materials or literature and did you read them?"

Rene answered, "Yes they did and I did extensively. I saw that they offered many opportunities for education and other benefits."

Harm countered, "Then how do you explain what happened to Seaman Granato?"

Rene answered honestly, "The Navy is like anywhere else. There are those who are honest in presenting themselves. Then there are others who are dishonest. I mean if everyone was honest, we wouldn't be sitting in this courtroom. I also read in the literature a line that stated 'upon availability'."

Sarah smiled as Harm had to give Rene props for her answer.

Harm gave up at that point, "I have no more questions for Miss Peterson."

Rene left the stand smiling. As she passed the defense table, she said "No hard feelings. Say hello to Diane for me." She understood perfectly what Harm had tried to do so she didn't hold a grudge.
The court declared a recess for the day. The next day based on Rene's answers Harm researched the records for those seamen that Pearson recruited. He found evidence that showed Pearson had another male recruit who was given an honorable discharge eight months after signing when the Navy failed to honor a contract that Pearson made. Harm recalled him to the stand. Pearson admitted he didn't lie but didn't point out any of the "bad things that could happen."

Harm told the jury, "The charges far outweigh the transgression.

They found her not guilty on everything except being UA.

Harm told Granato that she would probably get a dishonorable discharge with no jail time. Granato seemed happy with that.

Sarah was glad that the trial only lasted a week.
Immediately after returning to DC after the funeral, Chloe asked to have her room moved to the farthest from Sarah and John’s. The family used it for a study with a computer desk and a lounge with one easy chair, loveseat and a TV stand with a VCR/DVD Player.

John spent the week while Sarah was in Korea painting the room to Chloe's specifications and Peter helped him switch the furniture. He switched the computer and TV last. He set up a splitter on the cable line and installed a wireless router so that Chloe could watch TV and work on a laptop in her room.

Through it all Diane visited numerous times with her children. They always spent time together when Harm and Sarah were away together on a case.

During those times John also took Caroline to the Navy Yard Daycare Center. It was important that he and Sarah maintained a routine for Caroline's sake. There weren't a lot of times that Sarah went away. What made it easier was the fact that the day care center was convenient to both their offices. If they had more children after the latest still pending, they knew they would have enough room for them.

Chloe was sitting in the new study location with Caroline in her playpen watching TV. The family liked to sit there a lot because it was easier to just let Caroline sleep through if she fell asleep. John was downstairs in the kitchen making dinner, as Sarah wasn't home yet.

Now as Sarah walked in from through the kitchen she found that dinner was almost ready. John was making stuffed roast chicken. He made fresh sweet potatoes in a cream sauce with fresh string beans and baked potatoes.

As Sarah came in she laid a kiss on her husband. John told her. "Go get changed, dinner is almost ready."

She asked him, "Where are the kids?"

John answered, "Upstairs in the new study watching TV or Chloe is watching TV and Caroline is playing in her playpen. Though the last time I checked on them, Chloe was giving Caroline a bottle."

Sarah went upstairs and found her daughters in the new study. Caroline was in her playpen playing with an activity board. As soon as Sarah walked in, Chloe bounded up and hugged her mother. Caroline stood up wanting the same attention. Sarah released Chloe and hoisted Caroline up and gave her lots of kisses and squeezing hugs. Caroline just giggled with delight. Sarah carried Caroline into her bedroom as Chloe followed. She took Caroline to hold her as she sat on the bed and
watched as Sarah shed her uniform & underwear and took out her contacts. Sarah put on fresh clothing and hung up her uniform skirt and coat and switched her rank symbols to the next day's blouse.

Chloe asked, "Mom how come you always wear the lacy sexy underwear? No one is going to see it at work."

Sarah had to smile as she replied. "Your father likes how I look in it when I walk around in the morning getting ready to go to work. That's why he's always the last in the shower. When I'm at work I think of his smile as he stared at me. Also the uniform is stiff and so not that feminine. As I walk around I feel that much more special knowing what I have on under the uniform."

When she went downstairs Chloe followed her down for dinner. Sarah put Caroline in her high chair.

"What happened at work?" John asked.

As she set the table for dinner Sarah answered, "I'm prosecuting a case against Bud & Loren Singer."

"I bet Singer is doing all the talking." John said.

Sarah replied, "Oh no Bud got his wires out Monday. The admiral let him get his 'sea legs', so to speak, by having him lecture the new ensigns that were newly assigned. He's taken over your job very well."

John said, "Well that's good to hear."

Sarah continued, "I'm late because I had to amend the charges on the defendant."

"What's going on with the case that made you have to amend the charges?" John asked.

Sarah answered, "A jumpmaster Navy Senior Chief PO named Bracken is being court-martialed. He was training five brand new Navy jumpers who were on their first training jump out. All of them had with 75 pounds of gear and 65 pounds of parachute. As they left the plane, they were 800 meters short of the drop zone. He claimed that the "jump light" was green. But the pilot had realized they were short and not flipped it to green. So they jumped too soon. Two of the jumpers landed unexpectedly in the water. One was fine while the other landed in the hospital in a coma.

While I was speaking to the review board doctor, the petty officer that was in a coma died. I had to go back to the office and amend the charges from culpable negligence to involuntary manslaughter. Then I sent the Gunny with Bracken's photo to all the bars in Norfolk to see if he was drinking the night before."

John raised his eyebrows and asked, "The review board doctor told you he was drunk?"

Sarah raised her eyebrows back at him and said, "No silly. He couldn't tell me anything. You know it's against the law. Instead, he just told me, 'do what you always do'. So I had Gunny check Bracken's records. He found a 12-year old prior DUI. That's why I sent him out to check. The only reason he could have made that mistake was if he was hung-over. Gunny will call me tonight or tomorrow morning if he finds anything. But right now I want to forget about the case and just relax."

As they sat down to dinner, Chloe asked, "Mom how do I become a Catholic?"

Sarah answered, "Well you have to be baptized receive First Communion and then Confirmation."
The Baptism is usually done when you're a baby when we christen you, then in 2nd grade you receive First Holy Communion and then in 7th grade you receive Confirmation. For persons your age or older, you go through the religious instruction for RCI or the Rights for Catholic Initiation and receive all three sacraments at the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday. Do you want to do all that?"

"Yeah I want to be part of the family and do all the things you two do. I want you two to be happy with me." Chloe answered.

Sarah answered with the watery smile, "Oh baby, you're already part of the family. And you don't need to do all that to make us happy. We're happy that you're here with us. The rest is just a bonus. Just the same if you want to go through all that, we'll go see the head of Religious Instruction at St. Thomas to enroll you for next year. It's already too late for this year since Easter is a week from this Sunday."

John spoke up, "Maybe we can arrange for special accelerated instruction and have a special ceremony at another mass before the summer is out. Why make her wait a whole year. I mean they have baptisms every month."

Sarah replied, "You know you're right. We'll call Father Mario on Monday." Chloe was very happy to hear it.

Saturday, April 15, 2000

To

Sunday, April 16, 2000

St. Thomas, Apostle Church

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

As it happened Chloe didn't have to wait till Monday. They saw Father Mario at 5:00 Mass. He told the Marshalls, "Catholic University has a class for older converts on Thursdays at 7:00 PM for 2 hours. It's a 12-week course. I have sent a lot of boys and girls Chloe's age. The latest class just ended in time for Holy Saturday's ceremony. The next class will start 2 weeks from Holy Thursday on May 4th. Call me Monday morning at the Rectory and I'll enroll her then. She can receive all three sacraments in the 2nd week of August. How does that sound Chloe?"

Chloe was enthusiastic when she answered, "That sounds nice. I'd really like that."

The Marshalls went home and relaxed for the evening and the rest of the weekend.

On Sunday evening John's mom Maureen called and invited them to their cottage in Crystal Beach, Florida for the Easter Week. John and Sarah readily agreed. They arranged to take the Easter Week starting Thursday off anyway being that Chloe was already off from school. The older Marshalls were looking forward to spending the week with their new granddaughter.

Monday, April 17, 2000

1030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters,
When the trial resumed Monday morning Sarah called her first witness. "Petty Officer Scaline please tell the court. How did you come out alright and not Petty Officer Comstock?"

"I jettisoned my gear before I hit the water but Comstock didn't. He got tangled up in his chute and he sank under the weight of his gear. He was blue when he was retrieved from the water."

Sarah got some more testimony from Scaline then the judge declared the recess for lunch. During lunch Bracken admitted he was feeling shaky. He admitted to Bud and Singer, "I was not on the schedule and was out drinking the night before the mishap. I was called as a last minute replacement. I only told Capt. Miller of the mishap board."

Singer advised him, "Do not to say anything more to anyone."

Bud took issue with that saying, "We may be able to get a plea."

But Singer said to Bud, "I don't want a plea. I intend to win."

Bud said loudly, "But Loren, this may not be a winnable case. Sometimes you lose some because the evidence is so overwhelming."

Their argument carried from Bud's office and out into the bullpen where Admiral Chegwidden was walking and he overheard. As he walked into Bud's office the two lieutenants snapped to attention. AJ addressed Singer saying, "Lieutenant do you understand that the first chair is in charge?"

Singer answered, "Yes sir I do."

AJ said, "Good keep that in mind." Then he walked out of the room.

Bud turned to her and said, "We need to talk to Bracken to get him to agree to a plea." Singer could only agree. But Bracken did not. He wanted to let a jury decide.

When the trial resumed Sarah called the Review Board doctor, Dr. Eric Miller. She asked him, "Doctor did any of your drug tests on Chief Bracken show alcohol levels?"

Immediately Singer shot up with her objection. Bud had to sit her back down. Sarah went on with her questions. Despite that Captain Miller could only tell her what he was allowed by law. Despite that Sarah was satisfied.

When she got to her office Gunny was there, "Ma'am I was in one bar in Norfolk and I found a witness that told me she saw Chief Bracken drinking there the night before the incident."

Sarah told him, "Alright Gunny have her here tomorrow. I'll call her as my first witness tomorrow."

"Yes ma'am, she'll be here." Gunny said.

After that Sarah sat in her office for a time to do some note work then she left at 1700 to pick up Caroline.

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After the court recessed for the day Bud and Singer adjourned to his office. He told her, "You telegraphed to Colonel Marshall that there was a problem in that area. Now she has probable cause to
go digging for witnesses to his drinking."

Singer said, "I underestimated her."

Bud responded, "Or you overestimated yourself."

Singer said, "It won't happen again." She then went into her office to secure for the day. As she walked out she thought to herself, 'I still have a lot to learn. Bud was right, I telegraphed the chief's guilt. I should learn how to play poker.'

1730 Local Time

Navy Yard Daycare Center

Bethesda Navy Medical Center

When Sarah finally left JAG to pick up Caroline she spent a little extra time speaking with Emma as they got their daughters ready to go. Emma asked her, "So what is the Captain cooking tonight while you see Doctor Baldwin?"

Sarah said to her, "You know Emma outside the office you can call John by his name. You don't work for him. You make him sound like some old war veteran."

Emma laughed at the vision that popped into her head at that. Sarah sensed the same thing and they both had a good laugh as they walked out.

Sarah said, "John is meeting me at Bethesda for the appointment after he goes to pick up Chloe. After that we're going out to dinner."

When Sarah pulled up and parked she had just gotten out of the Trailblazer to unbuckle Caroline when John pulled up to the parking space next to hers on her passenger side. Sarah unlocked the passenger door and John picked up the diaper bag from the front seat. Sarah was preoccupied as she greeted John and Chloe that she didn't push the locking button on her remote.

They went in to see Eve. After the initial examination Eve asked John to bring in Chloe and Caroline. Eve had the ultrasound set up and was applying the belly-gel. As Eve maneuvered the wand around until she got it to where she wanted.

As John held Caroline, Chloe moved in closer. Her mouth dropped open in wonder and she only uttered, "Wow" as she saw the image of the baby in Sarah's womb. The spine and the beating heart could be clearly seen.

Chloe excitedly asked, "Can you tell the sex yet?"

Eve answered, "I don't think so. The baby is still too small." Still Eve moved the wand around some in an effort to see. This proved fruitless however as the baby wasn't giving up its secrets yet. Eve stopped the wand at a particular place and then she hit a control on the screen. Immediately the machine spit out a picture of the ultrasound. Chloe took it and just stared at it saying only, "wow, cool, awesome."

The three adults just smiled at the wonder of the teenager. After Eve wiped off the gel Sarah got up to get dressed. They left the office and returned to their cars. Sarah hit the unlock button as she approached the driver's side. She opened the back door and went to strap Caroline in. Chloe wanted to ride home with Sarah and she went around to the passenger side of the Trailblazer. As she opened the door she noticed that there was a document on the passenger seat. It was opened to a page where
a paragraph was circled in red.

Chloe was immediately curious. She picked up the document and asked, "Mom did you leave this in the car?"

Sarah looked up from where she was working with Caroline and looked over the back of the seat. She saw the circled paragraph and went to take it from Chloe. But before she could take it closer so she could read it, John reached in and gently took it from Chloe.

John held it by the corners, closed the document and read the title. He told Sarah, "This is "Part B" of the mishap report for Chief Bracken's case. How did it get into your car? I didn't see it when I pulled up. In fact I distinctly remember not seeing it as you asked me to get Caroline's diaper bag from this seat."

Sarah was at a loss. She said, "It's a good thing I didn't read it."

Surprising Sarah he went into his trunk and opened his Crime Scene Kit. He pulled out an evidence bag and put the document inside. As he was signing and dating the bag John said, "Someone's messing with you. You shouldn't have this report. I'm going to report this to Thomas and I'm also going to have Abby check this for fingerprints. You should report this to AJ. You don't need to have an ethics violation following you around."

Sarah could only agree. The family then went on their way. They didn't see or pay attention to a rented Chevy Lumina parked down the line. The man inside was watching them he cursed to himself when he saw John take the document and put it in the evidence bag. He thanked his lucky stars that he wore gloves whenever he handled the document. When he saw them finally drive away he thought to himself, 'Now how am I gonna win my case.'

Tuesday, April 18, 2000

1015 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah went straight into AJ's office to report that someone left the Part B Document in her car. She told him of the circumstances of the incident. AJ told her that he would coordinate with Admiral Magnum to investigate how the document was taken from Bethesda. He also assigned Harm to investigate with Meg.

When she returned to her office she found Gunny waiting for her. He told her, "Ma'am I have Krista Berren waiting to see you. She's the woman who saw Bracken drinking."

Sarah answered, "Where is she now Gunny?"

"She's right over here ma'am." Galindez said as he walked across the bullpen with Sarah to the visitor waiting area.

Sarah introduced herself and asked Miss Berren to come into her office. Sarah interviewed her and set her up to testify at the trial that morning. She notified Bud of the additional witness.

During the trial Bud recalled PO Scaline. During his cross-examination he testified, "I saw the green jump light."
But during Sarah's cross-examination Sarah got him to admit, "I testified that I saw the green light based on the chief saying it was green. The chief told me 'that it had to be on'."

After Sarah was finished with Scaline she called Krista Berren. Berren testified that she saw the chief drinking the night before the incident. After that Sarah rested her case.

Seeing that there was too much evidence against his client Bud called for and got a recess. He arranged a meeting with Singer and his client and Sarah in the conference room. Sarah proposed, "I'll take a guilty plea of negligent homicide with failure to use due care, dishonorable discharge, and forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and 3 years confinement."

At first Bud disagreed then Bracken began arguing. Sarah gave him her full barrel closing argument saying, "It was your job to not trust a 90-cent light bulb and stick your head out the door to check for danger; which you would have done if he hadn't been hung over."

Bracken finally agreed to the settlement. Sarah walked out of the room satisfied at the outcome.

1630 Hours

Harm's Office

Harm was on the phone with Meg. Meg went over to NCIS to speak with Abby Sciutto.

"Abby wasn't able to find any finger prints on the document except Captain Millers. So I went over to Bethesda to speak with him. He said that he had left the document in with all his others in the file room. That room is usually unlocked. I couldn't find anyone to tell me if they saw anyone unusual enter there. I even showed Bud's, Singer's and Bracken's photos around and they weren't seen there the day. It definitely could not have been Singer because she was at my house for dinner almost immediately after work"

Harm said, "Okay Meg, it's almost 1700. Why don't you go home and we'll get together tomorrow to write this up."

Meg agreed, "Okay Harm, I'll see you tomorrow. Good night."

"Good night Meg." Harm returned as he hung up.

As Harm settled back into his chair he looked out his office and saw Singer walking by. He called her into his office. He told her, "Commander Austen and I are trying to find out who put Chief Bracken's Part B Report in Colonel Marshall's car. So far we haven't been able to determine just who that is. Would you have any idea who that might be Lieutenant?"

Singer's face remained neutral as she said, "I wouldn't have any idea sir. Why would you ask me anyway sir?"

Harm's face was also neutral as he answered her question, "Because you would stand to benefit. If the colonel saw that document, you could honestly object to any testimony deriving from that as fruit from the poisonous tree. I will tell you this if I ever find out who placed that where she could see it, I will make it my mission to personally ruin that person's career."

At Harm's pronouncement Singer became indignant, "Are you accusing me?"

He said, "No, I'm only warning you not to let your personal ambitions overtake your abilities."

Staying in her indignant attitude she retorted, "I'm not a thief or liar but I will use any means
necessary to achieve my goal of being the first female JAG."

Harm held his temper in check as he said, "That will be all lieutenant, dismissed."

At that Singer turned and walked out of his office. Harm just shook his head. He knew she didn't do it. He thought that Chief Bracken had done it, but he knew he wouldn't be able to prove it. He did take satisfaction that his sister in law convicted the son of a bitch. In the meantime he would keep his eye on Lt. Loren Singer.

Thursday, April 20, 2000

1830 Local Time

Dulles International Airport

Sarah and John were walking into the Delta Airlines departure lounge after they got their family through the check-in process. They settled down to wait to board. Sarah and John were dressed for leisure. They left their uniforms at home. This would be the first non-working vacation in a long time. The trip to Australia was nice for everybody, but it was a working trip and they did not have to use their 'leave time'. Their bosses were very generous in giving the new family time with their relatives. And they were a new family. John's siblings were very welcoming to Chloe. Matt and Mark came down one weekend with their families shortly after John announced that the adoption was final. They all went out to dinner and celebrated. The only people missing were John's parents. Now they were on their way to James and Maureen's rented 3-bedroom cottage in Florida.

They just settled in for the wait when they looked up and saw AJ & Sydney come into the waiting area to the next gate over. AJ & Sydney saw them also and walked over.

After exchanging greetings John said, "Where are you two headed?"

Sydney answered, "Aruba, AJ managed to book a flight and room for us at the last minute. What with his schedule and mine rarely matching up, we were very lucky."

AJ asked, "Where are you all going this week?"

Sarah answered, "John's parents have rented a cottage in Crystal Beach, Florida. We're flying into St. Petersburg Clearwater Airport. Jim is meeting us there tonight to drive us. After Easter Sunday, we're all going to Disney World."

AJ smiled broadly at that, "Make sure you save the photo of John with Mickey's ears for the NCIS Most Wanted Gallery."

Everyone had a good laugh at that. They all chatted until their flights were called for boarding.

2230 Local Time

Saint Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport (PIE)

Clearwater, FL

Jim and Maureen Marshall were there to meet their son and his family. They had an especially exuberant greeting for Chloe. This was the first time Maureen & Jim saw her since before the fire that killed her grandmother & father.

Maureen said, "I'm so sorry about your family but I'm so happy that you're a part of ours now."
Chloe could only try and burrow deeper into her new grandmother's hug.

Maureen let go and said, "Now I'm sure you're all tired so let's go to the cottage. John and Sarah we have a new crib set up for Caroline in your room. Chloe your room is set for you."

After claiming and stowing their luggage, the Marshalls all piled into the Yukon that Jim rented for their stay. John sat shotgun with his dad driving while Sarah and Maureen split the back seat with Caroline's baby seat & Chloe. Sarah was touched that Chloe snuggled in and fell asleep in Maureen's arms. Maureen just hummed to her and gently stroked her hair.

They arrived at the cottage after a 45-minute drive. The cottage was one story with three bedrooms and one bathroom around a living and dining space with a galley kitchen. It had a big back yard with a built in brick gas fired barbecue grill. It was a block from the water of the Gulf of Mexico.

Chloe still wasn't awake so John just picked her up and cradled her in his arms and laid her in her bed. Maureen and Sarah both got her changed for bed while John settled Caroline down for the night.

After the kids were asleep, the adults sat down in the living room for some tea to wind down. They were still wired from the trip. Jim asked John & Sarah, "How has Chloe been since the fire?"

Sarah answered, "It was hard for her at first, especially when we went out to the funeral. She didn't want to leave my side throughout the whole time. She wouldn't fall asleep unless I lay down with her. Even then she would wake up in a cold sweat. She was afraid of being left alone again. She reminded me of me. It struck me that she went through the same things as I did, except that both her parents died while mine walked away. She only started to feel better after the judge in California ruled that we were allowed to adopt her and she asked if she could start calling me mom. When the adoption was finalized, I never saw a child so happy. Still we have her seeing our counselor, Jordan Parker at Bethesda to help her deal with her feelings and grief. Jordan tells us that Chloe seems well adjusted, but fragile. Chloe is still afraid that she may lose her new family."

Sarah then stopped and reached into her carry-on bag. She pulled out a framed photo. It showed Sarah and John's family. Chloe stood smiling proudly in her blue junior Marine suit between Sarah and John. John was holding a smiling Caroline. Maureen went right to her own watery smile as she reached for Sarah and warmly embraced her.

Eventually everyone was nodding their heads in exhaustion as they all said good night. The next day they resumed their vacation.

Monday, May 1, 2000

0730 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

As Sarah walked through the parking lot she met Meg Austen. Sarah asked her, "How was that undercover assignment in Gulfport last week?" Sarah assigned her before she went on vacation.

Meg went undercover in the Navy's Construction Battalion Center facility in Gulfport, Mississippi as CPO Bonnie Johnson in an on base Wicken coven as a new initiate to the religion to investigate a rape allegation by a Petty Officer Plunket. Plunket's claim was that she was raped, after being bewitched, by Chief Lane Merker the coven's 'high priest'.

Meg answered, "It was fine Mac. We resolved the case and got a conviction. But I let Harm & Bud have it when they got down there. When I met them at the airport they were so enthused at keeping my CPO cover intact that they loaded me with all the luggage and made me carry it to the parking lot."

Sarah smiled as she asked, "What did you do about it?"

Meg answered, "When we got to my car and seeing as how I outranked both of them anyway, I dropped the luggage right there and told them to load it themselves."

Sarah laughed and said, "Good for you. Never let the boys gang up on you. It's good to pull rank now and then."

Meg laughed along with her and said, "It was somewhat liberating standing outside in the nude at the initiating ceremony. It's a shame that Merker used that as a way to get laid. The people in the coven really believe in their Wicken religion, though they were really mad at me when Harm called me to testify. They all felt betrayed by me and they also thought we were invading their bedrooms."

Sarah added, "Don't let it get to you sometimes you have to invade someone's privacy in order to get the information you need."

Meg answered, "Yeah I know. When I got home and told Bob what I was doing he was intrigued to say the least."

Bending closer to Sarah, Meg dropped her voice to speak privately and said, "Between us girls we left Cat with my mom in Annapolis for the weekend and we went away to Rehoboth Beach. We didn't go outside much, it was wonderful."

Sarah smiled and said, "There must be something in the air. John and I had the same weekend in Florida. We left Chloe and Caroline with his parents at their cottage in Crystal Beach last Friday and we went to Treasure Island. We didn't go outside much either. It was wonderful for us to."

When the elevator door closed and the two women stood alone, they shared a giggle. When it opened on the 3rd floor they were all business.
Harm and Sarah walked out of the meeting together. Harm was unhappy. Admiral Chegwidden was notified of the finding of a US World War Two submarine that a salvager/treasure hunter wanted to salvage. AJ wanted to take the case and he assigned Harm to the budget again. AJ assigned Harm to fill in for him at the latest round of budget hearings saying, "The last time you got the funds to repair your holes in the courtroom ceiling. This time get at least a 4.3% increase."

Sarah was assigned to prosecute while Bud was assigned to defend Petty Officer 2nd class Potts. Potts was being in his court-martialed for ditching his mandatory physical training and taking diet pills to lose weight.

He said he wanted to stay in but Sarah told him that his love of the Navy was outweighed by his utter lack of military discipline. Bud identified with him and said that the Navy was using his as a scapegoat to send a message. He told him that he had "lost 20 pounds when he had his jaw wired."

He showed that Potts' job required him to sit and run a $50-million dollar missile system and that his CO said he didn't care how much he weighed unless he broke the chair.

Sarah countered that a Body Mass Index greater than 25 was considered unfit for the navy (weight in pounds X 705 / square root of height (in inches). Astounding everyone Potts could figure it out in his head.

There were two corporate recruiters watching the trial and started a bidding war in the hallway over Potts, including $120,000.00 per year, stock options, condo's etc.

Sarah was astounded when he said, "Ma'am I just want to stay in the Navy."

She counter-offered with "$20,000.00 per year, forfeit 30 days pay, 2 week confinement to quarters, drug testing, mandated PT and regulated diet, and may end up in combat."

Potts took the deal

While AJ and Sarah were working their respective cases, Harm couldn't ask Sarah for Emma's help this time around because she was on her own vacation with her family.

So Harm took the work home so he and Diane could work on it.

At home after Harm complained about missing the opportunity to participate in history, Diane went over, sat on his lap, put her arms around him and said, "Harm I have learned as we did the NCIS' budget that it was just like everyone else's. So we have to approach it as such." Then she leaned in and whispered into his ear, "After we finish, we can make our own history."
Harm pulled back to look at her. She just cocked her eyebrow at him. He and she went to finish the budget with renewed enthusiasm.

The next day when AJ returned from SEAL Beach, California, he asked Harm, "How did you do on the budget?"

Harm took a breath as he told him, "Well Diane and me worked on it together."

AJ was surprised and said, "You had your wife help you on the budget."

Harm spoke up defending himself, "Well sir she does the budget for NCIS and she has always gotten an increase and she manages the budget for our house so who better."

Satisfied with Harm's explanation he asked again, "So how did we do this year? Did you get the 4.3% I asked for?"

Harm said, "No sir."

Before Harm could continue, AJ got mad again and asked, "Well what the hell did you get?"

Harm stuck his tongue firmly in his cheek. He knew he had a gotcha moment on his commanding officer when he answered, "I didn't get the 4.3% increase because I got an 8.1% increase sir."

AJ was properly chagrined and asked admiringly, "How did you do that?"

Harm answered, "By adding funds for the inflation factor, contingency fund, and travel allowance."

AJ took control again and said, "Good. I'll give it to you every year."

AJ walked away smiling. Harm just walked away muttering about being saddled with that yearly chore.

Friday, May 5, 2000

2100 Local Time

Barkley Farms

Louisville, Kentucky

The reason Emma and her family took their vacation this week was because it was the first Saturday in May and Emma's parents, Robert & Frances Barkley had a horse running in the Kentucky Derby. So Emma invited Sarah and John's family to join her for the weekend. Sarah and Chloe were enthusiastic about going and wearing the big hats and the pretty dresses.

John and Sarah took Friday off and Chloe was given a pass to take off for the school day. They left DC from Reagan National Airport at 1000 hours and flown the 90 minutes to Louisville.

Emma and Teresa were waiting at the airport for them. She greeted the Marshalls very enthusiastically as they stepped off the jet way. John rented a car for his family and he followed Emma to her family's home. It was a sprawling 9 bedroom house on a horse farm in Fairdale a suburb south of Louisville.

Chloe was introduced to Emma's 16 year old sister Chelsea. Frances set up an extra bed for Chloe. John and Sarah were shown one of the guest rooms where Frances also set up a crib for Caroline.
Immediately upon arriving and changing into play clothes Chelsea took Chloe out to one of the stables and they went horse riding for the whole afternoon riding the farm and they fast friends.

After dinner Sarah and John put Caroline to bed and Chloe went with Chelsea to the latter's room to talk girl talk. Emma had told her parents that Sarah didn't drink. Frances had graciously not taken the liquor out. Sarah and John were sitting in the living room with Emma & her husband Michael and Robert & Frances having a late evening tea.

Robert asked, "So John, Emma told us that your father works at Aqueduct Racetrack in New York. What does he do there?"

John answered, "He's the Chief Engineer of the HVAC Department. He makes sure the place is properly air conditioned and heated. He even makes sure the HVAC Systems for the barns are working properly too. We have to make sure the horses are comfortable after all."

Frances asked, "Did you ever work with him?"

John smiled as he answered, "Yes I did for one summer. Though that's not how dad described it. One day my Aunt Margaret and Uncle Billy were visiting at the cabana at the beach club and Uncle Billy asked me, 'How do you like working with your father?' Well dad was very quick to say, 'He doesn't work with me. He works for me'."

Everyone shared a laugh at that and John added, "To be fair I did alright the summer I worked there. But I didn't want to go into that field. I wanted the Navy. Dad wasn't disappointed. He just wanted me to do well in whatever I did."

Robert said, "It's the same with my kids. Emma was the only one who didn't want to go into the horse business. I'm just glad she's doing well and getting her bachelor's degree. So being that your dad worked at Aqueduct, you were familiar with the horses."

John answered, "Oh yeah. He used to take us to the backstretch at the track and we'd watch a race from there. It was really intense to see the horses heading right at you as they came around the clubhouse turn as you were standing by the rail. Dad even took me to the Belmont a few years in a row. This time of year was fun even in college. I had an economics professor who used get the class interested in whatever horse was favored. He'd go and place bets for us. That's was also the one semester I did very well in that class."

Everyone laughed at that.

John continued, "Before I worked with or for Dad, there were three summers in a row where my brothers and I got minimum wage jobs cutting grass, raking leaves and even picking rocks off the track."

Sarah asked incredulously, "Picking rocks. That seems so trivial"

Robert and John shared a look and Robert bade him to continue.

John did so, "A group of guys would spread the width of the track and walk around. Any pebble we found we would pick it up and put it in a coffee can we had attached to our belts. The foreman was always telling us 'the only thing I want to see is asses & elbows'. You'd do that for a week then you went to pushing a lawn mower."

Sarah asked, "But why?"

Robert went to explain, "A horses legs are very fragile. That's why they run on a cushioned track."
The cushioning is made of a mixture of clay and sand. If a horse is running at speed and it steps on a pebble as small as a dime, it could shatter its leg. That's why John and his friends went around and picked rocks."

Sarah nodded her understanding. Eventually everyone was starting to feel the end of the day. They all said good night and went to bed.

Saturday, May 6, 2000

Churchill Downs Race Track

Saturday began very early. Robert Barkley went to the racetrack to get his horses ready for the day's races. Besides the Derby race, he had a horse in every other race on the card that day. Emma's two brothers, Robert Junior (the family called him RJ) and Brian were also married and they lived around Louisville with their families. They both went into their father's trade. Today they were working with their father.

Frances made a big breakfast for Emma and Sarah's families. Since the race wasn't until 5:00PM local time they waited until about 1:00 PM to go to the track. RJ and Brian's wives and children met at the Barkleys and they formed a motorcade to Churchill Downs

It was easy for the men to get dressed. All they had to wear were sport coats and slacks with shirts & ties. The women were in another category all together. Sarah picked a beige pencil dress with puffy sleeves, light blue trim on the sleeves and skirt hems. She was just beginning to pop her newest baby bump so she had the dress cut a little full so that it draped appealingly from below her bust, which had naturally gotten bigger with the pregnancy. Chloe had the same style pencil skirt but hers was light blue with dark blue trim at the hems.

Sarah told Emma what color dresses she and Chloe were wearing. So Emma had on giving Sarah one of her hats. Sarah's was a big tan straw hat with a dark blue band. Chelsie gave Chloe one of her hats that she had worn when she was Chloe's age. It was dark blue with a matching band.

Sarah and Michael were very amused that Emma and John were the ones getting together to pick the horses. They picked each of the horses Robert trained to win in every race. While Sarah understood that the odds with the big numbers were longshots, she and Michael were novices in trying to understand the ranking and all the other information that was printed on the Tote Sheet. Sarah picked her horses based on two factors, the color of the silks and the odds. She tried to pick the longshots. It made for an enjoyable afternoon as they had rooting interest in every race.

Eventually Fusaichi Pegasus, not one of Robert's horses, won the derby with Kent Desormeaux as the jockey. But it wasn't all bad. Robert's horses won 4 of the races on the card. The whole Gardiner & Marshall party went back to the Barkley Farm to celebrate their winnings and commiserate their losses.

The Marshalls flew back to Washington Sunday evening with the promise to meet at Pimlico in Baltimore in two weeks.

Monday, May 8, 2000

1015 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When Sarah got up that morning, she couldn't zip up her uniform skirt. So being that she had the maternity uniform ready to go anyway, she put that on. She remembered from her first time, that the
smock and stretchable skirt were very comfortable.

After staff call she and Harm went into AJ's office to receive their new assignment.

AJ started the briefing, "It seems that our old friend Lt. Curtis Rivers is in trouble again."

Sarah sighed and said, "Why can't he do this when I'm not pregnant. What's he done now?"

AJ and Harm each shared a laugh with her. AJ said, "Yes his timing seems to be impeccable. None the less we need to deal with him. Yesterday Lt Rivers, using his Medal of Honor, crashed an election rally in La Jolla for 'Wild Bill' Layton who is running for the California State Senate. Curtis called him an imposter. Layton, who was wearing his navy pin on his lapel, told everyone that he was a 'Navy SEAL' and running on the platform of 'integrity in government and family values.' Rivers removed the pin and Layton took a swing at him. Rivers held his hands up and stepped back until Layton came at him again so he decked him."

Harm spoke up, "I'm familiar with Layton. His campaign people called my mom asking to use her gallery for a fund raising party. She turned him down saying, 'Tell Mr. Layton that I know some real SEALs and he is not one of them.'

AJ laughed and said in agreement, "Your mother is right, Layton is not a SEAL but he had received a Navy Cross for action in the Vietnam War. Colonel you will prosecute, Commander you will defend. Let's get this resolved ASAP. And while you're out there Harm say hello to your mom from Sydney and me."

"I will sir and thank you for your regard." Harm replied.

He and Sarah left the offices and made their personal arrangements. Harm called Diane and his mother to let them know he was going to be out there. Sarah called John and he told Sarah, "Say hello to Trish for me will you sweetie. I love you."

"Of course I will honey. I love you to" Sarah said affectionately. Then she and Harm left for their 1300 flight to LAX.

On the flight out Harm let Sarah have the window seat so she could sleep undisturbed. He said, "If you weren't pregnant, we could have taken a Tomcat."

Sarah just rolled her eyes at him and said, "If we were in the Tomcat I couldn't do this." She picked her head up and kissed his cheek and then turned over to the wall, snuggled under her blanket and tried to sleep. Harm thought it was so touching that she put her newly laminated photo of her family that showed her, John and Chloe, holding Caroline, smiling wide and bright in a portrait setting. Harm saw that his sister in law did manage to sleep during most of the flight.

1530 Local Time

Los Angeles Intl. Airport, (LAX)

When they landed at LAX Trish was waiting for them, smiling brightly. She said, "I love it when you have a case out here. The only thing missing are the grandchildren." Trish patted Sarah's belly and said, "At least you have one with you. And Sarah, I was so happy to hear of Chloe's adoption. She must be very happy."

"Thank you Trish, she is." Sarah said. Then she reached into her briefcase and pulled out a wrapped package. She said to Trish, "This may not make up for their actual presence but at least you can see how Caroline has grown." It was a 5x7 framed duplicate of Sarah's laminated family portrait. Trish
was very happy to have it.

Even though John wasn't a blood relative, the fact that Sarah was her daughter in law Diane's sister, Trish considered Sarah as a surrogate daughter, much the same way Jim and Maureen considered Diane.

Trish wouldn't hear that they were going to stay at a local hotel or a VOQ. She insisted that they stay at her home while they worked the case and they readily agreed. Trish set them up in the two guest rooms.

Tuesday, May 9, 2000

1030 Local Time

Naval Special Warfare Center

Coronado, California

Sarah and Harm were interviewing Rivers as Sarah asked him, "What was it that made you feel you had the need to personally confront Layton? Why didn't you just send proof to the press?"

Rivers' answer was confrontational. "I felt I need to put his record straight personally. I'm not one to go through the press. That's the coward's way to do things."

Sara retorted, "But you assaulted the man."

Before Harm could advise Rivers to not say anything Rivers said, "I wasn't going to let him hit me. I am allowed to defend myself."

Sarah had enough. As she went to get up, Rivers put his hand out to help her up.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Sarah said as she took the proffered hand and got up.

As Sarah left Harm said, "You know lieutenant you are a very difficult client to defend. You have to learn to at least shut your mouth and let me do the talking or at least take my advice."

Rivers then answered, "Then in that case I'll make it easier on you. I'll defend myself. You can sit second chair."

Harm knew Rivers enough to realize that he could persuade him other wise and said, "You know the old saying, 'any man who represents himself has a fool for a client'."

1330 Local Time

Layton Campaign Headquarters

Cabrillo Park

San Diego, California

When Sarah was assigned to prosecute Rivers, AJ urged her to reason with Layton. So right after her meeting with Harm & Rivers she went to his campaign headquarters.

She was expecting to speak directly to Layton but instead she found his campaign manager Angela Ritter.
Ritter said, "We polled a focus group that said to convict Rivers. Then the group said that compassion was in this year."

Sarah asked, "What do you mean 'compassion is in'?"

Sarah heard a man's voice from behind her as he said, "It means that when he is convicted I step in and ask the judge for leniency. A 'Medal of Honor' winner should not be in jail."

Sarah was a bit startled by his sudden appearance. As she got up to greet Layton, she could see he was startled by her appearance.

He said, "And I see we're talking to a 'Legion of Merit' winner. Also I've never met one more beautiful or was with child."

Sarah smiled but she knew when she was being played. Layton was being totally smarmy showing off his ability to recognize award ribbons when he asked his next question. "And how did you win your medal colonel?"

Sarah smiled and briefly said, "Like the Medal of Honor one does not win the Legion of Merit. I received it with my husband." Then so as not to give Layton another chance to ask a question, she asked, "What do you have to gain by wanting Lt. Rivers convicted?"

Layton answered, "The fact that I would be proven right. He had no right to crash the party and be disrespectful, Medal recipient or not."

Sarah pointed out to him, "Do you realize that the spotlight would be turned on you?"

Layton said, "I have nothing to hide."

Sarah sighed as she put her cover on to go, "I hope so Mr. Layton. I'm calling you as a witness."

As Sarah walked out she was amused by the startled looks she got to that pronouncement.

1830 Local Time
Burnett Residence
La Jolla, CA

When they got 'home' to the Burnetts that evening they both went swimming. Frank and Harm brought chairs down to the sand for the four of them. Trish and Frank watched as their son and daughter swim. Sarah was a strong swimmer and even three months pregnant had no trouble keeping up with Harm. After their swim the four relaxed on the beach for a while before they sat down for dinner.

As the men brought the chairs back up to the house, Sarah and Trish walked back chatting together with their arms interlinked. The two women enjoyed preparing the meal together. Trish was really impressed with Sarah's culinary skills. At dinner Trish and Frank watched in amusement as they talked about everything besides the case. Frank asked them, "Is this what it's like back in DC when you oppose each other?"

Sarah answered, "Well when we leave work we go home separately. We only see each other outside of work on the weekends, usually after a case is over. When we have a case that lasts past the weekend, we stay away from each other over the weekend."
It was more interesting for me when John and I were opposing each other and we started seeing each other. Then we would go out and talk about anything but work. Thank God John can talk just about anything. I would just sit back and listen. He is definitely Irish. He does have the gift of gab."

Everyone shared a good laugh at that. The rest of the dinner conversation progressed past dessert and into the living room. Sarah and Harm shared all the family stories with the proud grandparents until everyone was ready to sleep.

Wednesday, May 10, 2000

1000 Local Time

JAG Regional Headquarters

San Diego, CA

Despite Harm's advice Rivers made his own opening statement. He began eloquently speaking rhetoric about SEALs.

Sarah objected, and the judge asked him if Harm could perform the duties of a SEAL.

Rivers responded, "No your honor."

At that Sarah asked him, "What makes you think you can do his job of a trial lawyer?"

Rivers responded, "Because I know the truth."

Sarah quipped, "Obviously you've never been to law school."

She began presenting her case. She called the campaign workers and party attendees who all gave statements as witnesses to the altercation they all said that Rivers was very belligerent and aggressive. As promised, Sarah called Layton, but as her last witness.

Rivers was involved with a group of retired SEALS who exposed imposters. When Harm asked him why he was associated with the group, Rivers pointed out that, "there were more fraudulent SEALS than real ones."

While Layton was on the stand, one person in the group named Munchak rushed in with evidence he'd just obtained.

When it was the defense's turn to cross examine Harm convinced Rivers to let him cross-examine Layton.

Harm asked, "Mr. Layton, tell us about your career in the Navy."

Sarah stood and said, "Objection your honor. Mr. Layton's military career is irrelevant to this case. It was Lt. Rivers who was charged."

The judge said, "Sustained. Commander, stay away from Mr. Layton's record."

Harm said, "Yes your honor. Mr. Layton, why did Lt. Rivers grab the trident off your lapel?"

Layton, answered, "Lt. Rivers called me a fake. I wasn't going to stand for that and I told him so. I'm not one to walk away from a fight. My record for fighting in Vietnam shows that."

Layton didn't know it but he had fallen into Harm's trap mentioning his record. That allowed Harm
to impeach his military record.

Harm asked, "Mr. Layton your record says that you were in a public affairs office writing press releases.

Layton gloated, "That was before I was transferred to combat unit."

Harm asked, "Is that how you obtained your Navy Cross?"

Layton answered, "Yes I was on a 'Riverine OP' on the Mekong Delta. We captured a North Vietnam Major on an ambush and abduction mission. We took fire as we evacuated the hot zone we came under fire. Then we interrogated him to reveal a weapons stockpile.

Harm didn't say anything. He went to the defense table and got the document that Munchak delivered. He gave it to Layton and asked him to read it.

When Layton read it in silence he blanched. Harm saw it and asked, "What's the problem Mr. Layton?"

Layton stammered as he answered, "This looks like a report of the operation on which I won the Navy Cross."

Harm countered, "Really Mr. Layton. Could you please tell us the names in the document or just tell us who received the Navy Cross?"

Layton swallowed, "The name of the recipient is one Petty Officer Mora."

Harm asked, "Mr. Layton, could you please describe the incident in question."

Layton recited from the document, "PO Mora was on a 'Riverine OP' on the Mekong Delta. His team captured a North Vietnamese Major on an ambush and abduction mission. They took fire as they evacuated the hot zone. When they returned to base they interrogated the prisoner they captured to get him to reveal a weapons stockpile."

"Mr. Layton aren't those the exact same details that you just claimed for yourself?"

"It would seem so. There were many such operations. The operation I was on was classified."

"Mr. Layton can you describe any of the men in your unit?"

"No I can't. I was pledged to secrecy because of the classified nature of the operation."

"Mr. Layton why did you wait until you were running for office to bring up your record?"

"I'm not one to go around blowing my own horn about my decorations."

"So let's examine your record. When did you start SEAL Training?"

"I earned my trident in the field when my team rescued three POWs."

Harm pounced and retrieved a document from his table. Holding it up he said, "This is a copy of a history book. Please read the highlighted portion Mr. Layton."

Layton began reading, "The POWs that came home from the Vietnam War had to wait till the war ended. There were no rescue attempts made to free them. In fact only one American had ever been rescued from captivity during the entire Vietnam War."
"Mr. Layton how do explain the discrepancy?"

Layton stammered as he claimed, "It was a black op, and no-one would admit it."

"What about the rest of your platoon?"

Layton was clearly becoming agitated as he replied, "The rest of my platoon disappeared in Cambodia. I was on solo recon and never made the mission."

Harm said, "Mr. Layton you were never a SEAL. You only become a SEAL when you go through the training required. You were one of those rear echelon clerks that saw all the heroic stories crossing your desk and you thought that you could fudge a story by just adding your name to it. Saying it was classified made it improbable that it could be checked out. You're nothing but a coward, liar and imposter. What made you believe that someone would buy your story?"

Layton couldn't answer. He just sat there.

Harm said, "Your honor the defense rests.

Sarah had no questions either as she also rested her case.

Their closing arguments were as usual short but eloquent. Sarah argued that Layton's record was not the issue here. If Lt. Rivers had a problem with Mr. Layton's record, he didn't need to confront Layton or provoke him into a fight and should be found guilty of assault and conduct unbecoming."

Harm argued, "Mr. Layton was running for office on false pretenses and Rivers felt the need to personally confront the inaccuracy of Layton's record. Besides it was Layton who threw the first punch. Based on that, Lt. Rivers should not be found guilty of anything."

The case was sent to the jury.

In the end after the jury deliberated for 90 minutes, Rivers was found not guilty of conduct unbecoming but guilty of assault and battery with forfeiture of one day's pay.

Rivers shook Harm's hand and went to shake Sarah's hand, she told him, "Lieutenant, try and stay out of trouble. I'm getting tired of coming to clean up your messes."

Rivers replied, "I'll try ma'am." He turned and walked away.

Harm joined Sarah as they walked out of the courtroom. While they were waiting at the elevator Harm said, "Mom says that she has a roast in the oven."

Sarah looked at him and smiled saying, "Harm you don't need to tiptoe around me. My feelings aren't hurt by losing this case. It was an even split. Rivers was found guilty of assault. Only the fact that Layton was a liar and he threw the first punch cleared him from the more serious charge. Let's enjoy the evening before we get on the plane home tomorrow."

Harm nodded as they got on the elevator and left the courthouse and went to the Burnetts to enjoy the rest of their stay. Early the next morning, they caught the first flight home.
After Sarah returned home late Thursday, AJ gave her and Harm Friday off to recoup from the trip. It was fortunate that Sarah returned home Thursday. John had tickets for him, Sarah and Chloe for the Kennedy Center's production of the ballet of Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty for Friday night. While John was waiting to pick up Sarah on Thursday John stayed home with Caroline. There he set about making babysitting arrangements. He called over to JAG to speak to AJ.

After John got past Tiner, AJ picked up the phone saying, "Captain what can I do for you today?"

John replied, "Admiral how would you like some practice being a grandparent to your goddaughter?"

AJ smiled as he replied, "What do you have in mind?"

John went on to explain about the ballet and said, "Sarah and I want to take Chloe to something nice. She is still not sleeping well and a nice night out with us will go a long way to helping her relax. With all that, Sarah and I thought you and Sydney would like to spend the evening with Caroline while we do that."

AJ replied, "You know John I'm glad you asked. Sydney and I would really like that. We don't have plans for tomorrow night."

John continued, "That's great admiral. The show starts at 8:00. So if you and Sydney can be at the house between 7:00 and 7:30 that will be fine. Sarah and I really appreciate this. We'll see you tomorrow."

AJ said, "Okay John we'll see you tomorrow."

John was dressed in his favorite white jacket and brown slacks as he was pacing the foyer waiting for Sarah and Chloe to get ready. AJ and Sydney were sitting on the living room couch. Sydney was holding Caroline as she gave her a bottle. Caroline was sucking quite energetically. Sydney was astounded that when she finished, the Playtex bag was totally sucked into the nipple.
Sydney smiled and said, "This child can really put it away." She put Caroline onto her shoulder to burp her. Caroline let loose a good one. AJ, John and Sydney had a good laugh. Just then Sarah and Chloe came down the stairs.

John just stared at the visions in front of him. Chloe was wearing a red silk dress with a high straight bodice and short puffed sleeves. Sarah was wearing a green silk sleeveless dress that showed plenty of cleavage at the bodice and hung down to cover her still small baby bump. Their hairdos were done up in identical ringlets that cascaded down to lovingly frame their faces.

John just said, "Wow you two look great."

Chloe shyly said, "Thank you daddy."

Sarah looked on and smiled as John pulled Chloe into a tight hug then helped her put on a shawl that matched her dress. While John dealt with Chloe, Sarah tried to put on her pearl bracelet. Seeing that Sarah was having the usual difficulty, AJ got up to help her out. "Here Mac I'll help."

Sarah gratefully stepped over to him. He had the same difficulty as John always had with the clasp. Sarah smiled as he patiently closed the clasp.

She leaned over and gave him a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you, sir. We really appreciate you and Sydney giving up your Friday night to babysit Caroline. I hope she doesn't give you any trouble."

AJ said, "How much trouble can a ten month old give a doctor and a SEAL? Also it's our pleasure. We don't get to do this very often. It's the least I can do for my Chief of Staff."

Sarah smiled and said, "Well thanks just the same. Caroline has already had her baby food dinner and she has more bottles in the fridge. She usually has one just before she goes to sleep about 9:00. Just put one in hot water for 30 seconds and it will be warm enough for her."

As John put a shawl across Sarah's back Sydney stood and walked to the door with the family. "Don't worry we have taken care of children before." She shooed them to the door. "Now go have a good time."

Sydney bent and gave Sarah a kiss then Chloe and finally John. They went out and got into John's Camaro and went to the ballet.

2230 Local Time

Marshall Residence

The night at the ballet was a total success as Chloe couldn't stop talking about it all the way home. Even AJ and Sydney stayed a little while and indulged her recitation of the performance. They only left when Chloe began to yawn then fell asleep on the couch. Sarah and John walked AJ & Sydney to the door and hugged and kissed them as they said goodnight.

Sarah said to them, "We really appreciate your doing this for us. I haven't seen Chloe this happy in a long time."

AJ said, "Mac we were glad to do it."

Sarah said to AJ, "Admiral could you please do me a small favor?"

AJ smirked and gave her a look that said, 'What did we just do?' but said, "Go ahead Mac."
Sarah took a good breath and went on. "When we're away from the office, could you please call me Sarah? I don't know if you've noticed but Harm and John haven't called me 'Mac' since the time Diane and I found each other. Mac is the name I use as a defense to strangers and those who don't really know me or aren't that close to me. I mean you've given me away at my wedding. You're Caroline's godfather. You've become such a big part of the family that it's only right that you call me Sarah."

AJ's smirk changed from indulgence to actual tenderness. Even Sydney was shedding a tear. AJ just opened his arms and Sarah willingly went to him as he enveloped her into a tender fatherly hug. "Alright Sarah if it will make you feel better. Do me a favor then leave the sirs and the admirals at work and leave it at AJ when we're together at family times."

Sarah shed a tear of her own and kissed his cheek. "Thank you AJ. I'll see you at the office Monday. Have a good weekend."

After they watched AJ and Sydney get into their car John went to pick up Chloe in his arms and bring her up to her room. Sarah followed them up to help John put Chloe to bed.

Monday, May 15, 2000

To

Friday, May 19, 2000

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

On Saturday Sarah and John took the kids down to Williamsburg to tour the Old Town and to the Busch Gardens Amusement Park. Sarah gladly waited rocking Caroline in the stroller as John and Chloe went on all the rides. They went to church down there and then stayed overnight and left Sunday morning. When they got home they relaxed the rest of the day away.

On Monday Harm and Sarah were handed a very personally volatile case. Ten years ago Lt. Commander Teresa Coulter came to her parents' house and found her mother dead in bed. She turned down the thermostat, opened the window. She stopped the record player which was stuck on a depressing song and noticed the dead goldfish. Her father, Capt. Thomas Chaddock and her mother, Ellen Chaddock had a history of fighting with him hitting her at different times. As a result he was the prime suspect and he was convicted of Ellen's murder. He was doing time in Leavenworth for the murder.

Shortly after he was given the case Harm went to the appellate court and obtained a new trial. Early on Tuesday morning Teresa stormed into Harm's office.

She said to Harm, "Why did you get a new trial from for my father?"

Harm gently explained, "The defense attorney was only 26 years old, his first murder trial. He conducted ineffective cross examination, and failed to interview key witnesses.

During his interview with Harm, Captain Chaddock confided in him, "I wrote to Teresa many times without response. I admit I was abusive to Ellen and that forced Teresa to hate me."

Harm gave Chaddock some comfort saying, "If I know Teresa, she'll come around when we prove you innocent. Also please don't worry about any conflict of interest because of me knowing your
daughter"

Chaddock said, "I'm not worried about because I can see that you are a principled man."

For the retrial Sarah was assigned to prosecute and Bud as Harm's second chair.

The investigation revealed the following:

Capt. French, Chaddock's next door neighbor, said he'd heard many arguments from the Captain but only twice from the wife: once, the day of the death when Captain left; and, second, the day before with Rory Coulter, her son-in-law. He told NCIS about it but they weren't interested. French said that a furnace repairman was there and heard the argument as well.

Teresa informed her mother that Rory had a job offer in California and they were going to move there. Teresa said this upset her mother greatly. Teresa also said that Rory was a weak man who ran from problems and had left her after her mother died rather than face Teresa's grief.

Teresa told Harm if he valued their friendship he'd drop Rory as a suspect. He went to talk to Rory anyway and found that he stole a car when he was 18 and hadn't put it on his job application. Rory told Harm that his mother-in-law told him that she had "ways to stop me" from taking Teresa to California. The job offer was withdrawn shortly afterward so she must have called the company and told them. Rory got upset with Harm and Bud and stormed out, leaving his jacket. Harm was showing plainly that all the prosecution evidence was circumstantial. Teresa wouldn't speak to her father in court.

Sarah called Teresa to the stand. She testified that her father had berated her mother on a daily basis and had threatened to kill her if she ever told him to shut up again. A week before her death, her mother called Teresa and said she'd thrown the Captain out because he assaulted her. Bud got her to admit that her mother and husband were angry with each other.

There was a single un-identified hair found on her mother's body which Bud matched to a hair on Rory's coat left in the office. Sarah refused to bargain.

Gunny found that the furnace repairman Ramón Arguento ran out of material so he had to leave the house to get more. He left the repair of the propane furnace incomplete but he also posted a sign advising against using it.

Sarah went to see Rory. But he refused to talk to her, on his attorney's advice. To remedy this she brought Teresa. Teresa asked him why he was acting so guilty. Later he skipped town which hurt Sarah's case so Teresa offered to help "find more evidence against him" and asked for the autopsy. Instead, she found that the autopsy showed "minimal brain swelling" not matching the supposed cause of death by trauma. She refused Harm's request for exhumation.

Her father testified that he threatened his wife many times but the first time he ever hurt her was a week before her death when he pushed her and she hit her head on a bed post. She never left him because she was afraid to be left all alone but she called him every day at the motel. He argued with her but she refused to take him back.

Based on that, Teresa allowed the exhumation which showed that there was some bone healing of the fracture before death. Harm and Bud stayed into the night going over seemingly unrelated clues. The next day during the examining of Teresa on the stand, it was revealed that her mother had committed suicide by turning on the defective furnace thus expelling carbon monoxide into the room and also killing the fish. Based on that evidence Chaddock was acquitted.
When the trial was over, Captain Chaddock stayed in the back of the courtroom hoping to speak to his daughter.

Seeing this, Sarah said, "Teresa, stay a bit, please."

Teresa sighed as she relented with, "Okay."

"Do you remember when we were together for the Blackhorse case and I told you the story of my family?"

"Yes I do."

"You have a golden opportunity to make things right with your father. Before I got married, John and I tried to find my dad but he didn't want to be found. We only found him when the priest, Father Genaro, who ran the hospice Dad was in, called me."

"How did you deal with that? How did you reconcile with him?"

"On the flight out to see him Diane, John and Harm and I had a long talk. They all told me that I had to lay my anger aside. What already happened was in the past. Nothing I would have said or done would have changed anything. So they as well as Father Genaro told me that the best way to find peace was through forgiveness."

"So were you able to tell your father that you forgave him?"

"Yes, I got to Dad just in time. I found out that despite everything he went through and put me through, he really truly loved me. He just didn't know how to express it. It was only when he was facing his own death, was he able to tell me he loved me. Also he got to meet his other daughter, Diane, whom my mom kept secret from him. When Diane was born, our mother put her up for adoption because she couldn't handle taking care of two babies alone. It was only pure coincidence that we found each other."

"What did your dad say when he met her?"

"Dad told Diane that if he knew her, he would have been just as proud of her. We were lucky. So don't pass this up."

"Okay I'll give it a try."

Sarah walked out of the courtroom with Teresa. They encountered Captain Chaddock at the elevators.

Despite her talk with Sarah, Teresa was still insecure so that when she approached her father all she could get out was, "Hi."

Sarah smiled and walked away to leave them to settle things between them.

Saturday, May 20, 2000

1530 Local Time

International Place Shopping Center

Arlington, VA

While Bud, Harm and John stayed home at the Marshalls with the kids, Chloe, Harriet, Meg, Sarah
and Diane were shopping for gowns. The four moms were going to the Surface Warfare Ball on the next Friday.

Even though Sarah, at just a little over two & ½ months pregnant and was wearing her maternity smock at work she only did it for the comfort. Her baby bump was not that big and she could still wear a gown, even one that was only two sizes bigger than usual.

Chloe was along for the shopping experience because Sarah wanted to include her in as many mother-daughter activities as she could. Sarah found a beautiful sleeveless red gown that plunged down to show her cleavage. As usual Sarah's breasts were getting bigger due to her pregnancy and the gown showed them to full advantage. Diane found a purple gown that clung to her slim frame from her shoulders to her hips and flared down to the floor. The gown plunged down to also show a lot of cleavage as well as falling down her back in a dramatic drape.

Meg found a gown that perfectly suited her tall frame and curvy body. It was light green, with a bodice held up by spaghetti straps. The bodice plunged to show her ample cleavage.

"With all the cleavage we'll be showing, you and I may end up like Sarah and Harriet at the end of the night." Meg joked to Diane.

All four women shared a good laugh. Still at the end of the day Harriet hadn't found anything that she liked or was in her price range or anything that would fit over her own bigger baby bump. She was becoming very frustrated saying, "Nothing looks good on me, even the maternity dresses."

Diane told her, "Harriet I have an idea. Come home with me and we'll try something."

Harriet agreed. She called Bud to let him know where she would be for the remainder of the afternoon as she went home with Diane.

Knowing that the other three wives were going out together, John also invited Bob Pike as well as Harm and Bud to come over. So he brought his daughter Cat with him. The men spent the day in the man-cave shooting pool while the kids alternated between watching one of their movies on the TV and just running around the room. John took the precaution of locking his workroom and placing the infant barrier at the bottom of the stairs to keep the toddlers on the same floor. The men loved the idea of spending family time without the wives.

They all got a kick out of Cat Pike, who was the oldest of all the children, trying to lead them around. Bob had to tell her more than once to be nice when she started feeling frustrated that the other toddlers weren't playing what she wanted them to.

The guys had 90 minutes of quiet time when the kids took naps. It was a touching sight to see the six children either sleeping in the two portable cribs, as with Caroline, AJ and the two Rabb twins or on the fold out sofa bed as Sarah Cate Rabb and Cat Pike, while the four men sat and quietly watched the ball game. It was Harriet's call to Bud that alerted the other fathers that the shopping was over and it was time to go home.

Sarah and Chloe went directly to church at St. Thomas where they met John as he took Caroline there. The Marshalls spent Sunday relaxing and watching baseball and eating on the patio as John cooked a steak as Sarah and Chloe prepared a salad and corn on the cob.

Monday, May 22, 2000

To

Friday, May 26, 2000
AJ's first order of business on Monday was to inform Bud that his brother Mikey was in trouble. Mikey was charged with improperly setting a CIWS gun (it fires 6,000 rounds per minute) and nearly hitting a boat of disembarking marines.

The incident was during a training exercise in Florida. As the fire control man aboard the USS Wake Island Mikey took over control of shooting down a drone after the prime control center had a malfunction. The drone should have gone around again but Commander Lyle ordered Mikey to go ahead when Marine Lt. Colonel Pergament said he didn't have time.

Mikey told the XO he "didn't do it," a "little too loud" so Lyle threw him in the brig on bread and water for 3 days. When Bud arrived on the Wake Island he found him there. Bud then began asking questions of the crew.

Mikey's apprentice, Harold Schofield, said he checked the "no-fire" settings and they were correct. The landing boatman said the marines was off course and had corrected.

Pergament took issue of Bud' questions and sent him "unofficially" to the brig for 24-hours to question his own brother. As a result AJ sent Sarah to straighten it out. Bud told her that she was a "marine and could break through their wall of silence." Pergament told her that she "was a marine and could break through the navy crap."

There was infighting between marines (who used all the water and took two pieces of pie each) and sailors and their leaders. When Mikey got out of the brig, his buddies told him he should have aimed higher to actually hit the "jarheads."

During it all, local environmentalists were trying to obstruct the navy's use of Florida land after a mishap in Puerto Rico had killed a civilian and the governor had kicked the navy off their routine practice site.

When Mac asked Lyle why he didn't have the drone go around again he got angry with her. So AJ sent Harm down to settle things down. Harm saw the series of mishaps as a pattern.

A protest rubber raft steered directly at the ship "looking for an incident which would make headlines." The protesters all jumped in the water then sent their boat into the ship's hull. Harm spoke with a female protestor and found that she knew of the gun incident and Mikey by name. Seeing their hurried, poor planning of the incident he realized it was last minute because they thought the exercise would have already been canceled. She confessed that the group had "hacked into the navy computer and caused the gun accident."

Harm recommended the exercise be cancelled which ticked off both Lyle and Pergament.

On Wednesday Harm and Sarah called AJ and reported the infighting, mishaps as well as the obstruction and finger pointing from both Lyle & Pergament. AJ called SECNAV Nelson. He recommended that NCIS be sent in to investigate possible criminal charges. So AJ called Admiral Magnum and he sent John and Dinozzo out to the Wake Island.

John and Tony arrived early Thursday morning. The first thing John did was get Lyle and Pergament alone in the Captain's quarters. John was wearing his khakis that showed his rank as Captain. Upon seeing his rank Lyle & Pergament stood and snapped to attention.

John asked, "I wonder were you two this courteous when you met Colonel Marshall?"
Lyle and Pergament just looked bewilderingly at each other.

"I'll take that as a no. Was it because she was a woman and you were looking at her breasts; because as both of you as O-5s do not out rank her?"

Lyle stammered, "Captain I apologize for any disrespect."

John just said, Uh huh."

Keeping the two at attention John started by showing them the SECNAV's orders and the saying, "Gentlemen you disappoint me. This rivalry you have fostered between the sailors and marines is appalling. The two of you were more interested in fixing the blame than in fixing the problem. It totally goes against all the principles of good order and discipline.

On top of that you two are treading very close to being charged with obstructing an official JAG-Man investigation by throwing the first JAG officer in the brig because you didn't 'like his tone' and stonewalling the next JAG officers' inquiries by pointing fingers at each other. I am very close to recommending that an article 32 hearing be convened. The first people against whom I would bring charges are you two. Then I'll go into who screwed around with the CIWS gun."

Both officers squirmed under the tongue lashing.

John continued, "Now this is what is going to happen. You two will cooperate fully with Mr. Dinozzo, Commander Rabb, Colonel Marshall and most especially Lt. Roberts. If you had done that in the first place we wouldn't be having this conversation and you two would not be facing obstruction charges. Am I making myself clear?"

The two officers both answered in a halfhearted "Aye sir."

John cocked his head saying, "What was that?"

Lyle & Pergament both stood straighter at attention and bellowed, "Aye, Aye sir!"

"That's better, carry on." John said. He then turned to leave.

Harm and Sarah were standing outside the captain's quarters. They both shared smiles and looks as they heard John lace into Lyle & Pergament. When John came out they both stood at attention, barely suppressing their smiles.

John smiled at them and said, "Knock it off." Addressing Harm and pointing his thumb back over his shoulder he said, "They're all yours." Harm walked into the room.

Addressing his wife he said in a low tone, "Colonel you look exceptionally beautiful. Would you like to come home with me?"

Sarah smiled and went along batting her eyes and answering like a southern belle, "Why Captain I bet you say that to all the pregnant Marine Colonels you see."

Holding hands she and John walked down the corridor to talk more privately where John answered, "No just the one I'm married to." Sarah smiled and gave him a quick kiss. Still holding her hand John said, "I'm hopping on the next chopper off here. I'm leaving Tony here to continue the investigation. I should be home in time to pick-up Caroline from daycare for the end of the day. If I see that I may be late I'll call Diane. If everything goes right you may end this tonight and leave in the morning."

Sarah answered, "That sounds good. Who did you get to mind the kids tomorrow when we go to the
Surface Warfare Ball?"

John answered, "Alicia Barnett from across the street agreed to watch them. Her parents will be home if she has any trouble. She'll walk over at 1830. She's bringing some 'chick flicks' she can watch with Chloe and Caroline."

(The Barnetts were an African American family who had moved in across from the Marshalls the previous year. Their only child, Alicia, was 17 ½ years old and a high school senior on her school's honor role. Nicholas and Dorothy Barnett had befriended John and Sarah as Nicholas was a major in the Air Force's JAG Corps and Dorothy was a senior special agent in the FBI's financial fraud division. They had some pleasant eat over times as the four professionals discussed a debated the merits of each other's jobs, cases and other general topics.)

Sarah said, "That's great John. AJ already told Harm and I not to bother coming into the office tomorrow after we leave here and have our report ready by Monday. So I'll have time to get ready."

Just then they heard the announcement that the next chopper off the carrier was going to leave in 15 minutes.

Kissing his wife goodbye John said, "There's my ride. I'll see you tomorrow."

Smiling deviously Sarah grabbed him and pulled him into a private corner and laid a long, deep, slow kiss on him. As she felt him get aroused against her belly, she smiled into their kiss. When they broke apart Sarah said, "That's to keep you honest till then."

John could only groan and pull away to settle down. He said, "I love you 'ninja girl'."

Sarah replied, "I love you to 'hot stuff'."

When he was ready he had to run to get to the flight deck. He made it to the chopper a mere 10 seconds before the chopper's crew chief closed the door.

When Harm walked in to start over with Lyle & Pergament, Pergament asked, "Where did he get off talking to us like that?"

Harm answered, "Well the captain is the Assistant Director of NCIS and also Colonel Marshall's husband. He and the colonel got the Legion of Merit medals working the same mission. He doesn't take any crap from anyone. I should know we worked together at JAG when I first started there.

When the SECNAV heard that the problems we were encountering conducting this investigation were coming from the top of the chain of command, he couldn't get John on the chopper out to here fast enough. Also the captain did have orders from the SECNAV instructing you on full compliance. So unless you want 'him' to come back out here, I suggest we get down to business, gentlemen."

Lyle asked, "How come you get off calling him by his first name?"

"His wife and my wife are sisters," Harm answered simply.

Lyle and Pergament said nothing about that as they set about resolving the investigation.

At that the investigation resumed. Harm conjectured that the protestors might not have hacked into the computer but had a spy instead. He suggested that Mikey "walk them through it." Mikey left the console for a 5 minute head break and again afterwards to see what had happened. Both times he locked it but Schofield had Mikey's access code. Harm interviewed Schofield again. He got Schofield to admit that his girlfriend Jennifer had talked him into sabotaging the gun to fire close to
the Marines. He admitted that his only goal was to stop the exercise because it was firing in an area where he used to fish as a boy. Dinozzo, Sarah and Harm got together to write the report. They were able to leave the Wake Island on the first chopper in the morning.

Friday, May 26, 2000

1700 Local Time

Surface Warfare Ball

Willard Hotel

John and Sarah walked into the hotel and met up with Harm and Diane in the lobby as they all went up to the ballroom. The Rabbs had gotten their own teenage neighbor to watch their children for the night. When they arrived at the ballroom entrance, they met AJ & Sydney as well as the Pikes. AJ was receiving an award at the Surface Warfare Ball. Despite that he was somewhat agitated.

After they went through the usual amenities, John asked, "Admiral what's the matter?"

AJ answered, "Before the problems with his brother on the Wake Island came up I assigned Bud to write my speech. But because of that incident he hadn't gotten around to it until this afternoon when he came back. He isn't here yet and I'm still waiting for the final draft."

Just then Loren Singer walked up to the group. She was escorted by Lt. Aldrich. Harm greeted them saying, "Lieutenant Aldrich, good to see you again. I was glad to see you were assigned to headquarters. I haven't had the chance to say hello until now."

Aldrich replied, "It's good to see you to sir. I only got here Tuesday while you were out on the Wake Island. Lieutenant Singer asked me to accompany her to the ball tonight."

Loren grinned as John and Sarah shook hers and Aldrich's hand when Harm introduced them to him. She had originally asked Meg's brother Bobby to accompany her, but he was called out of town on an assignment. Aldrich was her 'plan B'. Meg felt bad about that. She knew Loren and Bob were onto something nice.

Just then Bud and Harriet walked up to the group. Sarah, John, Harm and even Singer oohed and ahhed over Harriet's gown.

Diane smiled as the others just looked at Harriet in awe. Harriet was wearing Diane's maternity gown that she wore at the ball for Romanian Princess Alexie. After Harriet's unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable gown at the malls, Diane brought her home to look at the gown. Harriet was totally enchanted by the gown and had immediately agreed that it was the one for her. So being that Diane was very good with a sewing machine, she had over the course of the week shortened the gown and taken it in to fit Harriet's smaller frame.

Bud was kept out of the loop the whole week and she kept him out of their bedroom as she changed. When Harriet came out in the gown, he was totally floored by the vision before him. Harriet had immediately been very happy at his reaction.

Now she was beaming as she got that same reaction from her friends.

AJ got over his awe at Harriet's beauty and gruffly asked, "Lieutenant Roberts, do you have something for me?"

Bud was unperturbed as he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a three page, double spaced
AJ took the document and scanned it; he looked up slightly perturbed, "'Kicked me out' lieutenant?"

Bud stammered slightly as he replied, "I went for some humor there sir."

AJ sighed as he said, "Well this will do."

Just as the couples each linked arms and lined up to enter they all heard, "Wait for us."

The whole group of officers and escorts turned and were totally surprised to see Rene Peterson and Mic Brumby walking arm in arm toward them. Rene was wearing a stunning blue bustier gown with a matching shawl. Mic was wearing his Australian Navy Mess Dress Uniform.

Seeing everyone's looks Rene hurriedly explained, "I got an invitation from the recruiting office for the work Harm, Diane and I did on the recruiting commercial."

Mic took up the verbal baton and said, "And seeing that the trouble in East Timor has been resolved the RAN assigned me back here as their Naval Attaché to the Australian Embassy. I got here just this past Wednesday. I let Rene know I was in town again and she invited me to come out tonight. It's good to see you all again."

AJ then piped up saying, "Enough with the chit-chat Brumby, we're going in."

At that, the whole group processed into the ballroom.
Chapter 59

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 59

Saturday, June 3, 2000

1400 Local Time

Camden Yards Orioles Ballpark

Baltimore, MD

After relaxing Saturday and Sunday, Harm had the week from hell. He was out in the Florida Straits on the frigate USS Stanley Dace. The frigates skipper, Captain Berroa went to rescue Reynalda Montilla, a girl floating in the ocean off Cuba, and was "painted" by a Cuban vessel. They backed the vessel off but Chegwidden sent Harm and Bud to investigate.

Berroa, a Cuban orphan himself, said that Reynalda would probably be sent back because she wasn't "feet dry" (having had her feet on US soil).

When Reynalda was being examined in the infirmary she said that she and her father were in a 12 foot scow going to Florida when it sank in total darkness. He put air in his pants for a flotation device for her but was separated. She was poked by sharks until rescued. Her mother died when she was three and said she wanted to be taken to the U.S.

Berroa denied permission for the INS agent, Mrs. Vitagliano, to land aboard the ship and told Harm that he was going to see that Reynalda got to the US. Thinking quick, Harm suggested that the INS might send Reynalda to the US because her father was dead and she had relatives in Florida.

Chegwidden told Harm that the President was having 'Elian Gonzales nightmares' and doesn't want her anywhere near US soil." Harm didn't tell Chegwidden about the helicopter incident then explained to Bud that he "respected the captain because he was smart enough to stay true to his principles without breaking rules."

Vitagliano said she was sending Reynalda back because she had relatives in Cuba with the means to care for her. She explained that the circuit appeals court had held that a 12 year old could apply for asylum but a 6 year old wasn't old enough to do it.

Reynalda began having stomach cramps while the Berroa was talking to her and he suggested that they take Reynalda to the US for diagnosis and treatment. Alone, he told her he hadn't suggested Reynalda fake an illness because he "breaks rules cleanly." Reynalda developed a fever so Vitagliano decided to allow taking her to the US.

While Harm was on speakerphone explaining to the SECNAV Nelson and Chegwidden they heard the general quarters alarm on the ship and Harm hung up. The Cubans claimed that Orlando Montilla, her father, was picked up by a garbage scow and returned to Cuba. Reynalda became "stable" so Vitagliano flip-flopped and wanted to send her back. Harm suggested that they verify the Cubans claim and the government invited Vitagliano and Harm to come and see. They were taken to see Castro and were shown on ZNN where Chegwidden could see.

The Cuban interpreter wasn't doing it right so Harm confronted her on it. She then interpreted
correctly but the father seemed pressured to say that he was happy in Cuba with his newly offered job and wanted to be with Reynalda.

Harm told the captain of his orders and Berroa ordered him to stand down then headed for Key West. He told them that his Cuban parents had sent him, at four year of age, alone, to the US when they heard that Cuban children were being sent to school in East Germany. His father died in prison and his mother died of "heart failure" when she was 38. SECNAV Nelson and Chegwidden called and Berroa put the call on speakerphone so SECNAV Nelson couldn't swear or act abusive. Chegwidden advised SECNAV Nelson to relieve Berroa of command and before he could Berroa cut the connection.

Harm advised the XO, Cdr. William Crozier, to get Nelson back on the phone but he said that he wouldn't. Harm asked if it was worth "your career to take a dive for the captain's principles."

Crozier wanted to talk to Reynalda who then told them that she still wanted to go to the US because she and her father had made an agreement that the one who made it would stay and the other would keep trying.

A flash message came to the XO from Nelson and Berroa put Crozier under arrest so he couldn't take it. When they arrived at Key West they were stopped by Rodney Koger of the state department who told Vitagliano that it was the 7th circuit appeals court that set up the age of 12 and "we are in the 11th circuit."

Harm stepped in with the idea that the parents' wishes had no bearing when they were "abusive. He endangered her life in a broken down ship." He suggested Vitagliano take Reynalda into custody for processing. And Berroa said "if the father wants to contest it he can come here to testify."

Vitagliano backed Koger down the Reynalda was shown putting her feet on US soil and Berroa taken into custody. Vitagliano told Harm that if she "wasn't too old, too short or too married… never mind."

Harm was just glad that the ordeal lasted only 3 days and he could go home to his family.

Now the Rabbs, Marshalls and AJ & Sydney had box seat tickets at the ballpark. The Orioles were playing the Twins. AJ received the tickets another admiral friend at the Pentagon. The admiral had season tickets for a field level box that had 12 seats. He offered them AJ and he had invited his two senior attorneys and their families.

They had met at the ballpark. Chloe had never been to a ballpark but she understood the game and the Orioles were her favorite team. John bought her a cap and an Orioles Cal Ripkin jersey. Chloe was sitting in the front row of the box and she was thoroughly enjoying herself jumping up and cheering when the Orioles did well and booing and generally yelling her displeasure when they didn't do well. She even got on the plate umpire's case in the 7th inning on a close play that found Melvin Mora out at the plate. Shouting, "Aw c'mon ump! You need glasses! He was safe by a step."

Sarah Cate was bouncing herself and shouting along with her cousin, "Yeah ump. He was safe."

The adults were having a good time watching them. John held Caroline on his shoulder during the whole game. Even with all the cheering and jumping, Caroline remained calm and happy. John could hear her giggling as he bounced her on his shoulder. Harm also had Samantha on his shoulder and she was sleeping throughout the game. Trey on the other hand was being somewhat rambunctious. He was bouncing and squealing in his baby seat. He was trying to join his sister in the fun and he was letting everyone know his displeasure. It wasn't until AJ picked him up and held him so he could see everything that he calmed down.
The day ended when the Orioles won the game and the families all went out to dinner at a family style restaurant in the Harbor Mall.

When they arrived home, Chloe couldn't wait to see the game's replay on ESPN. She was disappointed to see that the plate umpire was right as Mora was indeed out on the play.

Tuesday, June 6, 2000

1930 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

On Monday night at Norfolk Ensign Susan Kingsley killed Misty James, her husband Andy's lover, with a pipe. She was forcing Andy to break up with Misty in her presence. A fight ensued where Misty was killed by Susan as she repeatedly hit Misty on her head with a pipe.

John's NCIS Crime Scene Team performed the initial investigation. Because the victim was a civilian, her body was turned over to the civilian coroner for autopsy. The investigation was concluded quickly as all parties agreed that Susan was the one wielding the pipe. The only question of guilt that needed to be resolved was whether 'self defense' played a part in the homicide.

Harm and Sarah were given the case on Tuesday afternoon. On Tuesday evening they went to NCIS Headquarters where the Kingsleys were being held. Sarah interviewed the husband Andy Kingsley while Harm interviewed Susan.

After Sarah advised him of his rights, Andy waived his right to be silent. His story was he met Misty James while Susan was deployed as the disbursement Officer on the John O'Connor. He met Misty at the Mini-Mart on base and he bought her ice cream.

"What was your wife's reaction?"

"Susan went ballistic ma'am. She wouldn't listen to reason. I had to restrain her."

"That's why you arranged a meeting with Miss James?"

"Yeah, then Susan got into the car to go with me. She told me I had to do it in front of her. My wife had a pipe in her hand. She must have brought it with her. Before I knew what was happening, she was attacking Misty.

"Did your wife say anything?"

"I tried to stop Susan, I tried to protect Misty. Then Susan turned on me. I never saw her like that before.

After she was advised of her rights, Susan told her story to Harm. "I thought he was being sweet buying me ice cream. But he was having an affair. A friend of mine saw them."

"What did you do then?"

"I confronted him and told him we were married for keeps and we needed to work this out. I told him to break it off.

"Why did you agree to accompany your husband?"
"Andy made me go with him. I didn't want to, it was degrading."

"What did you do when you got to the meeting place?"

"He got out of the car and they started hugging. So I got out of the car. I told him if he was going to
 do it he should do it. I think I was crying.

"What happened then?"

"The girl, she came at me with some kind of pipe. She swung it at me.

"What happened then?"

"I must have ducked, I don't remember. She came at me again. I grabbed the pipe and I swung it."

"Did you strike the blows that killed Misty James?"

"She tried to kill me sir, she and my husband. He tried to grab me to help her."

Harm was perplexed as he asked, "Why would your husband and Miss James try to kill you?"

"They were having an affair and I was in the way."

"Why not just file for divorce?"

"My family is rich sir. Andy wanted my money. I think that's all he ever wanted. I don't think he
 really loved me."

Sarah went home in John's NCIS car which he for Sarah to drive home because he took Caroline
 home in the Trailblazer so that he was there when Chloe came home from school.

Wednesday, June 7, 2000

1030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

After they had sat through the daily Staff Call, Harm and Sarah were in his office comparing notes on
 their interviews.

Harm said, "You should have seen her Sarah, she was breaking my heart."

"Her husband said she was more into breaking heads."

"Well she said they were trying to kill her."

"Kinda takes 'he said, she said' to a whole new level."

At that Gunny Galindez knocked on the door. "Ma'am, sir I have the preliminary autopsy report on
 Misty James and the forensics."

Harm replied, "Great thanks Gunny." As Gunny went to leave Harm asked, "Ah Gunny, you
 worked homicide in New Mexico, didn't you?"

Gunny replied, "Yes sir, until I got shot in left posterior."
Harm chuckled and said, "Stick around will ya and ask Chief Gardiner to come in." As Gunny went to get Emma he also got another chair.

Sarah started reading the report aloud, "The decedent received three blows to the head from a heavy linear object. A short length of pipe recovered at the scene was found to be consistent to the injuries sustained."

Harm replied, "Well there is no argument there. Both parties concur that Ensign Kingsley swung the pipe."

Sarah asked, "Well was it murder or self defense?"

Emma asked, "Any defensive wounds on the victim ma'am?"

Sarah looked at the report and said, "No marks on the hands and no marks on the arms."

Gunny said, "So she was caught by surprise ma'am."

Sarah answered, "Yeah which matches the husband's story."

Harm said, "Ensign Kingsley had no marks on her body."

Emma said, "Sounds like a one sided fight sir."

Harm then said, "There were two sets of fingerprints on the pipe, Ensign Kingsley and Misty James""

Sara said, "Which supports her claim that they were fighting for it."

Harm then said, "Miss James prints were formed in part on cerebral fluid."

Emma said disbelievingly, "She grabbed onto the pipe after her brains were splattered all over it."

She paused and looked at Gunny, Harm than at Sarah and added, "It's kinda hard to do."

The other three just looked at each other. They were both thinking that Kingsley was lying. Then they got up to go into AJ's office to consult him on the case. They were waiting for him in his office.

When AJ walked in they stood at attention. He told them "Morning, have a seat."

Harm began, "We're here to give you recommendation on Misty James' murder, sir."

AJ asked, "Did somebody really name her Misty?"

Harm answered, "Yes sir."

Sarah began, "Sir we believe that Ensign Kingsley murdered her."

AJ continued, "Jealous wife kills husband's lover."

Sarah said, "Yes sir the forensic evidence is pretty clear. We even have the husband as an eyewitness."

AJ read from a note, "Apparently the ensign thought you might pick her as the killer, she went and hired her own lawyer. Colonel, how do you feel about going up against your old professor?"

"Juanita Ressler?"

"Ensign Kingsley is going first class."
"I welcome the opportunity sir."

"Good, Roberts will assist. Commander you will look into the death of Petty Officer Mateo Palermo."

"The suicide investigation sir?"

"A suicide investigation aboard the carrier Seahawk. You can keep up your carrier quals while you're there."

"Thank you sir."

The two got up and left the office. On the way they encountered Bud and Harriet. Harriet was carrying little AJ.

Harm said the usual comments of AJ getting big and the Redskins needing a new lineman.

Gunny came over to tell Harm, "Sir Mrs. Palermo is waiting in your office. Harm went off to deal with that investigation.

Sarah asked to hold him. AJ cried a little and they walked into Sarah's office.

Once in there Harriet spoke up, "Ma'am, while you were in court the yesterday I was having some pelvic pain and Bud took me to Dr. Baldwin's office."

Sarah answered, "Is everything okay?"

Harriet went onto explain, "She did an ultrasound and she said that I just had a ligament strain."

Harriet paused then added, "The ultrasound also showed that the baby was a girl."

Sarah happily said, "Oh that's so great. You guys are so lucky having a girl this time, one of each. John and I are hoping for a boy this time." She put AJ down and patted her own baby bump which was just beginning to pop.

Harriet started to ask, "Well when I found out that I was having a girl, Bud and I thought about Sarah."

"Whose Sarah?"

Bud answered, "Well technically you are ma'am, Sarah."

Harriet said, "We decided to call our baby girl Sarah after you, if that's alright with you colonel."

Sarah sighed and smiled saying, "I'd like that. That makes three. John and I should start calling all the Sarahs by just their middle names. What middle name are you picking?"

Harriet answered, "Well since you're Catholic, we called John and asked him what your Confirmation name was. He told us Elizabeth."

Sarah said, "That would be so great."

Harriet was so grateful.

1830 Local Time

Sarah's Office
Sarah and Bud worked through the morning. Sarah took a break for lunch as she and Emma went to the daycare center to see their daughters. Then she and Bud worked through the afternoon and into the early evening. John went and picked up Caroline. He called Sarah and told her that he was making dinner and it would be ready when she got home.

Now Sarah and Bud were securing for the day. On the way out of the office she said to him, "I'll get Ensign Kingsley's academy records. You go out to the 'John O'Connor' and talk to her commanding officer."

As Sarah tried to walk through the bullpen Lt. Singer came up and told her, "Ma'am, I have a friend at BUPERS who has a friend at NAFSME who heard a rumor that Ensign Kingsley was taken to Captain's Mast for fighting with a fellow female officer."

Sarah stopped and asked, "A Captain's Mast where lieutenant?"

Singer replied, "Well I don't know ma'am."

Sarah told her, "Maybe your friend in BUPERS has a friend in SURFLANT who can find out."

Singer said, "I'll ask around ma'am."

Bud was looking at the TVs mounted on the walls. He said, "Colonel!"

Ressler and Susan Kingsley were conducting an interview on 'Trial TV'.

Mel the interviewer asked, "Why did you go with your husband that night to see misty James?"

Kingsley answered, "It was Andy's idea." Ressler pointed to the camera directing Kingsley to look there as she spoke.

Kingsley continued, "He wanted me to know that he was carrying through on his promise. Or at least that's what he said. They lured me there."

Ressler took up the interview, "Mel this charge is outrageous. Ensign Kingsley is the victim here."

Mel then asked, "Susan you had no idea what lay in store for you that night?"

Kingsley answered, "How was I supposed to know that my husband wanted to murder me. I went with him because I love him, because I wanted to save my marriage. And then that woman attacked me and he attacked me. I'm sorry she's dead. But I was fighting for my life, ducking and trying to hold onto the pipe and screaming 'they're trying to kill me. My own husband, he wanted me dead."

Sarah looked on in shock. The story Kingsley just told on TV was not the one she told earlier. She turned and told Bud, "Call Judge Morimoto in the morning. I want a gag order for Ensign Kingsley and Ms. Ressler."

Just then AJ came up and said, "Forget it colonel."

Sarah said, "But sir I don't want the whole country crying for this girl."

AJ said, "You don't have a choice. I just got off the phone with the SECNAV. Three months ago Trial TV requested to broadcast a court martial. This is the one they want. Jury selection starts tomorrow."

"Aye, aye sir." Sarah said in resignation.
Before she could walk away AJ asked her in soft voice, "Sarah can you still wear your uniform jacket comfortably?"

Sarah knew where he was going and didn't get angry. She was as image conscious as any private lawyer. "Yes sir I can, I just need to wear my bigger skirt. I was only wearing the maternity smock because it was more comfortable. I can wear my regular uniform for TV."

"Thank you Sarah." AJ said sincerely.

"You're welcome sir." Sarah replied with a smile.

At that Sarah left for home.

Friday, June 9, 2000

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

Even though she wore her regular uniform, the whole first day of the trial was not televised as it was spent selecting the jury from the pool of Marine and Navy officers. After the last juror was selected, Judge Morimoto called an early end of the day at 1500. "We will adjourn until 0900 Monday morning where we will hear opening arguments."

Sarah went back to her office. She gathered the material she would need to work at home and then she secured for the weekend. On her way out she met AJ. He asked her, "Colonel, looking forward to court on Monday?"

Sarah answered, "Yes sir I am. I'm taking work home this weekend to prepare."

AJ asked, "Are you getting John to help?"

Sarah answered, "Yes sir. John is taking the girls out all day Saturday with Diane and her kids to let me work in peace and then Diane and Harriet will mind the kids on Sunday while John, Bud and I work a mini moot court here. I think I'll be more than ready."

AJ said admiringly, "Excellent Sarah. I know you'll do us proud."

Sarah smiled saying, "Thank you sir." She left to pick up Caroline. On her way out she had to wade through a cadre of reporters. All she told them was "No comment."

Monday, June 12, 2000

Outside JAG Headquarters

Sarah arrived for work very early. Even so she was unable to avoid having to go through the reporter line. She just kept saying, "No comment".

As she entered the building she saw that 'Trial TV' 'stand up' reporter Lynne Kennedy was standing outside JAG Headquarters doing a live stand-up report.

Kennedy was saying, "I'm standing in front of the headquarters of the Judge Advocate General, a building that houses the elite cadre of Navy lawyers known as JAGs. 'Trial TV' has been offered the privilege of televising our first military trial, and that first trial is a capital murder case."
Friday's jury selection for this trial was not televised as the lawyers working this case picked the jurors, called members, from the pool of Navy & Marine officers. Opening arguments are set to begin today.

About to make her appearance now is the lawyer for the defense, the kind of lawyer the JAG officers do not often go up against very often; Juanita Ressler, who is known for her courtroom dramatics and media savvy. Good morning Ms. Ressler."

"Good morning Lynne."

"Ms. Ressler, can you tell me what approach you are going to take to this case?"

"The truth Lynne, simply the truth; Ensign Kingsley is basically a naïve young woman who suddenly found herself brutally attacked by her husband and his mistress. She screamed they're trying to kill me. That's the message we're going to be getting out in court."

"Ms. Ressler, the prosecutor, Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall is one of your former students. We're told she has a reputation of being tough and aggressive and despite having to overcome a series of personal difficulties has excelled as a lawyer. How does it feel to go up against one of your former students?"

Ressler turned to the camera and smiled, "I'm always proud to see that my students have done well after graduation. However I think she has failed to learn one basic lesson, you don't prosecute the victim."

Sarah was watching the interview along with the staff in the bullpen. When Kennedy mentioned her name, Sarah's official Marine photo appeared on the screen. Loren Singer leaned over and whispered, "That's a good photo ma'am."

Sarah acknowledged her with a smile. To her mind that was the only good thing on the TV. She went to her office to gather her things for court.

0945 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Main Courtroom

Judge Morimoto came in and called the court to order. "Good morning, please be seated. Today as all parties are aware and as consented to by the accused this court martial will be televised. This has been approved so that the general public may have a better understanding on how military justice works. But I will caution counsel that they will conduct themselves as if the cameras were not there. I will not tolerate any grandstanding or theatrics. Does counsel understand me?"

Sarah and Ressler both rose and said respectively, "We do your honor" and "yes your honor."

Morimoto said, "Colonel Marshall you may begin with your opening remarks."

Sarah rose and said, "Thank you your honor." Turning to the members she began, "Good morning during the course of this trial we will present clear and convincing evidence that Ensign Susan Kingsley killed Misty James, that her husband was having an affair with Miss James and that Ensign Kingsley knew about it, that she arranged for her husband to take her to Miss James so she could confront her, that she brought the murder weapon with her to the scene of that confrontation, that in full view of her husband, she struck Miss James repeatedly with that weapon. Those are the facts in this case. They are simple and they are clear. And they will indicate beyond any reasonable doubt the
accused is guilty as charged of premeditated murder. Thank you."

Morimoto turned to Ressler and said, "Ms. Ressler."

Ressler got up and playing to the cameras, walked slowly to the side of the jury box. There she clapped her hands four times loudly. "Surprise, that's what this case is really about. Colonel Marshall wants to talk about facts. But there are a few surprising facts she did not mention; the fact that her star witness is a man that cheated on his wife in the first year of their marriage, the fact that Ensign Kingsley expected her husband to break off an adulterous relationship with a teenage girl, only to find herself under physical attack. The fact that Ensign Kingsley fought to save her life only to find herself charged with murder. Ensign Kingsley has been a victim once. Don't let it happen again. Thank you."

As Ressler settled into her seat, Sarah called the first witness. She assigned Bud to question her.

Bud began, "Dr. Winston you are the Chief Medical Examiner of Norfolk Hospital?"

Dr. Winston answered, "That is correct."

"Can you tell us ma'am how Misty James died?"

"Misty James received three blows to the head from a heavy linear object. She died from blunt force trauma."

Bud went to pick up the pipe and as he looked up, he saw the camera pointing at him and he froze.

Morimoto saw this and said, "Lieutenant, do you have another question?"

Bud looked at him and stammering said, "Yes sir. Oh yes sir." He walked to the prosecution table to pick up something else and asked, "Dr. Winston could you..." He looked up and saw another camera and froze. Sarah whispered, "Enlighten". Bud turned around and displayed the pipe and went on, "enlighten us as to whether this pipe found at the crime scene inflicted the deadly blows?"

"Yes lieutenant in my opinion it did. It has the necessary mass and it has the blood, hair and brain matter that match the victim's."

"Dr. Winston can you explain for us the then the significance of small pebbles imbedded in the victim's scalp?"

"The assailant knocked the victim to the ground, perhaps even with the first blow. The pebbles in the head indicate that the victim's head was on the ground when at least one of the other blows landed."

"What are defensive wounds doctor?"

"They are marks on the hands wrists and arms that suggest the struggle to defend one self."

"Were any of these present on the victim's body?"

"No, which indicates the victim was struck by surprise."

"Thank you Dr. Winston." Walking back to his table he added, "No further questions your honor."

Ressler asked from her chair, "Dr. Winston on the night Misty James died were you at the scene?"

"No."
Ressler stood up and continued, "So you don't know what happened."

"Not from eyewitness knowledge, no."

"If Misty James swung the first blow and Ensign Kingsley ducked, you would have no way of knowing would you?"

"If she dodged every blow without injury I would know that that she was remarkably good at dodging."

"Did you know that Ensign Kingsley lettered in varsity track at Lake Forest High School?"

"No I did not."

"Could a fit young woman with an athletic background dodge one or more swings of a pipe before grabbing it away and swinging it back at her attacker?"

"Yes it is possible."

Ressler finished with the usual, "No further questions."

The next witness was Gunnery Sergeant Dandridge. Sarah began the questions, "Gunnery Sergeant when you arrived at the scene, did the victim have a pipe in her hand?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Where was Ensign Kingsley?"

"She was standing over the body ma'am."

"So it is possible that Ensign Kingsley was placing or had just placed the pipe in the victim's hand?"

Ressler got up and said, "Objection your honor, speculation."

Morimoto sustained the objection.

Sarah then asked, "As the Security Chief of PMO have you been trained in homicide investigation?"

"Yes ma'am."

"In you experience have you ever seen anyone club themselves to death?"

"No ma'am."

"Then how do you account that given her injuries the victim had the pipe in her own hand?"

"I can't ma'am."

"Unless someone placed it there."

Ressler objected again, "Speculation"

Morimoto sustained it again.

Sarah walked back to her table saying, "No further questions."

Ressler got up and asked, "Gunnery Sgt. Dandridge was it dark that night?"
"Most nights are ma'am."

"Yes they are. How was visibility that night?"

"Not good it was foggy."

"Well when it is difficult to see, one has to rely on other senses. Did you hear anything?"

"Just shouts, grunts, groans."

"Any shouts in particular?"

"I don't recall ma'am."

"Gunnery Sergeant that night a woman was fighting for her life. Take a moment and think back. Did you hear anything?"

Dandridge paused before he answered, "I recall hearing Ensign Kingsley yelling, 'they're trying to kill me.'"

At that Bud leaned over and whispered to Sarah, "I interviewed him three times colonel, he never said that to me."

Sarah whispered back, "Ensign Kingsley never said that at the crime scene Bud, she said it on TV."
Sarah sighed then called the next witness, Lt. Andy Kingsley. She asked, "Lieutenant what happened at the scene?"

"I didn't even expect Susan to get out of the car ma'am. Then all of a sudden there she was."

"What were you doing when she appeared lieutenant?"

"Misty had just put her arms around me ma'am. She thought I was just there to, you know, love her."

"What did your wife do next?"

"She said 'do it, tell her'. But before I could say or do anything she swung something and hit Misty in the head. After a second I realized it was a pipe."

"Did Ensign Kingsley bring the pipe with her?"

Ressler immediately said, "Objection calls for speculation."

Morimoto sustained it.

Sarah then asked, "Did you have a pipe in your car lieutenant?"

"No ma'am, I cleaned it out that afternoon. There was no pipe."

"Did you see Ensign Kingsley pick a pipe up off the ground?"

"No ma'am."

"Can you describe what happened after Ensign Kingsley struck Misty James the first time?"

"I tried to stop her and she swung at me. She hit me here." He pointed at his left forehead. "Misty had fallen to the ground and Susan hit her couple of more times."

"Lt. Kingsley had your wife expressed anger at Misty James for what you had done?"

Ressler immediately said, "Objection, hear-say."

Sara countered, "Accused state of mind your honor."

Morimoto said, "Objection overruled. Lieutenant you may answer the question."

Andy continued, "Susan said she felt that what I did was Misty's fault. But Susan got it mixed up in her mind."
"Had that happened before that your wife had gotten things mixed up in her mind?"

"Something would set her off and she would just lose it."

Ressler immediately jumped to her feet saying, "Objection move to strike, irrelevant."

Sarah countered, "Goes to a pattern of compulsive angry behavior your honor."

Morimoto said, "Objection sustained."

Sarah sighed then sat back down. Morimoto called a break for lunch.

On the way to her office she met Lt. Singer. Singer told her, "I couldn't track down anything on Ensign Kingsley's Captain's Mast."

Sarah said, "Thanks anyway."

Singer continued, "But I did pick up some rumors that she had some juvenile arrests."

Sarah was immediately interested as she asked, "Where, when?"

"I don't know ma'am."

"I need something hard lieutenant."

Singer walked away saying, "I'll do my best ma'am."

On the way to her office Emma gave her a stack of messages. Sarah asked her, "Who are all these from Emma?"

"They are all from 'People Magazine', the 'Washington Post' and '60 Minutes II'. They are all requesting interviews with you ma'am." Emma answered.

Sarah sighed and said, "I have better things to do."

Sarah thought about that as she put her things down then she had a second thought. She got up to go see the admiral.

When she knocked AJ said, "Ah colonel come in have a seat."

Sarah began, "Admiral this getting out of control. I'm being inundated for interview requests."

AJ said teasingly, "I didn't know that you led such an interesting life." He read aloud from a copy of 'People', "Her and her husband have two daughters, one of them adopted. Before she got married and started her family, her favorite hobby was collecting dinosaur bones. She has a skeleton of an icharasaurous in her home. What the hell is an icharasaurous?"

Sarah answered, "It's the oldest airborne vertebrate sir. It's a lizard with wings. Its wing span exceeds..." She dropped off when she realized the information was irrelevant. "Never mind sir."

AJ continued, "Her husband is Captain John Marshall, Asst. Director of NCIS. Her sister is law is Ann Marie Matthews, President Bartlett's Press Secretary. The colonel enjoys ballet and takes lessons. She and her husband enjoy ballroom dancing and they danced a tango at their wedding. The most fascinating fact, she can field strip an M-16 blindfolded in 16 seconds."

Sarah sighed in exasperation asking, "Where are they getting all this? John isn't talking nor is anyone
from NCIS. I certainly haven't spoken to them."

AJ commented, "And neither is anyone from this office. That just wets their appetite colonel. Any
time a public figure says no comment they say 'what's she really like, what's she hiding'. You
cooperate with them you can help your case."

Sarah sat up straighter and said, "I'm trying a murder case sir."

AJ said, "So is Juanita Ressler and she gave them a tour of her office."

Sarah said, "If she wants to try her case in the press let her sir. Court martial members are different
than civilian jurors. They take seriously their order to listen to only what they hear in the courtroom."

AJ said, "Oh like the testimony of the gunnery sergeant who testified that he heard Ensign Kingsley
yelling that 'they're trying to kill me?'"

AJ saw that he got through to her. Sarah sighed and got up to leave.

When court resumed that afternoon Ressler was cross examining Lt. Kingsley.

"Lt. Kingsley, don't you find it strange for a husband to meet with his mistress in front of his wife?"

"Yes."

"An honest answer at last."

Sarah said, "Objection your honor she's commenting on the testimony."

Ressler immediately apologized, Sorry your honor. Yet you did it Lieutenant. You lured your wife to
your private lover's lane to meet your school girl mistress."

"That's what Susan wanted."

Ressler immediately countered, "But not what you wanted."

"No ma'am."

"Lt Kingsley, didn't you lure your wife to deserted road in order to kill her?"

Sarah immediately got up and said, "Objection. Lt. Kingsley is not on trial here."

Ressler countered, "But he should be."

Sarah said, "Your honor?"

Ressler countered, "It's legitimate cross examination your honor."

Morimoto said, "Yes it is. Just watch the grand standing counselor."

Ressler said, Thank you your honor." Then she asked, "Lt. Kingsley is your wife rich?"

"Her family has considerable means."

"She has a trust fund and a generous allowance. Lt. Kingsley, have you ever withdrawn a sum of
money from your wife's account without asking for her permission?"

"Yes."
"Did you use that money to buy a gift for your teenage mistress?"

"Yes."

"Lt. Kingsley did you love Misty James?"

Andy paused before and looked at Susan before he answered, "Yes."

"No further questions."

Sarah sighed as she knew that testimony hurt the case. Morimoto adjourned court for the day.

1930 Local Time

Marshall Residence

When Sarah left the office she went to Bethesda for her monthly appointment. She was lucky that Eve agreed to not keep her waiting. After Eve performed the examination saying everything was fine she went right home.

"The only thing Sarah, come back in next week for the ultrasound. I'd give it to you today, but it's being maintained." Eve said just before Sarah left.

"No problem Eve. I'll see you then." Sarah acknowledged.

When she walked in the door, John shooed her upstairs to change as he and Chloe set about making dinner. So she carried Caroline upstairs with her and put her in the bedroom playpen. Sarah took her uniform off and properly hung it up. She fixed a fresh blouse with her insignias for the next day. She stood in front of the full length mirror on the closet door and looked at her body. She saw that her belly was just starting to pop with the new life therein. She rubbed her hand there. She didn't feel any fat only tight muscle. Even though Eve did a thorough breast examination, Sarah performed her own. She didn't find anything amiss.

As Sarah stood in front of the mirror Caroline started to demand attention. Still naked Sarah picked her up from out of the playpen and lay down on the turned down bed with her. Sarah enjoyed the sensual closeness that she shared with her infant daughter. She played with Caroline for a few minutes then she put her on the floor to let her crawl around. Keeping a 'mother's eye' on her she quickly put on fresh panties, sweat pants and a tank top tee shirt under a zipper fleece jacket. Sarah picked up her daughter and took her into the upstairs study.

As she sat breast feeding Caroline, she thought about what AJ told her about cooperating with the press. So she turned on 'Trial TV'. The first thing she saw was Johnny Cochran and Diane Allred debating the merits of the case. Cochran was clearly siding with Ressler using his stupid poetry to make his point. Then she saw Ressler on a live "Trial TV" interview show still telling her case. She even so much as went and personally attacked Sarah. Ressler said that she thought Sarah would make a "better lap dancer than a lawyer'. She changed the channel in disgust when she heard the 'lap dancer' comment. Sarah didn't like it when Ressler told her that in law school. She certainly didn't appreciate it when Ressler said it on TV for everyone to hear.

When she turned on E.T. she watched as Mary Hart was commenting, "Ratings have never been higher for 'Trial TV' since they started coverage of a military trial in Virginia. But it's not case law male viewers are drooling over. It's prosecutor Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall. It seems this sexy, sassy lady lawyer, is one giant mass attack on the TV competition. Her sizzle factor gives the phrase 'body of evidence' a whole new meaning. She has the reputation as straight shooter, and looks great in a bikini."
Sarah commented to herself, "My life has gone to hell and how the hell would they know what I look like in a bikini?"

She got her answer when ET showed a segment from the previous night's 'Late, Late Show' with Craig Kilborn.

Kilborn commented, "You know officially she's a colonel in the Marines. But to me she is a major babe." He then held up for the camera a photo of Sarah in her pale blue bikini standing in front of a lifeguard surf board in Australia.

Kilborn continued, "I think we now know why the Marines are the first to hit the beach, yikes."

She was immediately incensed. She called out, "John!"

John came running up from the kitchen. When he got upstairs he asked, "Honey, what's the matter?"

Sarah asked, "How did the TV people get the picture of me in my blue bikini that was taken in Sydney last February? The one I made into a poster you have on the wall in your workroom downstairs?"

John thought a moment and said, "Well remember Mic took all the beach photos and gave us the ones of all of us, even that one. Maybe they got it from him."

Sarah said, "Well I'll call the Australian Embassy tomorrow to check. The media thinks I'm just some sort of beach bimbo. They never even mentioned that I'm a dedicated Marine or that I graduated fourth from Duke Law or even that I received the Legion of Merit."

John said, "Well while you deal with Mic, I got an idea." He told Sarah what he had in mind.

When he finished she smiled and said, "Go ahead. It will probably help. But I'm still not going on TV."

John answered, "You know maybe you should. But think about it some more. In the mean time I'll call Joanne Lowell at WUSA tomorrow."

Tuesday, June 13, 2000

0945 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When Sarah arrived for work Tuesday morning she called Mic at his office in the Australian Embassy. She got him right away as he asked her, "Mac good morning. What can I do for you?"

Sarah asked, "Mic, are you talking to the press about my case on 'Trial TV'?"

Mic answered, "Yeah to a friend of mine at WUSA. He found out I used to work with you and I thought I could help by providing some background."

Sarah replied, "Background about my career I don't mind. But when you start telling people about my private life, I just wish you called me first."

Mic then said, "Well the stuff I told them was pretty much public knowledge anyway."

Taking on hostile tone, Sarah asked, "Public knowledge huh? Then how did a photo of me in my bikini get on CBS' Late, Late Show?"
Mic was embarrassed to answer, "Uh well he asked me if I had any pictures, so I E-Mailed him that one. Why don't you like it?"

Sarah was incensed and answered, "It's not that I dislike it, it's that you sent that one. I only asked you to take that one so I could give it to my husband. You had no right to distribute that or any other private picture of me to the media without my permission. Do you know how it makes me look?"

Mic tried to save himself saying, "Aw c'mon Mac, it's only a photo. The Marines sent them your picture."

Sarah countered, "While official photos that the Corps sent are fine, my private photos are not for public consumption."

Mic then said, "Mac don't you think you're over reacting?"

Sarah sighed and replied in a threatening tone, "Remember when we tried Lt. Hawkins in Italy and what I said?"

Mic swallowed as he answered, "Uh yeah."

Sarah said, "Well this difference of opinion will not be resolved and you will definitely regret ever knowing me."

At that she slammed the phone down. She vented as she said loud enough to be heard just outside her office with, "Oooh I should hit him upside the head with a lead pipe."

Emma was just outside the door with a cup of coffee. She reached in and closed the door before she sat down at her desk. Thankfully no one else was outside to hear Sarah's vent.

Sarah got ready to go to court.

1030 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

When John arrived at work he called WUSA, Channel 9. WUSA was the local CBS affiliate station for DC. CBS was the owner of ET. He knew one of the on air reporters at WUSA, Joanne Lowell.

John gave her some interviews on some cases that NCIS was working on. He called her saying, "Joanne it's John Marshall. Can you and a cameraman come to the NCIS media center today as of 5 minutes ago?"

Joanne said, "Ah sure John, what about?"

John answered, "It's about the Kingsley case Juanita Ressler and Sarah are trying."

Lowell couldn't get out of her office fast enough to tell her program director. The director practically pushed her out the door. When she and her cameraman arrived at NCIS John sat with them to give the interview.

Lowell started by asking, "Captain Marshall what can you tell us about the case?"

"Well I'm not allowed to comment directly on the case and its particulars. I can tell you about the prosecutor though."
"Isn't the prosecutor your wife Sarah?"

"Yes she is. I'm commenting on Ms. Ressler's attack on her character, particularly when Ressler said that Sarah was better off being a lap dancer."

"Go on."

"Ressler's comment was to say the most, extremely insulting, to say the least uninformed. It has no basis in fact. To begin with Sarah has a gift for languages. She speaks 5 other languages fluently, Russian, Farsi, Arabic, Hebrew & Spanish. She also graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Minnesota and then later 4th in her class at Duke Law.

"Okay let's go to law school. Putting aside you are married to her, how do you rate her as an attorney?"

"She is totally dedicated to the law and she knows it better than any attorney I have ever met, even better than me. Those times when we were on the same side in cases, I would always run a legal point by her to ensure it was what we needed to use. She was right every time. I really loved our time together at JAG. I got to see how good an attorney Sarah is, so much so that I can see her sitting on the bench."

"You mean on a JAG bench?"

"Not only that, but also on the Supreme Court. When we opposed each other during some trials, I really had to be on my legal toes."

"How did you two deal with that?"

"The loser paid for dinner. And no I'm not going to give you a score sheet."

Lowell laughed then she asked. "Other than as a lawyer, is there anywhere else where Sarah has done well. I mean one does not get promoted to a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marines solely on being a good lawyer. What else can you say about Sarah that hasn't been said before?"

"Well other than excelling as an attorney she has also excelled as a Marine. During the war in Bosnia, Sarah was a platoon commander. While she was there she received the Bronze Star for keeping Serbian Militia from throwing grenades onto her platoon. She ran the investigation office at NIS Pearl Harbor. She was one of the youngest women to be promoted to major. She had one of the highest aggregate scores ever achieved at the Marine Command and Staff College. She had to attend that before she could be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. She also received the Legion of Merit for retrieving the Declaration of Independence."

"Isn't that the same case for which you also received the same honor?"

"Yes Joanne. It was our first case together."

"What else is there about Sarah that you admire?"

"I have to say it was Sarah's substance, intelligence and inner strength that cemented my attraction to her after our initial 'Love at First Sight' encounter in the White House Rose Garden right before that first case. Besides being a loving mother to our two daughters and our new baby who is due in November, Sarah is a formidable woman who is more than a match for any 'show-biz' attorney."

"So tell me, who's going to win the case, Sarah or the showbiz attorney?"
"I can’t say. The facts of the case will determine that. I will say that Ms. Ressler is in for a good fight. So she better be on her toes or she’ll the one who should think about going into lap dancing."

Joanne ended the interview with, "Thanks John this was very informative as well as entertaining. I’m glad I’m not the one you’re mad at.

John laughed. "You’re welcome Joanne."

After the camera was turned off, John asked, "Will we see this tonight?"

Joanne answered, "Well we’ll edit it this afternoon and it should be ready for the 6:00 PM broadcast. 1000 Local Time

Main Courtroom

JAG Headquarters

When Court resumed that day Ressler called Susan Kingsley to the stand.

"Why did you go with your husband?"

"Because I wanted closure."

"What happened when you got there?"

"That woman, Miss James was waiting. Andy got out of the car and they embraced."

"What did you do then?"

"I made a mistake. I got out of the car to see what was going on."

"Susan, what happened then?"

"Miss James attacked me with the pipe. I tried to get it away from her."

"Did you succeed?"

"Yes, that’s when the worst thing happened. Andy grabbed me. I remember yelling, ‘they’re trying to kill me. Then I hit him by reflex I guess. It happened so fast. I just know he stopped coming at me. And then Miss James attacked me again. I swung the pipe to keep her away from me."

"Were you afraid for your life?"

"Yes"

"Ensign Kingsley that night was it your intention to kill Misty James?"

"No Ma’am. I regret very much what happened."

Sarah silently sighed and looked at the jury. She could see they believed Kingsley.

Just as Kingsley finished, Judge Morimoto’s clerk came in and handed him a note. He addressed the court saying, "Just this minute I was informed of a family emergency. As a result we will recess until 0900 tomorrow morning."

He banged his gavel and after he left everyone got up to leave.
As Sarah and Bud went through the bullpen Bud went over to Singer and asked, "Were you able to find out anything more about those rumors about Ensign Kingsley?"

"Somebody thinks they heard about her assaulting a classmate at Annapolis."

Sarah came up and commented, "Somebody heard."

Gunny said, "Her juvenile arrests record will probably be found in Illinois. That's where she went to high school."

Bud said, "But her juvenile records are sealed."

Singer said, "There could be some way to use them."

Sarah said, "We have sealed records, rumors, unconfirmed reports and the name of a state. There is nothing we can get into testimony."

Bud added, "Except the forensic evidence."

Gunny said, "Ma'am we could track down this other stuff if we had enough people looking."

Just then Sarah got a look on her face and walked away.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 61

1815 Local Time

Marshall Residence

John's interview was on the WUSA's 6:00 News broadcast. The Marshalls were watching it in the upstairs study. After it was finished, Sarah looked over at John with her watery smile and said, "Formidable woman, Supreme Court?"

John smiled and tenderly cupped her cheek. He used his thumb to catch the tear that fell. He said, "Well I may be a little biased."

Chloe interrupted him as she piped up, "A little, you mean a lot."

Sarah and John laughed at that. John continued, "But I call them as I see them."

Sarah cuddled up closer and whispered in his ear, "I'm already pregnant but wait until later, oh boy."

John just hugged her closer and kissed her temple and whispered to her, "I love you ninja girl."

Sarah wrapped her arms around him to burrow deeper into him as she replied in kind, "I love you to hot stuff."

After they watched that they switched over to 'Trial TV'.

That afternoon after Sarah left Bud, Singer and Gunny in the bullpen, she walked to her office, asking Emma to join her. Sarah told Emma, "Call 'Trial TV' back. See if you can get me onto a show this afternoon."

Now she was watching her own interview. The interviewer Mel Hayden asked her, "Colonel Marshall you've turned us down so many times before we've given up hope."

Sarah smiled shyly as she answered, "Well since my husband went and did his interview with my blessing I figured I could do my own. Besides I've been a little busy what with the trial, my doctor's visit and taking care of my family."

Hayden asked, "Doctor's visit?"

"I'm going to have a baby in November." Sarah answered modestly.

"Congratulations Colonel." Hayden said.

"Thank you Mel," Sarah replied appreciatively.

Then he got back to business Hayden asked, "So getting back to the trial, please tell me how it feels to go up against one of your old law professors in that courtroom?"

"Juanita is a great teacher Mel. In fact I'm still learning and profiting from her example."
"Is it true she once said you would do better as a 'lap dancer' than as a lawyer?"

"You would have to ask Juanita Ressler."

"She's the one who told me colonel."

Sarah laughed embarrassingly and said, "Juanita is a tough opponent. When you go up against her she makes you better."

"Well that's a very generous thing for you to say. But you do seem to have your own style, you're straight ahead, you let the facts speak for themselves."

"I believe in facts." Then she grimaced as she said, "That why I am little frustrated about all the rumors flying around this case."

"Yes there are all kinds of rumors about Lt. Kingsley..."

Sarah cut him short and said, "I'm talking about the defendant. I'm hearing stories of juvenile arrests, assaults on fellow naval officers, you name it."

"Really, assaults on fellow naval officers?"

"Well they are just rumors Mel. Until they are proven to be fact I don't deal with them, I can't deal with them. Only those people who have known Ensign Kingsley through the years can tell us if they are true. They might be out there somewhere."

The interview ended at that point.

John asked Sarah, "Do you think that will do some good?"

Sarah sighed and answered, "I hope so. In the mean time let's have some dinner"

Wednesday, June 14, 2000

0800 Local Time

White House Press Room

Even Ann Marie got involved. She had just finished briefing the press on President Bartlett's day when she fielded a not unexpected question from the CBS reporter. "Ann Marie, can you comment on your brother's appearance on the news last night?"

Ann Marie sighed. She saw the piece on the 6:00 news and she knew she would need to answer questions about it. "I don't know the particulars of the case. That said Ms. Ressler should have stuck to the facts of the case and left the personal attacks of her opposition in the closet. You do not go and start a fight with my brother or my sister in law. As my brother said, Sarah is a very formidable woman. That was one of the things that John found so attractive about her. They will always come out fighting and they will win. My advice to Ms. Ressler is stick to defending her client and don't mess with the family. That's all people."

The press corps laughed as they acknowledged her dismissal. Ann Marie's question and response was aired on Trial TV that night.

Friday, June 16, 2000

0900 Local Time
Judge Morimoto still had to deal with his family emergency all day Thursday. That gave Sarah's interview time to bear fruit. More than a few people called and gave her the things she needed. She was totally ready to cross examine Ensign Kingsley.

John and Diane took the day to watch the end of the trial in the courtroom. As she got up, Sarah saw them sitting in the back with AJ. She had a neutral expression on her face. She couldn't acknowledge them in front of the cameras.

Sarah started, "Ensign Kingsley, you testified that you struck Miss James several times."

"It was self-defense ma'am."

"Were you enraged when you struck her?"

"I wasn't anything ma'am. It all happened so fast."

"You weren't enraged even though she was sleeping with your husband, even though she embraced your husband right in front of you?"

"I wasn't enraged I was sad."

"That's why you got out of your car, because you were sad?"

"I wasn't thinking straight ma'am I was emotional."

"You have trouble controlling your emotions, don't you?"

Ressler immediately said, "Objection, relevance."

Morimoto overruled her.

Sarah asked again, "Do you have trouble controlling your emotions Ensign Kingsley?"

"No ma'am."

"Didn't you lose control of your emotions as soon as you learned of your husband's affair?"

"No Ma'am."

"Did you resolve to seek vengeance for what happened?"

"No ma'am, I didn't."

"So you made your husband take you to meet his girlfriend"

"That was his idea ma'am."

Sarah continued as she picked up the pipe in the evidence, "And you hid this pipe in your husband's car."

"I didn't do that ma'am."

Swinging the pipe a few times Sarah said, "And you swung it at the woman who had stolen your
husband."

"She attacked me."

Sarah paused then said, "She did attack you by stealing your husband and you wanted to teach her a lesson."

Swinging the pipe again she said, "So you hit her once and you hit her again."

"No."

"And you hit her again after she was helpless on the ground."

"No, I wouldn't ..."

Sara went on, "Time and again breaking her skull, beating her to death with no remorse and no pity."

Kingsley wailed, "No that isn't me, I wouldn't do that." Kingsley sobbed some more.

Sarah paused she reached the moment she planned. She asked, "You wouldn't? Isn't it a fact Ensign Kingsley that in 1996 you punched an ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend in front of a movie theater?"

Ressler jumped up and said, "Objection, alleged prior misconduct is not admissible."

Sarah argued, "MRE Rule 404 your honor. The witness' claim that she wouldn't commit an assault is subject to rebuttal."

Morimoto agreed and said, "Indeed it is. She opened the door Ms. Ressler, overruled."

Sarah said, "Ensign I'm sorry to upset you but please answer the question."

Kingsley straightened up and putting on a scowl answered, "It was an accident, I didn't mean to hit her."

"A juvenile court assigned you to anger counseling."

"My lawyer told me I had to do that."

"To avoid a conviction?"

Kingsley sighed and answered, "Yes."

Sarah asked, "During the summer program before your first year at the Naval Academy, didn't you assault a woman named Karen Starling?"

"No charges were filed ma'am."

"That's not what I asked. Did you assault Karen Starling for flirting with your boyfriend?"

"We had words."

"You hit her with a 5 pound weight."

Kingsley became enraged and spat out, "I told her I was sorry."

Sarah stood back and paused before she said, "An apology is not good enough for Misty James, Ensign. She can't hear you, she's dead."
Kingsley could only look at Sarah derisively as she silently sat there. Ressler also sat silently but in resignation.

1315 Local Time

While the members were deliberating, Sarah, AJ, John and Diane went to AJ's office to wait. They were watching the replay of the trial on the TV there.

Lynne Kennedy was still outside the building doing her stand up reporting. She was saying, "This morning was jammed packed with excitement and surprises. After a fiery cross examination closing arguments followed."

Inside the court room Ressler was up first. "I said this trial was about surprises. In an effort to defame the defendant and obscure the issues, Colonel Marshall has engaged in a mudslinging contest. But the oath you swore demands that you ignore the slander and consider only the facts."

The TV shot returned to Kennedy as she said, "But Colonel Marshall fought back in her closing."

The TV showed Sarah saying, "In addition to the forensic evidence, the prior acts of the defendant are at the heart of this case. Ensign Kingsley has a history of violent attacks against those, who in her mind, have sinned against her. In this instance her desire for revenge cost a young woman her life."

When it was done AJ turned to Sarah and said, "Not bad." John and Diane nodded agreement. Sarah just sighed glad it was over.

1400 Local Time

Main Courtroom

Sarah was notified that the members reached a verdict. When they reentered the courtroom Diane, John and AJ were sitting in the same places where they sat watching Sarah cross-examine Kingsley.

When the court came to order and the members filed in, Morimoto said, "Will the defense please rise." He turned to the leader of the jury and said, "You may publish your findings."

The leader stood and unfolded his slip and said, "Ensign Susan Kingsley on the charge and specification of violating Article 118 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Premeditated Murder, this court finds you guilty."

Kingsley broke down and started crying. As she cried Morimoto banged his gavel and intoned, "This court is dismissed."

Ressler stood stoically as Susan Kingsley was led away by the Marine Court Guards.

Sarah and Bud got up to leave. AJ gave her the rest of the day off. So Sarah returned to her office to get her things in order for leaving. While she did that, John and Diane left the building through a side exit to avoid the press. On the way out she let Ressler precede her out the front entrance and through the gauntlet of reporters.

Ressler's reply to their questions was a curt, "Only the beginning, we have a half dozen grounds for appeal."

She walked away quickly.

When it was Sarah's turn she fixed her cover and walked out saluting the Marine Guard.
Lynne Kennedy was able to stop her and ask, "Colonel Marshall, this is a great victory for you. How would you critique the performance of the attorneys for both sides?"

Sarah answered, "I would fault Ms. Ressler for trying to obscure the truth and I would fault myself for using trickery to reveal it."

Kennedy asked, "With all due respect Colonel, isn't that what lawyers do?"

Sarah sighed and answered, "Unfortunately Miss Kennedy, yes it is."

She walked to her car where John was waiting. They both went to pick up Caroline and Chloe and go home.

1930 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Friday evening Sarah was on the phone for what seemed like the whole night. She accepted many calls congratulating her on her win. She even received congratulations from President Bartlett.

"Colonel, congratulations on your win, I was watching the case every night. You did very well battling Ms. Ressler's theatrics as well as the press' incessant commentary."

Sarah graciously said, "Thank you sir."

Sarah was really touched by one in particular. She answered it in the usual, "Hello."

The voice she heard on the other end was totally unexpected, "Sarah it's Juanita Ressler."

Sarah had to catch her breath before she could continue, "Juanita what a surprise."

Ressler went on, "You argued a good case. Totally off the record and I will deny saying it, your cross examination of Susan was first rate. You left me nothing to argue with. Also I want to thank you for what you said in your interview. After what I said about you, you had every right to rip me a new one, but you took the high road. If you ever want to leave JAG again you have a place in my firm."

Sarah was gracious and totally appreciative when she said, "Thank you Juanita. I don't know what else to say."

Ressler went on, "And tell your husband I think he's hot and the same offer goes for him. I saw his interview on WUSA. I could see by how he defended you that he loves you very much. I didn't know his sister was Ann Marie Matthews. If I knew how connected you were, I would never have said the 'lap dance' comment."

Sarah laughed at that, "Though I didn't like it when you said to me in law school, I understand that you were trying to motivate me and I really appreciate it. I meant what I said in the interview, you really make your opponent better. He or she has to be on their toes when they go up against you."

Ressler said, "Well thank you for that." Then she laughed saying, "Here we are being mutually admiring where if we were in the courtroom, we would be tearing each other apart."

Sarah laughed along with her saying, "That's how it was when John and I went against each other. After all our cases we had to put aside whatever happened in court and move on because we worked in the same office."
Ressler said, "He would have had to if he was in love with you. Listen I don't want to keep you from your family. Good luck with the new baby. Keep in touch and let me know when he or she comes."

Sarah said, "I'd like that Juanita." They exchanged e-mail addresses and then Ressler said, "Goodbye Sarah and good luck."

Sarah replied, "Goodbye Juanita the same to you."

Saturday, June 17, 2000

1530 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Harm returned from the Seahawk the previous evening. The investigation and his carrier qualifications took most of the week. That morning he attended the funeral of the victim with Diane and Mrs. Palermo. Her grandson Dominic was the Seaman whose apparent suicide Harm had investigated. It had turned out that Dominic had licked a stamp that was coated with LSD. Dominic had gotten the stamp from his bunkmate's stash when he ran out of his own stamps. Hallucinating on LSD Dominic went out onto the flight deck and stood in front of a Tomcat that was landing. He had replicated a comic book hero's stance and he was killed. Harm had found out the truth which had allowed Dominic to be buried with full military honors, next to his late mother. As Harm had stood at Dominic's grave, Mrs. Palermo thanked him.

Now he and John were in the pool with the children while Diane and Sarah were lounging on the patio under the awning. While Caroline sat in the playpen in front of the two mothers, Chloe was helping Sarah swim while Harm had Samantha and John had Trey. They were there to relax. The two cases Harm and Sarah were involved with were very mentally exhausting.

Sarah said to Diane, "Harriet knows she is having a girl and she wants to name her Sarah Elizabeth. I told her I'm just going to call all the babies named Sarah by their middle names."

Diane reminded her, "Well it's not like they're all in the same family. Only my Sarah is related to you."

Sarah said, "Yeah you're right. But I'm just so embarrassed. I mean you're my sister and naming your daughter after me really felt right. And the Millers naming their new daughter after me after I helped in the delivery and rescue was great. But Harriet, I've only known her for a very short time..."

Diane got exasperated with her sister. Ever since she met her she was astounded that Sarah thought so little of herself. Diane finally reached a point that she needed to point this out.

"Sarah I want you to listen to me. You are the most amazing woman I have ever known. Yeah I graduated the academy, but I never experienced the things you did. All the tribulations you went through growing up and going to school without any parental support. Then there were your Marine deployments. All my deployments were cake walks compared to yours. Also there was law school, graduating 4th in your class. I would not have had the patience to go through that. Again you did all that alone and very well to. After all that you became a stronger and better person than before.

And haven't you been tutoring Bud all through his time in law school. Don't you think he appreciated that? You're like the big sister neither of them had growing up. Harriet and Bud see the same things in you that I see. You are a very good person and a very good friend. So taking all that into consideration it's only natural that Harriet wants to name her daughter after you."
Sarah looked at her with a sideways smile as a tear fell down her cheek. Diane went to wipe it away with her thumb.

Sarah held her sister's hand against her cheek, smiled and said, "You know it's really great to have 'Jiminy Cricket' for a sister. You give me the sisterly kick in the ass that I need now and then.

Diane sat back in satisfaction, "Here endth the lesson." Then she and her sister went into a giggle fit.

Tuesday, June 20, 2000

0830 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah was feeling very good today. She went to see Eve for an ultrasound the evening before, as Eve had asked her the week before. During the ultrasound, she had found that Sarah was going to have a boy. The baby was facing in the right way so that they could make out his little 'extension'. John was overjoyed.

When Sarah arrived at work she went into the break room to get some green tea. Emma met her in there and Sarah showed her the ultrasound picture. They were joined by some of the other officers, including Harm, Bud, Harriet, Loren Singer, Carolyn Imes, Meg Austen, Traci Manetti and even AJ.

When AJ entered the room, everyone snapped to attention. "At ease people, I was wondering where my staff went." He smiled when he spied the ultrasound photo in Sarah's hand. "Is it yours colonel?"

Sarah nodded and said, "Yes sir."

"Hand it over." AJ said as he put out his hand.

Sarah smiled as she handed the photo over and then she leaned in and pointed to a spot and said, "It's a boy. John and I are going to name him Patrick James after John's middle name and his father."

AJ looked between Harriet and Sarah, "So we're going to have AJ and PJ." Everyone in the room laughed at the admiral's joke.

Sarah smiled and said, "According to John he'll be Patrick. And I quote, (She dropped her voice to imitate John), "My son is not going to be known by his initials."

Everyone laughed even harder at Sarah's imitation, even AJ who added, "That's a father's prerogative. I'm sure Patrick will get the same attitude.

Sarah added, "Oh yeah and I saw first-hand that John will instill that in Patrick. When we were on vacation last summer we were up at his parents' house and some of his relatives were over from Ireland. Some of them tried to call him 'Jack' and he just refused to answer. I could hear him grind his teeth saying, 'My name is John, not Jack'. He really flew off the handle when one particularly snarky, smart-assed cousin named Seamus kept needling him and asked him what rank he was in the Navy."

Loren gasped and asked, "Oh no, he didn't call him 'Captain Jack'?"

Sarah smiled and said, "Yep, he did. John's brother Mark had to stop him from popping him in the mouth. Seamus' father pulled him out by his ear to the backyard and told him why he was offensive and told him to apologize, which he did."

Everyone laughed at that. Then AJ said, "Staff Meeting in 20 minutes people." That was everyone's
signal to get their beverage and get to work.

0900 Local Time

JAG Staff Conference Room

Sarah and Harm were assigned another unusual case. Princess Amatullah (Fanny) and Petty Officer James Elling were married after he smuggled her into the U.S. with forged documents. Her father and "first husband," from a prearranged marriage, wanted her back.

Harm defended Elling against Bud who was prosecuting on behalf of a hard-nose admiral.

Harm asked Sarah to defend the princess in the US immigration court. Nearly everyone Sarah met, including the judge, commented that they saw her performance on "Trial TV." The judge wasn't inclined to relent until Sarah suggested that Fatima's marriage status be tried in an Islamic Sharia court (put together in the US). Sarah was very knowledgeable about Islamic law and history because she had learned it at her grandmother's knee.

1130 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave. NW

Sarah didn't want to go to the Sharia court in her uniform so she went home to change into a maternity business suit. The court was set up in a mosque that was coincidentally 4 blocks from the Marshall's house.

Fanny accompanied Sarah home and up to the bedroom so they could speak. When they entered Fanny commented when she saw all the family pictures, "You have a lovely home. I can see that your daughters have a prominent place in your home. Does your husband treat them in a detrimental way?"

Sarah looked quizzically at her.

Fanny then revised her question, "I mean does he already have husbands chosen for them like my father did?"

Sarah smiled and answered, "We're Catholic and in our faith and in this country, we allow our children to choose their mates. I hope my daughters find nice men to marry. Until then they will learn how a man should treat a wife by watching how John treats me."

Fanny asked, "How does your husband treat you?"

Sarah smiled and said, "My mother asked me that once. John treats me like I am the greatest prize he has ever won. When he told me that he was in love with me, he said, 'the only thing he ever wants to do is to make sure I am safe, happy and loved. He cherishes me and every minute we have together. Because he is like that I can only reciprocate. We both believe that the first time we saw each other, we fell in love with each other."

Fanny replied, "It was like that for Jimmy and me. When he first saw me his jaw dropped."

Sarah smiled, "John did that to. It was only after we finished that first case, and being alone back here in DC that he said he liked me and wanted to spend his non-working time getting to know me."
Fanny asked, "Then what happened?"

Sarah said, "Since we were working together, we had to be careful at work. We did spend meals together and we enjoyed working the same cases together. After doing that for a few months, we admitted to each other that we were in love. After that it was magic. I nearly lost him though when he was shot. It took four months for him to recover before we got married. After that we felt more appreciative of our love for each other as it only made that love stronger."

Fanny asked, "Do you think these troubles Jimmy and I are going through will make our love stronger."

Sarah smiled and said, "You'll have to wait and see. I hope so for both your sakes. In the meantime let's get you through the troubles first." Sarah and Fanny left for the mosque.

During the hearing it was ascertained that Fanny did not give her actual consent to the marriage, but her father signed the marriage contract and acted as her proxy at the ceremony (beyond the age that he should have done so). She, however, sold the dowry that her "husband" gave her so she lost in the Sharia court and was considered married to the first husband.

However she arranged to immediately divorce him by giving him back the money. So Elling's marriage was void and Fatima would be deported, but he proposed again by giving her his phone card as a dowry. There was no resolution to the immigration status. But if she went back to her country, she could be killed for moral impropriety if she went back.

Harm couldn't sway his CO on Elling so he pleaded guilty and relied on a trial of peers for punishment. The strategy worked: no brig, reduced rank to Seaman and $1500 fine.

After that Fanny was sent to the State Department to apply for asylum. It was verified that she would subject to an honor killing if she returned to her country. So she was allowed to stay in the country and apply for citizenship.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 62

Tuesday, June 20, 2000

1500 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

For the last week Harriet was puttering around the bullpen. Emma was watching her when Bud was in court or out in the field on cases. She knew that Harriet was very near to her due date and she did not want a repeat of little AJ's birth.

Today Bud was out with the Gunny on a case and Emma and Loren Singer were speaking at Emma's desk when they saw Harriet carrying some files into the bullpen. Just then Harriet doubled over in pain, dropping the files. Emma got up and went over with Loren to help. While Loren bent to help Harriet into a chair, Emma and another petty officer gathered up the files.

As Harriet gripped her back Loren asked, "Are you having contractions Harriet?"

Harriet answered, "I don't think so, my back just spasmed. It really hurts."

After Emma helped picked up the files and gave them to a petty officer she asked, "Does it come and go?"

Harriet said, "Yeah it started as I was walking up from the file room. This latest one was the biggest."

Loren and Emma looked at each other. Emma nodded to Loren confirming their suspicions. Loren said, "Chief let's get Harriet to my car. I'll drive her to Bethesda. When we leave you get hold of Bud and have him meet us at Bethesda."

Emma said, "Aye lieutenant, let me get yours and Lt. Simms' covers and purses."

Loren and Harriet both said, "Thanks chief."

Emma and Loren helped Harriet down to Loren's car and set off to Bethesda. On the way they called Eve Baldwin. When they arrived at the maternity ward, Eve was waiting for them. Loren stayed with Harriet while Eve did her examination. She used the ultrasound and found the baby's heartbeat which was strong and she put the fetal monitor on Harriet.

Harriet asked, "My back spasms are still coming and going."

Eve smiled and said, "Harriet you're not having back spasms, you're in labor." Eve smiled and pointed at the monitor paper spooling out of the fetal monitor console. "A lot of times labor pains happen in the back. Judging by when you had your son, your labor should be relatively short. I'll be right back. I'm going to have the nurse prepare the delivery room." With that Eve left the room.

Just then the reception nurse came in and said, "Lt. Simms, your husband is here." Bud rushed in at that instant. "Harriet! Oh I'm so glad I got here in time. I didn't want to miss this one." Turning to Loren he said, "Thanks Loren I really appreciate the help you gave Harriet."
Loren smiled and said, "You're welcome Bud, Harriet. It was my pleasure." Turning to Harriet she said, "I'll go back to JAG then I'll go get AJ just like we arranged. I'll take his portable crib and he can sleep at my place tonight so don't worry about anything."

Harriet said, "Thanks Loren, you've been a great friend." Harriet put her hand out which Loren took. Harriet pulled her into a good hug. Loren had some tears in her eyes as Harriet hugged her tightly. She managed to keep them unshed as they broke apart.

Sighing heavily Loren said, "Okay call me when little Sarah comes." With that she turned to leave.

Eve passed Loren on her way in. A nurse came in with her. They got Harriet changed the rest of the way into a hospital gown and hook up an IV in her left hand. Bud gathered all Harriet's clothes. Then two attendants brought in a gurney and transferred Harriet. They wheeled her into the delivery room.

After scrubbing, Eve came in and set herself up for examining Harriet. Harriet was having strong contractions and she couldn't stop her pushing. Eve reached into her and felt for the baby. She let out a low, "Shit." She got a nurse to come over and instructed her, "Hold the head keep it from coming out, we have a prolapsed cord." The nurse did as she was told while Eve started giving instructions to the other delivery staff.

Bud was cleaned, gowned and masked and he was sat down at the father's stool. He asked, "Is that bad doctor?"

Eve said, "Yes Bud. We have to do a caesarian section. If the cord is crimped, it will deprive the baby of oxygen. You are going to have to leave, I have to operate." At that two nurses ushered Bud out.

Eve resumed giving instructions as the nurses set up for the operation. She turned to Harriet and said, "You heard what I said to Bud?" Harriet nodded yes, obviously dismayed. "Well we don't have time for an epidural. We're going to knock you out completely." With that the anesthesiologist injected the drug to knock Harriet out. "Don't worry Harriet from the time I make my first cut I'll have the baby out in a minute." Eve waited about 20 seconds until she saw Harriet's eyes flicker. "Okay people as soon as she is out we go to work." Harriet heard only 'okay' and she was out.

1715 Local Time
Bethesda Maternity Ward

Bud was waiting on a bench outside the delivery room for about 20 minutes. He was obviously worried. He had read about prolapsed umbilical cords and how dangerous they were to a baby. He was thinking of this when Eve came out. She pulled her mask down and breathed a long sigh. Bud got up still worried.

Eve turned to him and smiled. She said, "It was close but we were able to get little Sarah out in time. She was a little blue when we took her out but she 'pinned' up right away and she has good set of lungs." Bud could hear her crying through the open door. Eve continued, "The attending is sewing Harriet up. So come inside and meet your daughter."

Bud went in and saw that there was a movable barrier keeping him from seeing Harriet being operated on. The barrier could not block the unit of blood that was hanging on the IV Pole. To keep from thinking of that he put his full concentration on his new daughter. He smiled as the nurse put her swaddled form in his arms. He cooed and made the usual sounds at his daughter. Little Sarah just made her own usual sounds back at him. Just then he heard Harriet as she came out of her sleep.
"Bud, how's Sarah?"

Bud turned and brought Sarah over to her mother. Harriet brought her arms up as Bud settled the squirming bundle on her chest. Harriet weakly put her arms around her new baby. She started crying, "Oh Bud she's so beautiful." Bud beamed down at his family.

Wednesday, June 21, 2000

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Loren Singer got out of her car. She put a baby bag and her briefcase onto the hood of her car. She then went back into her car and unbuckled Little AJ from the baby seat. She placed AJ on her hip and reached and put the baby bag on her shoulder. Sarah and Harm had also arrived and saw her. Harm came over and picked up Loren's briefcase.

Loren turned to him and smiled, "Thanks sir."

As they walked in Sarah said, "Isn't little Sarah the most beautiful baby?"

Harm said, "She sure is. Just like her mother. Lieutenant have you seen her yet."

Loren said, "Not yet sir. I'm going there this afternoon after work. Right now I'm going to take this little guy with me until his daddy comes to get him." Loren tickled him and AJ giggled.

Sarah said, "You know Loren, Bud and Harriet really appreciate how you've stepped in to help them."

Loren said, "It was my pleasure. I mean you two are AJ's godparents, but you have your own families to take care of. I don't have any other non-work responsibilities, so it was the least I could do to help."

Sarah saw Harm give Loren a quizzical look as if to say, 'This is not the same overly ambitious, stiff robotic, no nonsense, female shark, officer lawyer I've become accustomed to.'

Sarah smiled back and said, "Harm I need to see you when you get yourself squared away. I need to inform you of something."

Harm nodded his understanding. Their exchange was lost on Loren as she concentrated on walking in with AJ.

When they arrived at the bullpen, the three separated to enter their own offices. Immediately upon putting his things away and starting his computer, Harm went out and knocked on Sarah's office door.

Sarah said, "Come in, close the door and sit down." When Harm had done so Sarah told him, "To answer your question about our favorite Lieutenant, Loren and I have been spending a lot of time together. I've encouraged her to open up to the others in the office. I think it's paying off. In case you haven't noticed, she is less formal and less stiff towards others. She's more open to trying a case to get the truth than just to win. It began after the Bracken case. She saw that her client was totally wrong, but she still zealously defended him. And by the way she was not the one who left the 'Part B of Bracken's Mishap Report' in my car. She was at Meg Austen's house that night. Meg invited Loren over for dinner to meet her brother, Bobby. Bobby is a Marine Captain from Lejune. Apparently Meg was telling Loren about him and Loren wanted to meet him."
Harm said, "She didn't tell me that when I asked her if she knew who put the report in your car. Why wouldn't she have told me that?"

Sarah answered, "Probably because she was hurt and thought you were accusing her. Meg already knew Loren didn't do it, but because you suggested that Meg go home on the night she was at Bethesda, she didn't get a chance to tell you that she ruled Loren out."

Harm thought back to that encounter. He had believed her mostly because she hadn't tried to convince him nor had she begged him to believe her. She'd said it matter of factly and not in any kind of persuading way. One other reason why he'd believed her was because lying and stealing are sure ways of destroying your own career and Loren wanted just the opposite. With her blunt and honest straightforwardness she had in just under a minute earned herself more respect from Harm than she'd ever know.

As he thought about that day some more he realized why Loren was hurt. Harm was so angry someone was screwing around with someone in his family. He let Loren see that anger and not even made an effort to explain it to her. Thus Loren assumed that the anger was directed at her. He immediately resolved to seek her out and correct that misinterpretation.

Harm then asked, "Well what happened that made her change so much?"

Sarah smiled and said, "She met Chloe."

Harm looked at her with a look that said, 'Aaand.'

"I invited Loren over for dinner a few nights after we got back from Florida. Earlier that day she came into my office to tell me she was sorry that someone tried to sabotage the Bracken case and that she wanted to win it fair and square. I gave her the same advice that we all get about how we JAGs don't get to choose our clients and that we always try to do our ethical best for the clients we're given. She said she understood that. She really wanted to know how we handle it when we lose a case when we have a client that was so guilty."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her that during any case, one was just part of the process whether you defended or prosecuted, just try to put the truth out there and that the truth is in the evidence. I advised that if the evidence showed that her client was obviously guilty she should not be afraid to plead it out."

"But how does that fit into her change in attitude and what did Chloe say to change her?"

"Chloe told her that in the years before she met me she didn't know that it was alright to be happy. You know Chloe's mother died when Chloe was very young and then all her step parents ever did were ignored or abused her. You remember that Christmas Eve when Chloe showed up here? (Harm nodded yes.) She was so desperately looking for someone to be her mother or just a parent. We found all this out in the course of her counseling with Jordan. That's why she was so devastated when her father and grandmother died. Her first real parents since she could remember were taken away from her. Well it seems that when she told Loren this, it struck a chord. I'm not violating Loren's privacy by telling you this because she asked me to tell you and only you so if you blab to anyone else, I will kill you."

Harm smiled and crossed his heart saying, "My lips are sealed."

Sarah continued, "So after Chloe told Loren that, Loren came to me the next morning and told me how she grew up. She lived in an alcoholic household like I did, except both her parents drank. They
treated her the same way Chloe's step-parents treated her. They pretty much ignored Loren unless she was disrupting their good times. The only ones they ever cared for were each other. They were the happy drunks, always looking for a good time, partying every day and having long weekends. Loren said it was only a miracle that she didn't end up drinking herself. Loren had only waited to leave until after she graduated high school.

Sarah thought to herself about that night and what Loren had told her, revealing so much of the reason why she was the way she was. Her youth was so similar to Sarah's; with her parents' alcoholism, but in her case the daughter was the one who'd left. Sarah had to admire that Loren had not given in to alcohol herself, like she had done. She saw how it had deteriorated her parents' lives. So she had remained strong and left before it had the chance to destroy her.

Despite this she was not too proud or too foolish to insist she could take care of herself completely. So during her senior year in high school she found help in her school's counselor. Being that Loren was already 18 years old, the counselor was not obligated to tell Loren's parents. The counselor referred her to an on school 'Alanon' program. It was a support group for the relatives of alcoholics. They helped her deal with her parents drinking.

After she graduated High School with honors and knowing that she needed a means to support herself, she joined the Navy. She started as an enlisted and then went through O.C.S. and became an officer. She entered Law School, NJS, passing them with honors as well.

It was then no wonder that she had become the way she was, hard, tenacious, and closed-off and determined to get all the way to the top. Her parents' alcoholism caused their irrational spending of money. The booze had also caused them to lose their jobs. Thus the entire family ended up at the social bottom. She had to work extremely hard to get out of there. Being that her parents spent themselves into poverty, Loren was very frugal.

Sarah saw that she had a lot of fortitude and tenacity. She succeeded not by hanging on or being connected to someone who owed her favors, nor sleeping her way to anything, used any holes in the system. She rose from the bottom of the social and military ladder on only her own merit.

To Sarah, Loren Singer was like an onion... when you peeled one layer away you were faced with another. Those glimpses of her true self revealed to Sarah that beneath that mask or that first layer of armor was a compassionate woman, a woman who only wanted a piece of happiness and love for herself in a life that had to have been hard and harsh.

Sarah returned to the present saying, "You know it's eerie, she graduated high school with honors like I did and she enlisted in the Navy and came up the same way as I did, except she wanted to go into law right off the bat whereas I had to be convinced to go into law.

Well anyway during the course of our conversation, I advised her to open up a little to our colleagues, let them see the real her. I mentioned that it would be easier to work with everyone if she did so. So she started by talking to Bud and Harriet. Harriet was so looking for someone to confide in and share things with. In case you haven't noticed, Harriet's not a lawyer."

Harm smiled sarcastically and bade her to continue.

"Well Harriet and Loren were spending a lot of lunch hours together and Bud and Harriet had her over for dinner. Little AJ took a shine to her and Harriet asked her to be a back-up care taker for little AJ if/ when Harriet went into labor, Bud was too far away from home on a case and that time came yesterday."

Harm said, "It all makes sense. Well I'm sure working with her will be so much easier."
Sarah heard his tone and said, "Don't you dare underestimate her. I saw up close how she worked when she worked on the Russian rules with the rest of my team. She does very good work, and again in case you haven't noticed, she is always prepared and she really knows the law. John said in his TV interview that he thought I was a formidable woman and he could see me sitting on the Supreme Court. Well I see Loren the same way."

Harm had to laugh, "Well she so much as told me she wants to be the JAG."

Sarah smiled and said, "That could work to."

Harm laughed then he thought to himself. He had once heard a description on the television, a description that fit Loren, Sarah, his wife Diane and even John's sister Ann Marie to the 'T'. A man, in this case an English Lord, had in a movie on TV called 'The Lost World' described a lady with the following words: "A woman of fire and steel." Harm thought he was very lucky to know four such formidable women.

1830 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Hospital

Loren walked into Harriet's room with an arranged bowl of fruit. Harriet was breast feeding Sarah behind the privacy curtain. Loren called out, "Harriet?"

Harriet said, "Come on in Loren, if it's only you I hear. Bud went to get some dinner for AJ."

Loren stepped behind the curtain and saw Sarah was latched onto Harriet's breast with a vengeance. Harriet winced and said, "Even no teeth this child is a barracuda."

Loren had to laugh at that. She said, "Well it's good to see she's doing well. From what Bud told me today, you were lucky that they were there when the prolapsed cord was found and were able to do the caesarian in time."

Harriet said, "We were lucky that Dr. Baldwin was there. I don't want to think if we had some other doctor. Bud said he heard two other doctors talking at the desk about what they were going to do after they got out of the Navy. One of them was showing the other a picture of a Porsche he was going to buy because he was a 'short timer' who was counting the days until he got into his private practice."

Loren added, "It boggles the mind that the concentration level isn't where it's supposed to be. I mean really the Navy pay isn't quite what it is in public, but you can still make a decent living as a doctor and an officer."

Harriet said, "I'm glad your concentration level was there when we needed it when you took care of AJ. Bud and I very much appreciated that. We have request for you."

Loren said, "What do you need Harriet?"

Harriet answered, "Well Bud is asking his brother Mike to be Sarah's godfather. I want you to be her godmother."

Loren was totally taken aback. She stammered, "I, I'm really touched and honored Harriet that you think I'm good enough to be Sarah's godmother, but don't you have a sister or other relatives you can ask? I don't want to step on anyone's toes."

Harriet answered, "No Loren, I'm an only child and my cousins are few and far between. I'm not that
close to them or anyone else in JAG or Washington besides the Rabbs, the Matthews, and the Marshalls and they are godparents to each other's children. I would really be honored if you said yes. So please say yes."

Loren cocked her head to one side and smiled her own watery smile, "Yes Harriet I'll be Sarah's godmother." Harriet opened her arms and Loren moved onto the bed to tightly embrace her.

Monday, June 26, 2000

1030 Local Time

Frohl Technologies

Oceanside, California

AJ assigned Loren and Harm to fly out to California to investigate a very complicated case. On the plane ride out, they had a long talk.

Harm said, "I'm sorry the anger you saw hurt you. You didn't need that. I believed you when you told me it wasn't you. My anger was directed at that person who was messing with someone from my family."

Loren was receptive and said, "I understand sir. I can see that family is important to you and you would go through the wall to protect them."

Harm put his hand on hers as it lay on the armrest and said, "That goes for my friends also Loren. I want you to understand that you can come to me or Diane if you need any help with anything or anyone that bothers you. Also as I told you at my wet down it's Harm when we're alone or not in the office."

Loren smiled and said, "Thanks Harm I really appreciate that. Knowing that makes me feel less alone. As a matter of fact, since I've been following Colonel Marshall's advice about opening up to our colleagues I do feel less and less alone at work. Heck Carolyn Imes and Traci Manetti are asking me to go to a spa day during the holiday weekend. We single girls have to stick together."

She and Harm had to share a laugh. After exchanging some anecdotes about the recent goings-on at the office and so forth, they settled down to discuss the investigation.

The investigation centered on Frohl Technologies or 'FrohlTech'. Two Naval aviators are killed in the crash of their newly upgraded F-14 jet. The upgrading was done at FrohlTech.

To make matters more difficult Lowell, Hanson and Lowne, with Dalton Lowne as the lead attorney was representing FrohlTech. Lowne dogged them even into their JAG meeting claiming pilot error. He interfered with their interviews of employees and Harm didn't comment on it. Lt. Burke and Commander Urquizu signed for the plane from Lt Commander Holtsford, working at FrohlTech, and then died when it crashed after takeoff.

They met FrohlTech's test pilot, Wilson, who invited Harm to fly with him sometime.

Harm and Loren finally managed to get a mechanic alone. He turned out to be very rude and sarcastic as he asked, "What do pilots use for birth control?"

Harm answered, "Their personality."

Harm then asked the mechanic "What is the difference between a pilot and a jet engine?"
The mechanic answered, "The engine stops whining when it lands."

Loren was listening to the exchange and couldn't help herself as she laughed heartily. Despite all that they were able to get some information from him.

Harm and Loren found that a plane was ready for pickup except for a CSD (constant speed drive) so Holtsford used the one out of the mishap plane. Then when it was ready he cannibalized the CSD from another arriving plane without paperwork, testing or inspection. The parts cannibalization of parts was common. Requisitions for parts were filled more with older parts scavenged from other planes, than from brand new parts.

After reviewing their report Admiral Chegwidden agreed to proceed with Harm and Loren that Holtsford needed to be court martialed. But Congresswoman Latham came asking for records from FrohlTech. She told AJ that she gave Holtsford immunity for testifying in her committee on military waste and fraud. She became loud and abusive to Harm saying that "it's a done deal" so he demanded to be there. She was against project "spyglass" (another FrohlTech project) and Harm said that there wouldn't be a hearing if she wasn't in a reelection campaign.

Going to a pre-hearing conference Congressman Porter told Harm that he was on "a fool's errand" to which Latham commented "and that makes me the fool?" Porter said that Spyglass was satellites which could read the label on Castro's cigar. Holtsford asked if he had immunity in the conference as well and was told "as long as you tell the truth."

Holtsford dumped the whole thing on FrohlTech, saying that they never had enough man power, cut corners, hired inexperienced mechanics making it impossible to do the job without cannibalizing parts, falsifying reports and gun deckling inspections; and so they could get through this job and onto the next.

Harm said it was Holtsford's job to protect the Navy's interest and he said that he was passed over for Commander twice and was out in a year. FrohlTech offered him a job to if he just got the planes out on time.

Harm was having mixed feelings about FrohlTech because he liked Spyglass. Porter questioned Holtsford who said that he had never seen the Jim Hepperly, the "big boss." Then Porter revealed a secret tape recording from Hepperly's office of Holtsford trying to "shake them down" for money in order to "say the right thing."

Hepperly told him to "get out of his office." So Latham "bailed" on the issue trying to avoid bad press. Harm pointed out that Holtsford lied making his immunity void and the court-martial back on. He volunteered to defend Holtsford and Chegwidden advised that "there were other forums to expose corporate misdeeds.

Lowne still dogged Harm's interview. Harm complimented Lowne on his "complete whitewash, except you forgot to fill in the hole where they crashed."

Wilson asked Harm if he was "still turning over rocks" and Harm said that "the worms have a lawyer" so he had to leave.

He then took Wilson up on the offer to fly and was told it was though Harm had never been out of the cockpit. They had to hurry back because the runway closed at 4 pm and he would be fined $500 which made Harm suspicious and he faked a CSD failure nearly running them into the ground until Wilson said "damn idiots, they keep doing this!"

He still refused to testify for Harm because they wouldn't let him fly again but told Harm where to
look. Lowne claimed harassment, but he was shown that no harassment was done because Sarah, being assigned to prosecute Holtsford, also with Harm's request for records.

A mechanic said that when he came to work at 3:00PM Wilson had just taken off to test the mishap plane. Harm knew Wilson couldn't have done the full two hour test if the runway closed at 4 so Wilson finally agreed to testify. He said that they scheduled three tests after noon which couldn't be done.

FrohlTech swamped them with useless records to obfuscate issues. Latham, Loren, Sarah and Harm were going over the records when Lowne walked in and confessed that he was there while the top echelon was culling papers to submit. He said that he took a memo and then gave them the "smoking gun." The memo was about "risk/reward analysis" on the refurbishment project and said they would cut their losses by "limiting the parameters of infrastructure support" preferring a few fines to the continued losses of doing it right.

Harm and Sarah bargained for Holtsford's "negligent homicide with 18 months." FrohlTech got a $10 million fine, reprimand and promise to work harder on the spyglass project.

Harm and Sarah were just glad it was over.

Saturday, July 1, 2000
0900 Local Time
Marshall / Rabb Bungalow
Rehoboth Beach, DE

The Marshalls, Rabbs and the Matthews spent the 2nd weekend of summer at the Rabbs poolside. Earlier in the spring Diane's old boss Admiral Grafton told John of an available four bedroom bungalow near his own in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. John called Harm and the two went to check it out. Seeing it was in good shape and with their wives approval, they decided to rent it for their families for the summer starting with the upcoming 4th of July weekend.

The Rabbs and Marshalls were lucky to get the week off from their respective offices. They arrived at the bungalow late the previous evening. Both couples drove their respective SUVs directly to Delaware from the Navy Yard. The bungalow was on the opposite side of the beach road from the beach itself. This ensured that the sand would not be eroded from under it over time. When they arrived they unloaded their cars then after getting a pizza delivered they put the kids to bed. Chloe and little Sarah shared a double bed in the middle bedroom with the babies in their respective cribs. Then the adults collapsed into bed in their respective rooms.

The next morning John and Harm got up an hour later than usual at 0700 to run on the beach. Before the men went running, they turned on the coffee maker. Sarah prepared the coffee the night before. When they walked back into the bungalow, they smelled the fresh coffee as well as bacon being cooked. When they entered the kitchen they saw that Chloe was expertly cooking the bacon. Sarah was feeding Caroline her morning cereal while Diane was doing the same to her twins. Little Sarah was eating from her own bowl of cheerios.

The two Mackenzie sisters turned to accept their husbands' kisses. Diane wrinkled her nose and said, "You taste sweaty. Take a shower before you sit down."

Sarah said to John, "That goes for you to Mr. Marshall." Before John could make a move Harm darted into the bathroom first. John smirked and poured himself his morning cup of coffee. He sipped
it as he leaned against the kitchen counter. Harm finished before he finished his coffee. After his last sip John went in to take his shower.

After breakfast Sarah and Diane packed a picnic lunch in a Coleman cooler for the two families. They went to the portion of the beach with lifeguards so they could swim in safety, which was conveniently just across the road from their bungalow. Harm and John set up the tent shelter and umbrellas to shade the kids as they crawled around the beach towels and the sand.

They spent a good part of the day swimming and building sandcastles with the kids. Sarah and Diane took the three babies to the water's edge and dipped them in the water. Caroline, Samantha and Trey squealed with delight as they toddled and splashed around the ankle deep water as it flowed around them under their mothers' watchful eyes.

At one point Chloe, little Sarah and Caroline buried their fathers in the sand. When the men came out of their sandy coverings they grabbed their daughters and ran into the water with them as they squealed with delight.

Eventually the day ended. They formed a caravan back to the bungalow. The three babies were in strollers that the parents helped carry to the pavement. Then the men gathered up the cooler, shade tent and umbrellas while Chloe carried the beach towels back to the bungalow.

The bungalow had an outdoor shower stall with hot and cold water. The men took their showers there. Then they changed into dry suits. The bathroom had a shower stall and a tub. While Chloe and little Sarah shared a shower together, Sarah and Diane put the three babies in the tub and cleaned them off. After Chloe and little Sarah left the bathroom, the fathers came in to see if they could lend some assistance with the babies.

"Do you ladies need help with them?" John asked as he saw that the kids were like slippery eels as the two mothers tried to corral them in the tub.

Samantha mooned her uncle and father as she bent over and looked at them upside down from between her legs. Diane gave her one more rinse and then picked her up from the tub and gave her to her father.

"She's already cleaned. Dry her off, get her dressed and give her a bottle." Diane said.

Harm took a towel and gathered her up and left the room.

Sarah did the same with Caroline. 'Trey' proved to be more rambunctious as he repeatedly splashed his mother.

"Honestly, he's just like his father. If he keeps this up, I won't need a shower." Diane said as she lovingly gathered her son up in a towel. Trey giggled as Diane briskly rubbed him dry. Harm came back in and took his son. Then the mothers took their own showers.

1900 Local Time

Rehoboth, DE

As the moms fed the babies, Harm and John cooked a stir fry chicken dinner. After dinner the adults settled the kids in for the night. Then they sat on the outdoor love seats on the front porch. Sarah and Diane were each nestled in her husband's arms.

Diane asked her sister, "So Sarah how's it going at work?"
Sarah had to smile as she answered, "Well if my brother-in-law isn't hovering around me being all protective, then Emma or even AJ are. I swear even if I'm out of site, as soon as I start to move something heavy or over reach for something, one of them magically appears. And who keeps stocking the crackers and ginger ale with my name on the package or bottle?"

Harm could only guiltily shrug his shoulders. "That would be me. Diane told me that you said your morning sickness was bothering you more with this baby than when you were carrying Caroline."

"Well thanks for that." Sarah said.

"How was it dealing with Dalton Lowne on the FrohlTech case?" Diane asked Sarah.

"He was a perfect gentleman. He was all work all the time. He told me he got married a few months ago. He even showed me a picture of his wife. She's going to have their first baby," Sarah answered admiringly.

Harm added, "Yeah he was actually very professional, handing us that smoking gun memo from FrohlTech. Without that, we would not have been able to reach a settlement so quickly."

Sarah added, "You know Loren Singer was very good working with you. She told me you apologized to her. She really appreciated that."

Harm said to Sarah, "Yeah she opened up to me about what you and I talked about. I have to give her a lot of credit for her accomplishments."

Sarah nodded then she asked John, "What time are the Graftons coming over?"

As Sarah rested her head on his shoulder John looked over her head. "In about 15 seconds." Callie and Jake Grafton were walking up the front path to the porch.

At that the wives disentangled themselves and they all stood to greet their guests. Callie and Jake shared hugs and kisses with the two sisters and Callie kissed Harm and John's cheeks.

"It's so good to have you all here. Bob and Rita were visiting her parents in California and Amy and her fiancé will be here tomorrow." Callie informed them.

"We're glad you recommended this bungalow." John said.

"Where are the children?" Jake asked.

"Chloe is inside watching TV and the babies are asleep." Sarah said pointing out the baby monitors.

"Can I take a peak?" Callie asked.

"Sure." Diane and Sarah said.

As the women went inside John asked, "What can I get you admiral?"

"First John drop the ranks and you can get me a beer and a Sprite for Callie." Jake said.

"Aye, aye Jake." John said as he got up to get the beverages. Even though Sarah didn't drink, she never begrudged John having an occasional beer, as long as he didn't overdo it or drive.

Callie, Diane and Sarah went to look at the babies. On the way in Chloe got up and greeted Callie. Sarah said to her, "Mrs. Grafton, your aunt and I are going to check the babies. Please go outside and say hello to Admiral Grafton and then after the show your watching is over, it's bedtime sweetie."
Sarah said as she gave her daughter a hug and a kiss on her head.

"Okay mom." Chloe said kissing her back on the cheek.

Sarah walked away with a smile. Callie saw it and said, "It was the same way with my Amy. There's nothing compared to the feeling when the daughter you chose calls you mom."

"My mom told me the same thing before she died." Diane said.

Sarah just smiled in gratitude.

When they walked into the central bedroom, they looked down on all the babies as they slept in their portable cribs and Sarah as she slept in the double bed she was sharing with Chloe.

"Sarah looks so cute with her arms wrapped around her blankey." Callie whispered.

The babies were all lying on their sides with either their own favorite blankies or stuffed animal.

"They looked so darling. I bet they're a handful." Callie said as then walked back to the porch.

"Yes they are with Sarah leading the parade." Diane said with pride.

"It's a good thing we have Chloe. Whenever they're together and the babies get a little out of control, Chloe will just put her hands on her hips and uses the full name of the one who started it. Mostly it's Sarah. I swear I hear 'Sarah Catherine Rabb don't you even think of doing that' more times than I care to count. They all look at her with their big eyes as if to say, (who me?)." Big Sarah said to everyone's low chuckles.

They rejoined the men on the porch. Jake was saying, "I've been in the Navy for over 30 years. It's time I call it quits and let some of you younger guys take over."

"Does the CNO know yet Jake?" John asked.

"Yeah he does. I'm going to retire effective at the end of the year. He's making up a short list for my replacement in J2." Grafton said.

"So who's on the top or can you tell us?" Harm asked facetiously.

"Yeah I can, he is." Jake said pointing to John.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 63

John sat there in total shock. Sarah just wrapped both arms around his neck and gleefully kissed his cheek.

"Let me back up a little. It's actually Rear Adm. Robert LaPorte who is on top of the short list. You are on top of the short list for his deputy. Bob Tarkington is also leaving Naval Intelligence. He told me that he and Rita are done with the Navy and they are retiring together, effective the end of the year. So that means that his position will need to be filled the same time mine will. He doesn't know yet that I'm retiring."

Everyone settled down somewhat after that. They were all still happy at the news.

Grafton went on, "While your fitness reports show that you're more than qualified to be bumped to Rear Admiral, you still have to serve the required time in rank as Captain. The reason you were bumped to Captain so fast was because your position required it and it's not unusual for a good officer to be bumped another grade after so short a time in the lower grade.

Also Thomas and AJ had nothing but good things to say about you. At JAG your case record was way above average. You rarely lost any case you prosecuted. All the cases where you defended a client were very ethically done; none of your clients had anything bad to say about you, at least the smart ones."

Everyone laughed at that.

Grafton continued, "Furthermore you've made a name for yourself at NCIS. The work you've done there has been exemplary. Even that job the four of you did in Russia. If it wasn't for your team's intelligence, those missiles would have ended up in terrorists hands otherwise. Also without giving away what they are, all the other covert ops you've run have yielded some very good intelligence.

Your grasp of the terrorist world is like no one we've ever seen before. You have a knack of looking at the big picture by linking terrorist activity with street crime. Your paper detailing the linkage of chemical purchases with bomb making was met with very favorable results by not only our people in the Navy and the Army and Air Force CIDs, but also by the FBI and by all the major urban police departments.

Then there's the work you are doing with Colonel O'Hara on militia groups. That has managed to shut down more than a few that were started up by disgruntled ex-military or wannabes. The follow-up on that group that forced that pilot to almost shoot down Yasser Arafat's plane that Sarah, Harm and Bud Roberts broke up was first rate. They couldn't have done that without NCIS' assistance."

"I didn't know you had Uncle Matt working with you. When did you start doing that?" Sarah asked.

"As soon as we came back from our honeymoon I went to him. It was one of the conditions of his going out on his Christmas visit. Harm had to be his attorney. (Diane looked at Harm with surprise.) He was happy to do it. It made him feel that he was contributing again. Because of his work, his sentence will be commuted from life to 25 years with parole eligibility after 5 years. And don't you two, (looking also at Diane) get on our case about not telling you. You know as well as we do we had to keep it confidential for the usual reasons. It was Jake here who spilled the beans."
Sarah and Diane wrapped their arms around their husbands' necks and kissed their cheeks.

As they came up from their embrace Sarah who spoke up, "Oh I'm not mad. As a matter of fact I'm happy.

Diane added, "And so am I."

Grafton continued, "The reason we can say something here is because you all have security clearance and Colonel O'Hara's work still isn't done. I've been authorized to tell you because he is being transferred to the Quantico Brig to serve out the rest of his sentence. There we can have more access to him and what he knows."

Sarah said, "I bet you have to fight with the FBI for access to Uncle Matt."

"Actually we don't. It really pays to have a friend in the White House. Admiral Magnum went through SECNAV Nelson and convinced President Bartlett to have the Attorney General tell the FBI to back off. They have to abide by NCIS' rules to talk to him. A senior NCIS Agent needs to be present at every interview. The guy from the FBI's anti-terrorist unit named Fornell is really chafing under those rules. He really doesn't like us. He is of the opinion that our agents are cowboys and no better than retread MPs or beat cops." John said.

The group laughed at that. They all knew John and Admiral Magnum worked very hard to dissuade everyone of that notion.

Grafton added, "And John, don't forget the Legion of Merit. That's the first thing they see when they open your file as well as yours Sarah."

Sarah nodded her head demurely and said, "Thanks Jake."

"So what happens now?" John asked.

"Well, you all need to keep this under your hats until after I've made the official announcement. That will be after Labor Day. After that the CNO will start calling in the candidates on the list. Only he, Admiral Magnum and I know your name is at the top of the short list for deputy director. Not even AJ knows yet. I'll tell him after this holiday. So everyone keep it on the Q.T. and keep doing the good jobs you're doing and let the process work."

The Marshalls and the Rabbs agreed. The evening ended pleasantly after that.

Sunday, July 2, 2000
To
Sunday, July 9, 2000
Rehoboth, DE

The Grafton's daughter Amy arrived the next day with her fiancé Roger Higgins, a captain in the Marine Corps. After church on Sunday, the families went to the beach and then again every day for the rest of the week. Each day the Graftons joined them. Jake and Callie acted like grandparents, totally spoiling the Marshall and Rabb babies. Amy told the Marshalls and Rabbs of her plans to become a doctor as she majored in pre-med at Georgetown. The three families had a barbecue dinner at the Graftons for the 4th of July. They all enjoyed the rest of the week relaxing at the bungalow. They all went back to Washington early on Sunday the 9th to beat the traffic.
Monday, July 10, 2000
JAG Headquarters
0900 Local Time

AJ asked Sarah to come into his office after Staff Call. "First things first, Jake told me the good news about John. It's premature for me to say congratulations yet, but I will say good luck" AJ said.

"Thank you sir," Sarah said demurely. "I'm very proud of John. I had no idea of the extent of his work. I mean I knew he ran the service with Thomas, but I didn't know how respected he was outside NCIS."

"Well we both knew how dedicated he can be. We both saw it while he was here. Tom told me that he really admired how he went through the chain of command to use his friendship with the President to get the FBI to back off his operation with your uncle." AJ said admiringly.

"Well he understands how politics and relationships work in this town. He also understands that the President would not just give him what he wanted just because of friendship. John had to have a lot of data to back up his request. Also John knows that we don't work in a vacuum. He would share his information with all the other law enforcement agencies as he needed to." Sarah said.

"You're right about that. Speaking of working in a vacuum, I'm sending you to 'the hill' to work with Congresswoman Latham." AJ said.

"What 'military waste' is she looking to get rid of now sir?" Sarah asked holding up her fingers in quotes at 'military waste'.

AJ answered, "The OSPREY. Ms. Latham was on a "ride-along" along with Congressman Feltzer in one. It was hit by an ocean swell. It seems she is blaming the mishap on the OSPREY which was (AJ consulted a note on his desk) 'so faulty that the pilot couldn't handle it'. She is also claiming that there was an attempt at a cover-up because the pilot over-flew the data recorder."

"Does Ms. Latham have a bias against the OSPREY sir?" Sarah asked.

"Ms. Latham is trying to kill the OSPREY. She will be conducting hearings to do just that." AJ answered.

"What do you need me to do there sir?" Sarah asked.

"I want you ensure that Ms. Latham asks the right questions. Make sure her concerns are legitimate and she doesn't rush to judgment. Former SECDEF Cheney may have tried to kill the OSPREY, but there have been enough good people working to keep it going. Find out all the answers Colonel." AJ instructed her.

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said.

"Also FYI your brother in law is defending the pilot involved, Major Asher. So you and he are working this case from different sides."

"Not a problem sir. Between the two of us, we'll get the answers we need." Sarah acknowledged.

"Very well colonel, dismissed." AJ said ending the briefing.

Wednesday, July 12, 2000
Marshall Residence

John was following Chloe though the backdoor from the driveway into the house. They came from dinner at the Rabbs. The Marshalls came home in separate cars because they met at the Rabbs. Sarah went there straight from Capitol Hill in a JAG Staff car while John left his Crown Vic' at NCIS and drove the Trailblazer to pick-up Caroline from the daycare center and then Chloe at school.

As Chloe entered the house, she didn't even think of stopping as she marched quickly upstairs. As John entered the kitchen he winced as he heard his daughter slam her bedroom door. At least he thought it was her bedroom door.

He turned to face the source of the familial angst as she entered the kitchen. Sarah was carrying Caroline and her baby bag. John relieved her of Caroline and the baby bag, putting her down in the kitchen playpen and the bag down on the floor beside it.

John and asked, "So do you want to talk about it Sarah?"

"Talk about what?" Sarah asked, feigning ignorance.

"About whatever it is that has you so preoccupied this evening," he replied as he shrugged out of his suit jacket and draped it over a kitchen chair. Sarah sat down at the kitchen table.

"I'm in my second trimester with my second baby." Sarah replied. "I think I'm entitled to the occasional moment of preoccupation."

"If I thought this was about the baby, I wouldn't be asking," John said softly as he sat down in the chair adjacent to her. "I saw that you almost bit Diane's head off when she asked what was bothering you. Then you yelled at Chloe when she didn't answer you right away. She had four squealing infants around her as she was reading a story to them and she just didn't hear you. You've never done that before."

"Oh Chloe will get over that." Sarah said flippantly.

"Maybe, but not right away, Chloe was really upset. During the ride home she told me that your outburst reminded her of her step mother." John said.

"She didn't?" she asked dismayed as she met his gaze.

"She did," he replied, reaching for her hand. "So I'll repeat the question. Do you want to talk about it?"

Sarah sighed and dropped her head into her hands. "It's this whole OSPREY mess."

"Is it a classified mess?" he probed.

"No," she replied with a small smile in his direction. "It's a Congresswoman Latham mess."

John smiled as he pulled her hand to his lips and placed a kiss on it before he said, "Then you're allowed to share with me."

"She's the one pushing the issue about the OSPREY not being safe, and because of that, she's trying to cut off the funding for it. She also thinks just because I'm assigned to her staff that I have to support her every opinion, like some glorified uniform wrapped 'yes lady.'"
"Uh huh Harm told me that you and he have been investigating the cause of the mishap that occurred on the OSPREY flight. He didn't say that you were having problems with Latham." John said.

"Yeah it's really out of the public's view," she said as she stood up and began to pace. "Harm is representing the pilot Maj. Asher. He managed to show that the mishap was due to Latham's two hour delay.

"And they went ahead with the mission?" John asked, watching her restless pacing and being reminded of watching her in the courtroom.

"Yeah," she answered as she suddenly stopped pacing and turned to look directly at him. "And because of the two hour delay, they were flying directly into the sun. Because of that, the glare off the water was bad, causing the pilot to misjudge how close he was to the water.

Also we found out that Congressman Feltzer prolonged the jump exercise because he wanted to stand for a picture and the jump master called a halt to all activity. Because he did that when the wave hit, Feltzer fell and hit his head so bad that he lost consciousness.

Being alerted to that Asher flew straight to Portsmouth so Feltzer could get the medical care he needed. Latham accused Asher of over-flying the data recorder to cover up the 'error'. Asher then refused to say anything at first about the delay having a negative effect on the mission. Harm and I had to find that out for ourselves. Being that I am not in a prosecutorial role, Harm and Asher felt they could share that with me."

"So what are you planning to do?" John asked as he stood up, moving to stand in front of her.

"Well Harm is going to have Asher present all that information before the committee." she replied firmly. "And I'm very much going to enjoy watching the Congresswoman squirm."

John couldn't help the slight chuckle that escaped. "You really don't like her, do you?"

"Believe me, it's mutual," Sarah stated. "She and I have never seen eye to eye."

"So Harm told me," he replied as he reached out and ran his hands up and down her arms in an attempt to calm her down.

"She has been treating me as some sort of inferior being because she didn't get airsick when Harm took her up in a Tomcat while we were in Italy. We all know I was prone to do just that when he used to take me up. Then there's the fact that I'm pregnant. She doesn't believe that I can make a rational decision or come to a rational conclusion because I'm carrying extra cargo. She thinks that my hormones will run away with my thinking." Sarah said plaintively.

She continued, "And another thing, because I wanted to take lunch with Caroline, she accused me of not being totally focused." Sarah added.

"Really, she said that?" John asked incredulously.

"Yeah, she did!" Sarah said almost in tears.

"Well I can see how that would upset you. That's the one part of your day you really look forward to." John said into her hair as he drew her closer.

"I mean she was almost blocking my way to the car. I had to insist she come with me. While we were there she kept 'tisking' and generally acting like she wanted to be somewhere else. I had to cut it short and leave the center with Caroline crying." Sarah said sniffing. She cried for a short time as
she went into a hormone moment. John had finally gotten the answers he was looking for.

"She's really not a bad person, you know," John said as he tightened his embrace. "I think she's just jealous that you have everything, a good career, a nice family and home. She's totally dedicated to her work and she never tried to devote herself to anything or anyone else." John said.

"You really think so?" Sarah asked as she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Yeah I do." John said as he kissed her hair. He continued, "Also I think if you two sat down and got to know each other, you'd be surprised at how much you have in common," he said as his hands trailed up and down her back.

"I don't see that happening any time soon," she said defiantly.

John sighed. "Well at least I know you'll be civil to her at the hearings," He said leaning back to look at her.

"I'll try," she agreed.

"Good enough," he replied. "Now, do you feel better now that you've talked about it?"

"Yeah," she admitted. "But you know what would make tonight perfect?"

"What's that?" he asked, noticing the slight gleam in her eyes.

"This," she replied before reaching up and claiming his lips.

"Mmm." he murmured when they broke apart several seconds later. "You were right. That does make it perfect." Sarah's hands moved to the bottom of his shirt and pulled it out from the waistband of his pants to slide underneath.

"You know that I'm more than willing to do this, but there is one more person you need to speak with." he said as her hands slid up and down his back under the material of his shirt.

She sighed, "Yeah you're right. I don't think I could stand Chloe hating me for the rest of her life."

"Nah, she doesn't hate you, she just needed some distance. That's why I insisted she go home with me. I told her that something at work was bothering you and she needed to go with me because I didn't want her to say anything to you that she would have regretted. She's probably waiting for you to come upstairs right now."

"I'll go up and speak with her now." Sarah said giving John a quick kiss.

She went right up to Chloe's room and knocked on her door. She didn't receive a response so she said, "Chloe honey it's mom. I'm sorry I got mad and snapped at you and..."

Sarah was totally surprised when Chloe flung the door open and flung herself into Sarah's arms. Sarah didn't say anything she just tightened her arms around her cherished daughter as they both had a good cry.

"I'm sorry I took all my anger out on you, baby. I've been dealing with a shrew of a congresswoman. She's been pushing all my buttons. I love you sweetie please don't hate me for being angry." Sarah said through the sniffles.

"I love you to mommy. I could never hate you. You're the best mom I ever had. I knew something at work was bothering you," Chloe said rapidly.
"Well I'll never do that again. I have to learn to leave work at work." Sarah told her. "Come inside and we'll talk about your day as I get changed for bed." The two walked into the master bedroom arm in arm.

Thursday, July 13, 2000

0930 Local Time

Congressional Hearing Room

US Capitol

When Sarah arrived on the hill Congressman Feltzer asked for her assistance on the committee.

"Roberta brought in her own hired gun William Markey, a civilian weapons analyst. He has debunked or attempted to debunk every weapons system as it came down the pipe." Feltzer told her.

"Would you like me to prepare some questions you can ask him sir?" Sarah asked.

"Yes I would colonel, but I want you to ask them," he replied. He saw the inquisitive look on Sarah's face and he stepped in to say, "If you ask the questions, there will not be any question that you are rebutting Markey's claims. We need to hear from someone who is on the military's side of the question. With that in mind, your rebuttal will have more weight."

Sarah couldn't agree more. Inwardly she thought that this was the perfect way to battle Congresswoman Latham.

When it came time for Markey to testify, Latham gave him softball questions to build up his reputation.

When Markey was done, Latham recognized Feltzer as the next to speak. "Madam Chairwoman because she has done the work for this part of the investigation, I request that Colonel Marshall ask the next set of questions."

"The chair will allow Colonel Marshall to ask the next set of questions." Latham intoned.

Feltzer moved his chair aside so that Sarah could sit at the table. "Thank you Congresswoman." Sarah said.

She set about to ask Markey very pointed questions.

"Mr. Markey didn't the Bell H-1 Helicopter have many fatal accidents during its initial phase of development?" Sarah asked.

"Yes it did..." Markey said before Sarah interrupted him.

"Isn't it now a proven vehicle of troop transport, serving admirably in the Vietnam War and elsewhere?" Sarah asked.

"Yes it is and." Markey said and was interrupted again.

"And what about the B-1 Bomber, didn't that crash many times before they got that right?" Sarah asked.

"Yes it did colonel." Markey said
"In fact isn't that true of any weapons system and aren't those same systems working with very positive results?"

"Yes that's true colonel." Markey answered subdued.

"Thank you Mr. Markey. I have no more questions.

Sarah knew she blew away the entire foundation of Markey's objections. She looked over to where Latham was sitting. She was satisfied to see that the congresswoman was in fact squirming in her seat.

1200 Local Time

NCIS Forensics Lab

During lunch time she went to see Caroline at the Navy Yard Daycare center. She brought her to NCIS so they could spend time with John. After lunch while Carolyn minded Caroline, John and Sarah went to Abby Sciuto's lab. She had Bud bring the tape from the data recorder to Abby. With the technical representative from the NTSB and Bud looking on Abby restored the data that was recorded over when Asher flew to Portsmouth. It proved that Asher was honest.

Later that afternoon when it was time for them to testify, Harm and Asher laid out the mishap time line.

"On the day of the mishap, we were scheduled to take off at 1300. We weren't able to take off until 1500. It took us about 1 hour to reach the drop zone. The winds were pretty steady at 20 knots from the west so we aligned the aircraft into the prevailing winds and set into hover. We were roughly 20 feet above the swells. We dropped all but two jumpers before the jumpmaster called a halt. He did so because Congressman Feltzer stood up. As we waited for the word to continue, I hovered the aircraft. The sun was setting very low at that time. I was unable to judge the height of the aircraft in relation to the waves because I could not see the water due to the glare. As a result a rogue swell struck the aircraft. I immediately pulled up to get away from the water. I was immediately alerted to Mr. Feltzer's injury. I flew immediately to Portsmouth so that the congressman could be treated. The flight time there was about 45 minutes.

"Are you saying that the military only fights when the sun is right?" Latham asked indignantly.

Harm replied to that. "Congresswoman, throughout history the military has always chosen when to fight based on the weather and the time of day. The D-Day Invasion was delayed many times due to storm activity in the English Channel. So when we fly an operation with the OSPREY or any other aircraft, we always pick the optimal time to go on a mission. The only one to blame for this mishap is you Congresswoman Latham as well as Congressman Feltzer. Your arriving 2 hours late and Congressman Feltzer's standing when he wasn't supposed to were the contributing factors for the cascade of events that made the mishap possible. The OSPREY is a good aircraft. It has proven itself to be a reliable aircraft for what it is designed for." Harm intoned.

Seeing that she was trapped Latham flippantly asked, "Is there anyone else you would like to blame?"

Harm answered, "Yes ma'am, the Critics - who expect hardware to be perfect out of the box; the Media for sensationalism, exaggerating everything to the dimension of tragedy; and Congress for not listening to those who know the aircraft best, pilots, who are telling you they are willing to risk their lives because they believe it's important to the defense of our country."
Harm also saw that Latham was still squirming. As Latham looked away, he caught Sarah's eye and winked. Sarah winked back with a satisfied grin plastered to her face.

Thursday, July 20, 2000

1930 Local Time

Near Catholic University, (C.U.)

Chloe threw herself enthusiastically in the Catholic Initiation attending all the scheduled classes. The holiday week of July 4th was the only week they weren't scheduled. Catholic University was only a short Metro ride away from St. Thomas where Chloe was volunteering as a day camp counselor for 3rd graders as well as taking a make-up math course. She had missed the last three tests, including the final for the course due to the funeral.

At Catholic University, Chloe was one of 6 students her age attending classes, 4 girls 2 boys. More times than not when John would come to pick Chloe up, he would find her with the other 5 students at the Dairy Queen which was just across the street from the C.U. campus entrance.

Tonight was no different. Just as John pulled his car into the D.Q. parking lot, he saw Chloe speaking animatedly with her friends. Before he could get out of the car he saw that Chloe had spotted him. She quickly got her things together and got up to leave. She waved at her friends as she walked out and got into the car.

As she got into the car, she leaned over to give John's cheek a quick peck. "How was your day kiddo?" John asked.

"It was okay dad. Day Camp was okay. Math was fine. I can't wait for the final. I think I'm going to do alright."

"That's great Chloe. You get the good grades you can go to any college you want, even all the service academies.

"Yeah I know dad. But I have four years before I have to make that decision. I just want to start and get used to high school this September." Chloe answered.

"So tell me about RCIA classes." John asked.

"Well Father Joe told us about the miracle at the wedding at Cana. Did you and mom have to go to Pre-Cana classes before you got married?"

"Sure we did. It's a requirement if we wanted to get married in the church." John answered.

After a few minutes of silence Chloe said, "I hope I meet someone like you so I can get married in the church."

John almost swerved the car, he was so startled. "Uh I'm very glad to hear that Chloe. I hope I live up to your expectations." He managed to say.

Chloe slid over in the bench seat and so as not to cause an accident, carefully leaned in, kissed his cheek and said, "You already do. I love you dad." Then she rested her head on his shoulder.

John smiled a very contented smile as they drove home. Sarah was very delighted to hear what Chloe said. She and John went to bed very happy.
Sarah walked into her home very exasperated. John was making dinner so she gave him a very appreciative kiss. She brought Caroline upstairs with her to get changed. Chloe was studying for her math final in her room. Sarah poked her head in there. "Hey Chloe come inside with me and tell me how school was." Sarah asked.

Chloe put her work down and walked into her mother's bedroom to talk with her. Sarah handed Caroline over to Chloe. Chloe sat down on the bed. As Sarah changed and prepared her uniform blouse for the next day.

Chloe answered, "It was fine. We went over what's going to be covered on the math final tomorrow. Then I have 2 more weeks of Catholic Initiation classes. I can't wait to start having a real summer vacation."

Sarah smiled as she finished changing, she replied, "I know sweetie. Right after your Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation on Sunday, the 13th we'll go back to Rehoboth for two weeks of R&R. We'll go to some amusement parks and so on from there. What do you think of that?"

"That's great mom, I can't wait. What's going on at work?" Chloe asked.

"This has got to be one of those weeks that make it so hard to enjoy your job." Sara answered showing her exasperation.

So what's got you so twisted this time? Congresswoman Latham come visiting?" Chloe asked facetiously.

"No sweetie it's just sometimes people you think should know better, do dumb things, like open their big mouths and say things that are better left unsaid." Sarah answered.

"Can you give me details?" Chloe asked.

"Well yeah I can, you're not working at JAG and the story is on the news anyway. It can be something you can learn from. Lt. Commander Caitlin Pike, whom your dad, Uncle Harm and I know, was assigned back to JAG, TDY. She told Harm that she had an incident four years back with Admiral Curt Hollenbeck, who back then was a Captain. Hollenbeck made inappropriate advances to her, which she rebutted. She didn't report it at that time.

The reason Cait told Harm was because Hollenbeck is being nominated for the Navy's Inspector General. It seems that there was another female officer that had a similar occurrence with him. She didn't report it at the time it happened either. She waited until Hollenbeck was reported as being nominated and she reported it to a TV reporter."

"So what happens now?" Chloe asked totally intrigued.

"Well since the story came out, Admiral Hollenbeck is facing a charge of conduct unbecoming. Evidence was being presented in an Article 32 Hearing to see if a court martial is needed. On top of that Lt. Commander Pike just would not shut her mouth. She also told me of an additional un-amicable affair with another one of her senior officer's named Commander Dennis Brockman who had then given her a bad fit rep which hurt her career. When the admiral assigned me to defend the Hollenbeck I had to recuse myself because Miss Pike told me what she told me about her affair
before anything came up in court."

"So who had to work the case in court?" Chloe asked.

"Well Harm was assigned to prosecute and Commander Mattoni was assigned to defend. Lt. Singer was also assigned to work with Commander Mattoni. Commander Mattoni assigned Loren to dig up dirt on Lt. Commander Pike for his defense of Admiral Hollenbeck. Well Loren was very thorough. Commander Mattoni was able to bring out Lt. Commander Pike's previous affair to discredit her on the stand. After her testimony she came to me and accused me of tattling."

"What did you tell her mom?" Chloe asked.

"Well I told her that all one needed to do was look at her record. It definitely showed that Commander Brockman gave her a bad evaluation. All Loren needed to do was talk to Brockman. I reminded her that she was indiscreet and to shut her big mouth before she said something else that I or anyone else shouldn't hear." Sarah answered.

"What happened to Admiral Hollenbeck?" Chloe asked.

"Hollenbeck explained to Cait at the time of their incident that he had accidentally slipped. But when he tried to explain that at the hearing, Cait cut him off. So he just let it lie. Harm got the SECNAV to waive the confidentiality of Lt. Commander Pike's previous promotion board and found that Hollenbeck was on the promotion board. While Hollenbeck was on the stand Harm questioned him why Kate was 'deep selected' from the 'low zone of the promotions list' over Brockman's bad report and suggested impropriety." Sarah explained.

"What did Hollenbeck say?" Chloe asked.

"Well he said that he saw that Caitlin was an exceptional officer who showed great promise, despite what Brockman said. As for the hearing it was determined that there was not enough evidence to bring any charges to a court martial. Nevertheless Hollenbeck's appointment as Inspector General was cancelled because of the rumors of impropriety." Sarah concluded.

Just then Chloe thought of something. "Isn't Meg Austen Caitlin Pike's sister in law?" Chloe asked in astonishment.

"Yeah she is. That's what got me so upset. Meg was so mortified. She asked Admiral Chegwidden to assign her to any case outside the office for the week so that there would be no sign of interference. Besides she and Cait don't seem to get along well anyway. After Hollenbeck's hearing was over, Cait elected to accept another JAG assignment in Norfolk as an olive branch to Meg. She said she didn't need to cause her brother Bob any problems with Meg."

"What about Caitlin's career?" Chloe asked.

"Well based on the fact that she may have been promoted by Hollenbeck for not reporting him, she may have hit a ceiling. She has to work doubly hard now to try and overcome that. If she stays at Lt. Commander for too long, that could be a problem for her. If you don't get promoted in a reasonable time, the Navy advises you to find another line of work." Sarah answered.

"Well your lesson to me was keep my mouth shut?" Chloe asked.

"Not only that, don't get involved with anyone that you work with," Sarah explained.

"Well didn't you meet and get involved with Dad at work?" Chloe asked cheekily.
"Well don't get involved with your boss or superior officer." Sarah replied sardonically. She continued, "Your father and I were the same rank and even though he was senior to me, he took great pains to make sure he wasn't placed in charge of me. Whenever we worked together, we worked as equals."

"Oh okay, then I guess that's alright." Chloe said.

"Also don't get an embarrassing tattoo or piercing, even one in an embarrassing place on your body."

"You have a tattoo and a navel ring." Chloe reminded her.

"Yes I do, but my tattoo is on my ankle, and it's not provocative or lewd. It's the Navajo symbol for peace. I can cover it up with concealer make-up before I put on my stockings. It's not controversial or demeaning. And the navel ring is my own adoration. No one sees it until I wear my bikini. And being pregnant. I'm not wearing my bikini until after the baby."

"Why did you mention the tattoo anyway?" Chloe asked.

"Well Bud defended a female Corporal, with a lewd tattoo on her rear end. She wanted to apply for Officer's candidate school. Her C.O. wouldn't approve her application without the standard photo disclosure. The Corporal refused, claiming gender discrimination. Bud failed to be able to circumvent the C.O. So the Corporal finally relented. In turns out that the CO didn't even look at the photo, but tore it up saying he "just didn't want to give her special treatment. The moral of the two stories is not to do anything that can come back and bite you in the rear end."

Chloe giggled and said, "Like that corporal's tattoo."

Sarah realized that she made the joke picked up Caroline and ushered Chloe out in front of her saying, "Come on smart-alec let's go make dinner."

Walking down the hall, Sarah put Caroline on her hip and put her free arm across Chloe's shoulder, drew her close and kissed the top of her head. They went downstairs to have dinner.
Chapter 64

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 64

Monday, August 28, 2000

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Conference Room

Sarah was true to her word. Right after the mass where Chloe and the other teens from St. Thomas received the three sacraments, the Marshalls, Rabbs, Matthews, Roberts and Chegwiddens went to Benzingers in Falls Church to celebrate. On the following Monday the Marshalls went out to Rehoboth to start their real vacation.

While John and Sarah were on vacation, AJ and Sydney also went away to Myrtle Beach for a week. On the last night there while they were at dinner in the hotel restaurant AJ proposed.

After dinner Sydney went into the ladies room. As he sat waiting for dessert, AJ paid the bill then he asked the waiter to bring over a fresh rose. AJ wrapped a napkin around the stem and then he slipped the 1.5 caret round diamond in a platinum setting ring over the napkin and placed it on the table next to the plate of chocolate pecan pie which Sydney ordered.

When Sydney came back she immediately saw the rose with the ring and gasped. As she removed the ring from the stem, AJ got up, went over to her side of the table and got down on one knee. Everyone in the restaurant was now looking at them.

AJ said to her, "I've been in love with you for a long time. You've been a good friend to everyone in my family and a very loving and sweet lady to me. I already asked Danny and he gave me his blessing to ask you this next question. Sydney Walden would you do me the honor of marrying me and becoming my wife?"

Everyone who was watching held their breath as Sydney took her own deep breath as she said, "Yes AJ I will marry you."

AJ let out the breath he was holding. He slipped the ring on Sydney's trembling finger. As he knelt before her, Sydney brought both her hands forward, took hold of AJ's cheeks and laid a deep kiss on him. Everyone in the restaurant started to applaud. When they came up for air, AJ returned to his seat. They only stayed long enough to finish their dessert. After they had done so, they practically ran out of the restaurant to go up to their room.

Now AJ was presiding over the daily staff meeting. As the meeting concluded, he said, "I have one more item to pass on. You're going to hear the scuttlebutt any way as Tiner had helped me get the ring. Dr. Walden and I are engaged." Before he could continue the staff around the table stood up and applauded.

AJ was somewhat embarrassed by the display but he had the good grace to stand and acknowledge their show of affection. He good naturedly let it continue for a few seconds then said, "As you were people." The staff stopped applauding and sat down but they still had very big smiles on their faces.
They were all very happy for their boss.

AJ continued, "We set a date for New Year's Eve at the Army and Navy Club. (Everyone oohed and ahhed at that.) I'll be sending out the invitations out within the month. As it is everyone would be invited to the church, but due to the limited space only those people who are somewhat senior in work and acquaintance would be invited to the reception. That's all people."

As the officers filed out, they shook his hand. Sarah, Harm and Bud were the last to leave the room. He asked them, "You three stay a minute." After they all sat back down he asked, "Harm would you be my best man?"

Harm was at first startled but he recovered quickly and said, "Of course sir. I promise no strippers and such."

The four shared a laugh then AJ continued, "Bud I would like you to be an usher. Sydney is going to ask Harriet to be one of her bridesmaids."

"Of course I would sir. It would be my honor and I'm sure Harriet will be honored to."

"Good." Turning to Sarah he asked, "Sarah would you please have John call me this morning. I want to ask him to be an usher also. And you need to call Sydney right away. She has a request for you."

Sarah said, "Of course I will sir. I'll do those things as soon as I get to my office. John would be happy to be an usher. By the way what did Francesca say about your engagement?"

"Well when I told her about the engagement she was overjoyed for me, then when I told her about the wedding date, she started cursing in Italian something about carnivale in Venice or something. But she did promise me that she would be there." AJ said.

Sarah and Harm laughed. Bud sat pensive then he said, "Admiral didn't you say that Francesca works in haute couture?"

"Yes I did Bud why?" AJ answered.

"Well there is a very popular fashion show in Venice every New Year's Eve. She probably was mad that she would miss that." Bud said.

"Well she was upset probably because she would have to do extra work so that she could trust someone to do her work in Venice." AJ conjectured. He then added, "I better call her and apologize." AJ got up to leave. Everyone else got up with him and left the conference room.

As Sarah went to her office to call Sydney she had an idea what Sydney was going to ask her. Her suspicions were confirmed when she got Sydney on the phone. "Sydney, congratulations I'm so happy for you."

"Thank you Sarah. I know you're having the baby in November. and you will be off for 6 weeks, but would you please be my maid of honor?" Sydney asked.

Sarah practically squealed with delight. "Of course I would. Being off for 6 weeks from work will give me time to help plan everything and an incentive to lose the baby weight."

Sydney smiled as she replied, "That's great Sarah. Let's get together this weekend to start, if that's okay with you?"
"Of course Sydney, I'll bring Chloe along and John can watch Caroline." Sarah answered.

Great Sarah, I'll see you Saturday about 11:00 AM?" Sydney asked.

"1100 is great Sydney." Sarah confirmed. They talked for a while with Sydney describing how AJ proposed and other things. After they hung up Sarah went about her work day.

1000 Local Time

Office of the Secretary of the Navy

Pentagon, Arlington, VA

While waiting for SECNAV Nelson, Admiral Thomas Boone was up for taking command of the 6th fleet. Boone told Harm how he had aced Rabb Sr. out of making the 100,000th trap on the Ticonderoga because Rabb Sr. had to go around for a visual inspection of his tail hook thinking it not properly extended.

John was also there. He was summoned by SECNAV Nelson. He had a feeling it had something to do with Admiral Boone. John had to ask, "Admiral was there ever a time that Harm's dad ever busted you in the mouth for being such a creep?" John did not have as high an opinion of Boone as Harm did.

Harm's eyes widened with the question. He was about to say something but Boone stopped him, "Yeah there was. One time during our first tour on the Hornet I pushed it a bit too far with a practical joke. Another pilot named Marinelli and I thought that Hammer was such a tight ass.

One time while he was in the shower Marinelli and I got a blow up doll and put it in his bed. We removed Trish's picture from Hammer's frame and taped to the face of the doll. Well he was incensed and came after us. He told us to come with him to the gym. He outranked us because he was our squadron leader. He told us to put the gloves on as he thought it was time for self-defense instruction.

First he took on Marinelli and knocked him out in 2 rounds. Then he took me on and knocked me out in one." Boone explained.

Harm and John smiled. John's opinion of Boone went up a notch.

"Did anyone ever affect you that way Captain?" Boone asked as he emphasized the 'Captain'.

"Yeah Joey Piccolo, he was the school yard bully in Far Rockaway. One time my friends and I were doing a pitch, hit and field drill in St. Mary's school yard. Piccolo came over and wanted to hit. I had just come up and I told him to take the field and wait his turn. Piccolo did want to do that so he got right in my face. I threw the bat behind me and I punched him in the mouth. Suffice to say, neither he nor anyone else ever bothered me again. I also found that whenever I encountered anyone who acted that way or tried to bullshit me I didn't tolerate it." John finished explaining.

"Well neither did 'Hammer'. After that I never called him a tight ass," Boone smiled and said, "But I really wanted to be the one hundred thousandth guy to trap on the 'Tico'." He finished with a smile.

"You have to understand John, fighter pilots are very competitive. We have to be." Harm finished trying to forestall anymore debate.

Before anyone could reply, SECNAV Nelson's yeoman came out and asked the trio to come into the office.
As the entered there was the usual handshakes and so forth as Nelson got down to business. "Admiral a problem has come up. We may have to delay your command appointment.' Nelson explained.

"Why is that Mr. Secretary?" Boone asked.

"It seems that there is an accusation that during your time in Vietnam you took part in killing civilians in Tan Dien village, Vietnam." Nelson explained.

John watched as Boone seemed to squirm in his seat before he settled down and asked, "And you came by this information how sir?"

"There was an anonymous tip." Nelson explained.

"So what happens now Mr. Secretary?" John asked.

"I'm glad you asked Captain. You and your wife will conduct an investigation. You will work this as a criminal investigation, while Colonel Marshall will conduct a JAG MAN investigation. Between the two of you, you will discover what went on. Find out who the anonymous tipster is and verify his information." Nelson explained.

"Mr. Secretary I believe Admiral Boone is entitled to be read his Article 31 rights against self incrimination and he is entitled to legal representation." Harm advised.

"I figured he might so just before you walked in, I was speaking with Admiral Chegwidden. He said to assign you as Captain Boone's Legal Counsel." Nelson said.

Boone and Harm exchanged glances.

"Admiral, Harm please let me know when you are available so we can talk. In the meantime I'm calling Webb at the CIA. We're going to need him digging into this." John said as he got up to leave.

"Captain, I will need you and Colonel Marshall to investigate this without any paperwork and report directly to me before the confirmation hearings." Nelson instructed him.

John stopped before he walked out the door and said, "Aye, aye sir. Harm, admiral, I'll talk to you later."

1145 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When John returned to the Navy Yard, he didn't go to his office. He called his yeoman Carolyn Turner and told her where he would be. When he walked into the JAG bullpen, he met his wife as she came out of AJ's office. They shared a quick kiss as they went into Sarah's office and closed the door.

"I take it that AJ told you about Admiral Boone?" John asked.

"Yeah it'll be fun partnering up again.' Sarah replied with a smile. "We'll start after we have lunch with Caroline." Sarah replied.

After they enjoyed lunch with their daughter, they set up shop at NCIS. It was more private there as they followed the SECNAV's orders of not keeping a record. John called Webb at the CIA office and told him of the case.
"Clay I know your dad was the CIA director in Saigon and in charge of the Phoenix program during
the Vietnam War. I need to have the CIA declassify his documents from that. I'm sending Kate
Larkin with authorization signed by the SECNAV. She'll take them back here. Only myself, Sarah
and Harm and Boone will see them."

"I'll get right on it. Kate should be back there before close of business today." Webb replied.

When John hung up with Webb, Carolyn buzzed him to tell him that Harm and Boone were there.

John told Carolyn, "Send them in please Carolyn."

Harm convinced Boone to schedule his interview as soon as possible.

Boone started, "I was assigned TAD to do reconnaissance in Saigon. I lost a coin toss with Hammer.
Before we went up I was shown a photo of a girl holding up the severed head of one of my friends.
After that I went up with Lt RC Coffin who flew for the CIA at night. One night we landed outside
Tan Dien village to stay the night. Tan Dien was supposedly pacified of VC by elements by the
South Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU). At least that's what we were told. What
Coffin really wanted to do was to see his girlfriend. While we were there a squad led by a guy
named Harry Drax came through. Drax was the project director of the pacification project. He was
known to kill bound prisoners in interrogation. Ellis Burke ordered Drax to the sweep of the village.
Drax and his squad went in shooting. During the melee, someone shot him in the back. After the
fight was over we found that Drax was among the dead villagers. We buried him with the other dead
in a mass grave. Coffin and I flew out the next morning. We left it to Ellis Burke file to the after
action report.

"Is that all that happened Admiral? What was your role during the melee?" Sarah asked.

"I was involved in the sole act of defending myself. I only shot at anyone who pointed a gun at me. I
didn't have time to ask who was innocent or not." Boone responded.

To forestall any more argument John spoke up, "I think that's all we need now Admiral. Let's wait to
see what the report from the CIA has to say. Harm when Kate brings it here, I'll call you."

As Harm and Boone got up to leave, Harm said, "That's fine John, We'll wait till then."

After they left, John and Sarah went back to his office. He asked her, "So what do you think?"

Sarah answered, "I thought that Boone wasn't being very forthcoming. He's hiding something."

"Yeah I got that impression to. We'll wait until Kate gets back with the CIA's report." John said.

Wednesday, August 30, 2000

1100 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Unfortunately Kate wasn't able to get the documents declassified for the end of the business day. The
investigation team had to wait until the CIA found them in their 'buried' section to get them. It took
the whole of two days.

After Kate brought it back, John gave it to Harm. He spoke with Boone. Boone remembered Coffin
as a liar and drunk. Sarah traced down Coffin who claimed he was dying of Tuberculosis and
wanted to "set things right."
As for Tam, Boone recognized her as the girl in the photo. Drax came into the village that night and warned them that Tam was VC.

Harm spoke with Burke who said Drax ordered the "death squads" after the decapitation as "payback." He said Boone was there and reports had claimed that he entered in the fighting. There was a quota of 2000 suspected VC kills per month.

He told them to get out or be in the fighting. Coffin said he went to try and find Tam then saw Boone ten minutes later using a little kid as a human shield and shooting Tam. Boone told Harm that he shot Tam while she was reaching into the hut roof for a gun.

Because of the controversy involved with his appointment, Admiral Nash relieved Boone of his command. As Boone left all the men and women in his former command saluted as a sign of respect.

Because of Nash's action against Boone, Nelson went to JAG to forcefully push for resolution. He didn't like the direction the investigation was going. He met AJ, Sarah, Harm, Bud and John in JAG's conference room. He started out directing his anger solely at Sarah and John saying, "I gave you an order to resolve this quickly. I didn't need you to dig up the whole affair but to make it go away."

Before anyone could say anything else AJ intervened. "Mr. Secretary, stop picking on my Chief of Staff. She can only go as fast as she gets the information. She can't control what came from the CIA's report."

Sarah really appreciated and welcomed AJ's support as well as his timing. As she and John sat together listening to Nelson's tirade, she put her hand on her husband's arm and gave it a good squeeze to restrain him. She as well as AJ saw that he was ready to go off on the SECNAV himself.

Refusing to back down in the face of lesser officers Nelson redirected his anger. He pontificated angrily about public relations and threatened Sarah, John, Bud and Harm. He told Harm, "I do not trust your judgment commander. I want assurance that you will consider the good of the service as your prime concern."

Harm stood his ground saying, "I can't do that Mr. Secretary."

AJ added as he pointed out, "He's right Mr. Secretary. Commander Rabb's first priority is his client, not the good of the service."

None the less Nelson spoke threateningly telling them all, "If you make the Navy look bad I'll cut you all off at the knees."

John had had enough, "Mr. Secretary, we have all been working very hard to find the truth of this mess you laid on us. The process has been slow because there are too many other people out there with other agendas. Those people also have access to the media. We can't control what anyone says in public.

Also there have been a lot of mistakes made here, mainly by you sir. Your first mistake was calling for the investigation to be done by Navy personnel. That smacks of favoritism. You should have handed it off to the Attorney General in the first place. Secondly telling the people you assigned how to run it, then finally the third in trying to influence the outcome. Your coming in here to threaten and cajole us into finding things to yours or the Navy's liking is not only improper, but it borders on illegal.

Did you actually believe that as a law enforcement official and officers of the court we would violate
ethics and just bury things that don't look good to the Navy? Sarah I are obligated to shed light on any and all aspects of this case. Any and all information Sarah or I obtain must go to Harm and Bud. It's called full disclosure."

The others in the room looked aghast at their friend's breach of protocol, except for Sarah. She just looked at her husband with pride. She had to put her hand up to her lips to hide her smile. Someone just threatened her and her husband and he wasn't going to take it lying down. He didn't care if it was the SECNAV or the President.

Nelson just stood there seething. No junior officer, admiral on down ever spoken to him like John had.

He was about to say something, but John went on, "You have to understand Mr. Secretary that the alleged actions or mistakes committed by one man or a small number of men will not shake or break the Navy. I'm not stating that Admiral Boone is innocent or guilty. We still need to find evidence to determine one way or the other. But if you insist on interfering with that process I will have no other choice but to call the Attorney General and prefer charges of obstructing an official investigation."

John was looking Nelson right in the eye as he said it.

Nelson fought through his rage and said, "I don't like to be threatened Captain."

"Either do I Mr. Secretary, but you know I'm right," John said meeting his gaze. He continued, "I suggest Mr. Secretary that you let us get back to work figuring out this mess and maybe more mistakes won't see the light of day."

John could see Nelson's expression change from one of superiority to one of embarrassment. He turned to walk out saying, "Let me know how it all comes out."

When Nelson left Harm and Bud's jaws were still on the floor. Sarah and AJ on the other hand were smiling at him. AJ said, "I guess being a friend to the President has its advantages."

John smiled back and said, "You know admiral that never entered my mind until just now. I may have torpedoed my career."

"Oh I wouldn't worry about that John. The SECNAV is known more for his bark than his bite. Remember what he was like with Plesac's trial."

AJ assured him.

John nodded and smiled and saying, "Be that as it may no one talks to me, my wife or even my friends like that and gets away with it, especially when that person is wrong."

AJ, Harm and Sarah smiled at that. Bud just look befuddled at being included in John's umbrella of protection.

Thursday, August 31, 2000

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After the session with Nelson the group went about trying to complete their investigation. The files from the CIA showed that they were dealing with a lot of conflicting information. There were just too many people on the outside looking in. Given all that Harm, Sarah and John saw no way they could resolve the mess without a paper trail. So they reluctantly called for a court martial.
Stuart Dunston of ZNN got wind of the scandal and starting with the day of the trial began dogging them and Singer for information. She was sitting 2nd chair to Harm. She told Harm that she knew Dunston and would see what she could do.

Harm told her, "Don't trust him."

Singer replied, "I won't tell him anything that was true."

Harm had to smile at that. Harm then set about working out a deal with his sister in law.

But Sarah refused to budge saying, "Admiral Boone is not telling the whole truth. That's one of the reasons we have to go to a trial. If Boone turns around and tells us the whole story, I'll make a deal."

Harm had to silently agree with her. Boone also refused to tell Harm the full story, even though that hurt Harm's plan for his defense.

During the pre-trial hearing Harm challenged for cause every potential witness who ever disliked Boone.

The judge overruled Harm's objections.

For his part John struck out finding anyone else who was at Tan Dien. He was only able to report that there was a marine deserter, Cpl. Owen Branson, whom he was still looking for.

At the beginning of the trial Sarah gave an excellent opening statement.

"The prosecution will present eyewitness testimony that on the night of August 12th, 1968, then-Lieutenant Thomas Boone was guilty of inhumane acts against the civilian population of the village of Tan Dien, South Vietnam. We will demonstrate that he was motivated by the desire to avenge the brutal death of his commanding officer at the hands of Vietcong irregulars whom he believed used the village of Tan Dien as a hiding place. We will prove that among others he murdered a woman named Nguyen Kim Tam in violation of Article 118 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. All of the admirals on this panel served in Vietnam.

I would ask that the members put aside their feelings about the war and about Admiral Boone who's had a long and brilliant career. This case must be judged on the evidence introduced here at trial. And the crimes charged may be old, but the concept of accountability is timeless. Thank you."

At his table Boone turned to Harm and said, "I underestimated her. She would slit your throat on a dark night and not think twice about it."

Harm replied, "I don't know about that. You'd have to check with her husband. On the other hand my wife, her sister, WOULD think about it before she did it!"

Boone had to chuckle silently at that.

Harm decided to reserve his opening statement for later.

Sarah's first witness was General Parker. He testified that he told Boone of the decapitated head photograph. Harm cross examined him and was able turn his testimony around to Boone's favor. Parker in support of Boone stopped at the defense table and shook hands with Boone before he exited the courtroom.

When Sarah called Coffin to the stand, he claimed that Boone used a child as a shield and shot Tam as she was going to hide.
After that the court was recessed for lunch the parties had to wade through the cadre of reporters. Dunston glibly thrust a microphone at Harm and asked, "Commander have you ever seen Boone smile?"

Harm told him, "You're an idiot." Harm didn't care that it was on live TV.

Loren Singer did talk to Dunston, "Stuart, let's talk later off the record, but you have to share."

Dunston offered to pay for lunch. Loren readily agreed.

Harm was glad that Loren was stepping up to help keep the annoying reporter off his back. He was further pleased when Loren was able to dig up some information on Coffin.

When the trial resumed after lunch, Harm cross examined Coffin, using the information that Loren had discovered from Dunston. Harm began to ask him of the alcohol treatment and delusions. After Sarah began objecting to everything Harm was asking, he let Singer take over. She brought up that Coffin was paid $50,000.00 for his story.

Shortly after that Sarah had to rest her case.

Harm's opening statement was eloquent asking the panel not to "make Boone the last casualty of the Vietnam war."

Harm's first witness was Webb. He testified that his father, Neville, was head of Phoenix program and that Harry Drax hadn't followed orders and told his men to shoot on site.

During a recess in the trial Congresswoman Latham came to tell John to go to the Dew Drop Inn, which is where the deserter Owen Branson, now known as Jed Howe, was.

Branson told John he didn't know anything but John saw a tattoo on his arm that he recognized so he called Webb for further information. When he got that information he brought it to Sarah and Harm.

Harm told Boone, "You need to take the stand. Sarah has made her case and your silence will convict you."

Boone replied, "I can live with that."

Harm sighed as he said, "My job as your attorney is to look out for your best interests. It's fortunate that I am, because you are doing a piss poor job on your own."

Boone cocked an eyebrow at his blatantly disrespectful tone.

Harm ignored it as he continued, "You are not protecting anyone with your silence. The only person you're hurting is yourself. You need to testify, it's the only way we can rebut the testimonies given so far. John was right. The Navy will survive on its own. It certainly doesn't need us propping it up."

At that Boone relented and agreed to take the stand, which he did when the trial resumed.

During Boone's testimony John brought Branson into the courtroom. He convinced him to come by threatening him with removing his retirement. He gave Sarah and Harm each a note describing what he found out about Branson.

Boone testified that he took the girl, who was standing in the middle of fire zone, to safety. He saw Tam going for a weapon so he shot her. He then saw the PRU killing non-combatants so he ordered them to stop. Drax came up and shot them all anyway then threatened to kill Boone before he
walked away. Boone called for him to stop then had to shoot him in the back before he started killing again.

After Boone finished his testimony Harm called "Harry Drax" to the stand. Everyone murmured as Branson got up to take the stand.

Drax testified to his part in the killing. He said, "My only regret was we didn't kill them all. Boone had no part in the killing and that he shot Tam in self-defense."

Harm asked, "Why have you been living under another's name all these years?"

"Neville Webb changed my name and retired me to avoid publicity. The real Branson was killed in Vietnam."

Harm having proved his case said, "I have more more questions for this witness."

As Drax left the stand he stopped at the defense table and told Boone, "If you are going to kill someone do it right."

Sarah and Harm gave their closing arguments. Sarah asked that the members carefully consider the evidence as they make their verdict.

While the members deliberated, Sarah and John went to visit Caroline at daycare. Due to the trial they missed out on their lunch time visit.

Now that it was over they could discuss the case. They spoke of the twists and turns in the road to its conclusion.

Sarah said, "You know I'm very proud of you."

John was sitting giving his daughter a bottle, "Oh really what did I do now?"

Sarah rolled her eyes as she went along with his charade of indifference. She knew he loved when she told him that. "You never stop working a case. Nelson and Boone were acting like total jerks, with one being an obstruction and the other being a real nudge in trying to influence the outcome."

John looked up and cocked an eyebrow at her, "Nudge?"

Sarah smiled and cupped his cheek and leaned in to give him a peck at his lips, "Yeah 'nudge'. Your 'New York' attitude is rubbing off on me. Also remember I also speak Hebrew fluently."

"Yeah Boone and Nelson were made for each other. They both have the notion that they're the pillars of the Navy and as they go, so goes the Navy. They forgot that the Navy is bigger than any one man." John replied.

Sarah agreed as she continued her compliment, "Even though finding Drax damaged my side of the case you still went after him, after the truth. That is the one professional thing I admire about you. Based on that, I can stand being on the other side every time." She leaned in and gave him a kiss, which he returned with equal fervor.

During the kiss the Caroline stopped sucking her bottle and reached up to her parents demanding her piece of the action The proud parents disengaged their lips and gave their cherished daughter her much desired affection. Caroline just drank it all up, giggling all the way. During this the head of the center, Amy Wilson, came to them, "Colonel, Chief Gardiner called. The verdict on your case is in."
John finished feeding and changing Caroline while Sarah hurried back to the JAG building. He followed her and seeing that it was near the end of the work day he also took Caroline with him. John stayed in Sarah's office with her as she sat in her stroller.

Boone was acquitted. Sarah wasn't disappointed. She knew that the evidence was in Boone's favor. Despite that, Nelson, fearing that the 'not guilty' verdict would be perceived as a cover up, forcibly retired Boone.

That night at dinner at the Marshalls, Harm relayed that news to John and Sarah. John told Sarah and Harm, "I was wrong."

Sarah asked, "About what?"

John replied sardonically, Boone's not the creep, Nelson is."

Sarah and Harm both had to smile at that.

Monday, September 4, 2000

Labor Day Holiday Week

Yuma International Airport

Yuma, AZ

Sarah was glad that the Boone case had finished in time. The Marshalls and Rabbs had plans on how to enjoy the last holiday of the summer. They received numerous invitations from the Hassan side of Sarah and Diane's family. They all wanted the families to come out on vacation to see them. They still wanted to get to know Diane more. So the four officers saved their leave time for the Labor Day Week and went out.

John and Harm made reservations to fly into Yuma where most of the aunts and uncles lived. Sarah and Diane led the way as they walked through the jet way. Chloe followed close behind holding little Sarah's hand and Diane was holding Samantha. John followed holding Caroline and Harm was holding Trey.

As they walked into the waiting area, the two families were inundated. Sarah and Diane's Aunts Mehry, Amira, Niki and Zoya and their husbands and children, 30 relatives in all, were waiting there for them. There was a lot of hugging, kissing and general affection as the whole entourage made its way to the luggage claim area. They were all very glad to see the new babies and Chloe. They piled into the cars and drove into Yuma.

The Marshalls stayed at Aunt Amira's house while the Rabbs stayed at Aunt Mehry's home. The two aunts lived two blocks from each other, so meeting up for activities was convenient.

Before the Rabbs and Marshalls separated, they went to Aunt Amira's house.

Sarah was the first through the door with John right behind her holding Caroline. As she turned into the living room she stopped in her tracks as she beheld the person standing there nervously wringing her hands.

"Momma?" Sarah asked incredulously almost not recognizing the thin woman standing there.

Deanne just smiled her own watery smile as she nodded wordlessly and tentatively held her hands
Sarah just dropped her bags and went to her and enveloped her into a tight hug, crying for joy in her shoulder. Deanne wrapped her arms around her as she too cried with joy.

Sarah and Diane were writing their mother on a regular basis. Deanne even purchased a laptop computer so that the three could e-mail each other.

Deanne was not able to get out to DC to see the new grandchildren when they were born or even after that because of health issues. Her phlebitis had really acted up on her and she landed in the hospital for 3 weeks as she dealt with it. Her doctors put her on Cumiden, a strong blood thinner. Because she had to be monitored continually, she could not travel until the outpatient drug therapy was completed five months after she was hospitalized. During her recovery she was offered a clerical job at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, her local parish. So having a steady job and support from her friends in the church and her Alanon meetings she was able to follow her doctor's advice on her diet and was eating more healthily. As a result in the 17 months since she last saw her daughters she lost 110 pounds.

Sarah and Diane knew of the health issues and her new job, but not the weight loss. Deanne knew that eventually she would see her girls and she wanted to surprise them.

Diane was right behind John carrying Trey. Upon seeing Sarah go to their mother she gave him to Chloe and she rushed to her mother. Deanne held out one arm and gathered Diane into her hug with Sarah. The three women shared a good cry before they broke apart. They turned to see tender smiles on John and Harm's face.

Sarah was the first to speak. "Momma why didn't you tell us you were going to be here?"

Deanne answered, "Well your husband told me not to." At that John came over and enveloped Deanne in his own bear hug. He hugged her tight enough to make her groan appreciatively. She hugged him back as tightly as she could.

When they broke apart and she finished sharing hugs and kisses with Harm, Chloe and the four babies she sat down. Holding little Samantha on her lap she began to explain. "It was all John's idea. He told me you all were coming out here and he arranged for my plane tickets and called Amira. I arrived yesterday. Because of my leg I still can't stand for too long and waiting at the airport would have been very uncomfortable for me, so I waited here. Amira has me staying in her daughter Alyssa's room I'm in the bed while she sleeps in the fold away cot."

Diane spoke up, "From your letters and e-mails, you said that you're working at your church. How is that going?"

"Oh that's going well. Between my disability payments and the salary they pay me, I make enough to get by. I have a lot of nice friends between the church and Alanon so I'm happy. It really makes my day when I come home and open your e-mails to see every new picture of you and the kids. I'm just glad that everything is finally working out for all of us."

"So am I momma," Sarah said as she went to hug her again.

They all shared more updates for another hour before the Rabbs left to settle in at Aunt Mehry's.

1930 Local Time

Aunt Mehry's home
The first dinner at Aunt Mehry's home was everything Sarah described it would be. There was indeed much loud talking and reaching across diners. Sarah was really tickled to see the expressions on John, Harm and even Diane's faces as the relatives continually reached in front of them for the plates of food in the middle of the table.

At one time during the meal Sarah turned as she heard Chloe laughing hysterically and looking her way. Deanne was sitting next to her telling her stories about the funny and the nice things Sarah did growing up. Sarah sat back with a very contented expression that eventually turned into her watery smile. A happy tear escaped her eye and rolled down her cheek.

John was sitting next to Sarah and he caught her tear with his thumb. He said, "I know what you're thinking."

Sarah said facetiously, "Oh really. Care to enlighten me?"

"You're thinking that it's really nice that you've come back home, you're original home. Also that you came back successful and happy, with a great family between us and Harm's family and that you brought your sister home with you so you could share this with her. Also you're very happy that your mother was able to get here and you love that she is doing better than the last time you saw her, right?" John said.

Sarah smiled and said, "Now I know how you felt that Thanksgiving after our engagement. You felt that you finally reached your goal of having your own life in your own home and you got to show your family how well you were doing. Well that's how I feel now. I've finally come full circle, back to my roots and I love it. I left here under bad circumstances and now I'm back better than I was, happy, successful and content. The professional success is because of the Marines. The rest of the success and the majority of the happiness are mostly because of you. Thank you so, so much."

"You're welcome sweetie," he replied as he pulled her close to kiss her temple.

Yuma, AZ

Tuesday, September 5, 2000

To

Friday, September 8, 2000

Yuma to Grand Canyon National Park

Arizona

On Tuesday they all met to drive to the Grand Canyon for a three day camping trip. It was a caravan of three vehicles that left Yuma.

Deanne rode with the Marshalls in Amira's mini-van while the Rabbs rode behind in Mehry's SUV. They were driving in line behind the RV Aunt Amira and her husband Paul rented. Amira and Paul's three grandchildren, Maryam, Olivia 13 and Ahmad 12 rode with them. The RV was furnished with 4 beds. Sarah, Diane, Aunt Amira and Deanne would sleep in the RV while John, Harm and the older kids would stay in the tents. There was enough room for the two sisters to set up portable cribs for the babies to sleep. They all stayed two days at the park before they drove back to Yuma early Friday.

Sunday, September 10, 2000
The Rabbs and Marshalls flew back to DC on Saturday. The Marshalls spent Sunday after 11:00 Mass just decompressing from the trip.

After they came home from mass Chloe told her mother that she was fascinated that Amira’s family was praying at odd times of the day, or at least odd to her. Sarah explained that the followers of Islam were required to pray a certain amount of times a day. Sarah already promised that she would teach Caroline and Chloe the Koran and teach her the Middle Eastern languages, just like her grandmother did with her. John was secure enough in his faith that he didn't mind that Chloe and soon Caroline knew of other faiths. He figured that since it did their mother a lot of good, it was also do them some good.

When they returned to work on Monday everything was normal for Sarah and John but not for Diane and Harm. Harm was given the assignment of going to Russia to assist in setting up their military legal system. He was to leave the following Thursday. He would be gone for three weeks. He spent the rest of the week getting ready for the trip. First he used Monday and Tuesday wrapping up cases at JAG and then on Wednesday he went to the State Department getting briefed on what his duties in Russia would be.

Harm didn't know it but the trip would have an extremely profound effect on his life.
Chloe began her first year at Gonzaga College High School the Wednesday right after Labor Day. The school was a general interest junior high & senior preparatory school sponsored by the Jesuits, teaching students in grades 9-12. Located near the Union Station Metro stop, it was only one stop down one Metro Line to the Navy Yard and her parents' offices.

John and Sarah worked out a routine of dropping her off there on their way to their offices in the Navy Yard.

Earlier in the morning Sarah and Bud saw the end of their case. They were prosecuting a Commander Wade Carlton. He was caught selling secrets to a Russian Embassy agent named Andre Suknoff. Carlton was convicted. As Carlton was led away from the courtroom, she and Bud congratulated each other and then went to lunch.

Out in the parking lot Sarah was returning from her lunch at the Navy Yard Daycare Center with Caroline and John. She met Bud as he was walking back in from his lunch. He went home to see Harriet and his children. As they walked across the parking lot they encountered Carlton as he was being led away by two marine guards to their car.

As the guards pushed Carlton into the car he shouted, "There's more I need to tell you colonel."

Sarah turned him down saying, "I don't do deals with traitors I've already convicted." Sarah turned and walked away with Bud. They were a couple of car rows away when Carlton's car blew up. The force of the explosion was so powerful she and Bud were thrown forward. Fortunately Gunnery Sergeant Galindez, who happened to be walking toward her on his way to lunch, caught her before she could impact the ground and hurt her baby. After he eased them both to the pavement he asked, "Are you alright colonel, lieutenant?"

Bud was getting up saying he was fine. Though she was somewhat stunned, Sarah took a quick personal inventory before she replied, "Ah yeah I'm fine Gunny. What happened?"

"That car blew up ma'am," the Galindez replied as he helped her up. Sarah turned toward where he was pointing and saw that it was Carlton's car.

AJ and Emma were in Sarah's office watching as Sarah was sitting at her desk being checked by a
female EMT. Being that Sarah was almost 7 months pregnant Emma insisted that an EMT check her out. AJ had backed up the Chief.

"I'm fine sir. I don't feel any pain or anything, though my ears are still ringing." Sarah said in mild protest.

"Indulge me Sarah, that's an order." AJ said mildly.

Hearing him use her given name instead of Mac or her rank, Sarah sighed and said to AJ with a smile, "Honestly sir sometimes you act more like my father than my CO."

AJ just grinned at her.

Still she sat back and let the female EMT administer to her. She checked Sarah's pulse and blood pressure and asked her the usual questions.

While Sarah was being checked Emma said to AJ, "Sir I would stand away from the door."

AJ looked at her asking, "Why's that Chief?"

Emma smirked as she told him, "Well sir when Captain Marshall finds out that the colonel was near the explosion and is now being checked out, he will waste no time getting here and lord help anyone who is in his way. He will run them over. Five bucks says when he comes through that door, he won't even knock."

AJ said, "You're on." Still he cautiously moved away from the door.

Right as he did that, John burst into the office, without even bothering to knock. AJ took his wallet out and handed a $5.00 bill to Emma.

"Pleasure doing business with you sir," Emma said smiling as she took the money.

Looking up from her chair Sarah smiled as she watched the expression on John's face go from fright to relief at his seeing she was alright.

John, as well as everyone else in the Navy Yard, heard the explosion. He was in the bullpen on the way to his office. There was a big picture window there that looked out over the parking lot and the Capitol Building in the distance. He and everyone in the bullpen saw the smoke curling up from the bomb site.

He immediately ran out along with Gibbs and his team to check and offer help as needed. They arrived at the scene at the same time the fire department arrived to put out the fire. After the fire was put out, Gibbs and his team began their forensic investigation. John went about interviewing witnesses. He started with Gunnery Sgt. Galindez who stated, "Well sir your wife was thrown forward by the explosion. I happened to be right in front of her and caught her before she hit the ground. She complained of being dizzy and Lt. Roberts walked inside with her."

John turned ash white and said "Thanks gunny, I'll go in and check on her."

He practically ran into the JAG building and took the stairs up to the third floor three at a time. When he got to the bullpen he met Bud who told him, "Sarah is in her office being checked by an EMT. When we walked back into the office she complained of being dizzy."

He looked over and saw that the blinds in her office were closed but the door was partially open. "Thanks Bud."
He rushed over, and flung the door open, not caring if anyone was standing on the other side. As he entered he saw AJ and Emma standing in front of Sarah's desk looking down at her with concerned looks on their faces. The EMT was removing a blood pressure cuff to Sarah's arm as she ended the examination.

Sarah and everyone else in the room looked up at John's sudden entrance. He went and knelt in front of her and took her hand and before she could tell him to calm down, he breathlessly asked, "Are you okay? Do you feel any pain? Is the baby alright?"

She sighed, gently cupped his cheek and answered his questions in order, "I'm fine, no I don't feel any pain and yes the baby is fine."

She paused to let John catch his breath. He still looked at her skeptically and she added, "Stop looking at me like that. I'm fine, really."

John sighed got up, went around of the front of her desk and took a seat. AJ shook his head, turned to Emma and said, "C'mon Chief, let's leave it to her husband to deal with her."

Emma smiled and walked out with him. She stopped at the door and turned to speak to John and Sarah. "Colonel, Captain if you need anything just holler, okay ma'am, sir?"

"Thank you Emma." Sarah and John said in unison.

John turned and listened as the EMT gave her report of Sarah's condition, "Colonel you seem to be fine with no signs of discomfort or trauma. Your dizziness was caused by the ringing in your ears which was caused by the loud noise of the explosion. You say that you're over that now?"

"Yes I am." Sarah replied.

I suggest though that your OB/GYN give you a pelvic exam and a sonogram as soon as possible to rule out any trauma to your baby."

Sarah spoke up at that point, "I have an appointment with her this evening. We'll tell her as soon as we see her."

John agreed but added, "Why don't we see if she can see us early. You told me at lunch that since Carlton's case was over, you only needed to sign off on some cases before you secured for the day. Why don't we see if the admiral will let you go early?"

Sarah agreed just for the sake of putting her husband's fears to rest. She picked up the phone and called Eve at Bethesda. John heard her side of the conversation. "Eve, hi it's Sarah."

"Well I was in the parking and the shockwave from an explosion…" Eve interrupted her so loudly that Sarah pulled the phone away from her ear and grimaced. Even from where he was sitting John could hear her clearly as she said, "Get in here right now Sarah. I'll clear my schedule." Eve hung up on her.

Sarah sighed and asked John, "Did you hear her?"

"Yeah I'll go tell the admiral while you get your stuff squared away." John replied.

John got up, went around Sarah's desk and pulled her up into a gentle hug and kissed her on the top of her head. John went into AJ's office where he readily agreed with Sarah going to the doctor.
ASAP. John met Sarah in the bullpen as she stood with Bud. She was giving him instructions on investigating the explosion. "Call Jethro Gibbs and tell him that I ordered you to work with him. Offer him any and all assistance. I'm sure he'll be grateful for the help. Also could you please take Caroline & Chloe home with you? Chloe usually comes here right after school since it is only one Metro stop away and then we go over to pick-up Caroline. I already called the daycare center and told them to expect you. We'll pick them up at your place after Bethesda." Sarah gave Bud her keys to the Trailblazer. "Use my car so that you don't have to switch seats."

"No problem ma'am, don't worry I'll take care of everything. Just make sure Patrick is okay." Bud replied.

"Thanks Bud." Sarah said as she gave him a friendly squeeze of his hand then walked out with John.

1930 Local Time

Marshall Residence

John drove Sarah to Bethesda. After examining Sarah physically and with the sonogram, Eve said everything was fine with the baby. She did tell her to take it easy for the rest of the night.

While Sarah was getting dressed, Eve asked John to step into her office. She told him, "You need to watch for signs of shock. They can vary from nausea, to chills, to fainting. So as soon as you get home, get her right into bed. After you do that, I want you to call Jordan Parker and speak with her. You also need to deal with the stress. I've been watching you since you came in. I have never seen you look as worried as you are now. I know you were scared for Sarah and you should not hold that in. Tell Jordan everything that happened and how you felt about it. I'll call and tell her that you'll be calling her. Don't wait too long to call and don't hold anything back, understand?"

John smiled sheepishly and said, "Aye, aye doc."

Sarah met him in Eve's office and they went to pick up their daughters from the Roberts. While she was there Chloe finished her homework. When they got home John did as Eve instructed as he shooed Sarah up to their room. He told her to get into bed. At first she protested but she relented when John sat down on the edge of the bed next to her and said, "Look let me do this for you. Let me take care of you tonight. You've had a traumatic day and you could use some pampering. I'll bring Caroline to you so that you can feed her and then I'll get her ready for bed."

Sarah gave him her watery smile and leaned in and gave him a long and lovingly tender kiss. When they came up for air she said, "How can I refuse an offer like that. Just give me the phone so I could talk to Bud to see what he found out."

John agreed as he helped her put her uniform up. She sat cross legged on the bed as he brought her next day's blouse so she could put her Lt. Colonel's 'oak leaves' properly on her collar. Then he took the blouse and hung it up for her. She settled in to relax for the night. Before he ate dinner John brought Caroline in so she could be breast fed. After Caroline was fed, John took her and changed her diaper, put a sleeper on her, read her a story till she fell asleep and put her to bed. John then brought Sarah her dinner on an over the lap tray.

As they ate dinner in the kitchen, John asked Chloe, "Do you understand what happened today?"

"Yeah dad, I was really scared when Bud and Harriet told me." Chloe answered him.

"Do you want to talk to Dr. Parker about it?" John asked.

"Not today, maybe when we see her again next week." Chloe answered.
"Okay in that case after you finish dinner could you please to go sit with your mother? She needs some TLC after this afternoon. Just talk to her. Tell her about your day and don't worry about anything else or about falling asleep, just curl up next to your mom, okay?"

"Okay dad." Chloe said with a smile. John pulled her in for a good hug and kissed the top of her head.

Later Chloe came into her parents room already dressed for bed and sat with her mom while he did that. Sarah was touched that after Chloe told her all about her day, she started yawning. Sarah patted the bed beside her and Chloe came over and nestled herself next to her mother and promptly went to sleep.

After he cleaned up the kitchen and he was sure Chloe had Sarah's complete attention, John sat down in the living room and called Jordan. Jordan was expecting his call as Eve already notified her. John told her everything that happened and his reaction to it. Jordan told him that because he first asked if Sarah was fine before he asked after the baby, Sarah knew that he loved her as he had his priorities in order. After Jordan told him that his reactions were fine and that he didn't have anything more to worry about, John thanked her and said goodnight.

He went into the nursery and saw that Caroline was sleeping peacefully. When John came into his room he grinned lopsidedly when he saw that both Sarah and Chloe were asleep. Sarah had lain down with her back to John's side of the bed and wrapped her arms around Chloe as she had cuddled in front of her mom with her head nestled in the crook of Sarah's shoulder.

John went into the ensuite bathroom and changed for bed. He came in, bent over the two and gave them each a soft kiss each on their temples then he got into bed and spooned with Sarah as they went into a peaceful sleep.

Tuesday, September 12, 2000

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John accompanied Sarah to JAG as they delved into the case. Along with AJ, he, Sarah, Bud and Gibbs went over all the information Carlton sold. They found a map of Michigan and some plans for an unknown plant marked "rouge." Bud dug deeper into Carlton's life. He found a phone number that Carlton called several times after his arrest. Bud came into Sarah's office to tell her and John of the phone number. Sarah put the phone on speaker and dialed the number. The voice that answered totally astounded them,

"Clayton Webb."

John spoke up and said, "Clay it's John Marshall I'm calling from Sarah's office. We're here with Gibbs and Bud. What can you tell us about Commander Wade Carlton?"

"Only that what you already know plus what I can't tell you over the phone. We need to meet face to face." Webb informed them.

Sarah spoke up at that point, "Come to my office at JAG and we'll talk here." John nodded in agreement with her.

When he got to JAG Webb said, "Carlton wanted to trade information on a big operation. I delayed until after the trial and he was already convicted. Obviously I was too late. Before you called I was going to check out an address of someone who recently bought a remote control device. Anyone
want to come with me?"

Sarah and John accompanied Webb to that address. They were surprised when 'Mark Falcon/ Major Sokol answered the door. Sokol said, "Sarah, John, it's good to see you."

John answered, "Forgive me if I don't return the sentiment. What are you doing here?"

"I came here to question a man named Vasilieve Rokatov who was living here. Obviously he's already gone. I believe that he is the assassin that killed your Commander Carlton."

The three Americans exchanged perplexed looks as they left.

1830 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah was fixing dinner as Chloe was upstairs in her room doing homework and John was giving Caroline a bath in the downstairs bathroom. As Sarah checked her pots, she smiled as she listened to the happy sounds of John talking all baby to Caroline as she giggled and splashed. After a time she heard John say, "That's enough of that young lady."

Sarah went to the door and leaned on the lentil and looked in as John took Caroline out of the tub and lay her down on a dry towel on the floor mat. He put a folded towel under her head and proceeded to gently dry her off with still another towel. Caroline giggled as John pretended to eat her toes as he dried them. He used baby powder on her and then put a diaper on her. He reached for and put a sleeper on her and exited the bathroom. Just as he stepped into the kitchen, he heard the doorbell ring. He handed Caroline to her mother and went to answer. For the second time that day he was surprised to see who came to the door.

"Captain, I'm sorry to interrupt your evening may I come in?" Sokol asked.

Being cautious but hospitable John opened the door to let him in saying, "Sure, come on in Marc. Can I get you anything to drink?"

"Sure, a beer would be nice." Sokol answered.

Just then Sarah walked in from the kitchen carrying Caroline. Sokol politely greeted her, "Good evening Sarah. I was going to say congratulations earlier on your pregnancy before you left, but I'm glad I saved it for now so I could say it and include your lovely daughter. She looks like you Sarah." Looking around he added, "You have a lovely home."

Sarah smiled indulgently saying, "Thank you Marc. To what do we owe the pleasure of your company this evening?" She shifted Caroline onto her hip.

John came back with the beer and stayed to listen as Sokol addressed both of them, "My government has reason to believe that Rokatov had also been paid for an earlier assassination in the U.S. but it was cancelled then recently rescheduled. We don't know where or when. I was hoping you may have come up with something."

John answered for him and Sarah, "So far we only know that Carlton knew who the target was. We haven't been able to determine who that is yet." John fudged the truth knowing how the game was played. You never show all your cards until the hand is over.

Sokol sighed knowing he wasn't going to get anything more from his visit. As he stood up to leave, he drained his beer. "Well I hope you are successful in finding out who is before anything else.
happens. Good night then." Sokol got up and left.

John and Sarah watched from their door as Sokol got into his car and drove away.

"Sarah said, "I don't like that he knows where we live."

"Either do I. I'll call Thomas and let him know that we may need a protection detail. In the meantime we go to and leave work in the same car and we check the car before we get in." John said.

Sarah shuddered and held Caroline closer contemplating what could happen if they weren't cautious. They would have more information the next day and maybe then they could wrap this strange case up.

Wednesday, September 13, 2000

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John called Admiral Magnum and told him of Sokol's visit. Thomas agreed with the need to provide the Marshalls with the protection detail. He set up Chris Pocchi, Jessica Morgan and Kate Larkin for the detail. Chris was to stay with John, Kate with Sarah and Jessica with Chloe at school. Now John and Sarah were in AJ's office with him, Bud and Webb. As they were going over the information, Bud picked up a news article he obtained in his research. He did a computer search for any connection to plants in Detroit as they related to Russian visitors.

As he read the article he had an epiphany. He spoke up saying, "I got it. Rouge is the code Rokatov gave an auto plant in Detroit that President Putin planned to visit."

Webb spoke up in concurrence, "That makes a lot of sense. The CIA found out that a military faction, which Russian Generals Suknoff and Krylov were in, was planning to have Carlton killed because he had guessed their plan. We followed Krylov. We eventually saw him talking to Rokatov in Russia. Krylov may still be planning to kill Putin. We don't know when. Someone needs to go to Russia and find out." He looked at Sarah as he said that.

John saw the look and said very firmly, "Are you out of your mind Webb? No way is a 7 month pregnant woman traveling overseas to Russia, especially to Chechnya."

"How do you know you need to go to Chechnya?" Webb asked.

"What, like you're the only one with sources in Russia." John retorted. "I put one of my people onto Krylov. He's been tracking him since his name came up in the trial."

"Who?" Sarah and Webb asked. Webb found it curious that AJ wasn't asking. In fact Webb was further wondering why AJ was wearing a knowing smirk. AJ saw this and nodded to John to continue.

Which he did, saying "It's Harm."

Webb looked on incredulous.

John saw the look and said, "Well duh. His wife works in my agency as my counter intelligence expert."

Sarah and AJ each grinned, trying to hold back their laughter while Webb's look changed from
incredulous to annoyed.

John continued, "I've been getting information from him through Diane since he's been there. She tells me of everything he says about Russia, where he is and who he is working with. Diane already told me that he knew Krylov was the Commanding General of the Russian Army Base in Khankala, Chechnya where Harm is working. When Krylov's name came up concerning Carlton's assassination, I asked Diane to tell Harm to keep tabs on him."

Webb was listening thinking out loud, 'Why didn't I think of that.'

Sarah just smiled knowing that John was doing what he did best, working the case in ways no one else ever knew.

John continued, "Webb and I will go Chechnya together. We can't trust Sokol. We don't know which KGB faction he is really in."

Webb nodded his head in agreement.

AJ also agreed saying, "Go get 'em John."

Sarah went and hugged her husband. Then she went to Webb and getting into his face menacingly whispered to him, "You better keep an eye on him. If you come back alone or he comes back in any other condition but vertical, I will make it my mission to make your life as miserable as possible."

All Webb could do was gulp.
Timing Is Everything

Thursday, September 14, 2000

1411 Zulu

Russian Army Base
Khankala, Chechnya

Harm's stint as a legal advisor in Russia started rather inauspiciously. They gave him a desk in an old lavatory with a selection of 30 years old files in Russian. He was working with a Russian-to-English dictionary as he attempted to translate what he was reading. His progress could be described in two terms, slow to none at all. He was sent to Russia to advise on their military's legal system. But at the rate he was going, he knew he would not be any position to advise anyone. He was thinking that they should have sent his sister in law Sarah with her gift for understanding Russian. But that was out of the question because of her pregnancy. As he thought of that, he ruefully thought of Admiral Chegwidden's advice when he was given the assignment. "Just don't shoot holes in their courtroom ceilings." Harm wondered half aloud, "I got more accomplished doing that than what I'm doing here."

His train of thought was interrupted when a Russian Army Captain came in appearing drunk. He was going to use the toilet before Harm loudly spoke up. "Hey the toilets don't work."

The captain stopped what he was doing and went over to Harm. He looked over his shoulder to see what he was working on. He helped Harm read some Russian files. As the Russian translated, he so was impressed that Harm showed insight into Russian soldiers' problems that he dropped his drunken soldier act.

"I am Captain Volkonov. I hope you realize that some 'do-gooders' in the Kremlin arranged your mission as a way to appease you for the old regime holding your father. But these same people see no advantage in it."

Harm sat back to listen, showing more interest.

"What you should be doing is going after the real villains in our government." Volkonov said.

"Oh really, and who would the real villains be?" Harm asked half intrigued have skeptical.

Volkonov continued his spiel, "One of the real villains is one Colonel General Arkady Krylov. He is very corrupt."

Volkonov showed Harm a photo of Krylov's mansion. "He obtained this by selling weapons to Chechens. He was the Deputy Commander of Western Forces who were fighting the Chechens!"

Harm agreed to go to Krylov's base, under the cover of ostensibly to observe the legal system from the front lines. When they got there Volkonov met with and asked Krylov to fly him and Harm to a front line post. Krylov assigned Russian helicopter pilot Sergei Zhukov fly them around a limited area.
When Zhukov first saw Harm, he showed surprise, which went right by Harm. You see earlier in the week Zhukov's copter was shot down over Chechnya by a missile. After it landed and before it exploded he went back for his papers which turned out to be a photo of Harm.

During their flight Zhukov told Harm that the missile which shot him down was Russian and rumors were that arms convoys from Kanyshev arrive with less than their manifests. Harm and Volkonov flew with Zhukov in air support for the next convoy. He dropped them off to inspect the manifest. While they were on the ground Zhukov was ordered to go to Bamut. While Zhukov was gone the convoy was ambushed. Harm and Volkonov were able to take cover and hold off the Chechens. They were only able to come out from their cover when the Chechens that were removing the cargo told their comrades that they were ready to leave. Shortly after that Zhukov returned.

Before any words were said Harm walked over and slugged him, saying, "You set us up. You lied about everything, about your roles in the thefts and everything else."

Sergei said, "I would not lie to the son of Lt. Harmon Rabb."

Harm was totally taken aback asking, "How do you know about my father?"

Zhukov replied, "Your father escaped from a Siberian Gulag. He was taken in by a farm woman in the village of Svischevo. He later died defending the woman from drunken soldiers. Before that they lived together as husband and wife. She was my mother and I am his son. That makes you my brother."

Harm stood there incredulously. Sergei showed Harm a photo that he carried of Harmon Rabb Sr. and Sergei's mother together in Russia.

Friday, September 15, 2000

0554 Zulu

Sheremetyevo Airport

Moscow

Meanwhile John and Webb arrived in Moscow. As they exited the airport terminal they met an old friend. It was Alexi, the opportunist cab driver from their first trip to Russia.

John asked him, "Who are you working for now, CIA, KGB, FSB or Russian Mafia?"

Before he could reply Alexi was interrupted by a voice from behind them with, "No, he works for me." It was Sokol.

1721 Zulu

Federal Security Service

Moscow, Russia

Sokol insisted that John and Webb go with him to the Federal Security Office. They got into Alexi's cab and followed Sokol there.

When they entered Sokol's office he turned to them and asked, "What are you two doing in Russia?"

"We're in pursuit of the man who killed the two marines in an exploding car in the JAG parking lot, the same explosion that nearly killed my wife and unborn son." John replied.
Sokol was properly chagrined saying, "Be that as it may, your pursuit of criminals stops at your shores. You have no jurisdiction here. I should still have you deported."

Webb spoke up saying, "Why don't we do this. We're after the man who not only killed those marines, but was also planning to kill President Putin as he visited an auto plant in Michigan. Think of how it would look if we were working for you to catch him and prevent him from carrying out his plan."

Sokol still wasn't quite swayed until Webb said, "Besides, who else can you trust?"

Sokol said, "Okay you follow my lead and follow my instructions. Mr. Webb you come with me. John, your brother in law went to investigate Krylov. He doesn't know he is in the middle of our investigation of Rokatov."

"Where is Harm now?" John asked.

"He's in Khankala, Chechnya." Sokol answered.

John just turned to Alexi and asked, "What's the fare to Chechnya?"

1411 Zulu

Russian Army Base

Khankala, Chechnya

Sergei flew Harm and Volkonov back to the army base. When they got there they set about investigating why Sergei was called away to leave the convoy.

On the way back Sergei told them, "It was Corporal Trapeznikov, the communications clerk who relayed to me the order to abandon the convoy."

But when they went looking for Trapeznikov he was gone. Krylov granted him an early discharge. Harm and Volkonov exchanged perplexed looks.

1722 Zulu

Russian Army Transit Camp

Mozdok, North Ossetia

They were able to catch with Trapeznikov at the exit camp. He told the trio that Krylov ordered the guards to withdraw, then he told them were to find the original signed order.

Harm and Volkonov found the signed order. As they went to find someone to question they ran into Krylov.

Krylov immediately put Sergei under arrest. "We found stolen weapons on Corporal Zhukov's helicopter. We are charging him with treason."

Same time

On the road to Chechnya

Webb panicked that John was missing. He told Sokol, "If anything happens to John while we're working together, his wife will make my life a living hell."
Sokol laughed at that saying, "Well when he gets to Chechnya we'll know he's there as he'll meet his brother in law. John should be just as surprised as he is."

"What do you mean?" Webb asked.

"I like Commander Rabb. I've have been keeping track of him since he came to Russia. I've been aware of his every movement and everyone he met. I threw something extra in the pot. Let's call it a family surprise."

Webb had no idea he was talking about.

In the meantime John's fluency in Russian came in handy as he was able to bribe his way through a guard that was ordered to stop a Moscow taxi. After they got through that they stopped to change a flat tire, Alexi wanted to turn back.

"Where's your sense of adventure Alexi?" John asked rhetorically.

Alexi just finished changing his tire. He muttered to himself, "The sooner I get you to Chechnya the sooner I can leave Chechnya."

1822 Zulu

Russian Army Base

Khankala, Chechnya

Krylov put Sergei on trial almost immediately. Harm and Volkonov were allowed to defend him. But they were playing against a stacked deck. As they proceeded they found out that their witness was 'accidentally' killed in a mine accident. To further compound the stacked deck the tribunal was a set up with graft ridden judges who denied all motions and threatened to jail Harm for submitting evidence against Krylov. Krylov lied and Harm had to refute him with the information that Sergei was his brother.

Sergei was sentenced to death, after the judges denied any appeal, to be carried out the next day. Harm and Volkonov went to appeal to Krylov for a stay to appeal, under their law, to Putin. Krylov said, Why don't you ask Putin yourselves this afternoon when he comes."

In the midst of all this Sokol lost Rokatov from his surveillance. He was immediately worried because President Putin was flying to visit his troops at Krylov's camp.

Eventually John arrived at the base. He changed into his Navy khakis and went looking for Harm. He was told by a guard that he was in the brig. When he got there he found Harm locked in the brig along with two Russians he didn't recognize.

Harm got up and shook his hand asking, "What brings you here?"

"Webb and I have been working with Sokol trying to track an assassin that killed a Navy commander that Sarah tried and convicted for treason as well as the two Marine guards that died in the same explosion. He's after President Putin." John replied.

"Really, well he's due to arrive here." Harm told him.

"So what are you doing in the brig?" John asked him.

Harm answered by saying, "I was defending my brother against charges of treason."
"What did you say, your brother?" John asked back incredulously.

Harm said, "John I would like you to meet Captain Volkonov and my brother Corporal Sergei Zhukov."

John just shook hands first with Volkonov then Sergei. As he stood to take in the new information he glanced out the window. He spotted Rokatov.

"He's here. He's really going after Putin." John said.

"Who are you talking about?" Harm asked.

John pointed out the window at Rokatov. "Him, he's the guy Webb and I have been chasing across Russia. He was the one who planted the bomb in the car at JAG that nearly killed Sarah.

As Harm stood in the cell looking on in surprise, John went out to inform the guard of the assassin. The guard wouldn't believe him. He forced John back into the brig at rifle point.

Outside Rokatov drove a vehicle loaded with explosives next to the brig.

The guard who was trying to keep them inside, opened up the cell to get John inside. As he did that Harm was able to distract then subdue him. The four went outside after Rokatov. Rokatov left the truck. Sergei snuck on board and defused the remote device while John hot-wired the vehicle. Harm caught up with him just as Sokol and Webb arrived.

Sokol took Rokatov into custody. He waited till Putin finished his visit before he went to arrest Krylov.

Sunday, September 17, 2000

0754 Zulu

Sheremetyevo Airport

Moscow

Harm, John and Webb were standing at the departure terminal speaking with Sergei. Harm was saying, "Here's a first class ticket to DC. You can come to the states and we could use DNA testing to prove you're our father's son. You could stay with my family in our guest room until you got yourself a place of your own."

Sergei said, "But I have my life here. My name has been cleared and I can continue to serve my country. I must refuse. Perhaps I can come visit sometime in the future, after you tell everyone of me. I don't want to be an unwelcome surprise."

Harm could only shake his head and agree. The three Americans went to board their flight.

Half way through the flight, John felt the need to console Harm as he saw his brother in law was disappointed that Sergei didn't want to go home with them. "Harm can I give you some advice on how to be a big brother?"

Harm just nodded ready to listen as John began. "You know I'm the middle brother. All through my life living at home my older brother Matt would always try to order me around and my parents encouraged him saying to me, 'listen to your big brother'. I hated it. Being that I'm only 13 months
younger than Matt I felt that we were equals. Matt didn't agree with me and we had some knock
down drag out fights over it. It wasn't until I graduated college, joined the Navy and started living my
own life that my brother finally got the message that he was no longer in a position to order me
around. We came to the point that we can agree to disagree. That didn't mean we didn't love each
other, but it meant that he no longer tried to order me around."

"So how should I handle Sergei?" Harm asked.

John's reply was very sobering, "How about not at all. He's a grown man. Let him decide for himself
what he wants to do. He knows about you and the two of you will keep in touch. If or when he
decides he wants to come to the states, just be ready to give him help, but only after he asks for it.
Just let him know that you're there when he needs you. Just don't push yourself on him, because if
you do, he will resent you forever for it."

Harm nodded his head as he considered John's advice.

Monday, September 18, 2000

1130 Local Time

Dulles International Airport Arrivals Terminal

Sarah and Diane were standing with their children waiting for their husbands. Webb was the first
through customs. He was just able to shake hands with the Mackenzie sisters before John and Harm
came through right behind him.

Each sister wrapped her husband in a tight hug and gave him a deep, deep kiss.

When they came up for air, John cupped Sarah's chin saying, "I should go away more often."

"Don't you even think about it hot stuff," she said with love as she hugged him closer.

For his part Harm said, "Boy do I have story to tell you."

Diane replied, "I already know a big part of it. Sarah and I were in ATAC watching as you guys
drove that truck away from Putin. We didn't know what was in it until John called Admiral Magnum
to give his report."

Diane went on to tell him what went on in DC the last few days.

During John's time in Russia AJ allowed Sarah to spend her working day at NCIS. She did her work
in John's office. She loved being there as there were many reminders of his love for her and their
family. Of course John had his Giants' autographed Football and Helmet on a shelf in the wall unit,
but that was all he had there that was only his. The rest of the wall unit was filled with photos of her,
their children, including framed photos of both Caroline's and Patrick's first sonograms. The front of
John's desk was lined with photos of her and only her. He had two photo cubes of Caroline and
Chloe on either side of his desk blotter. She knew that he frequently rearranged the order of the
photos to keep his view of them fresh.

When she wasn't doing her work she was spending her time in ATAC. That was because Diane was
tracking John's movements in Russia. Diane was able to do so because John had an advanced GPS
chip in his cell phone. So Admiral Magnum instructed Diane to task a satellite to follow him across
Russia. Not even Webb knew about it, because if he did he would not have been as distressed as he
was when he had lost track of John on his way to Chechnya.
Because of that, they saw via the satellite screen as John, Harm, Sergei and Volkonov came out of the brig and moved the truck with explosives. When John called NCIS to report what went on, Sarah almost collapsed at hearing the news.

Admiral Magnum was in ATAC when he saw Sarah sink into one of the audience chairs in shock at hearing how close John came to being blown up. He and Diane first made sure Sarah was okay then they had supported her as they walked into John's office. Carolyn took over as she made sure Sarah was lying comfortably on the couch in John's office. Diane made sure that Kate Larkin drove Sarah home. Kate stayed at the Marshalls overnight, every night John was away.

Now Sarah was very grateful that John came home in the same condition he left.

When Diane finished her story Harm said to her, "Well John didn't tell you the other part, did he?"

"What other part?" Diane asked. John told Magnum about Sergei, but he asked him to allow Harm to tell Diane. Magnum readily agreed. Family members should be told of other family members.

"Well when we get home I'll make like Paul Harvey and tell you the 'rest of the story'." Harm said facetiously.

Diane slapped his arm saying, "You are horrible. Now I'm going to go nuts until we get home."

"Believe me you'll be glad you're sitting down and not driving when I tell you." Harm reassured her.

"Okay if you insist," Diane said as she reluctantly acquiesced.

After they got home and got the kids settled to play on the living room floor, Diane finally asked, "So what's the rest of the story?"

Before he answered Harm took his wife's hand and led her to the couch and made her sit.

Diane said, "Now you're scaring me. Did something happen to you"

Rubbing his hand over his face he started, "There's no way to say this without you being totally surprised so here it is."

He paused to take a deep breath which made Diane shout, "C'mon honey you're driving me crazy."

"I have a brother." Harm blurted out.

Diane's jaw dropped open as she sat there in shock. Of all the things she thought he was going to say, that was not one of them. Then it dawned on her, "Your father."

Harm nodded continuing his story, "Yes his mom is the woman we spoke to in Svischevo, Siberia. It seems that my dad and she fell in love. I mean dad must have known that there was no way he was ever going to get home and he took whatever comfort he could. The result was Sergei."

Diane said, "That's his name, Sergei?"

Harm smiled saying, "Yeah he's a flyer like our dad." Diane smiled indulgently at that.

"But he flies helicopters for the Russian Army." Harm continued.

Diane said, "Tell me everything."

Harm did. He finished with, "Now I know how you felt when you finally met Sarah. The only
difference between the two is you were expecting to find her after your mom told you about her in your letter, where I was taken totally by surprise."

Diane was crying happy tears as she saw the joy spreading across Harm's face. She saw that though he was surprised, he was so happy to have a brother. She placed her hands on each side of Harm's face and brought her lips to his and kissed him deeply.

After they came up for air she said, "You have to tell Trish."

Harm was going to say something but Diane firmly stated, "You can't wait doing that."

Harm nodded his head in surrender. "I'll tell her in the morning."

But Diane had other plans. She got up, walked across the room to the cordless phone. She brought it back to Harm and said, "You'll do it now."

Harm smiled as he said, "Man you're tough. No wonder I married you."

Diane sat on his lap as he dialed his mom's number.

Trish answered the phone with, "Harm darling, you're back from Russia already? I thought you'd be there another two weeks."

Realizing she had caller ID, Harm began. "Well something happened that made it possible for me to go home."

Diane got off his lap to sit next to her husband. She nudged him mouthing quietly, 'Tell her.'

"Mom while I was in Russia I found out about something, something about dad." Harm began.

"Really, what did you find out?" Trish asked in trepidation.

Harm began to tell his story. "Well you know I told you that he escaped from the camp where he was held and that a woman took him in after she found him hiding in her barn. Well they became close and..." Harm was interrupted.

"There was a baby wasn't there?" Trish said simply.

Harm could only gulp. All he could say was, "Yeah there was." He took a deep breath to calm himself. When he found his voice again he continued, "His name is Sergei Zhukov. I met him when he was assigned to fly me around."

Harm went on to tell his mom the rest of the story. After he finished he could hear her crying softly. His heart was breaking because he had made her cry. He was about to ask if she was alright when he heard Frank come on the phone and say, "Harm is everything alright with you and the family?"

"Yes Frank everything is fine here. I just found out something about Dad while I was in Russia." Harm told Frank the same story he told his mom.

At the end Frank said, "Harm your mom went into our room to think about what you told her. There is a lot she has to digest. When she's ready she'll call you back."

Harm said, "Okay Frank please tell her I love her."

"I will Harm. She already knows that. She'll call you soon. Good night son." Frank said warmly.
"Goodnight Frank." Harm said as the two men hung up the phone.

When Harm pressed the 'off' button Diane saw that he was at a loss for words and what to do next. Diane just opened her arms said simply, "C'mere."

Harm slid across the couch into her arms. Dianne held her husband close to her breast as he had his own good cry.

1830 Local Time

Marshall Residence

After they got home John told Sarah the same story that Harm was telling Diane. After she got over her shock she asked, "Is Harm telling Diane?"

"Yeah he is. I urged him to tell his mom, but I'll leave it up to Diane to get him to do that."

"Yeah, if I know my sister she won't let him sit on that for very long at all. In the mean time we need to eat." Sarah said.

"Always the hungry marine." John said. He yelped when Sarah playfully smacked his butt rather hard.

"Remember I'm also carrying your son." Sarah retorted playfully.

In response John gathered her into his arms and planted a deep kiss on her.

Chloe came into the kitchen saying, "Oh brother, you're at it again."

Laughing the two parents disengaged from each other and set about making dinner.

After having a leisurely family dinner they all fell into Sarah and John's big bed and watched a family friendly movie. During the movie Sarah breast fed Caroline. When Caroline was sated Sarah gave her to John. She knew he needed to take care of his daughter to make him feel that he was finally home. She stood at the nursery door and watched as John changed their daughter's diaper, put a sleeper on her and sat down in the rocker to read her a book. This was the routine that they performed every night they were home. Caroline did not sleep well while John was away. Now she was settling contently into John as he softly read her story. As usual Caroline fell asleep before he was even half way through the story. He picked her up and laid her in her crib on her back. She looked so cute with her hands closed into little fists and held back by her ears. John pulled the baby comforter up to her armpits and leaned in to gently kiss her cheek.

He turned to see Sarah leaning against the lintel. As he got closer he saw that there were happy tears running down her cheeks. She had made no effort to wipe at them or to leave them unshed. As she stood up straighter he went over to her, gently cupped her cheeks with his hands and used his thumbs to wipe them away. He leaned in and gently captured her lips in a long and tender kiss.

Chloe was coming out of the bathroom on her way to her room and she said, "Hey you two your bedroom is right there."

Sarah just broke off her kiss and went to playfully swat Chloe's rear end. "Go to bed smart-alec."

Chloe dodged her mother's mock punishment and scooted into her room saying a sweet, "Goodnight mom, goodnight dad." She was happy that she finally had parents that were still in love with each other.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 67

Saturday September 23, 2000

0600 Local Time

Marshall Residence

As usual Caroline determined when the Marshalls woke up. Around 0545 she started squirming in her bed. When they were at Disneyworld John and Sarah had purchased an electronic Mickey Mouse music player. It had Mickey’s head with his bandleader’s hat and bowtie. It was attached to the rails on the far side of the crib. When one pulled the bowtie down the player started playing the melody from "It's a Small World".

As Caroline wormed around in her crib she reached over and pulled Mickey's tie and the music started. Sarah was the first to hear the song through the baby monitor.

She was surprised to hear Chloe go in and say, "What's up pumpkin, you want some attention?"

Sarah heard Caroline giggle and squeal as Chloe picked her up and brought her to the changing table. She heard as Chloe opened the tabs and remove the diaper and say, "Oh we have a surprise don't we. Well we can't have that now can we?"

Sarah listened as Chloe cleaned and changed her sister. Then she heard, "Come on let's see if mommy is up and can give you breakfast."

At that Sarah sat up in bed and waited for Chloe to come in, which she did about 10 seconds later.

"Oh you're up already," Chloe said brightly.

Sarah smiled and held out her hands to gather her daughters into her embrace. Chloe sat down, handed Caroline to Sarah and snuggled contently up against her mom.

Caroline started rooting for the breast so Sarah pulled down the spaghetti strap of her negligee and let her contently latch on.

"So what do we do today?" Chloe asked her mom.

The answer came from the other side of the bed as John tiredly said, "I had sleeping in for a couple of more hours on my mind."

John rolled over to face the three most important females in his life. He bunched his pillow up under his head to get a better look at them.

Sarah looked lovingly down at him and said, "We have to meet Sydney to go and see her wedding dress and we two have to go with Diane, Harriet and Francesca to get our bridesmaid dresses, though my fitting will have to wait until after Patrick is born."

"When is all that female activity going to commence?" John asked.
"At 1100, Diane is leaving her kids with Harm. She and Harriet are coming here to pick us up. Then we're going to pick up Sydney and Francesca at Sydney's house. Then we're going to the dress shop. After that we're going to lunch." Sarah explained. She went on further, "We have some bottles with formula and milk I expressed in the fridge so you should be set up nicely with Caroline."

"Well why don't I get up and make us a nice big breakfast to hold you over till lunch." John said as he got out of bed.

Sarah and Chloe's eyes lit up at that. They both said together, "Blueberry pancakes, English muffins, hash browns and bacon."

John sighed as he acquiesced to their menu requests. Before he left the room to change in the ensuite bathroom, he bent and kissed his wife's lips then kissed each of his daughters' heads.

1845 Local Time
Marshall Residence

After they enjoyed John's hearty breakfast, Sarah and Chloe Diane, Harriet, Sydney Francesca went out to the dress maker. They had a great time trying on dresses, even though Sarah had to sit and watch as Chloe and the other women tried their dresses on. Chloe was getting her first formal dress and she was really enjoying herself.

Now the Marshalls were sitting down to dinner. Sarah started to say, "You know there is something I want to tell you."

John had to smile as he answered, "I seem to remember a certain colonel telling me to just say what you need to say without that preamble."

Sarah had to smile at the memory as she started to tell John, "While you and Harm were in Russia my mother called Diane and I. She's expressing an interest in moving to the DC area to be closer to us. Diane and I are in favor of that. The only thing I told her that it would not be a good idea for her to live with either the Rabbs or us. Diane and I are looking for a nice place for her to live close to both of us."

John replied, "That's great honey. It would be nice to have her close to you and the kids. We can visit her more often. Despite what happened in the past you should still have a nice relationship with your mom. What happened to her was not entirely her fault, but it's a good thing that you have been communicating with her. The trip out to Yuma was very nice. You, Diane and Deanne looked like you were having a good time at the Grand Canyon."

"Yeah we were. We talked about a lot of the stuff that made us estranged. I realized when I was growing up she did a lot to keep my father from hurting me. It was the time that he put the knife to her throat that she really feared for her life. She truly regretted leaving me with him when she left. We both agreed to put that behind us and move forward in our relationship. There is one thing I have to ask though." Sarah finished.

"What's that honey?" John asked.

"What made you think of getting my mom to meet us in Yuma? I mean I loved that she was there and that you arranged it., but what gave you the idea to call her?" Sarah asked.

"Well I knew that you missed having your mom in your life seeing how my mom was involved with us, at least as involved as she could be living as far from us as New York. But I went through some estrangement with my mom, maybe not to the level you did, when I first went into the Navy." John
began.

He was going to go on but Sarah asked, "Really, I had no idea. Did your estrangement from your old girlfriend have anything to do with that?"

"Partly, my mom didn't want me to go into the Navy because she grew up during World War Two and she thought that the Navy would use me only as cannon fodder. She wanted me to be the 'breakfast eating Brooks Brothers type'. So she urged Annie to try and convince me to not go into then leave the Navy. After the accident during the Gulf War, Annie had had enough of being in the middle. She said as much in the letter she wrote breaking up with me. That's why I stayed at Aunt Margaret's during the time I went to law school. I was still angry at my mother for trying to use my girlfriend to get me to do what she wanted.

It wasn't until just before I graduated Law School that Aunt Margaret convinced my dad to convince my mom to reconcile with me. She only came around when she realized that I was going into a safer profession, though still in the Navy. She just about freaked though when she found out how we got the Legion of Merit. The time I was shot freaked her out even more. That time it was my dad who convinced her that Coster was crazy and my being shot had nothing to do with the Navy. Still mom and dad don't know of the things I did as a SEAL or the risky adventures as a JAG, especially the HALO jump into Columbia and punching out with Harm in Russia. Ann Marie and I only told them that we went strictly on a fact finding mission trying to find Harm's dad. We didn't tell her Harm and I even went flying."

"What about the latest trip?" Sarah asked.

"Well this latest trip was classified 'top secret' so not even Ann Marie knows about it. So there is little chance that mom and dad will find out about it." John replied.

"That's good to hear." Sarah said. She then asked, "Now about my mom. What do we do next?"

"Well we, as in Diane, Harm, you and I, need to find a nice place for her to live. I suggest a place outside DC proper, maybe somewhere in Virginia. That way she's close to us and the Rabbs." John suggested.

"Well Diane and I will get started on that as soon as we can." Sarah informed her.

After that evening, the Rabbs and Marshalls went full out to find a nice place for Deanne to live. They were able to find one in Alexandria, Virginia. The Paul Spring Retirement Community was on 12 acres in a residential community just south of Old Town Alexandria. It had a good reputation as a premier retirement community in the Mount Vernon area. It had generously sized apartments with private baths and full kitchens.

Sarah and Diane arranged for Deanne to fly in and see the facility.

Deanne immediately fell in love with it. Sarah went ahead with the legal procedures while Diane arranged with Deanne's health insurance and Social Security to get Deanne an apartment there. They had to wait a month until an apartment became available. Deanne was able to move into her new apartment during the last weekend of October. She was thrilled that Sarah and Diane brought their children to her place for Halloween. They all walked around the retirement community with them as they went door to door trick-or-treating.

Deanne's arrival to DC could not have been timed better.

Friday, November 3, 2000
1000 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah was starting to feel like she was never going to give birth. She was on maternity leave the last two weeks. Admiral Chegwidden did not want a repeat of Harriet's birth of AJ Roberts so he had insisted that she take the leave in her 36th week. Sarah spent the time getting her mom settled into her new home and working as Sydney's maid of honor, planning the wedding. Sydney was very accommodating of Sarah's condition by doing most of her planning for the wedding at the Marshalls. John gave up his man cave as he installed a Plexiglas top and a tablecloth on the pool table. It was strewn with the wedding paraphernalia such as the seating charts, menus, receipts, guest lists and the like. He cheerfully called it wedding central.

Now while John was out with Chloe and Caroline at the Rabbs, Sydney, Francesca, Diane, Harriet and Sarah were sitting in the dining room going over the guest list. They were also addressing the invitation envelopes. They were going along very well until Sarah stood up rather suddenly and raced into the bathroom off the kitchen. She was in there for about five minutes before she called out in a desperate tone, "Sydney!"

Sydney went right in. When she got into the bathroom, she saw Sarah crying and standing pointing at the toilet. Sydney looked in and saw that the water was pink with blood.

"I'm scared Sydney." Sarah cried.

"Okay sweetie let's get you to the hospital." Sydney said as she gently guided her out of the room. She started giving instructions like the doctor she was. "Diane, stay with Sarah. Harriet get a blanket and a large plastic bag. Cut the plastic bag up and place on the back seat of my car with the blanket on top of that."

Harriet did so and Sydney and Diane helped Sarah into the backseat. Sydney got in to drive as Diane got in the back with Sarah. They made it to Bethesda in no time. Harriet stayed behind at the Marshalls' to call John at the Rabbs. Then she went to Bethesda.

1330 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Medical Center

Bethesda, MD

John was slowly, but surely, wearing a path on the waiting room floor. His friends tried to keep him calm, but it was a fruitless effort. He wasn't nervous about the birth. After all he had delivered Harriet's baby without so much as batting an eye. He was nervous at what Eve had told him and Sarah.

After Sarah had arrived at the hospital, Eve examined her. She said, "The blood you saw was from the mucus plug that you would normally expel. What happened with you was your water broke and that also expelled the plug."

Sarah was relieved at that. She became distressed at the next thing Eve told her.

Eve had an old-fashioned hand held microphone and speaker unit from the infancy of Obstetric Listening. It was her father's and he had proudly handed it over to her when he retired. She had used it on all her patients.

On all Sarah's examinations she had found the baby's heartbeat in the same place, the lower right
quadrant of Sarah's stomach. It was the same during the last appointment a week ago. This time however as she went looking for the heartbeat there she didn't find it. Eve didn't panic explaining that during labor the baby would move into the birth canal. She moved the listener around Sarah's stomach and found the still strong heartbeat in the upper left quadrant, just under the left ribcage. Eve had immediately ordered the sonogram machine brought in. As Eve examined the images, she saw that the baby was in an unusual position.

She explained to Sarah and John, "First of all the baby is not in distress, the heartbeat is very strong. The reason I am concerned is because the baby's head should be down completely under its body. That is the normal birth position. This time however the baby is in a partially breached position or what is called a transverse breach position." Eve pointed at different points on Sarah's baby bump, "The head is here in the left lower quadrant, the rear end is here, the upper right quadrant, just under the right rib cage. The feet are in the lower right quadrant. Now we can manipulate the baby down by applying some pressure, but I would prefer to play it safe by doing a Caesarian. Either way we can deliver the baby safely. I'll leave you two to decide." Eve said before she walked out.

"Well what do you want to do?" John asked Sarah.

Sarah thought for about a minute. "Let's be safe. Eve delivered Diane's babies after she had the previa problem, and then Harriet's after she found the prolapsed cord. I think we should go that way. Do you agree?"

"Absolutely I agree," he said.

"Okay, call Eve in," Sarah said

Eve came back in and said, "I know you're making the right choice. John step out and let me get Sarah prepared for the surgery."

The anesthesiologist and nurse came in to administer the epidural, catheter and IV line in her hand. John went outside to the waiting room where Diane, Sydney and Harriet were waiting. He was about to explain what was going on when he saw some more familiar faces as AJ, Ann Marie and even Deanne had arrived. Ann Marie had picked Deanne up in Alexandria after Diane called to tell her about Sarah going into labor.

Ann Marie had left her children home with Peter while Harm stayed home with Chloe and Caroline when Diane called there to tell John that Sarah was in labor. Ann Marie had called their mother and Diane had called Trish to let them know that the birth was imminent. Diane had asked her to pick Deanne up, which Ann Marie had graciously agreed to.

"It should be any time now. They are preparing her for a Caesarian." John answered their questions about Sarah's condition and why they were doing the Caesarian.

AJ was just about to order him to sit when a nurse poked her head out of the door. She smiled and said, "OK, Dad, I kind of think you're gonna want to be in here for this." John looked at this friends and family for support and headed back in.

The nurse got him gowned and masked and lead him into the operating room.

As soon as John took his place at Sarah's side, she looked at him and saw his nervous expression, even with the mask on and asked, "Are you Okay?"

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" he countered.

Sarah started to reply, but Eve stopped her. "Cut the chit-chat, you two. We have work to do. Sarah
you're sedated to keep you calm. You are also going to feel some tugging and so forth. As soon as I make my first cut, I'll have the baby out in 5 minutes. Then you are going to have a beautiful baby boy in your arms. Are you ready?"

Sarah looked at John, saw his reassuring smile, and knew that they both were.

15 minutes later . . .

The nurses were at the warming lamp washing and examining the perfect newborn boy as he made the healthy noises that they were so relieved to hear. He was weighed at 8 pounds and 9 ounces and 20 inches long. John stayed with the baby there as Eve finished Sarah's post op procedures. After Eve was finished, Sarah was transferred to a bed and wheeled into recovery.

The nurses finished cleaning and swaddling the baby and gave her to John. John and Eve followed Sarah into Recovery. John put the baby in Sarah's arms then sat down on a stool next to her bed. Eve made sure John was sitting comfortably then told them about the operation, "It's a good thing that you decided on the Caesarian. When we took the baby out his umbilical cord was around one ankle and his throat. We were very, very lucky," Eve, said to the relieved parents.

As they heard the news, they both reeled in shock at the near loss of their child. Sarah was already lying down so when she felt light headed, she just let it pass. Even through that she just pulled the baby closer to her. John on the other hand had to have Eve steady him as he almost fell off the stool.

Eve made sure they were all right and said, "I think you've got half the US Navy waiting out there. John, go tell them they come in two at a time gowned and masked. I believe we have someone they'll want to meet," said Eve smiling.

John looked at Sarah, as if waiting for permission to leave her side. She simply told him she loved him and pointed him towards the door. John wiped away a few stray tears from his own face and kissed his wife before he went out to get their family.

When he returned, he quickly moved to Sarah's side, as she held their son. The first people in were Deanne and Diane, followed by Ann Marie, Harriet, then AJ and Sydney.

"Everyone I would like you to meet Patrick James Marshall.

After the retinue all came in and made the usual comments and congratulations, John took Patrick to the nursery and Sarah settled in for a good night's sleep.

Thanksgiving Day 2000

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Sarah came home with Patrick after 5 days in the hospital. She had a very restful time there as she healed and took care of her son. Patrick was a bit of a fussy baby. He reminded Sarah of Diane's son Trey. When Sarah went to give him the breast he took so long to latch on to his mother's nipple, but once he latched onto her breast he stayed until he was sated. Sarah really enjoyed the feeling of breast feeding a newborn again.

When she got home from the hospital, she spent Patrick and Caroline's nap times expressing her breast milk for the night time feedings. She learned from her first time to do this so that she could get some steady sleep at night. John had no problem getting up to give Patrick the night time feedings. As a result she went through the day feeling less exhausted.
After the 2nd week she and John took a social trip to the Navy Yard one day to let the staff see their new son. They went to JAG Headquarters first. Everyone oohed and aahed at the newborn boy. Even AJ came out to make the usual noises at him. The staff nearby had almost started to giggle at his display of affection, until he had stared them down with his usual 'command glare'.

After they left JAG she walked over to NCIS to show Patrick to John's Staff, where they got the same reaction.

Now Sarah, John and Chloe were walking up the Rabbs front walk. Sarah had Patrick in her arms, while Chloe carried Caroline. John came up the rear carrying the baby bag and portable crib. Diane invited Deanne, Trish and Frank as well as Maureen and Jim. Harm went to Alexandria to pick Deanne up.

Deanne really enjoyed meeting John and Harm's parents. She expressed her appreciation to Trish and Maureen at adopting her daughters as surrogate parents.

The Chegwiddens also came for dinner. The Roberts went down to Florida to spend the holiday with Harriet's parents, while Ann Marie and Pete went up to New York to be with Pete's parents.

Harm had his own playroom with a big screen TV and his own pool table. The men gravitated to there. John even set up the portable crib there so that he could watch over his son.

He told Sarah, "He has to learn to hang out with the boys eventually."

Sarah had just smiled indulgently at him and gave him a sweet kiss.

The women went about preparing the holiday meal. Sarah and Diane especially enjoyed working with their mother on the meal. Maureen, Trish and Sydney took their own joy seeing the three Mackenzie women really enjoy working together.

After feeding Patrick and putting him down to sleep in the portable crib and placing Caroline and the Rabb children in high chairs, the adults sat down to dinner. Harm put Sarah on his right with John next to her, then Maureen and Bill then Chloe on Diane's left. He sat Sydney on his left with AJ and then Trish and Frank, then Deanne on the other side of Diane.

The flutes were filled with sparkling grape cider. After grace, Harm got up to propose the toast. "Well we have another year to be thankful for. We have new additions to the family with Patrick James and Chloe. We also have Diane's and Sarah's mom with us this year in good health and Sydney and AJ are getting ready to be married by the New Year. So I will propose this toast: May God bless and keep us, may his face shine upon us, may we always be free from strife and blessed with much happiness and may we always love and care for each other."

Everyone touched their glasses in agreement. Everyone enjoyed dinner as no one got up without saying they were totally full. Eventually the babies determined when the evening was over. John and Sarah took Deanne home and then they went home to settle in for the night.

Monday, December 18, 2000

0800 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah and John had Patrick christened on the 2nd Sunday of December. It was a very nice celebration that started at St. Thomas Apostle as Fr. Mario baptized Patrick. Then the family went to a nice restaurant for the party. Harm and John's brother Mark were co-godfathers while Diane was
Patrick's godmother.

Sarah went back to work after the usual 6 weeks. As with Caroline, she lost most of her baby weight from the breast feeding and exercise. After she was deemed healthy enough to run, she had set up a weekend routine of running at Rock Creek Park with John, Harm, Diane and AJ. As with Caroline, AJ joined them on the weekends and he enjoyed pushing Patrick in the jogging stroller. Unlike Caroline, Patrick just slept through the runs.

She also took the babies three times a week to visit Deanne at the retirement community. There they walked all around the compound. Sometimes Diane would take a day and join them. Also there was the Christmas shopping. Diane, Sarah and Deanne went shopping together for their families the last two weekends.

The week they returned to work Sarah and John registered Patrick in the same daycare as his sister Caroline. After the Marshalls left the children at the center they walked to their separate offices, but not before sharing a loving kiss.

When Sarah walked back into the JAG Bullpen she was greeted with "Attention on Deck" from Chief Emma Gardiner.

"As you were" Sarah called out cheerfully.

As she walked toward her office she was intercepted by Emma who told her, "Excuse me Colonel, but your work is in Admiral Chegwidden's office."

"Why's that Emma?" Sarah asked.

"Well the Admiral is at the Pentagon working on the promotion board for the new Captains. As Chief of Staff you're acting JAG ma'am." Emma informed her.

"Well that's a heck of way to come back from maternity leave." Sarah said sardonically. Despite her tone, inwardly she was very proud to be in the position she was in.

She went through the day rather easily, dispensing case assignments and catching up on the work she needed to catch up on. When it was over she met John and Chloe at the daycare center as they picked up their children to go home.

Tuesday, December 19, 2000

1800 Local Time

McMurphy's Bar

Sarah sat at the bar reading a newspaper and nursing a tonic with lime. She was waiting for John, the Rabbs, the Roberts as well as AJ and Sydney. She couldn't wait to refer to them as the Chegwiddens. She was finally getting fitted for her maid of honor's dress. Then the couples were going to go out to an adult dinner. She and John arranged to have Deanne stay at home with Chloe and the babies while they were out. John went to Alexandria and taken Deanne to their home for babysitting duty before he went to meet Sarah.

Sarah was just about to order another drink when AJ walked in. She could see by his expression and demeanor that he was tired as well as peeved. She said, "Admiral you look positively awful."

AJ looked at her sardonically at which Sarah blanched as she realized her faux pas, "And what I said was totally inappropriate."
AJ smiled back saying, "That's alright colonel. It's been a rough two days. I have looked at so many candidates and most of them were very qualified for promotion, except for one. Without saying who it was the SECNAV was not happy he wasn't picked for promotion the first day. So on the second day he sent me back to the board to try and get him promoted."

"Did that work sir?" Sarah asked.

"Not even then. He was seen to be lacking in the qualities need for his position of leadership." AJ answered.

"Wow, do we know this candidate sir?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah we do." AJ said in disappointment.

Sarah could think of a few commanders that were in line for promotion. One name came right to the front of her mind. Without realizing that she said the name out loud she blurted, "Lindsey." She looked at AJ embarrassed.

AJ just looked back with raised eyebrows as if to say, 'you said it not me.' But he confirmed her suspicion.

"Yeah based on his record, the members found it difficult to promote him. One comment about him stands out, 'he's an empty suit'. His record in the courtroom was certainly not exemplary. He lost way more than he won. Except for one command position which he botched, he's never been anything but an aide to his commanding officers. As a matter of fact, he's the commander you replaced in the Administration and Legal Services Departments. The bad evaluation that was written about that department was an indictment of him and his work." AJ told her.

"So how did he end up being the SECNAV's favorite?" Sarah asked.

"Well when Lindsey was removed from JAG, he appealed to retired Admiral Brovo for a recommendation. Brovo called Nelson and the SECNAV took him onto his staff. Lindsey does well organizing one man, not an office. The SECNAV wanted to take care of him to allow him to eventually retire with a bigger pension. But the other Captains found him lacking. I had to agree with them." AJ finished.

AJ had another thought, "You know Sarah after I left the promotion board, I was thinking of you and your record."

As usual when she heard AJ use her given name Sarah listened more closely. She asked, "Really sir?" Sarah asked.

"Yes I did. You have a better chance of getting your bird then Lindsey ever did. The work you've done as the Information and Public Affairs Officer as well as the aide to the Brigade Commanding Officer in Japan, a platoon leader in Bosnia, then Supervisor of the Investigators' Office at NIS Pearl speaks very well of you. Then there're the high marks you obtained from the Marine Command and Staff College, graduating with high marks from college and law school added to your Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit, not to mention being my chief of staff you have a very impressive record. There is only one thing you need." AJ told her.

"What's that sir?" Sarah asked intrigued.

"You need a sea tour." AJ said.

"Really sir I haven't really thought of that. In the last year and a half, I've been concentrating on my
marriage and being a mother as well as doing the work that was in front of me, it's been hard to think of anything else." Sarah said.

"Well after today I'll look into what you may need. In the meantime, keep everything we've talked about in your mind. Discuss it all with John. Speaking of John and I'm only asking because you're my friend, are you two planning on having any more children?"

"Ah no, John and I have decided that we are going to hold off having more children for a time. Two babies at the same time can get to be a bit overwhelming," Sarah said taken by surprise at the question.

"Okay that's good to hear," AJ said.

"Why is that sir?" Sarah asked half knowing the question.

"Because according to Article 2, Section 14 of the Rules Regarding Women in the Armed Force states: Any female member of the Armed Forces of the United States may not enter into any combat, sea duty, undercover, or other mission or duty which places her life in danger, while she is knowingly with child. I can't assign you to sea duty if you are going to have another baby," AJ answered in a kind tone.

"You know I should have said that myself sir," Sarah said half embarrassed at not mentioning that part of the UCMJ first.

"That's alright colonel. In the meantime talk about what I said with John and when you come to a decision let me know," AJ told her.

"About how much time would you like me to take sir?" Sarah asked him.

"Well it's another week till Christmas and then there's my wedding on New Year's Eve. Lets' say right after I come back from my honeymoon. Sydney and I are only taking a week. Do you think you will have an answer when I get back?" AJ asked.

"I absolutely will sir." Sarah said happily.

"Good." AJ said.

Before Sarah could say anything more, John walked in. She turned to accept his kiss. She held it for a few seconds longer than usual. As she did that Harm and Diane walked in.

Diane said, "Hey didn't you two just finish making a baby?"

Sarah pulled away from her husband and stuck her tongue out at her sister. Just then the Roberts walked in with Sydney.

Sydney laughed and said, "Is that mature behavior for a Marine colonel and my maid of honor?"

AJ as well as everyone shared a good laugh, including Sarah.

John then asked, "Do we have time for a drink before we leave?"

Before he could get an answer, they all started to hear Dean Martin and Martina McBride singing a familiar holiday song on the jukebox.

Sarah picked it up immediately and started to sing along, "I really can't stay."
Harm also recognized the song and joined in singing, "Baby it's cold outside."

Then it was Diane's turn, "I've got to go away."

John, "But baby it's cold outside."

Sydney, "This evening has been

AJ, "Been hoping that you drop in"

Harriet, "so very nice."

Bud took her hands singing, "I'll hold your hands, they're just like ice."

Sarah, "My mother will start to worry."

John, "Beautiful what's your hurry."

Sydney, "My father will be pacing the floor."

AJ, "Listen to the fireplace roar…"

Diane, "So really I'd better scurry"

Harm, "Beautiful please don't hurry"

Sydney, "But maybe just a half a drink more"

Bud, "Put some records on while I pour"

Sarah, "The neighbors might think"

John, "Baby it's bad out there"

Diane, "Say what's in this drink?"

Harm, "No cabs to be had out there."

Harriet, "I wish I knew how."

Bud, "Your eyes are like starlight now."

Sydney, "to break this spell"

AJ, "I'll take your hat, your hair looks swell"

Sarah, "I ought to say "no, no, no sir"

John, "mind if I move in closer"

Diane, "At least I'm gonna say that I tried"

Harm, "What's the sense in hurtin' my pride"

Harriet, "I really can't stay"

AJ, "oh baby don't hold out"
They all chorused, "Baby it's cold outside"

They all took turns singing the boy and girl parts of the rest of the song until they all joined in for the finale, "Baby it's cold, Baby it's cold outside."

They all shared a laugh as they finished singing. Then they all filed out of the bar.

Monday, Christmas Day 2000

0330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

The Roberts had a Christmas Eve party for the JAG Staff at their apartment. After the party they went to the traditional ecumenical military Christmas Service at the Navy Yard Chapel.

By their common request to their other family members, the Rabbs and Marshalls were not having many guests as they were sharing their first Christmas together with Deanne. For the occasion John and Harm drove Deanne to visit her brother Matt at the Quantico Brig on Christmas afternoon. They rightfully decided to leave the wives and children at home. Sarah and Diane was taking their children to visit their uncle regularly every month. Matt had already seen the children including the newborn Patrick the previous Saturday. Being that this would be her first time seeing her brother since before she walked out of her home all those years ago, Deanne asked to have a private talk with her brother.

After going through the usual personal search and other security procedures, Deanne went into the visitors' room alone to wait for her brother. When he came in she burst into happy tears as she went to embrace Matt. Matt was just as emotional as he went forward to wrap her arms around his sister.

The two sat alone and spoke for an hour. First off Deanne told Matt why she gave Diane up for adoption.

She explained, "I knew when the girls were born Joe's drunkenness and abusive behavior would make it difficult for me to properly care for one girl. It would have been impossible for me to properly care for both. So in order to save one, I had to give her up."

When she told Matt what happened on the night she left, Matt said, "I know. Sarah told me that about how Joe put the knife to your throat and threatened to kill you. The only thing I can say is why didn't you come to me when that happened?"

"I don't know Matt. I felt that I alienated our family by sticking with Joe all that time I did. I just didn't want to hear that they were right. I just couldn't face that, so I left."

Matt just said, "Well there's nothing we can do about that now except go forward."

"Thanks Matt." Deanne said sincerely as she took hold and gave his hand a squeeze. Then she got a mischievous look in her eyes as she asked her next question, "So tell me what made you think of stealing the Declaration of Independence?"

Matt just rolled his eyes as he tried to explain. Deanne just sat back as he hemmed and hawed through his explanation. She just said, "You're a regular Don Quixote. It's just like you to take up an impossible cause."

Matt and she shared a laugh at that. Then Deanne went on to tell Matt how she spent her life in the years between then and now. She was especially grateful that her daughters allowed her back into their lives. Deanne then thanked him for being there for Sarah when she really needed help.
After their hour alone Matt asked Harm and John to come in. For the next hour the four shared funny family stories. They ended the visit with the promise to visit as often as the prison allowed.

Deanne, John and Harm returned to the Marshalls to share the holiday dinner.

Sunday, December 31, 2000

1530 Local Time

Marshall Residence

The day dawned bright but very cold with temperatures in the upper 20s to the lower 30s. Sydney was very thankful it wasn't snowing or raining.

Just like Sarah's wedding, the bride and bridesmaids met at the Rabbs while the groom and groomsmen met at the Marshalls.

Being that she really didn't know the admiral and Sydney very well Sarah and John got Deanne to babysit. They also got Alicia Barnett from across the street to help her watch the babies while John and Sarah were going to the wedding. Her parents, Dorothy and Nicholas would be home in case Alicia had a problem. They would also come over to share the New Year with her. That morning Sarah expressed plenty of breast milk for the evening. Just before she put on her maid of honor gown, she breast fed Patrick. John had his Mess dress pants and shirt on. He put on an outer coat to escort Chloe and Sarah to the waiting limo. Sarah had on her fur coat. After John gave Chloe a quick hug and kiss, he turned to help his wife get into the limo. Before she got in the car, she gave John a lingering kiss.

"See ya at the church 'hot stuff." Sarah said.

"I'll be waiting at the altar just like the last time." John said.

Sarah smiled a bright smile as she got into the limo.

John went inside while the limo pulled away. Shortly Harm pulled his Corvette into John's driveway. He and AJ got out and walked into John's house. Bud showed up shortly after that with Danny. The men shared a bottle of champagne before they got into their limo and went to the church.

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Diane also got their teenage neighbor to mind her children. Now the bridal party was getting ready for the wedding. While Chloe, Diane, Harriet, Francesca and Sarah were fine, Sydney was slowly going nuts. "I can't believe I'm finally getting married. I don't remember being this nervous when I married Danny's father."

Sarah was doing her part of the maid of honor as she tried to keep Sydney calm. "Now try to relax Sydney. Everything is going fine. Francesca is the best. She'll have the dress repaired in no time."

In her excitement of getting ready Sydney ripped the lace from the front of her dress' bodice. Francesca immediately asked Diane for her sewing kit and set to repair the torn fabric. It took her no time at all as she brought it to Sydney.

"See there you are Sydney, all done." Francesca proudly said. She and Sarah went to help Sydney into the dress. After successfully getting it on her, they went to get the rest of her ready. They put on
her veil and then got her into her coat. The women then left the house and got into their limo.

1700 Local Time

St. Thomas Episcopal Church

8991 Brook Rd,

McLean, VA

It was decided that all the groomsmen would wait at the altar. The only exception to that was Danny as he was walking his mom down the aisle. AJ and Harm were waiting at the altar for the ceremony to begin. AJ was fidgeting something fierce. Harm had to say to him, "AJ relax it's not like you haven't been through this before."

AJ looked at him sideways and said, "The last time I went through this it ended badly. The only thing good to come out of it was Francesca."

"Well Sydney is no Angela Paretti. She's not afraid of what you are and she will stay with you forever." Harm reassured him.

Before AJ could comment the music began. The doors in the back of the chapel opened. All the bridesmaids wore gowns that were designed by Francesca. They were deep violet long sleeved with straight bodices that clung to each woman's curvy upper body with pleated skirts that flared out from the hips to the floor with no train.

First Diane walked down the aisle, then Harriet, followed by Francesca. Finally it was Sarah's turn to walk down the aisle.

The music changed to the bridal march as the doors were opened again to reveal Sydney holding onto her son Danny's arm. Sydney's wedding gown was ivory, long sleeved with a bodice that plunged down to show her cleavage under the lace. The bodice clung to her curves while the pleated skirt also flared from the hips to the floor with a modest train.

Danny escorted Sydney down the aisle. At the end he gallantly handed his mom off to AJ.

AJ's old friend Chaplain Turner performed the ceremony. Sydney and AJ fidgeted through the whole thing until Chaplain Turner finally said, "You may now kiss your spouse."

The two practically ran into each others' arms as their lips collided in a passionate kiss. It lasted until Harm, doing his duty as best man, coughed and whispered, "Hey get a room." The two pulled apart their faces glowing in their adoration of each other. The whole congregation stood and applauded.

At the end of the service Chaplain Turner intoned, "Ladies and gentlemen I give you for the first time, Admiral and Mrs. AJ Chegwidden."

At that AJ & Sydney turned and walked arm in arm down the aisle amid applause and cheers from their friends and family. They were followed by Sarah & Harm, Francesca & Danny, Harriet & Bud then lastly Diane & John. The congregation filed out after them.

The bridal party lined up in the large entrance foyer. Those that were not going to the reception slipped their gift envelopes to Harm and Sarah who placed them in the silk drawstring bag that they had for just that purpose.

The Chegwiddens didn't want a sword line and they also didn't want everyone waiting too long in
the cold so as soon as the last person filed outside, the bridal party lined up on the steps, the bridesmaids opposite the groomsmen. The photographer lined up his shot and called the bride and groom out, saying, "Alright everyone on the count of three, one, two and three."

On three Sydney and AJ went down the steps ducking their heads as the whole mob of guests threw up a shower of rice that cascaded down on the happy couple.

Army Navy Club

1930 Local Time

Washington, DC

After they rice throwing the bridal party went back into the church to take photos at the altar. Then they piled into the waiting limousines.

Sydney and AJ arranged for a private limo for themselves and a super stretched limo for the rest of the bridal party. The ride to the Army Navy Club was short enough to get the Bridal Party there quickly, but long enough for the Bride and Groom to sit and enjoy their solitude.

At the club the bridal party went to a private room for their own cocktail hour where more photos were taken. Then it was time for them to join the reception. The master of ceremonies had them set up outside the door and then he started to announce their entrance.

"Ladies and gentlemen would please rise and greet our wedding party. First we have the children of our bride and groom AJ's daughter Francesca and Sydney's son Daniel."

The two marched out arm in arm amid applause and cheers to their assigned place.

"Next we have Diane and John." There were more cheers and applause.

"Next there's Harriet & Bud." There was till more cheers and applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen we have out maid of honor and best man, Sarah & Harm." This time there were louder cheers and applause.

The band stopped the music and began a low drum roll as the master of ceremonies intoned, "And now ladies and gentlemen for the first time in public, Mr. and Mrs., Admiral AJ and Dr. Sydney Chegwidden." This time there was a wall of noise as the guests cheered, whistled and applauded as Sydney and AJ walked through the gauntlet of their bridal party to their place.

The master of ceremonies then started the first dance off to "Always and Forever". After the rest of the bridal party joined in, the guests were invited out to the dance floor.

The rest of the evening was a whirlwind of partying and fun as the reception touched on the rest of the wedding traditions. When it came to the mother-son dance, Danny proudly led his mom out to dance to Paul Anka's, The Times of Your Life".

For the father-daughter dance Francesca had a surprise for her papa. She deliberately didn't tell him what song she wanted to dance with him. As the band started playing Francesca led AJ out to the dance floor. He noticed that there was no one ready to sing at the microphone.

Francesca started to sing:

I would ride on your shoulders
Look out on the world
Pretending I was big and tall like you
When you were there to hold me
I never was afraid
You made me feel there’s nothing I can’t do
If I’d spread my wings to fly when I was very small
I knew that you'd be standing by to catch me if I fall
You're my hero
Chasing the monsters from my room
Going on trips around the moon
The one who's always been there faithfully….

When Francesca finished the song there wasn't a dry eye in the house. AJ was a mess. Francesca just tipped her head and kissed his tears away and then enveloped him a tight hug.

1130 Local Time
Marshall Residence

The reception was planned so that right after the stroke of midnight, and the beginning of the New Year the bride and groom would leave. Sarah and John also arranged with Sydney and AJ for Sarah, Chloe and he to slip out at 2330 and spend the New Year at home with Deanne and the babies. The newlyweds were very understanding.

When Sarah, Chloe and John got home they found Deanne along with Alicia Barnett and her parents Nicholas and Dorothy waiting for them. John brought out the sparkling grape cider.

As the countdown reached a minute, John handed out the flutes. John gave Nicholas the bottle as he was proficient at popping the cork without spilling a drop. They started counting down from 10, "9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1." Right on the stroke of 2001 Nicholas popped the cork while his wife gave him a kiss. Deanne and Chloe hugged and kissed each other while John and Sarah reached for each other and shared a deep passionate kiss. Then they turned to accept the flutes of cider. As the host John gave the toast, "Happy New Year everyone. May this next year bring us much joy and happiness."

The babies had completely different reactions, while Caroline was bouncing and bubbly, Patrick was cranky. So Sarah picked him up to soothe him. After bouncing him on her shoulder, he calmed down some but started rooting for Sarah's breast.

Knowing that the night was over at that point the Barnetts said good night and went home. While Sarah took Patrick up to nurse him John got Deanne settled in the study. He already folded out the sofa bed for her to sleep over.

When John entered their room, he saw that Sarah was sitting on the edge of the bed. She only managed to unzip her gown to pull down the bodice and remove her bra to expose her breasts for Patrick.
"He was crying so much. I only had time to get this far." She explained softly. She was trying to get her son to go to sleep.

John took the time to change into his bed clothes. When he got back into his room he saw that Patrick was finally asleep. Sarah gave her son over to John then she went to finish changing. John brought Patrick into the nursery, changed his diaper and sleeper and put him in his crib. He bent over to check Caroline to find she was sound asleep. Chloe helped her mom out by giving Caroline a bottle, changing and putting her to bed.

John left the room and went to check Chloe. He found her in bed just about to fall asleep. He bent over and kissed her cheek, "Good night sweetheart, happy New Year I love you."

"Night Dad, happy New Year, love you to." Chloe said groggily.

John went into his room and saw that Sarah was already under the covers, also just about to fall asleep. He turned out all the lights and climbed in and spooned with her.

As he nuzzled her neck he whispered, "Happy New Year ninja girl, I love you."

Sarah turned to give him a quick kiss and said, "Happy New Year to you to hot stuff. I love you to. I can't wait to see what this next year brings us."

"Me to." John said. Sarah just nodded as they both fell into a blissful sleep.
Harm and Sarah walked into the bullpen together. It was pure coincidence that they did. They and their families had arrived at the Navy Yard parking lot together. The Marshalls met the Rabbs in the parking lot as the Rabbs were coming from the Navy Yard Daycare Center. The Rabb's had just left the daycare center after leaving their children in the child caregivers' capable hands.

Diane asked, "Where are the kids?"

Sarah answered, "Caroline woke up vomiting early last night. We took her to Bethesda and her pediatrician saw her and confirmed it was stomach flu. He gave her some medication to keep her from throwing up her formula and she was fine after about 0200. So we decided to leave her and Patrick home so that the other kids don't get sick to. We called mom and asked her to mind the babies for us. John picked up mom and brought her home just now."

"Oh that's too bad. I hope Caroline gets better." Diane said.

"Thanks Di" Sarah said.

Then they all walked into the JAG building.

Sarah went into her office to put her things away. Then she walked over to AJ's office. It was AJ's first day back from his honeymoon and she promised that on that day she would have an answer for his plan to advance her career that he mentioned 4 weeks ago. In those four weeks she and John had a lot of talks about that. John was totally in favor of her going on the sea cruise as a Staff Judge Advocate of a fleet.

The Rabbs and Marshalls had an especially long talk the day after Christmas as John told her, "Look I don't want you to worry about our children. It'll be like when Harm went on his cruise and we helped Diane out with her kids. Besides your mom is in town and she'll visit a lot. I won't burden her with child care, due to her age and her health problems. Chloe will also be a big help. And don't forget that my sister is going to be out of her job on the 21st when Mr. Bush gets sworn in and she'll be available to help me when I need it." John finished.

Sarah replied, "Yeah you're right. We have so much family living near us that everything will be fine. I'm just afraid I'm going to miss my kids so much that I won't be as effective of a leader as I need to be. I'm also afraid that Patrick won't know what I look like."

John answered her, "If you leave this winter, you'll be back before Patrick turns a year old. In that
time he'll be too small to even realize he's missing anything. I'll have Harm and Diane here a lot. Heck when Patrick sees Diane he'll just think he's looking at you."

Sarah laughed at that in agreement

John continued, "We'll do a lot of video calls on the computer and send you a lot of DVDs of what he's doing while you're away. So he will not forget what you look like."

Harm gave her advice on his own cruise on the Patrick Henry. "You'll have it easier than me."

"How's that?" Sarah asked.

"You won't be flying. You'll just have to concentrate on your JAG duties."

Again Sarah had to nod her head in agreement.

She was also glad that Chloe was totally supportive. "You have to go mom. Don't worry about me I'll be fine with Dad, Grandma and all the aunts and uncles living here. I'll make sure I tell Patrick and Caroline all about you."

Sarah was so overcome with emotion that she just gathered Chloe into a fierce hug as they shared happy tears.

Now she was thinking of all that as she walked across the bullpen. She asked Tiner, "Can the admiral see me Tiner?"

"Yes ma'am, go right in please. He's been expecting you." The yeoman answered.

AJ looked up as she entered. He got up and went around his desk to greet her. He heartily shook her hand and directed her to sit. Instead of returning behind his desk he took a seat in the next chair.

Sarah began, "Welcome back sir. I hope that your honeymoon was all you expected."

"It certainly was colonel. St. Thomas was wonderful." AJ replied happily. He then asked, "I take it you have an answer about your career for me?"

"Yes sir I do. After long talks with John, Chloe, my sister and our extended families, I've decided that I'll go on the next available cruise."

AJ smiled at that as he said, "I'm very glad to hear that. I've prepared the road for you. On January 31 the Guadalcanal and the 4th Marine Expeditionary Fleet will be leaving San Diego. I can cut your orders to have you assigned as the fleet's Staff Judge Advocate by the end of the day. That will give you three weeks to prepare. Commander Austen will be acting Chief of Staff as she was during both your maternity leaves. And you'll have time to break in a new addition to our staff. He'll arrive at the end of the week and start next Monday."

"Is the new addition anyone I know sir?" Sarah asked.

"You may have heard of him from Harm and Diane as the three attended the academy together. Commander Sturgis Turner just completed his cruise as the 4th Fleet's Staff Judge Advocate on board the Nimitz. You already know his dad, Chaplain Turner who officiated at the wedding." AJ replied.

"That should be fine sir. Will I be taking on any new cases before I leave?" Sarah asked.
"No I don't believe that will be practical. For the next two weeks you'll just finish the cases you already have. After that I'll give you a week's leave so that you can spend it with your family." AJ replied.

"That's fine sir. Is there anything else sir?" Sarah asked getting up to attention.

"Yes there is. I almost forgot to tell you. I'm sending the Gunny with you as your legalman." AJ said.

"That's great sir. I'm sure I'll put him to good use," Sarah said.

"That's good to hear. If there's nothing else colonel dismissed." AJ finally said.

"Aye, aye sir." Sarah said with a small smile. She was quite pleased at how things were turning out. After that she went about preparing for her cruise. AJ let her leave the office as early as she could so that she could maximize her time with her family before she left.

Monday, January 15, 2001

0730 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

The Marshalls and Rabbs were walking into JAG together. John and Diane were going to testify on a murder and espionage case that they worked on together.

As they walked through the lobby Harm called out, "Hold the elevator."

A female hand came out to interrupt the sensor causing the door to reopen. The foursome entered the elevator and went up to the 3rd floor. They walked across the bullpen and they separated as the Marshalls went into Sarah's office while the Rabbs went into Harm's office.

As Harm and Diane were speaking Tiner came in saying, "Mr. Commander Rabb, the admiral would like to see you sir."

"Right away Tiner." Harm said. He turned to kiss Diane saying, "Good luck in court today. I'm sure Imes and Mattoni will treat you and John right."

"If they don't, then I'll just arrest them." Diane said as she smiled and held up her badge.

Harm and she laughed as they exited his office. Diane went to collect John from her sister while Harm went in to see the admiral.

He opened the door after AJ's usual bellow of "Enter."

As Harm entered the office he saw that there was one other person already inside. When that person turned around Harm smiled, stuck out his hand and said, "Sturgis how have you been? How come you haven't written?"

Commander Sturgis Turner was a slim medium height light skinned African American. He had the badge of the Submarine Service above his row of ribbons. He shook Harm's hand firmly and warmly. His reply was, "I would have written if you wrote me giving me your new address. It was only after dad had told me that he saw you at the admiral's wedding that I found out you lived in Fairfax."

"I would have written if you sent something to me here. You knew I worked at JAG." Harm returned.
Before they could go further AJ stepped in. He was amused at their back and forth and only let it go for the two rounds. Now he knew he needed to call a halt. "Alright commanders, that will be enough! This is still my office. You'll have the opportunity to catch up when you leave here. Mr. Rabb please show Mr. Turner to his new office. We're giving him the new one we built when we combined the two under used supply closets."

As part of her job as Chief of Staff, Sarah was also the head of Building Services. She thought having two supply closets next to each other was wasteful and inefficient. She found a bigger closet just outside the bullpen area. It was a catch-all closet which the workers used as storage for their supplies during the renovation of the building. After the renovations were done, they did not clean the closet out. There were things in there like old paint cans, broken ladders, broken chairs and a broken desk. She had Building Services clean it out, paint it, install shelves and a new combination lock on the door. She transferred the office supplies from the two closets into the new supply closet. She then ordered the workers to break the wall between the two old closets and make another office. Individually, they had both been way too small for either to be used as an office alone. She could make the two closets into one office because the closets each had an exterior window. The workers also removed one door and replaced it with a window looking out toward the bullpen. As usual privacy blinds were installed on the office window.

That work was completed during Sarah's last maternity leave, so she didn't have to deal with the noise and the distraction of the demolition and repairs.

Now Harm was showing Sturgis the new office. As they walked past Sarah's office Harm peaked in. He had intended to introduce her to Sturgis but he saw that she wasn't there. So he continued on with Sturgis without a second beat. When they walked into the new office they saw that there was a new desk with two credenzas, one behind the new chair and one under the window that looked out to the bullpen, a decorative wall unit, a book case for the law books, two filing cabinets and two guest chairs in front of the desk. They could even smell the fresh paint.

Sturgis looked around saying, "This will be great buddy." He went to sit behind his new desk. He saw that the chair was too low so he set about adjusting it. As he did that, Harm sat down in one guest chair.

Sturgis asked, "So how have you been since I saw you at your wedding?"

"That was the day after Christmas 1997, over 4 years ago. What have you been doing since then?" Harm asked incredulously.

"Well buddy as you will remember I still had one more year of law school at the University of Maryland at the time. After that I went to SubComPac in Hawaii as their JAG for two years. Then I went to Europe as a JAG in Italy for one year. I just finished serving 6 months as the 4th Fleet's Staff Judge Advocate on board the Nimitz. So here I am. What have you been doing?"

"Well Diane and I have three kids. After the twins were born the end of June 1999 I went to serve as the 6th Fleet Staff Judge Advocate on board the Patrick Henry. I received another DFC when I was there. Oh I forgot to mention in March 1997 Diane met her sister."

Sturgis just sat there astounded at how much he was out of touch with his classmate's life. He managed to stammer out, "Wh-what was that, three children, twins, Diane's sister? She didn't have a sister when we were in Annapolis."

"Well Diane had baby number one, a girl, 9 months after our honeymoon. Her name is Sarah Catherine, named after her sister."
"What sister?" Sturgis asked.

"I'm getting to that." Harm said thoroughly enjoying himself as he drew out the story. "Anyway the twins were born as I said the end of June 1999."

"So what's this about Diane's sister?" Sturgis exasperated

Harm decide to let him off the hook saying with a big part of mischievousness, "Well Diane found her after she was assigned here after she and her partner, now her husband retrieved the Declaration of Independence from her uncle." He then glanced over his shoulder through the blinds. He saw Sarah as she reentered her office with a cup of coffee.

Sturgis was unable to see her from where he was sitting. He opened his mouth to ask about Diane's sister again when Harm got up and said, "Wait here, I'll introduce you."

Harm walked out of his office into Sarah's. He stuck his head in to ask, "Hey sis, you got a minute? There's someone I'd like you to meet."

Sarah liked whenever Harm acted like her brother. She got up to go with him into Sturgis' office. When they walked in Sarah was greeted with the same expression Harm gave her when they first met.

Now it was Harm's turn to say, "Sarah, the Commander with his chin on the floor is Sturgis Turner. He's just been assigned here. Sturgis, may I present Lt. Colonel Sarah Catherine Marshall, JAG Corps Chief of Staff and my sister in law."

Sarah was amused to see that Sturgis was pointing his hand at her in astonishment. She went over to take a firm hold and give it a good shake. "I'm pleased to meet you commander. Please call me Mac."

Sturgis shook himself out of his stupor. He intelligently replied, "Like wise I'm sure, and it's Sturgis." Turning to Harm he said, "I gotta hear this story."

Sarah and Harm shared a laugh. It was Sarah who suggested, "After you and I go over the cases I'm assigning to you, the four of us and you will have lunch together in the commissary."

Sturgis asked, "The four of you?"

"Yeah my husband John and my sister Diane are in court upstairs. When they break for lunch we'll tell you the whole story." Sarah said feeling quite pleased with herself.

"I'll look forward to that." Sturgis replied.

1245 Local Time

JAG Commissary

Sarah asked Sturgis to follow her into her office. There she assigned him his cases. Sturgis was astounded that there were so many. He asked, "Mac, I get the impression that you're leaving."

"That's right Sturgis. Starting January 31, I'm going to be the Staff Judge Advocate for the 4th Marine Expeditionary Fleet on the Guadalcanal for 6 months. While I'm gone Commander Meg Austen, whom you'll meet shortly, will be the acting Chief of Staff."

"That's a coincidence, while I was on the Nimitz in the Indian Ocean I was assigned to investigate a
case from the Guadalcanal." Sturgis informed her.

"Oh really what was it about?" Sarah asked.

Sturgis told her, "I received a report that a Major Miles Holmes the Staff Judge Advocate assigned there went overboard. When I arrived I started looking into his computer files to see if there was a suicide note. I found that Miles had communicated with a USO worker named Susan Evans as much as he had with his own wife. Miss Evans met the 'Canal at all of her last ports. My legal man and I discovered that Miles faked his own man overboard, then he hid out in a ships void until he could sneak aboard a landing craft the next day to Jakarta. We intercepted Miles and Evans both at a hotel on the island. Oddly Miles said the strangest thing when he was caught."

Sarah asked, "What was that?"

"He said that maybe someday I could work without a net and love someone!" Sturgis replied.

Sarah just shook her head at the stupidity of misplaced lust. She and Sturgis finished their case review. Just before they were about to leave for lunch, John and Diane showed up.

After politely knocking and waiting for her "enter", John stuck his head in and said, "Hey beautiful, ready for lunch?"

"I sure am my love. Ask Diane to step in here will you please." Sarah replied.

John turned and sticking his head back out the door and seeing that Diane was just standing in Harm's office door said, "Hey Di your sister wants to see you." Diane turned and smirked at John indulgently as she walked over to her sister's office.

When Diane walked in she exclaimed, "Sturgis! What are you doing here?" Before receiving his reply she crossed the room and enveloped him her classmate in a good hug and kissed his cheek.

'Well I've just been assigned here. My office is next door. It's good to see you Di'. I thought I was living in the Twilight Zone when I met Mac here." Looking between the two Mackenzie sisters Sturgis shook his head adding, "I gotta hear this story."

Sarah stepped into the verbal void and said, "Sturgis this is my husband Captain John Marshall. He is the Assistant Director of NCIS while Diane is the NCIS Counter Intelligence Department Head in ATAC."

"I'm very pleased to meet you commander. Harm and Diane told me some very amusing stories of your time together at the Academy." John said shaking his hand.

"Did you go to Annapolis Captain?" Sturgis asked.

"No I went Naval ROTC through Fordham University in the Bronx. I graduated there in 1986." John said.

Sarah stepped in saying, "Enough chit chat. Let's go eat and tell this man our story so I don't have to hear again", everyone there said it with her, "I gotta hear this story." Sarah added, "one more time."

The four shared a good laugh and walked out of the office. They collected Harm on their way to the commissary. There they regaled Sturgis with 'the story' he so wanted to hear as well as others that the Marshalls and Rabbs were pleased to tell him.

As he returned to his office Sturgis thought to himself, "I can tell it's going to be fun working here.'
Friday, January 26, 2001

1630 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah and John were sitting in her office. John came over with the children 30 minutes ago to be with Sarah as she left headquarters on her last day before deployment. John was sitting in a guest chair as he had Patrick in his lap and was giving him a bottle. To get him prepared for not being breast fed, Sarah weaned him from the breast and started him on low-iron infant formula just after the Christmas holidays. Caroline was sitting contently in the other guest chair at the front credenza working on coloring book. Sarah sighed as she looked at her 17 month old daughter as she stuck her tongue out the side of her mouth as she concentrated on staying in the lines. Deanne saw Caroline do that at home and told her daughter, "She looks just like you did at that age."

Sarah got up as she finished signing her last case document. "Okay, I'm ready to go."

John stood up with her. The timing of the move was just right as Patrick finished his bottle. John laid him in his part of the double stroller and then he went to put Caroline in her part. Then the Marshalls walked out into the bullpen.

They were met by the cries of, "SURPRISE!"

Sarah and John were completely taken aback. While they sat in the office Tiner and Harriet strung up a banner saying, 'Good Luck & Semper Fi Lt. Col. Marshall & Gunnery Sgt. Galindez on your deployment to the Guadalcanal, Hurry back – We Love You.'

Harriet was standing at her desk with Gunny Galindez. Harm and Diane as well as Ann Marie and Pete were standing outside Harm's office. AJ stood just outside his office with Sydney looking on in approval.

Sarah turned to her husband and said under her breath, "I thought I told you I didn't want a big send off."

John leaned in and whispered, "You forget I don't work here anymore and they don't take orders from me. Besides it was AJ's idea."

Sarah looked up and him and grinned sarcastically. Then she turned on her most charming smile as she faced the staff.

Bud wheeled her cake over. There was a sentiment written in icing, 'Semper Fi Lt. Col. Marshall, 4th Marine Expeditionary Fleet, Staff Judge Advocate'. Sarah cut the first piece and then Bud and Tiner took over the distribution.

Everyone called for a speech. Sarah sighed as she began, "Just like Harm I'm only going to be gone for 6 months. Also as with Harm you'll be hearing a lot from me as I will e-mail him and he will share those messages that I want you all to see. I'll miss you all and while I'm gone try to keep my brother in law from shooting anymore holes in the ceiling."

Everyone shared a good laugh at that.

After the cake was eaten, Sarah and her family went through the friendly gauntlet of well wishers. AJ & Sydney were the last. "Thank you so much for this opportunity and the send off sir." Sarah said as she gave him a sincere hug and kissed his cheek. As she gently broke away, she used her thumb to wipe off the lipstick mark she left there.
"You're welcome Sarah. Write as often as you can. Sydney and I will help watch out for John and
the kids."

"Thanks AJ", Sarah whispered.

As the Marshalls walked into the elevator they turned to watch their friends wave goodbye at them.
They gave a brief wave as the doors closed.

2100 Local Time

Colonial Gardens Bed & Breakfast

Williamsburg, VA

After they left JAG Sarah and John went home to get their overnight bags. Ann Marie followed them
home and picked up the Marshall children took them to her house for a sleep over that night. After
Ann Marie left with the kids, John and Sarah sped off in the Corvette to the Colonial Gardens Bed &
Breakfast in Williamsburg. They went away so that they could spend some husband and wife time
alone. As they packed their bags the night before, Sarah deliberately kept John from seeing what she
had packed for she wanted to surprise him.

They arrived at the B&B after 1900. After they had a leisurely dinner they returned to their room.
She asked John to change into the bathrobe that was provided by the inn and wait while she went
into the bathroom to prepare. When Sarah came out from the bathroom she was wearing a lacey pink
demi bra with a camisole, with matching panty and stockings. The camisole had garters strips
holding up the stockings.

Sarah smiled as she could immediately see that John liked what he saw as he became immediately
aroused. She went to him as he sat on the bed. She pushed him back until he was fully lying on the
bed. She then straddled him as she knelt over his hips. She put her hands down until she was on all
fours on top of him. She bent to kiss him long and deep. When they came up for air she put her
finger to his lips and said. "John let's have no words tonight. I already know you love me and I love
you. Just lie back and let me be your woman tonight. I want to do everything to you so that you can't
forget me while I'm away."

With that she reached down and opened his robe. His erection stood waiting for her. John lay back
as Sarah went to lie beside him. She started to kiss from his jaw and neck down to his chest. As
always she gave his nipples ample attention, alternatingly kissing one while stroking the other with her
nails. She moved down from his chest over his stomach to his swollen member. She started to kiss
around the base of it while gently stroking him with her open palm. She then ran her lips up and
down it. Using only her lips she gently sucked on his tip, taking it in just past her teeth. Then she
opened her mouth and engulfed him completely. As usual he was astounded that she was able to take
him all the way in past her gag reflex. Keeping her mouth on him, she rotated her body so that her
knees were at his shoulders and her pubic area was right in front of his face.

John saw that her panties were held closed by snaps at her hips. When he released them and pulled
them away he saw that her silky folds and clit were almost dripping as they were fully aroused. He
brought his lips to her and proceeded to devour her. Sarah groaned as she kept her mouth on him and
stretched her knees until she was fully lying on him so that they could simultaneously use their
mouths to give each other pleasure. They gripped each others' hips as they worked on each other.

Sarah moved her mouth up and down him while John licked her up, down and all around. Sarah
kept up her stroking mouth and sucking, bringing him closer and closer to his climax. John moaned
into her sex as he felt himself getting closer. He took her clit between his lips and started to suck on
it. As John sucked hard Sarah moaned even louder as she redoubled her efforts, increasing the frequency of her stroking mouth.

Their moans combined into a crescendo as they climaxed together. As John got closer to his climax, Sarah felt him swell. She took him fully in and held her lips hard against his body as John shot his load down her throat. John also completely engulfed her sex as he lapped up the juices flowing from her. Their bodies convulsed in unison as they expended all their passion and energy. Eventually they calmed down and released each other.

Sarah turned so that she was lying next to John. John gripped her into a tight hug and proceeded to kiss her long and deep. He reached for her and placed his hand on her soft curls, dipping his finger into her silky folds. She in turn reached for him and started to stroke him back to his full hardness.

Now John took control. He proceeded to pull her off the bed and stand her up in front of the low dresser. He shed his robe and went to stand behind her. He pulled the spaghetti straps of the camisole down until her breasts were free of the bra. He then reached from behind her to sensuously knead and squeeze them together. He alternated between squeezing them and rolling the nipples between his fingers until they became rock hard and erect.

Sarah closed her eyes and held her head back and growled low in her throat at his rough treatment. John then turned her around and captured the right one in his mouth. As he worked his mouth on that one, he worked his hand on the other. He alternated between full gropes of her heavy globe and twiddling the nipple. She loved how his rough tongue felt on her sensitive nipple and his treatment of the other. John then switched sides. As he worked on her breasts he was pushing the camisole down until it was below her hips hanging from her thighs by the garters. John bent down and removed the camisole and the stockings. He went back up to her breasts and resumed his playing with them. After giving them his full attention, he left them and kissed down her torso again. He took her navel ring in his mouth and sucked on it. She undulated her body as he did that, still not saying a word. Eventually he was back between her thighs. He went to work there again.

Now Sarah felt the need to speak. "John I want you, now!"

With that John stood up. He picked her up by her hips sat her on the dresser. Then he entered her. She wrapped her legs around his hips and her arms around his neck while he held her up by her butt. He began to stroke in and out of her slowly at first then as the passion took over he went faster. He could tell she was getting closer to her climax as she repeated, "Oh John, oh John."

He picked her up off the dresser and turned toward the bed. He was able to lower them crossways onto the bed and still stay intimately connected. Then he resumed his stroking of her. After a few strokes, Sarah reached her moment. As usual her clutching him tighter brought on his own climax. He nailed her to the bed as he pumped into her. She in turn pumped up to him to hold him in her as deep as she could for as long as she could. They gave one final convulsion then they collapsed in exhaustion.

When John caught his breath he went to lie fully on the bed. He nudged Sarah along with him. When they were positioned properly on the bed, they went to hold each other in tight hugs. John kissed her deeply again. They didn’t have the energy for another coupling. So they settled for gentle kissing, rubbing and cuddling. Eventually Sarah let out a good yawn. John took that as signal to pull the covers up over them. As John lay back, Sarah settled into him with her arm across his body, her head on his chest and her legs intertwined with his. They both fell into a deep and restful sleep.

Monday, January 29, 2001

1000 Local Time
Sarah and John returned from Williamsburg Saturday afternoon. They spent that night and all day Sunday night with their children.

Sarah asked that only her family, Harm's and Ann Marie's families be at the airport to see her off. She said her staff farewells at JAG and even asked that Harriet and Bud not go to Dulles. She wanted to spend her remaining time with just her family. Only Gunnery Sgt Galindez was there as they were traveling together. He boarded the plane ahead of Sarah to give her time with her family. He reassured John that he would watch out for her. John was grateful for that.

Now Sarah was saying her farewells to her family. After she hugged and kissed Ann Marie, Pete and their children, Harm gave her a hug "Remember Frank and my mom are meeting you in San Diego. They'll take good care of you and see you off at the 'Canal tomorrow."

"Thanks flyboy. It's good to know I have family there to meet me." Sarah said as she hugged him back and kissed his cheek. Sarah bent to give each of the Rabb children and hug and kiss. Diane then gave her a hug. Sarah whispered in her ear, "Watch out for John at work please. I think he's going to miss me the most."

"I will sweetie. I promise Harm and I will take good care of him." Diane reassured her sister.

After she hugged and kissed her children ending with Chloe, Sarah was then enveloped in a passionate hug by her husband. John had some unshed tears in his eyes as he said, "I love you ninja-girl. I'll e-mail something every day when I start work and every night before I go to bed. You get those DVDs and pictures as often as I can send them."

"I love you to hot-stuff. I'll do the same as often as I can." She released her husband, picked up her carry on and walked up the jet way. At the end she turned and threw a kiss back at them. They all returned the gesture as Sarah entered the plane.
Chapter 69

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 69

Monday, January 29, 2001

1245 Local Time

San Diego International Airport

Sarah and Gunny were the last persons off the plane. As they walked down the jet way Sarah spotted Trish and Frank. She gave them a big wave. When they reached the waiting area, Trish drew Sarah into a big hug. Sarah returned the hug just as enthusiastically. After Trish released Sarah she went to Frank whose own hug was a little more restrained, but just as sincere.

"It's so good to see you even if it's only for a day. I almost didn't recognize you. Your hair is so short now." Trish said.

"Yeah I cut it short last Friday for the cruise. It's just one more thing that I don't need to worry about." Sarah explained.

"Well let's get your luggage and we'll go home and get settled in." Trish said.

Besides their own carry on wheeled suitcases, Sarah and Gunny also packed a large sea bag each. As they collected them from the luggage carousel, Gunny said as he turned to leave, "Colonel I'll see you tomorrow at 0900 at the 'Canal."

Before he could walk away, Trish spoke up, "Where are you going Victor?" When Harm had called his mom to ask her to meet Sarah, he also told her about Gunny accompanying her.

"I'm going to check in the enlisted quarters at the base Mrs. Burnett." Gunny told her.

"Nonsense, you and Sarah are a unit now and wherever she goes you go. You're coming with us." Trish demanded.

Sarah looked at Gunny half embarrassed and said, "It's best not to argue with her Gunny. Remember she had to handle a younger Commander Rabb."

Trish laughed indulgently at that saying, "Besides we'll give you a comfortable bed and your last home cooked meal before you deploy."

"Well in that case ma'am, how can I refuse?" Gunny replied.

The foursome trooped out to the car and drove to La Jolla.

Tuesday, January 30, 2001

1330 Local Time

San Diego Naval Base

USS Guadalcanal Berth
Sarah and the Gunny officially reported for duty on board at 0900 that morning. Sarah took the morning to unpack in her quarters, change into shipboard BDUs and then check out the JAG Office. Gunny was already there when she arrived.

"So Gunny, are you ready for our cruise?" Sarah said as she sat and started to organize her desk the way she wanted.

"Yes ma'am. It'll be good to be around more marines than sailors." Gunny said.

"I hear ya gunny. Just don't let me forget to e-mail a couple of particular sailors every day." Sarah smiled.

"And Chloe ma'am cause if you don't she'll never let you hear the end of it." Gunny reminded her.

Sarah smiled at the gentle reminder. Even though she'd be away from her family, she knew she was going to enjoy working with the Gunny on this cruise.

Soon their first day aboard ship came to an end. The next day the ship left port. It sailed across half the Pacific to Hawaii.

Thursday, February 8, 2001

1200 Local Time

The King Kamehameha Club

Honolulu, HI

When the Guadalcanal docked at Pearl, Sarah put on her summer season uniform for a trip into Honolulu. She wasn't going to see the sights though. Sarah had already seen them during her time working at the NIS office at Pearl, as the last time she was here she was showing them to John on their honeymoon.

During their honeymoon, even though they were going onto Kauai, Admiral Magnum insisted that they spend a few nights in the gatehouse at an estate called Robin's Nest. The estate belonged to author Robin Masters. The estate's majordomo treated them like royalty. He had ensured that the newlyweds had whatever they needed, including the privacy they desired. On the evening before the Marshalls flew onto Kauai, he treated them to a lavish dinner at the King Kamehameha Club.

Now she was back to see the same majordomo. Admiral Magnum asked her to him look up.

As Sarah got out of the cab and walked up to the door, she was immediately recognized by the greeter, "Colonel Marshall how nice to see you ma'am."

"Hello Keoki, how have you been?" Sarah asked pleasantly.

"Oh I'm just fine colonel. My son and his wife are making me a grandparent again." Keoki said.

"That's wonderful. The last time I was here with my husband your son was a newlywed himself." Sarah said.

"How about you colonel, are there any little Marshalls?" Keoki asked.

"Yes as a matter of fact there are. John and I have a daughter and son and we also adopted a teenage girl." Sarah answered proudly. She took out the latest laminated family portrait from her purse to show Keoki.
"The teenage girl is Chloe, then there's Caroline who is almost two and Patrick who was born last November." Sarah said pointing out everyone in the photo.

"So is Captain Marshall joining you later?" Keoki asked, looking behind her for any sign of John.

"No not this trip." Sarah answered wistfully.

"Oh really, why not?" Keoki asked, raising an eyebrow in question.

Sarah had to smile at the question as she replied, "Don't worry Keoki. I'm in Hawaii because my ship is docked at Pearl. I've just begun my sea duty."

Keoki sighed almost in relief. He was about to reply when someone bellowed from behind him, "For heaven's sake man don't hold the colonel up. Can't you see she is in uniform which suggests she does not have a lot of time to socialize?"

The loud voice was accented in cultured English. Jonathon Quayle Higgins was in full bellow. He was walking to the greeting podium impeccably dressed in a summer weight dark blue blazer, cream colored pants, soft leather loafers, with a white summer cotton shirt and an Eton striped tie, tied in a perfect Windsor knot. He was walking with a cane but his gait was very steady and strong.

He walked up to Sarah. Grasping both her hands he gave her a kiss on each cheek, saying, "Colonel, it's very good to see you again."

Hooking his hand into her elbow she and Higgins walked into the club proper. Sarah replied, "It's Sarah Jonathon and I'm so very glad to see you're looking so well. Thomas told me about the stroke when it happened last summer."

"Oh that. It was a minor inconvenience." Higgins said.

Sarah smiled indulgently. Thomas rushed back to Honolulu when he heard the news of the stroke. When he returned he told Sarah that Higgins was lucky to be alive. The stroke happened at the club. The staff was very good at treating sudden illnesses such as heart attacks and strokes and had called '911' and got him to the hospital right away. The drug therapy the doctors put Higgins on worked its wonder very well. The physical therapy also did wonders. As a result of the stroke Higgins was paralyzed on his right side. The therapy enabled Higgins to regain the use of his right side. The only reason Higgins walked with a cane was because his therapist insisted on it. Even though he looked fully recovered, Higgins still did not have full or the same feeling on his right side.

"Well I'm very happy to see you looking so fit and handsome." Sarah sincerely said.

Higgins grunted his appreciation. Sarah knew that his British 'stiff upper lip' prevented him from saying his full appreciation, but she could see the gratitude in his eyes.

"Magnum called and told me that your ship would be in port for a very short time. He said that you are on your first sea duty. How is John taking that?" Higgins asked.

"He is very supportive. He always told me as long as you enjoy your work, keep doing it. Only retire when you feel that one part of you is overwhelming the other."

"How very Zen of him." Higgins said.

"Well he is a Libra after all, all things in balance.' Sarah said with a smile.

"So how is he balancing the fact that you are not there as his counterweight?" Higgins.
"Oh we have a great familial support system. My mom, my sister Diane, his sister Ann Marie and even his mom from New York are pitching in to help with the children. So he will be somewhat overbalanced." Sarah told him with a smile.

Higgins grunted a soft chuckle as they sat at their table. Sarah and Higgins enjoyed a great lunch and a few hours of loving conversation until Sarah's sense of time told her that she needed to leave.

"Jonathon I regret to say I have to go. I have to report to the 'Canal by 1900 to get ready for the other sailors and

marines to return. You know as well as I do that the first time young people see Honolulu, there is usually trouble following and I know the Gunny and I will be hard at work sorting out all that trouble." Sarah told her host.

"Well I had a very enjoyable time with you. Please give my love to John, the children, to Magnum and to Margaret and their children. Tell him that 'I feel fine'." Higgins said as he kissed her hand.

"How very 'Spock' of you, Jonathon." Sarah said with a twinkle.

Higgins grunted another chuckle as he walked her out to the driveway. He held her hand gallantly as he helped her into her cab.

Valentine's Day 2001

1030 Local Time

On Board the Guadalcanal

Sarah was right about what she said about young people getting into trouble after they saw Hawaii for the first time. After they returned to the ship she and Gunny were very busy sorting out all the types of unsavory incidents that came across their desks. Some were very serious requiring severe disciplinary action while others were not. There were the usual incidents of theft from sailors and marines as well as the usual arrests by the Honolulu police for solicitation. They were all sorted out before the ship left Pearl 5 days later.

Now they were six days out of Hawaii off Guam. While it was 1030 on Feb. 14 in that part of the world, it was 1930 on February 13 in Washington DC. It was the best time Sarah and John could video conference. John said that in an e-mail the day before that he and the children were planning a video surprise. Now she took a break to receive her surprise.

As she logged on, the first thing she saw was Chloe, Caroline and Patrick sitting on the living room couch wearing white tee shirts with red hearts printed on them. In the hearts were "We love you Mom" written in white script.

On her end as soon as Chloe saw her mom come up on the screen, she yelled, "Surprise, Happy Valentine's Day."

Caroline and Patrick just giggled enthusiastically along with their big sister.

Caroline reached out to the screen saying, "Mama". Patrick just laughed and waved his arms.

Sarah was totally beside herself with happiness. She had her watery smile as she said, "I miss you guys. Where's daddy?"

Hearing his wife ask for him John came up behind them saying, "Right here honey." He sat down on
the couch next to Chloe, put Patrick on his lap and waved. As he got comfortable he asked, "How's it going out there?"

"It's going well. They keep me busy enough that I forget to miss you all, but then I sit down at my desk and I see that there are so many messages from you, Chloe, Harm & Diane, the rest of JAG and even Ann Marie. It makes me feel good that there are so many people thinking of me. And I love the tee shirts"

"Yeah we got them at one of those tee shirt kiosks in the mall. It was the perfect thing for this video."

"So tell me what's happening there." Sarah requested.

Chloe started to tell her about all that was going on at school and otherwise. When she was done she got up to give her dad & mom some husband & wife conversation. She took Caroline with her upstairs while John sat Patrick on his lap. John started to tell her of the goings on at NCIS and JAG.

"Harm tells me that it's boring without you there. He misses the court battles and the long discussions you two have. He tells me that Lt. Singer is giving Meg Austen fits though." John told her.

"Oh really how is she doing that?" Sarah asked.

"AJ had Singer to sit first chair on a case with Meg as her second. Singer keeps going against Meg's advice in trying the case. Finally while I visiting Harm in his office on another matter, Meg came in asking, 'Is it legal to shoot the lead counsel.' Harm had to practically pull her away from the cliff saying he'd speak to Singer." John finished.

"Yeah Loren can go overboard some times. I tried to teach her not to do that on several occasions, but I don't think the lesson held. She's still in the win or else mode I guess." Sarah theorized.

John nodded his head in agreement saying, "Harm said the same thing."

"So what else is going on there?" Sarah asked.

"Well the Chief of Naval Operations has formally nominated me as Deputy Director of J2" John said nonchalantly.

Sarah was practically giddy at hearing this as she said, "That's really great honey. I'm so happy for you."

John smiled at her enthusiasm. "It seems that the President may sign off on it right away. I have to go before the Navy Board first. Right now I'm in the middle of prepping for them. They sent an officer from the J2 Office to work with me. She's very good."

"Oh what's her name? I may know her." Sarah asked.

"Lt. Commander Faith Coleman. She was the J2 Legal Advisor. She has got to have the most put together briefcase I have ever seen." John said with a laugh.

"Yeah I do know her. I worked with her when we put together the Russian Rules for their participation in Kosovo. She came to DC after you left. There wasn't a lot of room at the Navy Yard Building so the admiral sent her there. Pay attention to whatever she tells you. She knows how things work in that building." Sarah told him.

"You're right she is very bright. She's just like you. She won't let me get away with anything." John said.
Sarah chuckled. "Yeah she struck me as totally straight laced and squared away. I told her she should have been a marine."

John laughed at that. He replied, "Well we're working together three afternoons a week at NCIS for the next three weeks. The Navy Board is meeting then. I'll know their decision a week after that."

"Well honey I'm so happy for you. Let me know right away what happens. I'll be on pins and needles until then." Sarah said sincerely.

"To bad you're not here. I have a way to relieve you of that feeling." John said seductively.

"I know you do but that will have to wait until we see each other again my love. So keep those thoughts in your head until then. I love you hot stuff." Sarah said in closing.

"I love you to ninja girl." John returned.

They blew each other a kiss before they signed off.

Tuesday, March13, 2001

0815 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm and Bud entered the break room to find Admiral Chegwidden making the coffee. He was doing that because Tiner, who usually made the first pot of the day, was out registering for college. Harm and Bud saw that AJ was putting too many scoopfuls of coffee into the coffee maker. Both he and Harm commented that, "That might be enough, sir"

AJ grunted, "We'll see. I like it strong." Not wanting to be one of AJ's guinea pigs, Bud tried to beat a hasty retreat saying, "I have some motions to file."

Harm said after him, "Coward."

"Self-preservation sir, I only drink Harriet's coffee." Bud said as he hastily left.

With Harm alone with AJ in the break room, it meant that after it brewed, Harm was to take the first drink. He took a sip and just barely controlled his grimace. In a raspy voice he told AJ, "It's robust, sir"

"That's what Sydney says whenever she drinks it. Though since we got married, she has ordered me to not make any more coffee at home. Still we need a REAL coffee drinker. Too bad Sarah's not here, she drinks the marine grade stuff." AJ responded.

"Oh she's got you calling her Sarah and not Mac to." Harm said pleasantly. He studiously avoided drinking any more coffee.

"Well she explained that since I walked her down the aisle at her wedding, and I'm Caroline's godfather, she considers me part of her family." AJ replied.

"Yeah you're right. Still she told Sturgis to call her Mac." Harm related.

"Well you and I both know that's her defense mechanism. It helps her keep her distance, while still being friendly." AJ said.

Harm added, "I miss her. She lends a lot of life to the office. She's always so happy and chipper.
Whenever some case gets her down, one phone call from John or her lunch visits to her children always makes her feel better. Even Chief Gardiner misses her. They always went on those breaks together. I can't wait until Sarah gets back."

"Yep, me to, and if you tell her in those e-mails you two exchange, I'll have your stripes." AJ said brusquely.

"Don't worry sir my lips are Sealed." Harm replied with a smile.

"Good, Staff Call at 0900" AJ said as he left the room.

Harm was grateful for his timely exit. As soon as he saw that AJ was not coming back, he dumped his cup of coffee in the sink. He set about to make another pot for the office, the way Tiner always made it.

1145 Local Time

Harm's office

When Harm came in from court he found Webb waiting for him.

"Morning Clay, what's brings you here?" Harm asked pleasantly.

Webb looked like his stomach was going to turn over. He said, "I just received word from our office in Moscow that Sergei's helicopter was shot down in Chechnya again."

"Do you have any more details than that?" Harm asked dismayed.

"No unfortunately I don't." Webb answered.

Not wanting to hear any more Harm said, "Thanks Clay. Please let me know if you find out anything else." Harm said.

"Okay Harm. I'm sorry." Webb added as he left hastily, not wanting to endure anymore angst from Harm.

After Webb left, Harm immediately went to AJ's office.

AJ knew about Sergei as Webb was there first. So as soon as Harm walked in, AJ said, "Request denied."

"But sir he's my brother." Harm began.

AJ interrupted as he asked, "Didn't you tell me that John said that your brother is a grown man and can take care of himself?"

"Yes sir but I have to do something." Harm complained.

"You don't have to do anything but stay in DC and take care of your family." AJ sternly reminded him. As he saw Harm soften at that he mildly suggested, "Why don't you go over to NCIS and speak with Diane and John. They have a finger on the pulse to what's going on over there. Maybe they can come up with some information."

Harm nodded at that in agreement saying, "Yes sir you're right. Then at least I feel that I'm actually doing something to try and find him."
AJ nodded satisfied that he redirected Harm to a more useful path. "And since you don't have court this afternoon take the rest of the day, dismissed."

Harm snapped to attention and said, "Aye, aye sir and thank you."

AJ just grunted his acknowledgement as Harm walked out of the office.

1225 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

When Harm went over to NCIS to speak to his wife and brother in law about Sergei and his need to go help him, Diane reminded him, but in soft tones, "Harm AJ is right. You can't go traipsing off to Russia at the drop of a hat any more. You have a family to take care of."

"I know that, but he's my brother. I don't know what to do," Harm said.

"Well let's see what Webb can come up with." Diane reminded him.

John had had another idea. "You know let me call Joanne Lowell at WUSA. Maybe if she did a story on Sergei and him being Harm's brother, it may prompt the Chechens to at least go easy on him."

"Yeah that might work." Diane said. Harm sighed in agreement.

Thursday, March 15, 2001

1830 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After John called Joanne at WUSA, she came and interviewed Harm and Diane at NCIS later that day. Two days later Harm found out that the story bore fruit. He was in his office with John and Diane. They were at Harm's computer 'instant message chatting' with Sarah on the Guadalcanal about Sergei and other things. Chloe already sent her messages so she was out in the bullpen watching Caroline, Patrick and the Rabb children as they sat in their strollers.

AJ came out of his office with Webb. As he passed by the kids, the admiral exchanged smiles with Chloe. He and Webb went into Harm's office together to tell him the news.

Harms typed, 'Hold on Sarah the admiral and Webb just walked in. They may have news about Sergei.'

Webb started, "Your interview with WUSA got us some results. The Red Cross here in DC saw it and they called their counterparts in Chechnya. They found out that Sergei was captured alive and he's in a Chechen prison camp. The Chechens assured the Red Cross that he would be treated well."

"Oh thank God," Harm sighed in relief.

Monday, March 26, 2001

1500 Zulu Time

Office of the Secretary of the Navy

Pentagon, Arlington, VA
March 23, 2001

To: Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall

From: Captain John Marshall, Deputy Director J2 Naval Intelligence

As you can see the appointment came through. The Chief of Naval Operations signed off on it today. I guess my telling the SECNAV to get off our backs during Admiral Boone's case didn't kill my career after all. So starting Monday I will be the Deputy Commander of J2 Naval Intelligence. Jake is officially handing over command to Admiral LaPorte and I will take the oath as his deputy at a ceremony in the SECNAV’s office at 1000 DC Time which is 2300 your time. He assured me that there will be a video feed so that you can see it. The kids as well as Mom & Dad, Ann Marie & Pete and Diane & Harm will be there. Ann Marie and Diane both assured me that the kiss will be done accordingly in your stead. So I look forward to seeing you again, even if it is only on a video screen.

Until then, all my love,

John

When she read John's message she screamed, "YES". This was unfortunate as she was sharing quarters with another Marine Lt. Colonel, this one a helicopter pilot. She was an African American named Florence Wright who was commanding the squadron of Cobra helos. The two officers hit it off very well and become great friends. Florence insisted that Sarah call her Flo and Sarah said, "Call me Mac." As they began to open up with each other they found that they came up through the ranks the same way from enlisted, to OCS and so on. Flo also had a husband and was a mother of 3 children, two boys and a girl ages 16, 14 & 12. Her husband Robert was a Marine Colonel commanding Harrier pilots on another ship.

Sarah's scream woke Flo up. Startled, she sat up in bed saying, "Mac what's wrong?"

Realizing what she had done Sarah immediately apologized saying, "I'm sorry Flo. I just received the best news from my husband. His appointment came through, he's Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence." she delightedly related.

Flo got out of her bunk and looked at John's message over Sarah's shoulder. After reading it she shared in Sarah's delight saying, "You go girl!"

Now John and the others were at the Change of Command ceremony. His children, Maureen and Jim Marshall as well as the Chegwiddens, the Rabbs and Matthews' families were assembled in a conference room of the SECNAV's office suite. The room was big enough to accommodate the whole retinue. SECNAV Nelson also arranged for a video feed to the Guadalcanal. John could see Sarah smiling on the laptop's screen.

After Admiral Grafton had officially transferred his command to Admiral LaPorte, John stepped forward to take the oath of his new office.

It was decided that in lieu of Sarah's absence, at least physically, John's mom would hold the bible. The SECNAV started the ceremony. Captain please place your left hand on the bible and raise your right hand and repeat after me.

"I Captain John Patrick Marshall solemnly swear that I will honestly and faithfully discharge the duties of Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence. Bearing this duty freely and willingly in true faith
and allegiance I will faithfully honor, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America from all enemies. So help me God."

"Congratulations Captain. Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Commander Rabb I believe the next part is yours."

"Yes sir." Ann Marie and Diane replied. They both went to either side of John and they gave him a kiss on each of his cheeks. They used their thumbs to wipe off the lipstick marks.

After offering their congratulations, the whole company left to attend a reception in the Pentagon's Officers Dining Room and left John to stay a while to have some husband and wife talk with Sarah.

"So what do you think Mrs. Marshall?" John asked her proudly.

"I think it's wonderful Captain Marshall." Sarah returned just as proudly. "You know I'm very proud of you and all that you've accomplished."

"I couldn't have done it without you Sarah. You know no matter what rank I have on my collar, you're still the boss of my life Sarah. I really miss you. I wish you were here to really give me the official kiss." John said with a catch in his voice. He missed his wife more than he let on to anyone and only Sarah knew that.

"Oh now don't start, you'll only make me cry. I miss you to sweetie. Look when you get settled in your new job, I'll see you when you come out here like we planned. We can go to Sydney or Darwin." Sarah reassured him.

"Yeah you're right. As soon as I can, I'll make the reservations. Mom and Dad told me that they'll stay at our house during then." John said as he brightened in anticipation of that time.

"Until then know that I love you John." Sarah said.

"And I love you, Sarah." John returned.

They blew each other a kiss before they signed off. John sighed and took the time to gather himself before he went to join his family and friends. AJ and Harm were waiting outside the SECNAV's office for him. They could see by the look on his face that he missed his wife.

AJ said, "C'mon Captain we all miss her. In the mean time we have a party to go to."

"Thanks fellas." John said as his friends led him to the reception.

Tuesday, May 1, 2001

1438 Zulu

USS Guadalcanal

Off the Andaman Islands

During Sarah's time on the 'Canal, she received a lot of e-mails, from her family. The ones she got from John were his expressions of love and the updates of their family and how he was settling into his new job. He took Carolyn Turner as his Yeoman.

She saw that Patrick was thriving. It was no wonder. He was getting a lot of attention from his aunts, Ann Marie and Diane as well as his two grandmothers. Deanne was a frequent visitor to the Marshall home as well as Maureen. She was visiting every other weekend. Deanne was very gracious to put
Maureen up at her place on those weekends.

The e-mails she got from Harm and Diane were also expressions of fraternal love and updates on their family and of what was happening at JAG and NCIS. Sarah was proud to hear that her sister was being promoted to Asst. Director at NCIS as John's replacement.

She even got news about some of the humorous incidents at JAG from Harriet and Bud.

While on board Sarah was going to mass every day before breakfast. She brought James Marshall's Rosary Beads on the cruise with her and she prayed The Rosary before every mass. Many days Gunny would also go to mass with her. On Ash Wednesday she as well as the other Catholics on board went to mass and got their ashes. On Easter she had one of her weekly video conferences with her family.

Outside her times at mass, Sarah got to know the Catholic Chaplain, Father Peter Mayhew. She fell into the old military way of calling him 'padre'. She would talk with him about her family and her life.

One day Sarah told him, "You know padre as I look back on my years at Indian Ridge High School I find that despite my home situation; I had a pretty good time back then."

"What made you realize how well you did back then?" the padre asked.

"When I went to visit my family in Yuma last September, I met one of my old teammates, Cindy McAdams. She told me that she missed me. She told me that she and many of my friends read about me many times in the newspapers. Cindy said she and they were proud of me and all that I did in the Marine Corps and as a JAG lawyer. She was especially glad that I was doing well and had a nice family."

"So tell me what it was like for you in high school." Mayhew requested.

"I was a good student. I graduated near the top of my class. But I was so socially awkward. After the pretty girl cliques shunned me, I turned to sports. I only went into sports as a way to stay away from my bad home life." Sarah explained.

"How did you do?" Mayhew asked.

Sarah proudly told him, "Well I lettered in volleyball, softball, track and even basketball. We won a few state championships in each sport." She added with a little embarrassment, "But I told Cindy that I didn't think I was that special. Cindy disagreed though."

"What was her response?" Mayhew asked.

"Cindy reminded me that I was elected as the captain for all the teams I was on. She also said that many girls who knew me and all the bad stuff I went through at home were amazed that I had done so well. She said because of that I inspired many girls to look beyond their own bad situations to do well themselves."

Padre Mayhew replied, "That must have made you feel very good about your time there."

"Yeah I did come away from our visit feeling good about high school." Sarah confirmed.

"You've really come very far from your high school graduation to now." Padre Mayhew added.

Sarah answered, "I sure did. Now I have a good husband and we've made two beautiful children and
adopted another. I really miss them. My son is growing without me, my baby daughter is getting her first teeth, my teenage daughter is getting her first period and looking at boys and I'm not there to help her. I'm missing all that."

"Well I'm sure that they miss you just as much and when you're reunited, you will all experience an unbelievable outpouring of love." Mayhew reassured her.

After that whenever she felt really down she always went to him. She never let on how lonely she felt in her e-mails and chats or show it when she would have a video conference with John and the kids. So she just went to the padre to get his reassurance.

Also during that time Sarah and Gunny were kept busy with many minor cases. Most of them were disposed of very quickly and did not take up a lot of time.

Now Sarah was sitting at a place that she called her own whenever she had free time from work and her exercising. She was sitting at a set of drums. She had on her BDU tee shirt, a ball cap on backwards and a towel around her neck.

She learned how to play the drums as a teenager. After she left Yuma, she did not get the opportunity to play them. So as a result she fell out of practice. She gravitated to them when she saw them in one of the storage lockers when she was looking for something else.

She asked around if anyone on board played them and she was surprised that no one did. So she asked Captain Huddleston if she could set them up in one corner of the exercise area. He gave her his blessing to do with them whatever she wanted. He explained that drums were Navy property anyway and the previous crews on board used them very enthusiastically.

So Sarah set them up and began to practice on them every day she could. During one practice session some marines approached her. They saw that even though she had not played the drums for many years, she was still very good. They asked her if she wanted to start an on-board band.

Sarah surprised them saying, "Sure, what do we want to call ourselves?"

They bandied about some names such as, 'canal rats', 'jarheads and squids' and others that didn't appeal to them. It was Padre Mayhew who suggested the name that stuck. He was watching Sarah as she played and he joined in the discussion. "Why don't you call yourselves 'Colonel Sarah's Lonely Hearts Club Band'?"

They all agreed to the name. They began to practice together as much as they could.

Then Padre Mayhew further surprised them by joining them and showing his amazing skill as a rock guitarist. He could play a guitar like Eric Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughan. The other band members could play other instruments such as bass guitars and the keyboard, trumpet and the saxophone. There were still others who could sing in the background, Florence Wright being one of them. Another set of crew members could competently rig the amplifiers and the microphones.

They wanted to put on a show for the crew on the middle day of their cruise. It was Sarah who ran the show. She had the day's 'down time' for the hanger deck reserved for the occasion and they posted flyers on the ship's bulletin boards.

As the crew assembled in front of the band Sarah shouted from her spot behind the drums, "Happy Hump Day! We're coming to the home stretch people. So lets paartay."

She immediately went into the drum solo introduction for Bruce Springsteen's 'No Surrender'. The band went right along. After that they went into Twisted Sister's, "We're Not Gonna Take It', Bob
Seger's 'Old Time Rock And Roll' and many more songs in the ninety minute set. They ended with Bob Seger's 'Like a Rock'. It was Padre Mayhew who sang the ballad and did the slide guitar solo. Many of the men and women paired up to slow dance to the ballad.

Unbeknownst to Sarah there were a couple of special spectators watching. They stood on the catwalk above the hanger deck with Captain Huddleston watching in awe of her performance. They kept their ship's ball caps pulled low over their eyes so Sarah couldn't recognize them. It would not have mattered as Sarah was deep in the groove of her performance.

Pointing to Sarah playing the drums one spectator said to the other, "I never knew she could do that."

"Me either. Could you imagine what everyone back at JAG would say if they saw her like this. They'd lose all their fear of her." the second spectator said.

"Oh I don't know she'd find another way to instill that fear." The first one chuckled.

Huddleston added, "She has been nothing but a pleasure to work with. She's the one who organized this show. If she weren't the fleet JAG, she could go out on the USO tour. I'm sure they'd love to have her. Even though she is glad to have this duty, she would much rather be at home. Sometimes we have dinner together and all she can speak about are her children and you two and the times she's had with you."

"She always asks about the kids in the e-mails she sends me. I can tell she misses us a lot." The first spectator said.

"And she always asks what's going on at the office," the second spectator said.

The three men stopped speaking and went down to the flight deck to watch the rest of the show from there.

One of the spectators was on board for JAG work and the other was on board for something other than work. Earlier the prior week Sarah and Gunny got a case that needed their complete attention. A marine was killed during a training exercise that was held during a severe-storm. Captain Huddleston demanded an unusual special court-martial.

He disliked the Marine in charge of the exercise, Major Lasley. Huddleston considered Lasley to be arrogant and incapable of admitting that he is wrong. Since the beginning of the cruise Huddleston and Lasley could not get along. Huddleston read Lasley's record and he was not happy. He saw that Lasley was involved with many questionable operations that did not go well. He also saw that Lasley had a pattern of avoiding responsibility.

He ordered Sarah to investigate the incident. Even though there was lousy weather Lasley still refused to cancel the exercise. Sarah suggested an article 32 hearing but Huddleston didn't want to give up control and ordered Sarah to convene a court martial. The court martial was a way for Huddleston to try to force Lasley off his ship. Sarah and Gunny agreed with Huddleston, but they still had to do their due diligence.

Lasley demanded council. Since she was the only JAG on the ship and she was prosecuting, she called JAG Headquarters in Washington and request they send out a defense counselor for Lasley. She was told that the counselor was on his way and would be there in 48 hours. That was on Sunday.

When the band was finished the members went to mingle with their fans. Sarah was dabbing at her sweaty face and drinking from her water bottle as she waded through the crowd gratefully accepting
their praise. Eventually she got to Captain Huddleston. He had a smile on his face. "Colonel that was a great show I really enjoyed it."

"Thank you skipper, I was glad to do it." Sarah graciously acknowledged.

"Also I have two gentlemen here to see you." Huddleston said as he stepped aside.

As he moved out of the way the first person Sarah saw was, "Harm!" She immediately enveloped him in a hug as she kissed his cheek as she said, "I had a feeling the admiral would send you. How was your flight?"

Harm smiled, "Well it was long but I had company." He stepped out of the way to reveal, "John!" That was shouted with more volume and more enthusiasm as she jumped into her husband's arms and captured his lips for a long passionate kiss. The whole of the crew that was there to see her band play got to see another show as they hopped and hollered at her and John's display of affection.

After breaking their kiss for air Sarah turned and said, "Everyone this is my husband, Captain John Marshall."

John shouted "Semper Fi Marines."

They all replied, "Ooh rah sir"

Flo Wright came up to them and said, "Mac I'm going to have the duty tonight so I won't be in our quarters all night." She winked at Sarah as she said that.

"Thanks Flo. I really appreciate the gesture." Sarah replied gratefully.

Harm said to them, "I'm going to confer with my client. Sarah we'll talk tomorrow. I'm sure you'll be otherwise occupied tonight."

"Thanks Harm. Gunny will show you around from here." Sarah said as she saw Gunny Galindez come over to greet Harm and John.

He greeted John and said, "Captain I'm very glad to see you sir. Maybe now the colonel will stop growling at me."

"Careful Gunny or I'll have you up on charges for disrespecting an officer," Sarah said in a semi threatening tone. She continued on a more humorous note saying, "Besides I do not growl, snap at you and shout maybe but no growling."

Everyone chuckled at that.

Gunny then turned to Harm and said, "It's good to see you also sir. If you come with me I'll take you to Major Lasley."

Harm walked away and left Sarah and John alone.

As they walked in the other direction, John bent to speak softly to her and said, "I didn't know that I married a rocker chick."

"So what does that make you my groupie?" Sarah asked mischievously.

John smiled saying, "Well as a loyal groupie, I get to follow you anywhere just to sleep in your arms."
Sarah tightened her grip around his waist at that.

Then John added, "Speaking of which you know as a visiting intelligence officer I get to stay in the ship's VIP quarters and no one would think anything bad if you spent the nights I'm here, there."

"Oh are you exercising 'admiral's privilege' before you get a star?" Sarah asked.

"Oh you betcha ninja girl," John said as he pulled her closer.

"Well you may not be an admiral but I intend to take total advantage of my "captain's" privileges." Sarah whispered back seductively.

John bent to kiss the top of her head.

"So how did you know Harm was going to be out here?" Sarah asked her husband.

"AJ called to tell me that he was sending Harm out to here on a case and he asked if I wanted to tag along. I jumped at the chance. Besides we were due to meet in Darwin next Saturday anyway. I just left DC two days earlier than we planned." John explained.

"Well I'm darned glad you did hot stuff." Sarah said as she rose up to kiss his cheek.

They walked away arm in arm to her quarters. She gathered some of her things such as fresh clothing and underwear and her toilet kit. Then they went to John's quarters.

They had to wait until her case with Major Lasley was concluded before they could leave for their vacation alone.

Wednesday, May 2, 2001

1419 Zulu

USS Guadalcanal

Indian Ocean

When Major Lasley asked for defense counsel, he did not have a Navy JAG in mind. So without telling Harm, Lasley hired Larry Kaliski. He was a civilian attorney who was versed in military law. Also he previously won a case against Sarah. Kaliski wanted Harm to continue second chair to which Harm only reluctantly consented. Kaliski threatened Harm with filing a grievance on him if he didn't act appropriately subservient. He nearly lost the case until Harm recreated the boats course showing that the accident happened due to inaccurate maps, and unknown sandbar and Huddleston's own insistence on a delay which washed away the marker buoys.

Sarah finally got Lasley's XO to admit, "Others may have taken the heat for Lasley in the past."

Harm finally negotiated a settlement with Sarah if Lasley would take the stand and admit his portion of blame; but he was still too arrogant and refused to do so. As a result Lasley was found guilty of dereliction of duty. The whole trial took three days.

Friday, May 4, 2001

0456 Zulu

USS Guadalcanal
Sarah had really enjoyed having her husband on board and she had spent all his nights on board sleeping with him in his quarters. They both believed that it would be bad form for them to really get reacquainted, at least in the conjugal sense, so they settled for just holding each other as they slept.

During his stay on the 'Canal, John really enjoyed watching as she tried her case. It reminded him of their time during their courtship when they tried their own cases together as co or opposing counsel. John knew that Lasley was his own worst enemy with his arrogant attitude and his inability to accept responsibility.

Now Sarah, John and Harm were sitting in the officers' mess talking about home. Larry Kaliski left with his client hours before. Harm was scheduled to leave the ship the next morning along with the Marshalls. But while Harm was going back home, Sarah and John were going onto Darwin, Australia for a week's leave.

"So tell me what's going on at home?" Sarah asked.

John was the first to respond as he said, "Well I'm getting used to my new office. Carolyn and I have to get used to being 'back 'n the bag' again. Did you know that Carolyn is a Master Chief now?"

"Oh she finally got that extra stripe. That's great she deserves it." Sarah said.

"And she's engaged." John added.

"Get out." Sarah exclaimed. She asked further, "When did that happen?"

"Last month. He's an FBI agent. His name is Bruce Pierce. Last January he came into NCIS with Fornell. He was working closely with her on the case and when it was over asked her out and she said yes. Eight weeks later she shows up with a ring on her finger." John answered.

"Well good for her. When does she want to have her wedding?" Sarah asked.

"Next November 10. She's making plans for the Officers' Mess at Quantico." John answered.

"That's great. I'm glad I'll be home for that. Harm, how's Diane doing as NCIS Assistant Director?" Sarah asked him.

"Well she got her eagle last week." Harm said proudly.

"Oh that's great. How are you taking it having her outrank you again?" Sarah asked.

"Oh it's not a big deal. I mean I had to go into the Navy Reserves for 2 years while I recovered and I was in law school to practically reinvent myself so I missed a few promotion windows. But I also know my time will come soon enough. I mean that's why I did my sea cruise primarily as a JAG instead of a pilot. That way my career is seen as one smooth progression and not all over the place. I found that while I was on my cruise I was enjoying being the JAG more than my flying. I'm thinking of giving up flying after the next year. I mean I'm getting too old to strap on a Tomcat and go off into the wild blue yonder."

Sarah and John were totally surprised at Harm's admission. Sarah was the first to ask, "What does Diane think of this?"

"Oh we've already discussed it and she's behind me all the way. I mean she knows that there would be less of a chance of me leaving. I'll keep up my quals for the next year and then I'll hang up my
wings unless a war breaks out or something and they need pilots. So far there is not one brewing anywhere.

John nodded then changed the subject, "Speaking of Diane, she told me that her replacement in ATAC is an agent named Jenny Shepard. Did you know she was Gibbs' fourth wife?"

"Fourth wife, I only knew of his three divorces." Sarah said.

"Well his first wife died along with his daughter, Kelly when they were killed by a drug dealer. They saw him commit a murder. That happened while Gibbs was in Iraq in 1991." John explained. He further said, "And you two don't know that. It's not something Jethro makes common knowledge."

"Don't worry about that John. I rarely see him anymore anyway." Harm said.

Sarah changed the subject asking, "So Harm have you been keeping out of trouble? Who has the admiral partnered you with, Meg, Bud or Sturgis?"

"Well first I worked with Bud then I worked with Meg." Harm answered.

"What case did you and Bud work on?" Sarah asked.

"We worked a murder off the Benjamin Harrison. We were lucky to get a conviction. The Captain was a total ass. He went and searched the suspect's locker before we had a warrant. We had to do some legal tap dancing to win against Mattoni." Harm explained.

"What did you and Meg work on?" Sarah asked.

"We went out to Greece to investigate a collision at sea." Harm explained

"What happened?" Sarah asked.

Harm explained the case. "During war games between Greece and the US, the skipper of the US ship came out of a fog. When he turned to close on the Greek ship, it turned into him. The skipper was not able to avoid the collision and they rammed the Greek ship. Seven sailors were killed and two more were declared missing. On top of that the SECNAV demanded that Admiral Chegwidden prosecute the US skipper, Captain Merrick, personally. Admiral Chegwidden appointed us to defend."

"Oh that must have been fun," Sarah said sardonically.

"Oh yeah it was. On top of that we didn't get a lot of cooperation from our witnesses," Harm said.

"That's always a pain in the neck," Sarah said.

"Yeah it was. When we called the XO to testify against him, Merrick wouldn't allow the XO ruin his career. Merrick, who seemed to be determined to fall on his sword, told us to take a plea."

"Is that all?" Sarah asked.

"No, we also had to deal with the Turks. The captain of the Turkish ship claimed that the Greek ship was in their waters. They argued over the radio for eight minutes. Then the Turks tried to ram the Greek ship. That's what caused them to turn into the US ship. We were able to impeach the Greek and Turk captains for their own dereliction on the stand. There was one other thing that really made the case a real mess."

"What was that," John asked.
"Admiral Chegwidden found that the SECNAV not only circumvented our investigation, but he lied to us when he said that the other countries were also charging their captains. The admiral didn't like that the SECNAV wasn't looking out for his own people. So he told Meg and me that our plea was unacceptable. He didn't say it but Meg and I got the idea that we should press forward to continue our investigation. We discovered that the Greek ship Gelibolu had radar troubles prior to the games. The games should have been postponed or cancelled. However, Admiral Picato, the Italian exercise commander colluded with the Greeks to continue the games before the end of the fiscal year. I put that information in a report. Meg and I delivered it to the SECNAV."

"What did he do with it?" Sarah asked.

"Well after he realized that it would embarrass the UN, he threw it in the garbage and gave Merrick the chance to retire. Admiral Picato was charged with dereliction of duty. The SECNAV reasoned that was more acceptable than blaming the Greeks or Turks."

After he finished his story Harm, Sarah and John looked at each other thinking the same thing, the SECNAV will never change. He'll still be a creep that they all had to put up with.

Saturday, May 5, 2001

To

Friday, May 18, 2001

Their helo flight from the Guadalcanal took Harm and the Marshalls to the nearest military air field. There Sarah and John bid Harm goodbye and then they went on their respective flights. Harm went back to DC with a video of Sarah's performance which the 'Canal's Public Affairs Officer took, to show to their families and friends back in DC. Sarah and John boarded a flight to Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia.

Sarah and John spent their week's leave in Palm Cove, North Queensland at the Mango Lagoon resort. It was a resort near the Great Barrier Reef. They did some river rafting and some snorkeling during the day and some more reacquainting in their room during the night. Their idyllic vacation came to an end all too soon.

Now they stood at the departure gates of Darwin International Airport. John was boarding a flight to Sydney to connect onto DC while Sarah was waiting for her flight to the RAN Airbase at Timor.

"I had a wonderful time John. The next time we'll see each other outside our video conferences will be when I come home after the cruise." Sarah said as they sat at John's gate.

"I know sweetie. But the next two and half months will be over before you know it. We won't even have time to miss each other." John said as he cupped her cheek.

Sarah smiled her watery smile at that. Just then John's flight was called for boarding. As they got up, Sarah held John in a tight hug. They broke apart to share a kiss before he turned to walk onto his plane.

Sarah walked to her gate to board her flight.
When Harriet wasn't puttering around the JAG bullpen doing her usual job related tasks, she was planning her daughter Sarah's first birthday party. Even Loren Singer was looking forward to the party. Harriet was so happy to have her own little Sarah. She doted on her in every way a mother could a daughter.

Bud was in court prosecuting against Harm. Harm's client was guilty as hell and Bud was going to roast him alive. The defendant was an officer doctor named Gettis from Bethesda. He was out of the hospital buying a luxury car while he was on call and should have been in the Obstetrics Department. As a result of his absence a Lieutenant, named Camille Boland had begun to bleed excessively after delivering a boy. But because Gettis wasn't there to operate, the lieutenant died from blood loss before another doctor could be brought in. Coincidently, Gettis was one of the doctors Bud saw the year before when his daughter Sarah was born. Gettis was discussing buying a luxury car upon his enlistment expiring.

Now Harriet was working at her desk. She picked her phone up as it rang. "Lieutenant Simms."

"Harriet it's mom." Lydia Simms said in a somber tone.

"Mom what's wrong?" Harriet asked.

"Something's happened to your father. He's had a heart attack." Lydia said.

"Oh my God," Harriet exclaimed out loud.

Chief Gardiner whipped her head around at Harriet's exclamation, becoming immediately concerned.

"Lieutenant is everything alright?" she asked Harriet.

Harriet was too busy writing down information to respond. When she hung up the phone she said, "I'm sorry chief. I just got word that my father had a heart attack. I have to go down to Naples, Florida to see him."

Harriet looked up and saw Loren Singer come out of her office.

Loren had also heard Harriet's cry, so she also asked, "Harriet, are you alright?"

Harriet began to ramble on saying, "No I just heard my dad had a heart attack. I gotta go down to Florida. Loren when Bud comes out of court, could you please tell him what's happening? I have to make plane reservations for us. I'm going to leave Sarah and AJ in daycare for now. Could you please pick them up after work? They love you so much. You can stay at our place while we're out
of town and…"

Loren went over to Harriet to stop her rambling almost yelling, "Lieutenant, take a breath."

After Harriet stopped talking Loren put her hands on Harriet's shoulders and went on in more gentle tones, "Of course I'll pick them up this afternoon Harriet. It won't be any trouble. Just give me your car keys so we don't have to switch baby seats. I'll leave my car here and drive the both of you to the airport and take your car home."

"Oh thank you Loren." Harriet said. She turned to make the calls she needed to make.

Loren then said, "Harriet, why don't you use my office? It's more private. I'll go to court to get Bud."

"Thanks Loren. I really appreciate it."

"My pleasure Harriet," Loren replied. She then went to get Bud out of court.

That evening the Roberts went to Naples, Fl. while Loren stayed at their house with the children.

June 19, 2001

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Harm and Loren were defending Lt. Commander Kegan. Kegan was charged with killing one Anton Summer. Summer and Kegan were on the same flight. Summer was caught disabling a smoke detector in a lavatory so he could smoke. Sturgis was prosecuting.

Coincidentally Harriet was on the same plane returning from Florida. She went down to see her father after his heart attack. Unfortunately her father passed away after another heart attack three days after she got there.

Admiral Chegwidden made arrangements for him Harm, Diane, John as well as Loren and the Roberts children to fly down for the funeral. Harriet and Bud were very grateful to see their friends at her difficult time.

After the funeral, she stayed behind to help her mother handle her father's estate. She sent Bud home with everyone else to be with her children. Loren was taking care of them for over a week and Harriet imposed on her charity enough.

Because she was a witness to the incident on the plane, Sturgis called her to testify. Harriet testified that she saw Kegan knock a water bottle out of Summer's hand. Summer became belligerent and a struggle ensued between Kegan and Summer. During the struggle Kegan wrestled with Summer. The struggle ended when Summer fell and broke his neck.

When it was the defense's turn to cross examine her, Harm allowed Singer to do so. Loren got up resolving to be as professionally gentle as she could to her friend.

"Lieutenant, where were you coming from?" Loren asked.

"I was returning to Washington from Florida." Harriet answered.

"Why were you in Florida?" Singer asked again

"My father passed away two weeks ago. I was there with my mother to resolve his estate." Harriet
"Lieutenant, were you tired?" Loren asked.

"Yes I would say I was," Harriet answered.

"Would you say that you were preoccupied about your father?" Loren asked.

"He was on my mind. I mean I was thinking that I was going to miss him," Harriet answered.

Loren pressed on that asking, "Being that your father was on your mind would you say that you were blinded by grief over losing him?"

Harriet disagreed, saying, "I don't think so. I mean I was crying on and off about my father, but I do remember being aware of what was going on around me."

Knowing that the 'grief' tactic may not work Loren tried another line of questioning as she asked, "Lieutenant did you know what transpired before the defendant and Mr. Summer began their struggle?"

Harriet answered, "No I did not?"

Loren then asked, "Did you stand up to watch the struggle between the defendant and Mr. Summer after it began?"

"No I stayed in my seat." Harriet answered.

"Okay as you stayed in your seat were you able to see where the struggle was happening?"

Harriet answered, "Yes I was."

"Where was it lieutenant?" Loren asked knowing she scored a point.

"It was happening next to an exit door." Harriet answered.

'Did you see where Mr. Summer was reaching?' Loren asked.

"No the seats blocked my view of that." Harriet answered.

"Did you see if Mr. Summer had grabbed the exit handle and was trying to open the door?" Loren asked.

"No I did not." Harriet answered.

"I have no more questions for Lt. Simms your honor." Loren said in conclusion.

Harriet left the stand after the judge dismissed her.

The trial went on as a pilot riding on board as a passenger testified that he conversed with and warned, Summer not to smoke in the lavatory. He also testified that Summer said, "Let the captain try and stop me".

A flight attendant also testified that she requested that Lt. Commander Kegan watch Summer while she notified the pilot. She said that's when Summer made for the door. Kegan then knocked him down as he grabbed the exit handle. As Kegan and Summer struggled, Summer was still trying to open the door. During the struggle Summer and Kegan fell against a bulkhead. They fell in such a
way that Summer's head dragged against the bulkhead and his neck was broken. The jury found Lt. Commander not guilty of manslaughter.

After the court was adjourned, Loren went to find Harriet to see if she was alright. Harriet reassured her that she was. The two ladies then joined Bud and Harm in AJ's office to wait on word of what was happening with Sarah in Indonesia. Word came to JAG that there was trouble at the American Consulate in Aceh and Sarah was deeply involved.

June 19, 2001

1300 Zulu

Police Department

Aceh, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia

Sarah and Gunny flew off the Guadalcanal to Aceh. They were notified that a Marine lance corporal based at the local American Consulate was accused of raping a local woman. As he was being chased by the local police the corporal ran to the embassy. Before the Marines at the gate could open it and let the corporal in, the policemen grabbed him and dragged him away to the police station.

Sarah knew that she would need all her negotiation skills to deal with this affair. She also knew that the police were notorious for being very corrupt. She knew from other marines who were stationed in Indonesia that police were not above demanding personal items in lieu of cash for bail. So she left her jewelry, including her wedding and engagement rings back in her quarters on the 'Canal. She only took $5,000.00 from the ship's bank. Upon landing at the airfield they went straight to the police station to see a Captain Jarot.

When they entered his office he greeted them saying, "Ah colonel what can I do for you today?"

"Captain Jarot I'm Lt. Colonel Marshall, US Marines JAG. We've come to set bail for Lance Corporal Lassiter. We understand he's been accused of raping a girl he met in a bar. We assure you that we will investigate and see that justice is done."

"But colonel we are still performing our own investigation. He has to be a positively identified first. That will in itself determine justice." Jarot countered.

"Do you have the victim ready to identify the lance corporal as her attacker?" Sarah asked.

"Yes we do colonel. She is right next door waiting behind a one way mirror. We will present the corporal in, what do you call it, a line up?" Jarot said in a smarmy tone.

"Yes captain it's called a line-up where we come from also." Sarah said in exasperation.

"Then let us proceed." Jarot said as he got up. He escorted Gunny and Sarah into a darkened room with a one-way mirror. The alleged victim was sitting there with a female officer. She was looking through to a lit room

Jarot went over to the intercom on the wall and said "Alright bring them in."

In the lit room 6 men walked in, but only one of them was Caucasian, Lassiter and he was in his Marine dress blue uniform.

Before Sarah could protest the girl stood up and said, "That's him the one in the uniform. He's the one who tried to rape me."
Jarot went to the intercom and said, "Alright take him away." Two men came into the room and led Lassiter away.

After the girl was escorted away Sarah said, "Captain Jarot that was not a proper line up. You should have had all Caucasian men in the same uniform. If we were in America I can have that identification thrown out of court in a second."

"Ah but colonel we are not back in America, we are in my home in Indonesia. Now let us go back to my office to discuss bail." Jarot said as he walked out.

Sarah and Gunny sighed and followed him out. When they reached the office Sarah spoke up and said, "we are ready to offer $1,000,00 for his bail."

"No we require $10,000.00" Jarot countered. Then the bargaining began.

"$2,000.00" Sarah countered

"$8,000.00," Jarot returned.

$4,000.00," Sarah went a little higher.

"$5,000.00," Jarot said.

"Done," Sarah finished. She took the money out and counted it out for him.

Jarot took the money and put it in his uniform pocket saying, "It was a pleasure doing business with you colonel."

"Like wise Captain." Sarah said not meaning it. They went to collect Cpl. Lassiter and returned to the American Consulate.

1400 Zulu

American Consulate

Aceh, Indonesia

As a result of the misconception that an American was being set free after he raped a local girl, an angry mob besieged the US consulate. The mob set fire to a car which exploded. Due to this Ambassador Raymond Dart ordered the embassy be evacuated. The staff set about burning the sensitive records.

Out at the gate the Marines were having a difficult time keeping order. As they stood at the gate, someone in the mob dropped a grenade. The ensuing explosion killed Gunnery Sergeant Simpkins and blinded his second in command.

Ambassador Dart panicked and wanted to give Cpl Lassiter to the mob as a diplomatic solution.

Sarah, due to her rank as the senior officer declined, "We don't leave any American behind no matter how guilty they are. We have to find a way out of here. The helicopter will not be able to land if that mob is throwing hand grenades and firing into the compound."

Just then a young girl walked up to her, "Colonel I know a way out."

Sarah knew who she was. Her name was Ileana. She first met her when she arrived at the embassy. Ileana was the daughter of a consulate cook. Ileana was astounded that Sarah, a woman was carrying
a weapon. She was so taken with Sarah that she drew a picture and presented it to Sarah. It was a crayon drawing of Sarah in her uniform holding a rifle with Ileana standing beside her. In return Sarah took off her 'ball and anchor' insignia from her uniform collar and gave it to Ileana.

Sarah said, "You do Ileana, where?"

Ileana took her hand and led Sarah down to the cellar saying, "I know a secret tunnel. My mother and I found it one day."

Ileana, Gunny and Sarah went through the tunnel to see where it led. They saw that it came out onto the next street and at Ileana's school building. They went back and told Dart of their find. Sarah gathered the Americans down to the cellar and led them out through the tunnel. They were able to enter the school without being seen by the mob. Sarah radioed the helicopter circling above, telling them where they were.

As they waited there Sarah told Ileana, "Wait until after we leave. Then it will be safe for you to go home. Okay?"

"Okay colonel I'll wait. Don't forget your picture though." Ileana implored.

Sarah smiled as Ileana handed her the picture, "Don't worry I won't forget."

Just then she heard the helicopter as it began to hover outside. As the helicopter went to land in the school yard though, some of the mob spotted them. As the Americans boarded the helicopter, the mob came to the school and started to lob more grenades into the yard.

As the explosions went off around the helicopter, Sarah waited at the bottom of the ramp until the last American boarded. As she boarded, she looked back. Unbelievably she saw Ileana jumping up and down waving.

"Colonel you forgot your picture!" Ileana called out, but she wasn't heard over the noise of the helicopter and the explosions.

Standing inside the helicopter hatch Sarah shouted, "Go back Ileana." Just as it lifted off, a mortar exploded between Ileana and the helicopter. It turned away, blocking Sarah's view of where Ileana stood.

2000 Zulu

Washington Navy Yard

Chief Emma Gardiner knocked and entered AJ's office and joined the group as they listened to the speaker phone. They were on the line to Diane. Diane was in ATAC monitoring the situation in Aceh via satellite.

Emma asked AJ, "Sir how is Captain Marshall doing with what's going on?"

John found out of the trouble in Aceh because the skipper of the Guadalcanal sent the usual messages of the situation up the chain of command and it reached John's desk. He went over to NCIS to monitor the situation from ATAC. He also wanted to be with family during this difficult time.

Harm answered Emma's question, "Diane told us that John's in ATAC with her.

They all nodded agreeing that he was where he needed to be. Just then they heard what sounded like
applause coming from the speaker phone. Then Diane called over the phone, "They're away from
the embassy. Sarah got everyone out. They're on their way to the Guadalcanal."

They all let out a collective sigh of relief at the news.

Over in NCIS Diane and John shared a hug. Diane had to hold him for a while as he struggled to get
control of himself.

"Shhh John it's okay now, take a breath. You heard the transmissions, Sarah's okay. Go home now.
She's going to call you and the kids as soon as she gets settled." Diane whispered in his ear.

"Thanks, I love ya Di you're the best," John said gratefully.

"I love you to hot stuff," Diane returned affectionately kissing his cheek.

After she released him he left to get his children at Ann Marie's. Then they went home to wait for
Sarah to call.

2300 Zulu

On board the Guadalcanal

Sarah held it together until the helicopter landed on the ship. After she got the embassy staff safely
off the flight deck and down to the nearest mess hall, she went to her quarters. She shucked her
clothing and went into her shower. As she stood under the spray, she started to cry. She was so
distressed that she wasn't able to see if Ileana survived the explosion. She stayed under the shower
long enough to let it run cold. She dried off and put on her bed clothes which consisted of a tank top
and gym shorts.

She got her satellite phone, called CIC to reserve some time and sat down in a corner of her bunk.
She wanted to hear that at least one young person was safe and secure. She dialed all the numbers
that would connect her with home. The phone rang three times before it was picked up and an
excited voice answered:

"Mommy is that you?" Sarah heard Chloe say.

Sarah smiled as she said, "Yeah baby, it's me."

"You should have seen how fast dad drove home. When I asked him why he was going so fast, he
said we had to get home because you were going to call extra early tonight." Chloe rambled on.
After a while she stopped and asked. "Mom are you still there?"

"Yes baby I'm still here just keep talking I just want to listen to you for a while." Sarah said.

Chloe just rambled on again. As she listened to her daughter she shed some more tears. She couldn't
wait to see her again. Eventually Chloe ran out of steam and she put John on.

"How are you feeling sweetie? When I found that there was trouble in Aceh, and that the JAG from
the 'Canal was involved, I got so worried. I was with Diane as she tasked a satellite to observe and
we had the Guadalcanal's radio calls patched to ATAC. I didn't sit down until she said that you were
free and clear." John rambled on barely taking a breath.

"John take a breath, I'm fine. I got away without a scratch. Are you okay?" Sarah asked trying to
calm her husband.
"Yeah now I am. Jeez ninja-girl you really know how to give a guy a heart attack."

Sarah knew that he was fine when he started calling her by her nickname. They spoke for a while before the phone beeped telling her that her satellite time was almost up.

"John my satellite time is about to expire. I'm almost home baby. I love you and I'll see you in a month." Sarah said.

"I love you to sweetie, take care of yourself." John said.

The phone shut down as the time expired. Sarah stretched out and went to sleep, thinking of her family and the little girl she left behind in Aceh. She would not be content until she knew whether or not she was alright.

June 20, 2001

0900 Zulu

On Board the Guadalcanal

The first thing Sarah did after daily mass was go to the ship's CIC and place a call into the Aceh Police Department. She got Captain Jarot right away.

"Captain Jarot, this is Colonel Marshall, we met yesterday when I bailed out Corporal Lassiter."

"Of course colonel, I remember you well. How could I forget such a beautiful woman as yourself?" Jarot smarmily said. He added, "I am so glad you called. I did not know how to get a hold of you."

"Oh why is that?" Sarah asked.

"It seems that we have a young lady in one of our hospitals. She was brought into St. Carolus Hospital by her mother. She was injured last night in that riot outside your embassy. She had most unusual insignia on her clothing. It looked like a globe with an anchor. It took me only a short while to remember where I last saw such an item then I remembered I saw it on your uniform. Would you know who this girl is?" Jarot asked.

"Her name is Ileana. Her mother is or make that was our embassy's cook. I gave her that insignia. How is she doing Captain Jarot?" Sarah asked.

"Oh she is doing fine. She has some bruises, scrapes and a concussion. The doctors told me that she will make a full recovery.

"I would like to see her," Sarah asked.

"Of course colonel, meet me in my office and I will take you to her"

Sarah agreed immediately. She rushed back to her quarters. She changed into a set of civilian clothing. After what happened at the embassy, she correctly knew that she didn't need the extra attention her uniform would bring onto her. She also took the miniature copy of her Legion of Merit medal. She wanted to give it to Ileana. She got on the next helicopter to the main land. She went directly to Captain Jarot's office.

He said as she walked in, "Ah colonel that was quick. I have to ask what is this girl to you?"

"She helped us get out of the consulate to her school where the helicopter picked us up," Sarah explained.
"Well let us go to her so that you can see that how she is doing," Jarot said as they left the office.

When they arrived at St. Carolus Hospital Sarah was shown to the children's ward. She scanned the girls' faces as she walked bed to bed. Her heart leapt for joy as she spied Ileana lying in her bed.

Ileana looked up and said, "Am I dreaming? Is that my colonel?"

"Yes it is Ileana. I'm so glad to see you so well." Sarah said joyfully.

"Is everyone from the consulate alright?" Ileana asked.

"Yes everyone got out fine. They're on the LHP," Sarah explained.

"That's good. I am glad that I could help," Ileana said.

"And so am I," Sarah replied. "As a reward I have something for you." She dug into her bag and pulled out her medal. She went to pin it on Ileana's pillow.

Ileana was beside herself with joy. "Oh thank you colonel. I'll keep this forever," she exclaimed.

She sat up into Sarah's hug.

Monday, July 30, 2001

1400 Local Time

San Diego Naval Base, CA

John was waiting on the dock. He went out to San Diego to meet Sarah's ship. He left Chloe and the babies with his parent's in New York. They liked the idea of a holiday with their grandparents.

John planned his family reunion with his parents. Jim and Maureen were driving down to DC that very day and they would stay at the Marshalls' that night. John and Sarah were going to fly out to DC the next day. Tonight they would get some husband and wife time in the local Hyatt Hotel.

The last line was strung attaching the Guadalcanal to the dock. The gangplank was being swung into place. After it was properly secured Captain Huddleston gave the order of, "Crew Dismissed". Loud cheers and whistles echoed throughout the ship. Marines and sailors stormed down the gangplank to the waiting arms of their loved ones waiting on the deck.

John was wearing jeans and a bright red 3-button polo shirt. He didn't want to be bothered with the whole military courtesy rigmarole while he was reunited with his wife. As he stood away from the crowd, he kept his eye on the gangplank looking for his Sarah. He finally saw her coming down with Gunny. Half way down, she spied John standing gazing up at her with his arms across his chest and the biggest smile on his face. She quickened her pace till she was practically running down. He walked over to meet her at the bottom of the plank. When she reached the bottom, she just about jumped into his arms. She laid a deep kiss on him.

When they came up for air she smiled and asked, "Miss me?" Judging by how close he held her against him and what she felt against her belly, she already knew the answer.

John was happy to tell her saying, "Oh you bet I did. That's why I left the kids with my mom and dad. I made reservations in the Hyatt Islandia here in San Diego for tonight. I don't plan for us to leave our room until we check out tomorrow."

"Oh I get to enjoy my captain's privileges again," Sarah replied saucily.
"Or any other privileges you have in mind," John replied in kind as he bent to adjust the strap of her sea bag onto his shoulder.

As Sarah pulled her rolling suitcase behind her she draped an arm around his waist as they started to walk away to the parking lot and their way to the hotel.

Tuesday, July 31, 2001

1730 Local time

Andrews Air Base, Arrivals Terminal

Prince George's County, MD

Sarah and John enjoyed each other the night before. As promised they didn't go out of their room until they had to leave for their flight. They were scheduled to fly out of San Diego's North Island NAS Halsey Field at 0845. They barely made it on time. Their flight was smooth and comfortable and they landed at Andrews 5 hours later.

As they walked from the plane to the terminal, they could see their family waving at them through the window. Chloe was jumping up and down excitedly. Maureen was holding Patrick and Jim had firm hold of Caroline. Even Deanne was there.

As they passed through the gate, Sarah gave John her sea bag. She practically ran to get to her children. As Maureen handed her Patrick, Chloe and Caroline rushed to their mother. Sarah enveloped them in a tight hug.

"Mom we missed you so much," Chloe cried into her mother's shoulder.

"And I missed all of you," Sarah replied as tears of joy ran unabated down her cheeks.

After they came up for air Sarah heard a new pronouncement. "Mommy I got a new toof," Caroline said as she pointed at her opened mouth.

"I can see that baby," Sarah said laughing.

After properly greeting her in-laws and mother, the happy family departed the airport for home.

1830 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, N.W.

The Marshalls entered their home from the driveway. As they passed through the kitchen, they were greeted by the cry of, "SURPRISE!"

The Rabbs, Chegwiddens, Roberts and even the Millers were gathered in the dining and living rooms. The table was laid out in a buffet style and there was a cake with 'Welcome Home Sarah'. Sarah was totally touched by the display of affection as she cried some more happy tears and made the rounds hugging and kissing her family and friends.

After the amenities were done, John stepped forward saying, "Attention everyone!"

When all the attendees were silent John said, "Admiral Chegwidden has an announcement to make, AJ."
AJ stepped forward to begin, "For service rendered in extreme circumstances, specifically that of evacuating the American personnel from the embassy in Aceh during a time of riot the SECNAV has approved that Sarah be awarded the Meritorious Service Medal."

Everyone gasped and then started applauding. Sarah was totally surprised. She turned to her husband and asked, "Did you know about this?"

John replied, "Yeah I found out last week. Right after the incident Captain Huddleston wrote your commendation and sent it up through channels. As soon as the SECNAV saw it, he called me in and told me. I asked him to wait until you got home so that the family could be here when you were awarded the medal."

AJ added, "We will have an official awarding of the medal tomorrow at JAG. Deanne, Jim and Maureen I hope you can be there."

The proud parents all said that they would be there.

Wednesday, August 1, 2001
0900 Local Time
JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah's Meritorious Service Medal award ceremony was held that morning. It was a beautiful day so AJ held it in the JAG courtyard. The whole of the JAG Corps including the judicial branch, as well as Diane with some of the NCIS staff that knew her, John's parents and Deanne were there to honor Sarah. Carolyn Turner was also there with John. John was standing at attention beside AJ.

AJ called Sarah forward she came up from the front row of the formation to stand in front of him. He read aloud the official commendation. After he finished he turned to John asking, "Captain Marshall would you like to do the honors?"

"Of course sir," John proudly replied. AJ handed him the medal and he approached his wife. They both struggled to keep straight faces as he pinned the medal on her lapel. As he bent his head give her the ceremonial kiss he said, "This will make up for what we missed a few months ago."

Sarah smiled into their kiss remembering that she didn't give him his kiss at his appointment ceremony back in March. They pulled apart after the usual 20 seconds to the applause of all assembled.

After Sarah rejoined the formation and AJ dismissed them, they all crowded around Sarah to offer their congratulations as well as welcoming her back to the office. Eventually they all walked back into their respective headquarters buildings. John gave her another quick kiss before he and Caroline went back to the Pentagon.

When Sarah returned to her office she found a vase of flowers on her desk. She pulled out the card to read it. She recognized John's hand writing:

'To the only girl who gets my lips. Congrats' on your medal and good luck on your first day back at HQ.

All my love, Your 'hot stuff'
She bent to sniff the flowers contently and put John's note in the breast pocket of her uniform blouse near her heart. Just then Tiner came in and announced, "Colonel, the admiral would like to see you ma'am."

"Thank you, right away Tiner, oh and could you please clear a space and put these flowers on top of my bookcase?" Sarah asked.

'Of course ma'am," Tiner replied smiling.

When Sarah arrived at AJ's office, he immediately asked her to come in.

"I know this is your first day back, but it is in the middle of the work week, thus making it a little late to assign a new case to you. So to fill up the rest of the week, I'm sending you to Annapolis."

"To the academy sir?" Sarah asked intrigued.

Yes you're going to give a presentation on an old case." AJ said mischievously.

"How old is the case sir?" Sarah asked again.

"Almost 150 years old." AJ said with a smirk.

"150 years!" Sarah exclaimed.

AJ just smirked and handed her the folder with all the research material she would need.

When Sarah opened the folder she read the face page summary. She sighed in relief as AJ just smirked again.

Looking up at AJ, Sarah just smirked indulgently and said, "Touché sir. This is my law school dissertation."

"I know that's why I assigned you to give the lecture. I got that copy from Juanita Ressler. She was first approached to give the lecture but when she found out that the subject was this case, she backed off saying that you should be the one to give it. She said quote, 'Sarah's paper was the most comprehensive review ever written on this case.' The lecture is scheduled for Friday at 1100. Take today and tomorrow to re-familiarize yourself with your material, dismissed," AJ instructed her.

Sarah stood up and said "Aye, aye sir."

She stayed in her office the rest of that day and stayed at home all day Thursday with Patrick on her lap and Caroline playing at her feet reading and preparing her presentation.

Back in law school Sarah wrote of an incident of near mutiny on the USS Somers. The actions of the captain and his officers in the incident dictated that a much more sophisticated method of training officers in the Navy be established thus the founding of the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

The captain of the Somers, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie had believed that Philip Spencer, the son of the Secretary of War was plotting a mutiny. Then, through his paranoia, he hung Spencer and two of his accomplices.

Though cleared by a panel of inquiry, Mackenzie was charged with murder and court-martialed at the insistence of the Secretary of the Navy, whose son supposedly organized the mutiny and was one of the three men hanged.

Sarah thoroughly enjoyed her time at home Thursday. Between preparing for the lecture and taking
care of the kids, she was a very happy camper when she arrived at the Naval Academy Friday morning.

Friday, August 3, 2001

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah's lecture at Annapolis went very well. After she completed the lecture she fielded many questions from the midshipmen. She left the academy immediately after her session. She arrived at her office about 1500. She went to the Navy Yard because John dropped the babies at the day care center that morning. Sarah wanted to pick them up and meet John at home.

She dropped her briefcase and cover in her office. She then went into the break room. There she found Sturgis and Harm discussing who was better at basketball.

"You play like an old man Harm. You have no first step and you never left the key," Sturgis trash talked.

"Well I kept you from driving the lane. You could only shoot from outside," Harm shot back.

"Did you guys play ball at the academy?" Sarah asked.

"Just intramural," Harm answered.

"You know I lettered in basketball in high school. How about we three play a game of H-O-R-S-E tomorrow?" Sarah asked.

Harm and Sturgis just looked at her incredulously. Sarah took their silence as a signal to go on. "While I was on sea duty I played a lot of games with the marines on the LHP. I had a lot of fun and I got my shot back. While John was out there Gunny told him that I was playing a lot. So when he got back from there, he set up a hoop with painted half court boundaries and a key in the backyard for me. What do say we play about 1600? It will be cool enough outside then."

Harm recovered from his incredulity enough to say, "You're on."

Sturgis said, "I'll bring the beer."

"Ah, no beer for me Sturgis, I don't drink." Sarah said half in embarrassment.

Sturgis then said, "How about 7-Up?"

"That's fine. I'll tell John to expect you guys." Sarah said sweetly. She added, "Harm bring Diane and the kids, we'll have a barbeque."

Saturday, August 4, 2001

1545 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

Sarah was shooting baskets as Chloe looked on. Caroline was sitting in a playpen while Patrick was in a swing, both set up near the picnic table. John was rebounding for her. He marveled at her
prowess at shooting from all the areas of the court. She even had a very quick first step as she practiced lay-ups.

Presently she heard the front gate of the driveway open. Sarah Rabb came skipping into the yard. She saw her Aunt Sarah as she cleared the back of the house and ran into her arms.

As she kissed her aunt, Little Sarah said, "Auntie Sarah! I missed you when you were on your cwuze."

'I missed you to Les," Sarah said. Les was short for L.S. or Little Sarah. It was the two Sarahs agreed upon nickname for the young girl.

Diane and Harm followed with the twins in their double stroller. The Marshalls and Rabbs exchanged the familial amenities. The twins were put into the playpen with Caroline, which produced much squealing as the cousins got together.

Harm, who was already dressed in his gym clothes, picked up the basketball and started shooting. Shortly thereafter Sturgis showed up accompanied by, of all people, Congresswoman Bobbi Latham.

Bobbi called out, "Hi everyone." She went about greeting John and the Rabbs

At first Sarah just stood there looking stunned. Then she immediately recovered as she deduced that the congresswoman and Sturgis had become an item while she was away. Harm, Diane and John just took it in stride. Sarah and put her hand out in greeting. "Congresswoman welcome to my home."

Bobbi shook her hand saying, "Please Mac, let's leave the titles elsewhere. I'm here with Sturgis."

"I can see that. How long have you two been going out?" Sarah asked her civility back into place.

"We've been seeing each other for about a month. Harm was working on a case in which I became involved. During that he came to a party where a new missile was going to be unveiled. Sturgis came with him and he introduced us." Now that Sarah was caught up, Bobbi added, "So we're going to see an exhibition of courtship prowess."

"Yeah, Harm, Sturgis and I are going to play H-O-R-S-E. After that we're having a barbeque. John and I have some streaks marinating inside. It's a good thing John and I like to cook extra food, so we have enough for you." Sarah said.

"You know I played in college maybe we can go two on two. You and Harm against Sturgis and I." Bobbi challenged.

John spoke up at that, "Hey what about us? I played at Fordham and Diane played at the academy. Why don't we play '21'? The first one there wins."

"Okay that's fine. Easy on the rebounding and keep the elbows in people," Diane instructed.

They used a deck of cards to determine who went first. Diane was the first to shoot from the foul line.

The rules of '21' were simple. The person who shoots first gets to shoot again if the shot is made. If the shot is not made, the other players can rebound. Upon getting the ball, the rebounder must make his/her shot from the spot where he catches the ball. If he/she makes that shot, he/she goes to the foul line to shoot another. When a player gets to 19, he/she must take all his/her shots from the foul line, if he/she can get a rebound.
Diane didn't make her shot and the fun began. There was much laughter and good natured trash talking before Sarah came away the winner by one point over Sturgis. Harm, Diane, John and Bobbi all finished 3 points behind.

Monday August 13, 2001

1530 Local Time

USS Patrick Henry

Virginia Capes Operating Area

Harm had his six-month flight qualifications on the Patrick Henry scheduled for the weekend of August 10 to 13. Harm wanted to finish on time because Tuesday was Diane and Sarah's birthday. He and John planned a special celebration.

When he arrived at the Patrick Henry, Commander Stacy Loftness, the squadron's XO and head LSO, however was rude and abusive. He said to Harm, "You must have pulled favors to get back in the air. I don't need a Washington Weenie wasting my time."

Skates defended Harm saying, "Well sir you wouldn't be saying that if you flew with the commander like I did. He is one of the finest pilots I know."

Harm embarrassingly replied, "Thanks Beth."

"You're welcome Harm." Beth Hawkes returned. She was touched by his use of her real name.

Loftness walked away somewhat chagrined but still pissed off at having a desk jockey fly one of his planes.

Harm went about doing his flying. He had an inauspicious start though. During his first landing the auto-throttle went bad so he had to fly it manually. He set up a little high and was correcting when paddles called that the 3 wire was fouled and to abort. Harm powered and landed, just barely touching down successfully.

Loftness, looking for an excuse to ground him, told him, "I'm taking you out of the air for that stunt. You never wave off an abort."

"Why, I prevented an in-flight collision by touching down." Harm said in his defense.

Loftness wouldn't let it go though. He continued to harangue Harm, "You were too slow to respond to the wave off."

Harm told him, "I'm not about to be talked into a rookie mistake and dump the nose."

It was Captain Ingles who got Loftness to back off saying, "Commander Loftness, when you have two Distinguished Flying Crosses like the Commander does, then you can keep him on the ground. He flies."

Knowing that he made a major faux pas Loftness changed his tune. "Well you still have to fly 5 more traps at day and 5 more at night."

Harm walked away satisfied. Each time he trapped he was always aware of where Loftness was on the deck. He held up the number of traps he performed after each landing.

When Harm finished his quals on Monday he had the highest boarding rating and landing scores of
anyone else who was qualifying.

He told Ingles that he was anxious to get home for Diane's and Sarah's birthdays that Tuesday. Ingles let him be the last take-off before a major storm hit. Ingles asked that Harm send a piece of birthday cake back on the COD.

Loftness having witnessed Harm's prowess in the cockpit was rather friendly when he said, "Take Skates with you. She's going on leave to plan her wedding." Harm understood completely. Skates told him that this was her last flight before she was getting married.

When they took off the weather at the carrier was still good. But as they approached the coast they saw the wall of clouds waiting for them.

Harm went to gain altitude to fly above the storm. But as he reached 15,000 feet, he saw that the O2 light was flashing. That meant that they were low on oxygen so they couldn't ascend.

"Well we'll just have to power through it," Harm said. Skates just gulped.

They went through the leading edge of the storm without incident and were flying smoothly.

After about 15 minutes of buffeting and shaking a bolt of lightning struck the jet. The flash temporarily blinded Harm and Skates. After her eyes cleared Skates called out, "Harm we have flight control failure warning light."

Harm replied disgustingly, "Yeah I see it. How far are we from the coast?"

"We're about 25 miles, why?" Skates asked.

"I'm going to gain some altitude and keep us pointed in that direction. When we get feet dry, I'm going to turn parallel to the coast and we're going to ditch. I don't think I can keep this bird in the air for very much longer, that lightning strike really screwed us over. Call out a mayday and tell them what we have in mind."

"Right Harm," Skates said with trepidation. She called on the radio, "Mayday, mayday. This is Navy flight 401. We are experiencing multiple failures and have to ditch." She gave out their current heading and the plan.

"Harm don't waste too much time getting to me, I'm not a strong swimmer." Skates told him after she finished.

"I hear ya skates," Harm said reassuringly. He went about trying to keep the jet up for as long as he could.

1645 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah sat at her desk looking out at the storm. She was thinking, 'The weather report says this will pass in about an hour. The kids are home with mom today so I'll wait until then to leave'. Just then Emma knocked on her open door. "Colonel Marshall, the Admiral wants to see you in his office."

"I'm on my way, Emma," With a smile on her face, she made her way across the bullpen. She was looking forward to spending her and Diane's birthday together the next day so she was in a festive mood.
Her smile faded when she walked into the Admiral's office and noticed the look on the admiral's face. A sense of dread settled in her stomach as she came to attention with a crisp, "You wanted to see me, Sir."

"Have a seat, Sarah," he replied with a wave to the remaining seat in front of his desk.

Sarah settled in the seat focusing her attention on what the Admiral was saying.

"I just got off the phone with Captain Ingles from the 'Patrick Henry," the Admiral began as he walked around his desk and leaned back against it. "There is no easy way to say this, but there's been an accident."

Momentarily forgetting protocol, Sarah gave voice to the question on all of their minds. "Harm?"

"The plane he was piloting went down about an hour ago," AJ said.

Sarah closed her eyes in an attempt to keep her tears at bay. After several deep breaths, she met the Admiral's gaze again. "How bad, sir and does Diane know?"

"Yes she does. Thomas is with her right now. Search and Rescue is still out, but there's a pretty bad storm front moving through the area and it's slowing their efforts. I've already called John and he'll pick up the Rabbs' children and bring them home with him."

"What happened, Sir?" Sarah asked.

"Harm and his RIO were on their way back from his quals when a bolt of lightning wreaked havoc with their electrical systems. Unfortunately, the storm was also causing problems with communications, so Captain Ingles wasn't entirely sure what happened after that. The last transmission they got was a distress call saying they were ejecting."

"Sir, I'd like permission to head over to NCIS to be with Diane." Sarah asked, amazed that her voice didn't tremble.

"I expected as much," the Admiral replied. "I've arranged with Thomas to get them and us patched into the Patrick Henry, so we can at least listen in on how the rescue is progressing."

"Thank you, sir," Sarah replied. Before she could give into her emotions she got up and quickly walked out the door. She only stopped at her office to get her raincoat off the hanger. She threw it over her arm, grabbed her cover and her purse and practically ran out of the building over to NCIS.

She found Diane in her office staring out the window. When she turned to face her sister, she was holding a tissue and she had tears in her eyes. Sarah dropped her things into a nearby chair and opened her arms. Diane went right over and practically melted into her older sister. They both shared a bout of crying, before they settled down on the office sofa to wait.

1945 Local Time

Three Hours Later

Diane stood at the window in her office, watching the rain that was now falling gently outside. Search and Rescue pulled Skates out of the water fifty-four minutes ago, but so far, they'd been unable to locate Harm. Thomas secured the building for the night, but almost everybody was still there. They were all waiting on word that Harm was okay. Sarah knew that the same thing was happening at JAG.
Diane toyed with her wedding and engagement ring as she continued to stare out the window. For three hours now, her entire life was on hold. She refused to allow herself to even think that Harm wasn't going to be okay. They would find him and get him to safety and before she knew it, she would be seeing him home.

A soft knock on her door interrupted her and she turned around to find Sarah standing there holding two cups of coffee. "I thought you could use this," Sarah stated.

"Thank you," Diane replied as her sister walked over and handed her a cup of steaming liquid.

"How are you, sis?" Sarah asked.

"I'm okay," Diane replied, her attention once again drawn to the window.

"He's going to be okay," Sarah stated.

"I know," Diane agreed. "He has to be. It's our birthday tomorrow. He said he and John have a special surprise in store for us."

Sarah placed a comforting hand on Diane's shoulder. "I've never known your husband to give up on a fight."

"Neither have I," Diane replied.

Diane's yeoman's voice interrupted them. "Captain, Director Magnum has Portsmouth Naval Hospital on the phone."

Sarah and Diane sat their cups of coffee on the desk before walking out to the bullpen where Thomas was speaking.

"Diane, Sarah, they've got him," Thomas said as he listened to the conversation going on in his ear.

The two sisters each said a quick prayer of thanks before Diane asked, "How is he, Sir?"

"Here speak with the doctor," Thomas said handing her the phone.

Diane practically grabbed the phone as she said, "Hello doctor. This is Mrs. Rabb. How is my husband?"

"Well Mrs. Rabb at the moment he's suffering from hypothermia, but other than a few scrapes and bruises there are no other visible injuries."

"Oh thank God!" Diane exclaimed as she reached for Sarah's hand. Sarah went over and Diane held the phone so they both could hear.

The doctor continued, "He was conscious when they pulled him out of the water. The nurses that treated him said he was asking for you before he drifted into unconsciousness."

"Doctor, where did they find him?" Diane asked.

"They found him off North Carolina. According to the Coast Guard team that found him he ejected long after his RIO did. He landed in the water about 50 miles south of where she landed in the water. The reason they took so long to find him was because they were looking close to where she went in. They found him only after they started expanding the search area to the south when his RIO told her own rescuers that she didn't see him eject as the plane was heading away."
Diane said, "Thank you doctor," She hung up the phone suddenly very anxious to hold Harm in her arms and reassure herself that he was alive.

"Sir I need to go to Portsmouth," Diane said.

Thomas couldn't help but smile as Sarah spoke up, "I'll drive you Diane. We'll take my Trailblazer. Also John called my cell phone while I was getting the coffee. Ann Marie came over. They are giving the kids dinner. The kids will sleep over our place tonight."

"Okay Sarah, let me get my things together and we'll go." Diane said.

2200 Local Time

Naval Medical Center

Portsmouth, VA

Sarah drove all the way to Portsmouth. It was about a two hour drive. When they arrived at the hospital, they found Harm in a private room. Sarah left Diane there as she went to call home to let John know she and Diane arrived safely and that they would be staying at the Norfolk VOQ for the night.

While she was on the phone Diane came out of Harm's room.

Sarah concluded her call saying, "John, Diane came out of Harm's room. I'll call you when I get settled. Okay. I love you to."

Diane walked up to her sister and said, "He fell asleep. He was fighting to stay awake until he saw me. I told him to go to sleep and that I'd be there when he woke up. Did you reserve a room in the VOQ yet?"

"Not yet, I thought we'd get a bite to eat first," Sarah said.

"Okay after we eat, get yourself a room. I'm going to stay here with Harm. The nurse is going to set up a cot for me." Diane informed her.

"Okay Di'. That fine with me," Sarah said. The two sisters then went to get their dinner.

2300 Local Time

Naval Medical Center

Harm sat up in the bed with a smile when he saw Diane enter the room. "You're looking even better now than you did when I left," she offered as she made his way over to his side.

"I'm feeling much better," he replied, his voice still hoarse. "Especially now that you're back, I missed you."

"You needed the rest," Diane said as she reached out to smooth his hair back before leaning down to brush her lips against his. "You actually have a little color in your face again."

"You mean besides blue?"

She smiled at his attempt at humor, but he quickly grew serious again. "I really am sorry, Diane."

"I told you earlier there was nothing to be sorry about, Harm," she chided him. "You're safe and
"That's all that matters."

"And you're stuck here in sickbay instead of at home for your birthday," he replied.

"Do you honestly think I'd rather be home without you than here with you?" she asked as she sat down on the side of the bed, her hip resting against his thigh. When he averted his eyes from hers, she reached a hand up to his chin and forced his gaze back to hers.

"I love you Harm and I married you for the long haul. Now you might as well drop the overdeveloped sense of chivalry because it isn't working. And since we're both here, we might as well enjoy spending my birthday together."

"Did I hear someone mention birthday?" Skates asked from the doorway. Harm and Diane both turned at the sound of her voice, and noticing Diane, Skates hurriedly added, "Mrs. Rabb."

Diane waved her into the room with a smile. "Relax, Skates. In here, it's just Diane."

"I was beginning to wonder if you really had made it at all," Harm teased as Skates made her way over to his bed.

"Hey, it's not my fault you were unconscious when I stopped by last night," Skates smiled at him as she motioned to Diane. "Besides, I figured you were in good enough hands that you didn't need me around getting in the way, so I decided to spend some quality time with my soon to be husband."

"So in reality you were dumped for another man, Harm," Diane added with a grin.

Harm laid his hand over his heart as he replied, "Sure, kick me while I'm down."

"Now, what was that I heard about a birthday?" Skates asked again.

Harm reached out and took Diane's hand in his before he replied, "Diane got promoted to Captain last spring, but we didn't have a wet down because Sarah was out on the Guadalcanal at the time. So we thought we'd have it on their birthday, which is tomorrow."

"Captain! That's great, congratulations," Skates replied.

"We were going to have the wet down at our house. Even the kids were going to be involved. But the crash spoiled those plans."

"Considering the alternatives, I'd say it's not so bad," Skates replied softly.

Harm immediately dropped his sarcastic tone and turned his attention fully to Skates. "I'm sorry, Skates."

"Nothing to be sorry for, Hammer, you kept us in the air as long as you could." They stared at each other for a long minute before Skates cleared her throat and looked over at Diane. "Take care of him, ma'am."

"I'm trying, Beth." Diane replied wearily.

"See! Even your wife knows my first name and uses it," Elizabeth Hawkes said lightening the somber mood.

Diane and Harm laughed at that.

Looking to leave diplomatically Skates added, "I'd better get going."
"Thanks for stopping in," Harm replied. "Take care, Beth."

"You, too...both of you."

Harm and Diane both watched as she made her way out of the room before they once again turned to look at each other. "See, I told you there was nothing to be sorry about," Diane said as she shifted her weight on the bed to lean across his chest.

"Can I be sorry about the fact that you're practically on top of me and I can't take advantage of it?" Harm asked with a grin.

"Who says you can't take advantage of it?" Diane teased as she trailed a finger down the side of his face.

Harm chuckled as he allowed his hand to move down to rest just above her knee. "You do realize that even though this is a private room we are in a hospital right?" Harm asked arching an eyebrow.

"And your point is?" Diane asked, kissing down his jaw.

"Well since I haven't been checked on in over an hour, I'd imagine that someone will be in here any minute now." Harm replied, feeling tingly all over.

"Sure," she replied as her finger traced along his lower lip. "But it's my birthday and my greatest gift is lying next to me and I want to open it."

Diane leaned over and replaced her finger with her lips, gently sucking on his lower lip. She was going to go further before she heard a voice from the doorway. "Commander Rabb, it's good to see you awake."

Diane turned in surprise and Harm sat up as straight as possible when they realized that Captain Ingles had joined them. Captain Ingles hid his smile as he made his way over to the bed. "At ease. How are you feeling, Commander?"

"I'm much better, sir," Harm's replied.

"I'm glad to hear that," Captain Ingles replied. "I spoke to Lieutenant Hawkes a few minutes ago and she said you seemed to be in good spirits."

"Yes, sir," Harm replied again. "My wife has done a good job of making sure of that."

"So it would seem," he replied. Sensing Diane's discomfort, he added, "I'm glad someone knows how to handle the Commander."

"I like to chalk it up to years of experience captain," Diane replied.

Ingles nodded before he continued, "I arranged a ride here to see how you are and to tell you a few things. Before I left the carrier, I looked over the data from your flight. While I'm sure there will be an official investigation, it looks like the accident was due to an electronics failure caused by the storm. I'm still amazed that you managed to keep her in the air as long as you did, Harm."

"Thank you, Sir," Harm replied.

"Get some rest, Commander," Captain Ingles said. "I'm sure you two are looking forward to out of here by tomorrow so that you can have that birthday party."

Harm and Diane both smiled at that, and seeing the look that passed between them, Captain Ingles
turned to go. When he reached the door, he turned back to face them.

"Mrs. Rabb I see that the nurses have brought you a cot. Hopefully, having you here will encourage the Commander to get some rest instead of harassing the nurses about when he will be released. I hope you are both home tomorrow to enjoy your celebration."

"Thank you, Sir," Harm and Diane replied together.

They waited until he left before Diane took a step closer to Harm with a grin on her face. "Do you suppose he realizes that an extra cot is a waste of time and energy?"

"Probably," Harm replied as he scooted over to make room for her on the bed. "But he knows the hospital needs to follow the UCMJ rules against fraternization."

"Well as a married couple, we don't have to worry about that." Diane replied as she settled down next to him, "Including you. Now here's the deal, I'll stay here if you agree to get some rest."

Harm nodded his head as he gave in to the fatigue he'd been fighting. "Deal," he agreed as he shifted his weight and pulled Diane into his embrace.

"Good night, Harm," she whispered as she leaned up and kissed him softly.

"Good night, Diane," he replied groggily as his eyes drooped shut. Within a matter of minutes, he was asleep and Diane watched him contentedly until her own weariness took over and she too drifted off to sleep.
Chapter 71

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 71

Wednesday, August 15, 2001

1445 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Harm was discharged from Portsmouth Hospital earlier that morning. While Diane had stayed overnight there Tuesday into Wednesday, Sarah went back home Tuesday morning to get Harm and Diane a change of clothing. John rode back with her. On the way they stopped at Oceana NAS to retrieve Harm's Corvette. Sarah drove that while John followed in the Trailblazer.

After Harm was checked out and deemed ready to go home and recuperate, the Rabb/Marshall motorcade went to the Rabbs. Sarah gave Harm a big hug and kiss saying, "I'm so glad you're still with us. Remember your doctor's orders, rest through the weekend. Admiral Chegwidden said that he doesn't want to see you at the office until Monday at least."

"Thanks Sarah. I'll see you then," Harm replied returning her hug and kissing her cheek. When Sarah and John left Diane ushered her husband into bed.

John and Sarah took the Rabb children to the Navy Yard Daycare center after they had spent the night at Florida Avenue. As Harm slept into the afternoon Diane went to pick-up her children. When they got home Diane had the kids come in to say hello to their father. Little Sarah Cate was the most emotional as she knew that her daddy was in a crash and had feared the worse. She launched herself onto the bed and only Diane's restraining hand had kept her from landing on her daddy. Harm just gathered her into a bear hug that seemed to go on forever. As Sarah Cate cried out her relief, there were also tears in Harm's eyes as he affectionately squeezed her. It was only her protest of "You're squishing me daddy," that he let her go. Before she scrambled off the bed he gave her a noisy wet kiss on her cheek. The twins just squealed and wiggled on their father as he held them in their own tight hugs for a time.

After she got the children occupied in the playroom, Diane came in and sat on the edge of the bed. Harm took her hand into his as she asked, "Are you going to give up flying now like you said you would?"

"Yeah I am. Before I crashed this time I already told Captain Ingles that I was on my last set of quals. Even though I'm already qualified on the Hornet, I'll let the younger guys fly the new birds like the Hornets and Raptors. I already told Sarah and John that unless a war breaks out, I'm done flying. I'll concentrate on the law from now on."

"Good, then let's hope that we don't have a war," Diane said half in prayer.

Thursday, August 16, 2001

2045 Local Time
Marshall Residence
Florida Ave., DC, NW

It was after dinner. John was dressed in his usual bed wear, pajama bottoms and a tee shirt. He was watching Sarah playing with their son Patrick. He had really missed this in the six months she was away on her duty cruise. At what was the routine in the six months Sarah was away Chloe and Caroline were taking a bath together in the master bathroom. Sarah and he could hear the splashing and giggling.

The couple was sitting cross legged on their bed as Sarah, dressed in her favorite red satin pajamas and exercised her son. As Patrick lay on the bed in front of her she would take his hands in hers and ask, "How big is my boy?"

Then she would spread his arms out from his side saying, "I'm this big." She would then wiggle her nose into his belly and give him belly burps. Patrick would just giggle at that and at her funny faces and exaggerated deep baby tone.

Eventually Chloe came out of the bathroom holding Caroline's hand. Chloe had her mother's terry bathrobe on while Caroline was wrapped in a large towel. The two girls each had a towel turban on their heads.

"Did you two have a good time in there? Is the bathroom all cleaned up?" John asked taking Patrick into his arms.

"Yeah dad it is. I put all the wet towels in the hamper," Chloe said.

Sarah got up and said, "I'll get Caroline dressed sweetie while you put your pajamas on." She reached and picked up Caroline and put her on her hip. She draped her free arm over Chloe's shoulder and walked out of the room.

She came home that day very grateful that she had three healthy children with parents that loved each other very much. She was involved in a custody case at JAG earlier that week. The whole affair took three days and came to a surprising conclusion.

Flashback

Earlier in the week she was sitting at her desk preparing for a case when Emma knocked on her open door lintel.

"Yes Emma," Sarah said looking up.

"Colonel I have Lt. Maat and her daughter asking for help here," Emma said.

"What kind of help Chief?" Sarah asked seeing the lieutenant and a little girl standing behind the Chief.

"A custody matter ma'am," Emma replied.

"Bring them in Chief," Sarah said getting up from her desk to meet her guests.

Sarah sat and listened to Lt. Maat's story. She was divorcing her husband Seth because she believed that he was abusing their daughter, Caitlin. After hearing the story, Sarah enlisted Bud's help as they went to court. Unfortunately Seth Maat was also an attorney who was infuriatingly assured and cocky. When they went to court they weren't able to prevent the judge from granting joint custody.
The surprise came the day after the court decision. Lt. Maat allegedly went UA with Caitlin immediately prior to her father's first visitation. Seth came storming into JAG, pushing people aside and threatening everyone in sight with ruining careers and litigation. He said that his ex-wife was seen leaving her home in the company of a blond female officer. When Seth saw Harriet, he knocked Bud down to get to her. Sarah stepped in to restrain him and took him down.

Sarah told him that she would appeal the joint custody based on the assault charges on Bud. She was able to do so that day. After work she hurried to pick up her children at day care and bring them home so that she could shower them with love and affection.

End of Flashback

Now as Sarah came back into the bedroom she announced, "Caroline is already asleep and Chloe is getting there. She had a big day today at the summer camp. The group she counsels must have walked all over the Smithsonian's Air & Space museum today. She is totally wiped out."

John patted the bed in front of him as he shifted to the middle and made room for her in the V of his legs. This was a routine that they settled into when she returned from her cruise.

As she got back onto the bed, she unbuttoned her top and took Patrick from her husband. As Sarah settled into him, she put Patrick to her breast. She was so thankful that her son took to her breast again even after not feeding there for six months.

As Patrick suckled John started massaging Sarah's shoulders. After a few minutes of his ministrations she put her head back and they shared a kiss. John's hands started wandering over her body. He rubbed his hands up and down her arms a few times then he moved to her front. As his hands brushed the underside of her breast she inhaled sharply. He kept that hand there as his other slid under her pajama waist band to the soft curls and her soft folds. As soon as he made contact Sarah gasped happily. She was lost in a sensual world of bliss as her child suckled on one breast her husband gently kneaded the other occasionally twiddling the nipple between his thumb and finger. He nibbled her neck and earlobes and stroked her core slowly and sensuously. She could feel his arousal pressed against her back.

Miraculously Patrick disengaged from her breast. Sarah almost flew out of the bed with him. John smiled as her pajama shirt flared out behind her as she hurried from the room to the nursery to put Patrick down.

When Sarah walked back into the room she locked the door and went right over to the bed. As she knelt in front of her husband, she captured his lips in a deep kiss as he slid her pajama top off her shoulders. During the kiss they both lay down on the bed. John held her very close enjoying the skin to skin contact. Their hands started to wander lower and lower on each other's body. Sarah loosened the draw string of his pajama bottom and he undid the snaps on hers. They both slid the bottoms off along with their underwear until they were able to kick them away.

Now they really started going to town on each other. John positioned them until Sarah was under him. He went to kissing down Sarah's neck to the valley between her breasts. He could still smell the hint of perfume that she dabbed onto there that morning. He went to concentrate on her right nipple. As he worked there, his hand dipped to her core. He slid his hand into her silk folds and languorously stroked her. He could feel as she became more aroused. He got up and positioned himself between her legs. He took hold of her butt and lifted her to his mouth. She draped her legs over his shoulders crossed her ankles across his back in an effort hold herself to him.
He started by giving her serious pleasure devouring her until he heard her gasp, "John I want you now!"

John put her down and kissed his way up her body, stopping as usual at her navel ring, sucking gently on that. Again John loved the gasps that his efforts brought forth. He worked his way up until he was positioned to enter her. As he laid a deep kiss on her, she guided him into her. She sighed as she felt his hips settle fully into her saddle and he buried himself to the hilt inside her. He remained there, unmoving, for a long time gazing into her eyes.

He declared, "I Love you Sarah Catherine Marshall. I will always love you no matter how long or how far we are separated."

As Sarah captured his lips with a searing kiss, tears rolled freely down her cheeks. During the kiss they started to stroke their bodies. Their passion was like the waves of the ocean, lapping gently at first, filling them both with pleasure and desire. Their undulations began building in strength as he plunged harder and deeper. She lifted her hips in an effort to keep him fully inside her at each stroke. They kept it up until finally they both unleashed their passion in their joint climax. They sank beneath the waves, submitting blissfully to the rapture of their coupling.

He lay on top of her for a time as they came back to reality. He rolled off her and pulled her close to him. She willingly rolled until her head rested in the crook of his shoulder and her leg and arm were draped over his body. With Sarah's head in his shoulder, John reached that hand to stroke and play with her hair. Sarah in turn stroked his cheek while she kissed around his neck and face, almost reminiscent of when she comforted him after he woke from his coma a few years ago.

Very soon after John pulled the comforter up over them, they fell into a blissful sleep.

Monday, August 20, 2001

1230 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Navy Yard, Washington, DC

Harm's first case after his recuperation was very complicated. Harms former shipmate from his first cruise on the Patrick Henry, a Commander Rick Stoechler, was assassinated in a high security cryptography unit along with a Sr. Chief Trujillo. One Commander Pagano, who was also there, was only wounded in the assault.

As Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, John was involved. At John's request, AJ assigned Harm to parallel NCIS Special Agent Mary Holland's investigation.

She was receiving obstruction from National Security Group. Webb brought Harm a dossier, from his source in Beijing. The information in the dossier allegedly showed that Stoechler was a mole feeding info to the Chinese.

There was also a videotape showing the gunman shooting those in the office. There was also the fact that the last security code entered was Stoechler's. Webb also showed that Stoechler had $150,000 in a secret bank account.

Both Harm and AJ were suspicious. AJ stated, "When did Webb ever do anything without an agenda?"

Stoechler's boss, Capt. Reeves, was shown to be real jerk obviously pulling rank and hiding
something from Harm. Earlier on the day of the shooting Reeves summoned Stoechler to a needless offsite meeting and the killer entered the secured area after he returned.

Trujillo was shot once but Stoechler was shot three times. The tape showed the killer get the drop on Pagano and shot him point blank. Stoechler's wife set Harm on track of a memo she heard her husband said he sent to Capt. Reeves about the new experimental Submarine named the 'Jimmy Carter'.

Sturgis said to Harm, "You know I had heard of espionage a few times while I was JAG for COMSUBPAC."

The Jimmy Carter's Captain told Harm of the sub's recent tonal signature tests (noise "signature" which allows tracking).

Gunny and Harm went over the video tape frame by frame and found alterations! Seeing this Harm went after the original tape but Reeves blocked access to it. So Harm got AJ to have John recommend to Admiral LaPorte that an Article 32-hearing be commenced. LaPorte agreed.

Friday, August 24, 2001

1030 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

The hearing commenced after the Navy's Electronic Security prepared the room. The ensured that there were no listening devices and then they put in place the measures to prevent the functioning of any outside listening devices.

The hearing went late into the afternoon. During the hearing Harm called Reeves to the stand. Bud defended Pagano whose soot in his wounds proved his lie that he was shot from across the room.

Then, in a surprise visit, they found Reeves, Pagano & Webb conspiring in his hospital room.

Judge Morris made Webb testify so he finally admitted that they knew Pagano was really the mole. He told the court that fed him dis-information about the tonal tests. Pagano then passed on that faulty information to the Chinese.

But then, in his spy job, Pagano decrypted a message between two Chinese agents about the results. So he then told the Chinese that the U.S. knew that THEY knew!

The assassin was then sent, hoping that the info would die with the people killed. He deliberately left Pagano wounded so that he could still work as the Chinese’ agent.

Webb stated that he and Reeves ordered the videotape altered. They then framed Stoechler in order to preserve their deception.

Harm called the 'Jimmy Carter's' Captain who unexpectedly testified in front of Pagano that the decrypted message of their tonal tests were not the real results, thus spilling the beans of the CIA’s counter-intelligence. At that point Webb and Reeves then decided to turn Pagano into a double agent.

Harm then asked Webb, "How does the court know that you are telling the truth?"

Webb responded, "I'm under oath."
During the hearing John sat in the audience. After hearing what he heard of the 'turning of Pagano' he left the courtroom as fast as decorum allowed. As he strode through the bullpen he was in such a hurry to get to J's office that he didn't even look into his wife's office. He needed to tell him to stop Harm's inquiry before it got too far along and blew the cover off the turning of Pagano.

Sarah was working in her office when John came into the bullpen. She always seemed to know when he was near. She looked up and smiled as she saw her husband striding purposefully toward AJ's office. She was a little distressed to see the look on his face and that he didn't even look toward her on his way to AJ's office. He walked into the admiral's office without knocking. Shortly after, she saw the two come out of the same office and very quickly walk back through the bullpen and take the stairs up to the courtrooms.

When AJ went into the courtroom to speak with Harm, John stood in the back. Harm was not happy, but he understood completely.

John came up and said, "I'm sorry Harm, but you'll just have to be satisfied that you at least cleared your friend."

Harm sighed in resignation as he replied, "Well there is that."

During the exchange Webb came over and said, "Stoechler's wife can keep the $150,000.00."

John added, "And you can tell her and her kids that their dad was a hero and that a medal will be coming soon."

"Thanks John, Webb," Harm said.

"Now if you two gentlemen don't mind, since I'm here, I'll take advantage and go see my wife." John said pleasantly.

1630 Local Time

Sarah's Office

This time as John strode through the bullpen he went right to Sarah's office. He was glad to see that Chloe was there as she arrived at JAG for her usual end of the day rendezvous.

He knocked on the lintel saying, "You two want some company?"

"We sure do as long as it's you," Sarah replied delightedly.

Chloe got up hugged her father and said, "Hi dad."

"Hiya cutie how was camp?" John asked hugging her back and kissing the top of her head.

"It was good. We went on a field trip to the Capitol. Congresswoman Latham was our speaker. She didn't recognize me under my ball cap. She started to say some things about how congress keeps our government especially our military from overspending. It was so funny when one our group Maggie Shepherd, whose 8 years old and her dad is also a JAG but in the Air Force, asked her how her policies would affect her dad."

"Oh that must have been fun," John asked.

"Oh she started to sound like that guy from that old black and white show, the Honeymooners. She started to stammer and didn't know what to say. It was really funny," Chloe finished with a laugh.
Sarah and John shared a good laugh at their friend's consternation.

Sarah was the first to comment, "You know it just struck me that Bobbie Latham is somewhat lazy. I looked up her school record on her website one time. She graduated with honors from college and law school. She only decided to run for public office after working one year in the Detroit District Attorney's office. That was probably the last time she actually practiced law. I bet she hasn't been inside a courtroom since then. She just used her law degree and her time in the D.A.'s office as a jumping off point to become a politician."

Turning to her husband she backed up her thesis, "I mean look at the Sigonella case in Italy a few years back. She only wanted to fix the blame on the pilot to appease the Italians. If Harm didn't go on the same run and find the private airstrip and prove that the girl who took her father's plane up was the real cause of that accident, we would never have found out. Then there was the Osprey case. She was so guilty of negligence herself that she almost scrapped a working program. Both cases she just didn't do her homework."

John nodded his head in agreement saying, "You're right. She's very good at publicly saying she's against excessive military spending, but only if it doesn't affect her agenda. She'll yammer on telling us how to run the military, suggesting we shouldn't fight wasteful wars or wait until we're provoked, but as soon as a spot she's been watching needs military intervention, she's equally quick to pull our trigger."

Sarah nodded her head in agreement then she asked, "Is your driver still waiting for you?"

"Yes he is. What do you have in mind?" John responded.

"If you don't have to be anywhere else this afternoon, why don't you go home with us," Sarah responded hopefully.

"I think I can arrange that. Let me call Walter and tell him," John said smugly taking out his cell phone.

Sarah listened to his side of the call. "Walter, listen take the Town Car back and you can secure for the day. I'll go home with my wife from here. Okay Walter I'll see you at 0700 tomorrow at my place. Good night to you to Walter."

John hung up the phone saying, "There, I'm all yours." He added, "He's a great kid. He just got married last month and his wife is going to have a baby."

"Oh another honeymoon baby," Sarah said smiling.

"Yeah when he told me, he sounded like he was on cloud nine," John said admiringly. He switched gears asking, "So unless the admiral has more work for you, we can leave."

Before Sarah could answer AJ came to the door and said, "Thinking of playing hooky with your wife captain?"

Sarah and John went to get up but AJ waved them down. Before he could say anything else, Chloe jumped up and hugged AJ saying, "Hiya Uncle AJ." She pulled his head down to give him a kiss on his cheek.

Sarah and John just smiled at the display.

AJ gladly endured the show of affection. He was sure that the staff in the bullpen was looking at it and smiling also. Prior to his wedding last New Year's Eve they rarely saw the affectionate side of
their CO. They all believed that the fact that he was now married was a very good thing for him. After he came back from his honeymoon, they saw a complete change in him. Before the wedding he did not interact with his staff beyond the usual work related things. Since his honeymoon, he was asking after the family members of the staff, officers and non-comms alike. He would stand patiently at their desks as they showed them the pictures of their families and commented sincerely. So his gladly enduring Chloe's hug and kiss came as no surprise to them.

AJ kissed Chloe back on her cheek. Then he handed Sarah a case folder, "Colonel read this at home and give me your opinion tomorrow. Then he said, "Go on get out of here, all of you."

John turned and Sarah looked up as they both said, "Aye, aye sir." The family got up and set about to follow the pleasant orders.

AJ just laughed. He was proud of these two. Sarah and John came so far under his command. Sarah was his Chief Of Staff and one of his best attorneys and John was well respected in Naval Intelligence. Sarah was due to go before the Colonels Promotion Board in November. He had no doubt that she would pass with flying colors.

After she put the folder in her briefcase, Sarah got her cover and her purse. She hooked Chloe's hand onto her elbow and followed John out through the bullpen. They went to the daycare center to pick up their babies.

Monday, August 27, 2001

To

Friday, August 31, 2001

JAG Headquarters

During the week Harm and Sarah were assigned very different cases. One reinforced their opinion of Congresswoman Latham, while the other was somewhat humorous.

At first Harm was assigned the Capt. F.R.U.T.T. case in Quantico, while Sarah was assigned the investigation of Capt. William Sheppard who had led his men into an ambush in Sierra Leone, which killed six. Harm became very anxious about the assignments and said that he wasn't without influence on the hill which was needed in the Sheppard case. AJ reluctantly reassigned the cases.

Bud assisted Harm as they investigated the incident. They found that Sheppard exceeded the rules of engagement. He was supposed to be escorting a convoy. Instead Sheppard went off in pursuit of a War-Lord named Colonel Mohammed Makani. Makani was the leader of a faction in the civil war in that country who was targeting US peace keeping forces.

The convening authority didn't follow Harm's recommendations and ordered a public court-martial due to public and political pressure. Sheppard said that he was given verbal orders to take out Makani by Colonel Klesco. However Klesco denied giving them. Turner who was assigned as the prosecutor, showed that Sheppard posted a wanted poster and reward of up to $900 for Makani and had twice before broken away from an escort mission in pursuit of Makani.

Harm found an ex-Maj. Frank Seawell who said that he was given verbal orders by Klesco to take out a Taliban leader after the Bekea Valley army barracks bombing. He did so with faulty Intel and ended up killing the whole family. Klesco left him hanging back then too. Harm also found that Klesco was subpoenaed before the National Security Sub-Committee chaired by Bobbi Latham. Latham sent several SPECAT messages asking Klesco to capture Makani. Klesco armed and fueled
all his men for aggression not just escort.

But because Seawell didn't want to testify Harm tricked Klesco into admitting that he did indeed give verbal orders in Bekea Valley and also to Sheppard. Sheppard was found not-guilty.

After the verdict Turner said to Harm, "I don't mind loosing this time."

However Latham was very angry. She told Turner, "Talk some sense into Harm. She told Harm, "Sheppard wasn't the only one to receive unofficial orders." She wouldn't say who gave them to her.

Klesco told Harm, "I have no hard feelings but I may need a good attorney."

Harm agreed to help if necessary.

On the other hand Sarah's F.R.U.T.T. case turned out to be a 'peeping tom' incident. The incident occurred through the use of the "Forward Remote Unmanned Tracking & Transmission" hovercraft being developed in a Maj. Millan's unit.

The mother of a 17 year-old girl caught the unit hovering outside her daughter's bedroom window attacked it with a broom. The mother demanded that Sarah throw the book at him to protect her daughter's virtue.

Sarah eventually found that Maj. Millan borrowed the unit in order to catch his own daughter who was sneaking out of the house. Before he could do it though, the unit was stolen out of his locked car. Sarah found that it was Millan's 13 year old son.

The 13 year thought the girl was pretty and just wanted to hang out. He was upset when Sarah wouldn't just let him apologize by Email.

Maj. Millan grounded his son to "Low tech".

When Sarah returned to JAG to submit her report, she and AJ shared a laugh because she said, "The boy would get much worse from the angry mother." AJ agreed that Maj. Millan would receive a letter of reprimand for misappropriating the unit and then not properly securing it.

Labor Day 2001

Rabb Marshall Bungalow

Rehoboth Beach, DE

The Rabbs and Marshalls were enjoying the last weekend of the summer at their Rehoboth Beach bungalow. Even though Sarah was away on her overseas duty a major part of the summer, John took the family there along with the Rabbs every good weather weekend of the summer. When Sarah returned, they still went out there every weekend.

As John and Harm sat on the beach chairs drinking soda, they watched their families playing by the water. Chloe and Sarah Cate were making a sand castle, while Caroline, Trey and Samantha ran in and out of the waves that lapped on the shore. Through it all Diane and Sarah kept their mothers' eyes on the babies making sure they didn't go any deeper into the water than the height of their ankles. Patrick was rolling around on a blanket playing with his own beach toys under the shade tent that was set up in front of where the men sat.

The Mackenzie sisters were uncanny in their almost duplication of each other. They were both wearing similar style bikinis that accentuated each woman's curvy fitness. Sarah's was black with
gold flecks while Diane's was dark red also with gold flecks. They both exercised regularly so as a result they both boasted firm flat stomachs that showed very little that the two women experienced two pregnancies each.

As the husbands admired their wives, John turned to Harm and said, "You know we are a pair of lucky guys."

Without taking his eyes off the two sisters, Harm responded, "Don't I know it?"

"I mean think about it. We each married a beautiful woman and we have six beautiful children between us. Life couldn't get any better," John said.

Harm turned and bumped his fist with John's in total agreement.

They enjoyed the tranquil scene and the ensuing week. After that they would look back and say it was the last good week in a long while. Across the globe events were unfolding that would turn the Rabbs' and Marshalls' world upside down.
Sarah was in the break room preparing her first cup of office coffee. It was a good morning.

Corporal O’Reilly arrived as usual at 0700 in the Crown Victoria provided by the Navy. It became a routine that he helped John and Sarah put Caroline and Patrick in the Trailblazer for their daily trip to the Navy Yard Daycare Center. He and John took Chloe to her high school. Caroline and Patrick had really taken to the Corporal who had insisted on helping saying, "I need the practice for when my wife has ours."

After Sarah dropped her children off at daycare, she walked to the JAG building. She didn't see many familiar faces as she walked through the lobby and then through the bullpen on the third floor. She stuck her head into the night duty officer's office to let him know she was there to relieve him and let him go home. The night duty was always given to the young new comers. This week it was Ensign Stacy Wilson who joined the JAG staff during Sarah’s duty cruise. After Sarah received the usual list of cases that came in, she put them in her office then she went into the break room.

She was glad that Tiner was always in at 0700 every day and always made the first pot of coffee. As Sarah stood enjoying that first cup, Loren Singer came in. Sarah could see that Loren was extra bubbly. She wore a bright smile and was holding her hands closed in front of her with her right hand covering her left.

Sarah had to ask, "Well Loren how was your weekend?"

Looked around to make sure no one else was around Lorne answered, "Well Sarah to explain I have to say that for the last 16 weekends Robert and I have been doing an activity that corresponds to a letter of the alphabet. Robert got the idea from some Fanfiction website he looks at. This past weekend was the letter 'P'."

Sarah's eyes widened anticipating where the conversation was going. So she put her coffee mug down on the counter as she asked again, "And this weekend he did what?"

"Well to start on Saturday he took me up to Philadelphia to see the Phillies play the Mets."

Sarah slumped her shoulders in disappointment, but Loren went on saying, "I did the same thing when he first told me where we were going. Well between the sixth and seventh innings they started doing the 'kiss camera' on the scoreboard, you know where the cameras try to catch couples and have them kiss."

Sarah nodded and Loren went on, "Well after the song finished a message flashed on the scoreboard
'From Bobby to Loren; will you marry me?"

Now Sarah was getting excited asking, "Aand?"

Smiling even brighter Loren held up her left hand to say, "And I said yes!"

"Oh my God," Sarah squealed as she saw a nice sized round diamond in a platinum setting on her ring finger. She smiled as bright as her colleague and opened her arms. Loren went to her and they hugged each other tightly for joy.

After they hugged, Loren said "I wanted to get here extra early so that you could be the first to know, you've done so much for me."

"Oh Loren, I didn't do anything I just..." Sarah began.

Loren interrupted her saying, "Yes you did. You picked me to work with you on the Russian rules for Kosovo, you've been a mentor to me and you have shown me nothing but friendship since I got here. I will never forget that." As she took Sarah's hands in hers she continued, "You've been the big sister I've never had growing up. Since that has been the case I have one request."

"What's that?" Sarah asked.

"Would you please stand up for me as my matron of honor when Robert and I get married?" Loren asked.

Sarah's face just dissolved into her watery smile as she went to hug Loren again. "Of course I would Loren. There's nothing I'd like better."

Loren squeezed her friend a little tighter at that. Just then they heard Harm say from the doorway, "So what's going on?"

They two women broke apart almost in embarrassment trying to covertly to wipe the happy tears that fell on their cheeks. It was Sarah who spoke first saying, "Ah, the lieutenant was just sharing what she was doing over the weekend."

"That must have been some weekend," Harm said. He knew that they were holding something back. He went to get his coffee thinking they would enlighten him further. But when he turned around they were walking out whispering to each other almost giggling. "Oh well I'll find out sooner or later."

0900 Local Time

JAG Conference Room

It was the usual staff call meeting as Admiral Chegwidden was giving out case assignments. After he assigned the last case he had a gleam in his eye as he asked, "Lt. Singer do you have something you want to tell us?"

Loren barely controlled her smile as she decided to string her CO along just for the fun of it as she said, "I don't know what you mean sir."

"Lieutenant out with it" AJ almost bellowed, but with a smile.

Loren just held up her left hand and smiled and said, "Robert Austen asked me to marry him and I said yes."

The whole staff at the table applauded saying their congratulations. When Loren told how he did it
Meg said, "That's Bobby for you a true Texan. He always did things in a big way."

Everyone shared laughs at that as AJ adjourned the meeting. They all took their turns to personally congratulate Loren on the way out.

At lunch time just as when Sarah was engaged, AJ called the commissary and had a small buffet with soft drinks set up in the conference room to celebrate. Loren was very appreciative. There she announced that Sarah would stand up for her as her matron of honor, while Meg, Harriet and Traci were asked to be bridesmaids. She said that Robert would call anyone else to be groomsmen.

The staff went back to work as the day just flew by.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001

0830 Local Time

JAG & NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, DC

Sarah was at her office ready to work. She was going over a case that she was assigned when her phone rang. As she looked over at it she smiled recognizing John's office number on the ID Screen. "Lt. Colonel Marshall."

"Hello beautiful" John said affectionately.

"Hello your self hot stuff. What you get lonely already it's only 0834," Sarah said.

John explained, "The SECNAV wants to meet Admiral LaPorte and me at 1100. He wants to go over some intelligence reports we submitted last month. I won't be able to make lunch like we planned."

"That's no problem baby, Caroline, Patrick and I will make do," Sarah said facetiously.

"That's my girl. I'll see you at dinner time then. I love you babe," John said.

"I love you to sweetie," Sarah returned as they both hung up.

Sarah worked at her desk for about 10 more minutes. It was 0848 when she was startled to hear Harriet cry out from the bullpen, "Oh my God."

Sarah got up and went out into the bullpen. She saw that the whole staff was looking at the TV monitors. She saw that ZNN was showing the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center engulfed in smoke and flames. She immediately went back in and called John's office.

"Are you watching what's on ZNN?" She asked him.

"Yeah I am. It didn't look like an accident. I'm getting ready to go into our situation room to help coordinate responses to this. I'll call you later. I love you Sarah," John said.

"I love you to John," Sarah replied in a subdued mood.

After she hung up with John she went back out to watch the news with everyone else.

Fifteen minutes later at 0903 she and the others there looked on in horror as they saw another plane crash into the World Trade Center's South Tower. She stood frozen in shock at the image on the TV.
It was Bud who spoke first, "That was no accident!"

Sarah snapped out of it agreeing with her colleague. After seeing the second plane deliberately fly into the second tower, she realized that John was right in his earlier assessment of the first one being no accident either.

She started to give orders, "Okay people get on the phones. Call all our people that are in the field locally. Get them back to headquarters. Those that are out of town, have them secure where they are until further notice. I'm going in to speak with the admiral. After that we should have answers as what we may need to do next."

She went right into AJ's office pausing only long enough to knock and wait for his "Enter."

"Sir I had the staff call all our people in the field to have them report back to here. Those investigators or litigants that are working out of town will be instructed to secure in place. I couldn't think of anything else we could do." Sarah reported to him.

"That's good colonel. I spoke with the SECNAV and he agrees with you. With all our people in one place we'll be better able to coordinate a response."

"Sir I'll be in my office if anything else comes up," Sarah suggested.

AJ agreed saying, "That's good Sarah. Let's remember to keep our wits about us. I have a feeling that this is just getting started. Carry on."

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah acknowledged before she turned and walked out.

For the next 40 or so minutes Sarah was in her office receiving updates as to the status of the staff in the local area. It was 0945 when Emma cried out, "OH NO!"

Sarah rushed out and almost fainted at what she saw but she did cry out in anguish as her thoughts went immediately to, "JOHNNY! NOOO!"

ZNN was showing another building enveloped in smoke and flames. The caption underneath said, 'Breaking News "Reports of fire at Pentagon' Western side of Pentagon is on fire. The western side of the Pentagon was where John's office was located.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 73

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Emma and Harm were already standing together in the bullpen and they rushed to stand at either side of Sarah. Sarah just stood there in shock with tears rolling down her cheeks, totally unresponsive. Behind her back Harm and Emma looked at each other and Harm nodded at the unspoken suggestion. They took hold of each of Sarah's elbows and gently propelled her back into her office. They left her there as she waited for word on her husband.

1030 Local Time

Pentagon, Arlington, VA

Immediately after the second plane flew into the South Tower John went to the situation room. At 0930 he returned to his office and started to confer with his Yeoman Senior Master Chief Carolyn Turner.

At 0937 they were rocked by an explosion. It seemed to come from a few offices away. John and Carolyn were thrown to the floor. They each sought cover under whatever furniture they were near. It was fortunate that they did as parts of the suspended tile ceiling rained down. One wall was totally gone and there was black smoke everywhere.

The wedge of the Pentagon where John's third floor office was located had undergone extensive repair and restoration. New high impact walls and glass windows was installed. It was this new tougher material that saved the two.

John called out, "Carolyn you okay?" As soon as he said this he started coughing as he sucked in some smoke.

He heard Carolyn coughing as well. He got down on his hands and knees and tried to wade through the debris. The smoke was thick, black and opaque. He felt his way along the floor as he moved in the direction of her coughing. He knew he reached her when his hand came in contact with hers. He took a firm hold and pulled her toward him.

Leaning close in to her ear he said, "We have to stay low and find our way out."

He felt as Carolyn nodded her head against his chest. John then took off his uniform shirt and then his tee shirt. He put his uniform shirt back on without tucking it in. The he ripped the tee shirt in half. He gave one half to Carolyn saying, "Wrap this around you nose and mouth." She did as he instructed as he did the same.

They crawled on the floor and felt their way to the office door. They almost fell into a void in the floor but they were able to get around it. As they turned to go another way they heard, "Captain, Chief this way!"

It was John's driver Corporal O'Reilly. He was sitting at his desk in the outer office when the plane
hit. Again the newer thicker walls protected him from serious injury.

John said in between coughing fits, "Keep talking Walter."

John and Carolyn crawled toward the sound of O'Reilly's voice. "Keep coming sir. I can just see you."

Eventually O'Reilly was able to grab the two and pull them through the door

"This way," O'Reilly said pulling them along. The three of them were able to get out into what was left of the hallway.

They stumbled through the smoky corridor staying as low as they could, feeling their way along the right side of the hallway. They came to a smoke barrier door and they pushed through it to the other side. The smoke door did as it was made to do, slow the spread of smoke from one side to the other. As the door swung closed behind them, their visibility range was better and they made faster progress along the hall. They passed through one more set of smoke doors until they came to a fire stairway. They went though and started descending the three floors to the building exit. It took them 25 minutes to get out of the building.

The scene they saw outside the Pentagon could best be described as organized chaos. First responders from the local fire and police departments quickly coordinated their rescue efforts with the Pentagon Police Force. Triage areas were set up as the wounded and sick were given the appropriate care.

John, Carolyn and O'Reilly were approached by three EMTs and led to a triage area. There they were told to sit as they were given oxygen.

As John sat sucking in the sweetest tasting air he had ever experienced, he took stock of himself. His dress whites could only described as dress black. They were covered with soot and dirt. There was no mirror that he could see but he judged correctly that his face was just like Carolyn's and Walter's, smudged with the same debris that covered his uniform.

John saw the TV cameras and realized that Sarah must be watching what was going on. He felt in his pocket for his cellphone, but he lost it the crawl from the office. He asked the EMT treating him for his. The EMT, Roger, handed it over. He was still coughing so hard that he kept mis-dialing the number to JAG.

Roger seeing him get frustrated after the third try offered, "Here captain let me." He took the phone and dialed the number John told him.

1045 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After sitting at her desk staring at the wall for 10 minutes Sarah had an epiphany. Sarah knew the one thing she could do to help her husband in his time of trial, just like she did when he was shot.

She got her purse from her desk drawer. She brought out her Rosary Beads that John's Dad gave her. She sat back down in her chair, turned it toward the window and began to pray the Rosary. Kissing the cross and blessing herself with The Sign Of The Cross she began with:

The Apostle's Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and Earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On
the third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, to sit at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen."

She segued to The Lord’s Prayer: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and glory forever and ever, Amen."

Onto The Doxology: "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. O my Jesus, have mercy on us. Forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. Take all souls into heaven, especially, those most in need of thy mercy. Amen."

Then onto to The Hail Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

She was able to pray a whole decade of the Rosary before she was interrupted.

1115 Local Time

After Harm and Emma got Sarah into her office to settle down, he checked on her a couple of times. At the second check, he saw that she was praying so he left her alone to stand back outside.

He bent over to whisper to Emma, "Chief, Sarah's got her Rosary out. Let's make sure no one bothers her unless they have word on John."

"Aye, aye sir, no one gets by me." Emma reassured Harm.

So while Harm helped the office deal with the crisis, Emma kept anyone from bothering her colonel. When Harriet had approached Sarah's door in an effort to comfort her friend Emma firmly said, "Unless you have word of Captain Marshall, don't even think of opening that door lieutenant ma'am."

Harriet scurried away to do some more make work.

Eventually AJ came out to the bullpen. He was notified of Sarah's reaction to the crash at the Pentagon and her worry for her husband. He saw that Harm almost standing guard outside Sarah’s office talking to staff.

AJ went over to him and asked, "How's Sarah?"

"Right now sir she sitting in her chair praying her Rosary," Harm informed his CO.

AJ nodded his head in understanding. "Well I just received word that her prayers have been answered," AJ said as he and Harm stepped into Sarah’s office.

When Sarah heard them come in she didn't raise her head to acknowledge their presence. She raised her hand behind her and pointed her index finger up as a sign to whoever it was to wait. She didn’t turn around until she finished her prayer and blessed herself with the Sign Of The Cross. When she turned around and saw it was AJ and Harm she went to stand at attention.

AJ waved her to stay seated and said, "Sarah, Harm, I just got off the phone with an EMT at the
Triage Area outside the Pentagon."

Sarah's face lit up in hope as AJ continued, "John, Chief Turner and Corporal O'Reilly all made it out."

Sarah slumped in her chair in relief, raised her eyes up and softly said, "Thank you God."

She then asked, "Why wasn't he directed to my number?"

AJ explained, "Well I told the switchboard to give me all those calls that were the notification type. That way no one would deal with any potential bad news alone. John was coughing so hard that he couldn't stay on long. He had the EMT relay to me that he was alright. They were taking him and the others to the Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington to be treated for smoke inhalation."

Sarah said, "I have to go to him."

AJ held up his hands saying, "The EMT told me that all the roads leading across the Potomac to Virginia have been dedicated to go in one direction, away from the Pentagon to the hospitals on this side. Only emergency vehicles are being allowed to cross from this side. I heard John in the background ask for the phone. When he got on he told me, 'Tell Sarah to get the kids and go to Ann Marie's'. He said he'll call you from the hospital as soon as he can."

Harm spoke up saying, "Well that means that my family can't go home either. We'll go when the day is over."

"Well that will be sooner than you think. Come outside the two of you so that I only have to say it once." AJ instructed them.

Once outside he gathered everyone into the bullpen where he announced, "The President has ordered that all government buildings be evacuated immediately. I heard that the Secret Service informed The White House staff, 'ladies, take your heels off and run.' We being in the Navy Yard are also considered to be in danger. So those of you with children in the day care center, go get them now and go home. After they leave, the rest of you get out of here."

The staff acknowledged him with the usual 'Aye, ayes' and went about evacuating. Loren Singer came up to Sarah and asked, "Colonel, what about John any word?"

Sarah smiled at her saying, "He got out, but he suffered smoke inhalation. He's going to a hospital in Arlington. I can't get to him from here. He said to take the kids and go to his sister's in Silver Spring. The roads going into Maryland aren't nearly as blocked as the ones going to Virginia."

Loren then asked in a lower voice, "Sarah would like me to help you with your children?"

Sarah looked at her with the watery smile and gave Loren's hand a squeeze in gratitude saying, "Yes I would, thank you Loren."

"You're welcome."

They and all the others then left the building to get the kids.

Since they couldn't go home to Fairfax, the Rabbs decided to also go to Ann Marie's along with Sarah's family to wait until the roads cleared. Sarah called Ann Marie to notify her of the influx of people to her home.

Ann Marie took it in stride saying, "Don't worry about it, that's what family is for."
They encountered a long line at the daycare center and then after picking Chloe up from her school, a lot of congestion on the local streets leading to the outgoing highways. The caravan of cars didn't get to the Matthews' home in Silver Spring until the late afternoon.

When they got there Ann Marie was on the phone with John. She immediately gave the phone to Sarah.

John was wheezing as he spoke. Sarah asked, "How are you and don't give me any bullshit to keep me from worrying."

John laughed a little but he stopped when it degenerated into a cough. "The doctors said I have a lot of soot in my lungs and they're treating me with a nebulizer with some medicine to clear them out. They want me here overnight. When the roads clear some, get home and pick me up tomorrow. Don't worry I'll be fine here for the night. I'm just glad that you and the kids are safe."

"We're fine. You get some rest and I'll see you tomorrow. I love you John, very, very much." Sarah said with a slight choke.

"I love you to Sarah," John replied.

They hung up the phone each thanking God that, even though they weren't together, they were alive. Tomorrow when they were finally reunited they would find a way to deal with this tragedy together.
Chapter 74

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 74

Tuesday, September 11, 2001

1930 Local Time

Roberts Residence

Georgetown, DC

Harriet and Bud were settled in their apartment watching their children play on the blanket on the floor. They had no desire to watch the news. As with the other parents who had jobs in the Navy Yard, they had to wait on line to pick up their son and daughter. They went straight home. They considered going out of town to a hotel, but they were assured that the Georgetown area was safe.

As Harriet sat watching her children play, she was thinking about the morning when ZNN showed the Pentagon on fire and Colonel Marshall's reaction. Then she thought of her reaction. When Mac had screamed in worry for her husband, Harriet took a relieved look at her husband, working the phones in his office. She had not been quick enough to move to assist or comfort her friend before Commander Rabb and Chief Gardiner directed Mac to her office.

When the admiral came out and asked after Mac and Harm told her that, "Right now sir she sitting in her chair praying her Rosary," Harriet had felt at a loss. She found that she was resentful of being left out of helping comfort her friend.

It had further embarrassed her that it was Loren Singer who went to Mac to offer her assistance in dealing with the Marshall children's evacuation. Harriet felt that should have been her role and that Loren was a usurper. Harriet liked Loren, after all Loren was Sarah Elizabeth's godmother, but Harriet was at JAG first.

After they had dinner and were sitting in front of the TV, Harriet told all this to Bud.

Bud simply said, "Harriet as much as you want to be, you have to realize that you are not the office mother or the center of attention. Everyone at JAG has their own personal needs and concerns to worry about. So don't be resentful that Commander Rabb and Chief Gardiner closed ranks around Colonel Marshall. She leans on them more than she leans on you or even me. I mean look at it. Harm is her brother in law and her working partner. Chief Gardiner is her Yeoman. So it was natural for them to assume the roles of comforter and protector.

Also each person has their own set of priorities, (Bud ticked off a finger for each point), first there is self, then family, then your job and then friends. I wasn't even thinking about making sure anyone else was safe but you, AJ and little Sarah Elizabeth. I knew you were alright because I saw you. Mac didn't have that. John was in terrible jeopardy being involved in the fire and collapse of the building he was in. So naturally Mac was not even thinking of anything or anyone else but her husband.

Harm and Emma saw that to and they made sure that she had that freedom to worry and eventually pray for her husband's safety. In the state she was in, she was unable to be helpful to anyone else.

Loren offered to help Mac because she doesn't have anyone else to worry about yet. The other side
of that coin is Mac needed Loren's help in the absence of John. After all we had to evacuate AJ and little Sarah and thus we were not in a position to offer to help Mac or to anyone else for that matter.

So don't be resentful of not being asked to help. Everyone at JAG did exactly as they were supposed to do. We had our own things to worry about."

Harriet didn't like what she heard, but she knew Bud was right. Still, she sat a brooded about the whole thing.

Bud saw that and said, "You know Harriet be thankful that we are together with our kids. There are over three thousand families who don't have that tonight." Bud softened his chastisement with a kiss to her temple.

Harriet sighed as she thought, 'Bud is right. I should be thankful.' She responded, "I know sweetheart. I guess I'm just feeling survivor's guilt."

Bud just nodded and hugged her closer and didn't say a word.

Same time

Matthews Residence

Silver Spring, MD

Loren accompanied the Marshalls to Ann Marie's. Ann Marie asked her to stay for dinner saying, "Loren the roads are a mess right now. While we wait for them to clear, let's have something to eat."

Loren accepted the gracious hospitality. During the course of the afternoon and evening Loren observed that when Chloe was left alone, she became very withdrawn and nervous. Loren also noticed that Chloe put on a brave front when her mom was with her. So while Harm and Peter were dealing with the children, Sarah was on the phone with her mom and Diane was helping Ann Marie clean up after the meal, Chloe slipped out the back door. Loren saw that she had a sad look on her face so she decided to go out after her.

She found Chloe sitting on a lawn chair in the farthest and darkest part of the back yard. As Loren got closer she heard Chloe crying.

Loren called out softly, "Chloe are you okay?"

Chloe was startled and said in a fearful but still petulant tone, "I'm fine go away."

Loren heard the fear in Chloe's voice. She got another chair and put it down in front of Chloe's. She leaned toward the young girl with her elbows on her knees and said, "No you're not. Tell me what's bothering you."

Loren had an idea what was bothering her young friend but she knew Chloe needed to say it. Otherwise it would just eat her alive.

At first Chloe was resistant, wringing her hands and looking up, down and all around. It wasn't until she happened to look into Loren's eyes that the emotional sandbar she was piling up finally collapsed under the torrent of her tears. She flung herself at Loren wailing, "I'm so scared Loren."

To her credit Loren didn't flinch, but opened her arms and gathered Chloe in as the young girl cried all her fear out on Loren's shoulder.
While Sarah was on the phone with Deanne she saw Chloe go out and Loren follow her. She hung up with her mother and followed them out. She stood back as she saw Loren pull up her chair in front of Chloe and speak softly. As the two sat there, Sarah waited. While she wanted to go and offer her daughter her shoulder, she didn’t want to embarrass Chloe. She knew Chloe was in good hands with Loren. When she saw Chloe fling herself at Loren and cry on her shoulder Sarah put a hand to mouth to stifle her own cry.

As Chloe cried, Loren looked up and saw Sarah standing by the backdoor. Sarah nodded at her in approval. Loren nodded back and held Chloe and let her cry it out. Sarah sat down on a nearby lawn chair and waited.

Soon Diane and Ann Marie came out to see what was going on. Sarah put a finger to her lips to ask them to be quiet. She pointed at Loren and Chloe. The three women stood and waited, ready to offer whatever support they could.

As Chloe knelt in Loren's arms she started telling her what was on her mind, "I lost one whole family and I'm so afraid of losing this one. My dad was lost in a fire with my grandma and now my next dad was caught in another fire. What am I gonna do if he doesn't come back?"

When Sarah, Diane and Ann Marie heard that they each got a lawn chair and went to sit with Loren and Chloe. When Chloe saw them sit down she disengaged from Loren in embarrassment saying, "I'm sorry mom. I didn't want to upset you. You have dad to worry about. You didn't need me being a cry baby."

Sarah had her watery smile as she opened her arms. "Come here sweetie."

Chloe went over to Sarah and melted into her embrace. She told her daughter, "You are too young to think you have protect adults from worrying. Right now there is nothing to worry about. You dad is going to be alright and we'll see him tomorrow. All you need to do is be a 14 year old."

"I know mom, but I'm just so scared. They could crash a plane anywhere. How are we supposed to live like that?" Chloe asked.

It was Ann Marie who answered. "You keep doing what you always do. Live your life. There was a period in the 50s that everyone was afraid the Russians would drop the bomb at any time. It was just something that was there and it still is. That didn't stop anyone from living, going to school, going to work or starting families. We're still here. The terrorists think that we'll just cower and stop living. They made us stop for a time today, but we'll still sleep tonight and tomorrow we'll still get up and go to school and go to work. It's what we do."

Sarah, Diane and Loren nodded their heads in agreement. Ann Marie continued, "That doesn't mean we forget or forgive. Loren, your mom, your dad, your aunt and uncle will go in tomorrow and work on a way to get the bastards that planned this atrocity. That's also what we do."

Chloe smiled a small smile and said a soft, "Hoorah." The four women all shared a soft laugh.

Chloe then got a quizzical look on her face. Sarah saw that and asked, "What is it?"

Chloe responding by asking, "The Roberts went home to Georgetown and Aunt Diane and Uncle Harm came here because the bridges going to Virginia were closed."

"Yes that's right so?" Sarah asked.

Chloe asked, "How come we didn't go home?"
Sarah answered, "Well Georgetown is a little farther away from the White House than our house. The White House was always considered a target and the streets in a 15 block radius around there would be closed off. We live 10 blocks away. So we had no choice but to come here and wait until the streets opened up."

"Oh well that makes sense," Chloe concluded. Then she asked again, "How come Loren couldn't go home? No offense Loren but you live in Georgetown too. How come you didn't go home?"

Loren was embarrassed to say until Ann Marie smiled and said, "Come on out with it Loren."

"Well I don't live in Georgetown anymore. I bought a house three blocks from the White House. I knew I couldn't go home until the area opened up. So I came here with the colonel." Loren answered.

"When did you do that?" Sarah asked her.

"Well I closed on it four weeks ago. Bobby and I moved in two weeks ago last Sunday. I only had to move my bedroom set so we rented a U-Haul van. Meg and her Robert helped us. Bobby and I picked out the living room and dining room furniture together. As we shopped he just kept saying, 'that's good honey, whatever you want.' He was so accommodating," Loren answered.

Ann Marie and Sarah both chuckled. Sarah explained, "John did the same thing when he asked me to help pick out the furniture for our house also before he asked me to marry him."

"I think that's a prerequisite to asking. If he can agree with you on the furniture, then he can agree on everything else," Diane said.

They all shared a laugh

"Come on we'll see if the roads are opened up so that we can go home," Diane suggested.

Ann Marie gave everyone a tight hug as they all trooped out to their cars to go home.

The Marshalls were able to get home but Loren was not. Her block was still closed. Sarah offered her the foldout bed in the study. Sarah lent her a pair of silk short pajamas to sleep in and some clean towels.

For the next day, even though Loren was shorter, they happened to wear the same size lingerie. So Sarah lent her a panties and bra set to wear the next day.

Sarah started to tell Loren about the morning, "Patrick and Caroline usually wake us up between 0530 and 0600. John and I take care of them before we..." Sarah just started crying realizing how close she came to losing her husband.

Loren went right to her and pulled her into a tight hug. She led Sarah into her bedroom and sat her down on the bed. As Sarah bent over and cried into her hands Loren sat beside her and rubbed her back. Sarah finished crying and looked up at Loren. She pulled Loren into a tight hug of her own and said, "Thank you Loren. You've been a really good friend to day."

"You're welcome Sarah I was glad to be there for you." Loren returned gratefully.

Sarah smiled and said, "You know this doesn't change anything. I'll still kick your butt when we oppose in court lieutenant."

Loren smiled knowing that Sarah was using humor to deflect her anxiety. She retorted, "With all due
They both shared a cathartic laugh at that. Sarah took a deep breath and continued, "Well after the kids are fed, we get them ready to go out. While one of us took a shower the other got the kids dressed. Usually I'm taking the first shower."

"Well I'll help out in the morning as best I can so that we can get going so you don't have to worry." Loren offered.

"Thanks Loren. I appreciate it. Listen let's get some sleep. Good night Loren, sleep well," Sarah said.

"Good night Sarah you sleep well too," Loren returned as she got up and walked out.

After Sarah got changed for bed, she picked up the phone and called John at the hospital. She was only to stay on for 20 minutes due to the hospital restrictions. She heard that John was breathing better. John told her that Carolyn and Walter were also doing better.

"Why don't they let us sleep in scrubs or sweats? I feel totally exposed wearing this stupid gown. They wouldn't even give me any shorts." John complained.

Sarah giggled at her imaging of the sight saying, "Now you know how I felt when I gave birth two times and they gave me those gowns. I was always pulling up the covers to make sure that I wasn't exposed."

John laughed and said in a tender tone, "I'm going to have a hard time sleeping without you ninja-girl," John told her.

"Me too hot stuff," Sarah said choking up.

John said, "Don't worry honey. I'll be home tomorrow," John reassured her.

"I love you sweetie," Sarah said.

"I love you to honey," John returned.

They hung up with each other and they settled into some resemblance of sleep knowing they would be together the next day.
Chapter 75

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 75

Wednesday, September 12, 2001

Marshall Residence

Florida Avenue, DC, NW

The day after the attack Washington DC was in a state of lock down as President Bush declared that all government offices were to be closed. AJ called to tell Sarah of the closure. The schools in DC were also closed. So Sarah, Loren and Chloe buckled the Marshall children into the Trailblazer and set off. They dropped off Loren at her house. Loren was able to get to her house after her identification was verified. It was difficult because her driver's license did not reflect her new address yet. It was fortunate that she carried her deed to her new house, proving that she lived at her address.

After ensuring Loren could finally get to her home, Sarah set off to pick John up at the Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington. John was able to score a set of surgical scrubs to wear home. His dress white longs were a total mess as the nurses put them in a plastic drawstring bag. He wore his shoes and he was able to purchase a set of underwear and socks in the hospital shop.

He was sitting in a chair in his room when Sarah came in with the kids. After properly greeting his wife and kissing the babies, he gathered Chloe into a long tight hug. When Sarah called him that morning, she told John of Chloe's anxiety. They both shared joyful tears at their reunion. Sarah stood by and watched shedding her own happy tears.

Before they pulled apart John told her, "Don't worry about me, I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck with me until you're married and out of the house."

Chloe laughed at that and whispered in his ear, "Remember what I told you, I want a guy just like you."

"I hope you find him." John whispered back as he held her, shedding his own happy tears.

They finally broke apart and wiped the tears from their faces. As Chloe held onto Caroline's hand, he gathered Patrick in one arm and draped his other over Sarah's shoulder and left the room.

On their way out the Marshalls met the O'Reillys, Bridget and Walter, as well as Carolyn and her fiancé, Bruce.

It was Bruce who greeted them, "Hello captain. I want to thank you for helping Carolyn."

"As I recall Bruce, we were both in the same situation. If anyone should be thanked it's Corporal O'Reilly here. When the plane hit and the smoke came in Carolyn and I didn't know which way to go. Walter was the one to get us out to the hall. From there we were all the same," John told him.

Walter just nodded his head saying, "I'm just happy we all got out." Then he asked, "What now sir?"

"Well now we go home and rest with our families. The doctors told us to take a week off and get our lungs clear. There are other people getting together to assess what happened and how we're going to
respond," John replied.

Sarah offered, "I spoke with the head of the counseling at Bethesda this morning. She told me that they were setting up psychologists, clergy and other grief counselors to see all the survivors who think they may need help. John and I are going to call them. Bridget, it would do you two good to talk about what happened. I know it helped John and I when he was shot and when I came back from the Guadalcanal."

"Thank you colonel, I really appreciate you telling us that. I think Walter and I will decide what we need to do together," Bridget said.

With that they walked out of the hospital and went home.

Thursday, September 27, 2001

1100 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Hospital, MD

It was two weeks since the attacks. The Marshalls still had to wait to go for any counseling due to the overwhelming number of appointments made in the wake of the attacks. They felt they had experience with dealing with their stress so they did not mind waiting, knowing they would make an appointment when they felt they most urgently needed to. Now, that time came.

In the two weeks since the attacks, the babies had no idea what was happening as they went to sleep in their cribs with the usual bedtime activities. The older Marshalls on the other hand were having trouble sleeping, that is unless they were sleeping in the same bed. Most nights Chloe would wake up crying and Sarah would go in and bring her back to bed with her. Sarah would lie in the middle of a spoon sandwich holding Chloe with John spooned behind, holding Sarah.

The adults both agreed that this sleeping arrangement could not continue. So Sarah called Bethesda and made an appointment to see a counselor. Because of the back log of appointments their name was put into a queue that meant they would have an appointment when a counselor became available.

After leaving the babies at Ann Maries in Silver Spring, not far away from the hospital, Sarah, Chloe and John went to Bethesda. They walked through the corridors to their appointment with their counselor. It would be someone new. They knew that Jordan Parker was promoted to Commander and rotated to Rota, Spain a month before the attacks so they had no idea who their counselor would be.

When they arrived the receptionist recognized them and said, "Commander McCool will see you now."

John was intrigued by the name. He didn't share what he thought with Sarah or Chloe. That is until he walked into the psychologist's office. Then his face split in to wide smile, he opened his arms and said, "Vera, Vera!"

A tall slim African American woman smiling a smile as wide as John's came around from behind her desk and almost ran to him also with her arms wide open saying in reply, "John, John!"

They met half way and embraced heartily. At first Sarah and Chloe were bewildered at the shouted greetings then they smiled as they saw the two embrace like old friends.

They broke apart as she and John turned toward Chloe and Sarah. Vera went forward and
introduced herself to them. Shaking their hands she said, "I'm Dr. McCool. I took over Jordan's patients when she went to Spain."

Smiling Sarah asked, "I'm very pleased to meet you. How do you know John?"

As Vera quietly directed the family to sit on the office sofa John answered, "We went through ROTC together at Fordham as undergrads. At that time her name was Tyler. She dated one of our ROTC associates." Turning to Vera he said, "I see you married Kendall. When did that happen and why didn't I get an invitation? And how is Eight Ball doing?"

"He's doing fine. He is the XO on the John Stennis. We were married in San Diego 5 years after we graduated Fordham. It was a small affair just his parents and mine. There wasn't time to plan anything bigger. Right after our honeymoon Kendall went to Surface Warfare College while I went and got my doctorate in Psychology. After what I saw coming out of Panama, The Gulf War and the bombings after that I felt that's where I could best serve the Navy," Vera answered.

Sarah laughed at the 'Eight Ball' crack. Sarah went on and then asked, "Were the three of you thick as thieves in college?"

Vera answered, "Yes we were."

She just had to ask the next question, "Is Kendall by chance also African American?"

John and Vera nodded knowing what was coming next.

"So if Kendall was Eight Ball, did that make John, Cue Ball?" Sarah asked with a crooked look in John's direction.

Vera and John laughed some more. Vera explained, "John and Kendall worked at a hotel in Manhattan together as Security Guards while we were in college. One day they called each other over the house phones. Knowing it was John, Kendall answered, 'Al's poolroom, Eight Ball speaking.' So John started calling him Eight Ball, not even taking his skin color into consideration. One day John called Kendall that in front of the security director who asked the same question you did. And it stuck. The Security Director was to say the least incredulous at that."

After they shared a few laughs Vera got down to business, "When I was given the list of people that made appointments for counseling and saw John's name, I asked that you be assigned to me and retrieved your file from Jordan's archives. When I read it I was astounded. You guys have been through a lot of stuff."

"Yeah all that and what I just went through getting out of the Pentagon when the plane crashed into the section where my office is, or make that, was, located," John replied.

"What about you Chloe?" Vera asked the teenager.

At first Chloe was reluctant to say anything but Vera said, "One of the answers that your mom gave the counseling organizer was that you were finding it hard to sleep alone. How long has that been going on?"

Chloe looked up and said, "Since the 11th."

"Why do you feel that you can't sleep alone?" Vera asked.

Chloe answered in a rambling way, "I'm so afraid of losing my dad again. I already lost one dad to a fire. When I heard that Dad was in a fire I just freaked. It wasn't until I got to Aunt Ann Marie's that I
finally had a good cry. I didn't want mom to worry about me as well as dad and Gram Deanne. Her house isn't far from the Pentagon and I'm just so scared."

Vera jumped in when Chloe paused to take a breath, "Well he's right here, he's not leaving you. In his position, he's unlikely to be deployed overseas."

Chloe replied, "But what about mom? She can go overseas on a case, a mission or whatever. What would I do then if I lost her?"

Sarah drew Chloe into a hug, "Oh honey. If I go anywhere I'll be on a ship or any other place that's safe. I'm only a lawyer after all."

Chloe seemed to be soothed by this. For the rest of the hour the Marshalls went on to tell Vera of what they feared, how they felt about the attacks, the people who planned them and all the other related things that they feared. They ended the session by showing photos of their respective families and exchanging e-mail and home addresses.

Before the left Vera advised Chloe, "Don't bottle your feeling or fears. Tell your mom, tell your dad about them. Together you can better deal with them. Remember what you mom said, just worry about being a 14 year old."

Chloe smiled at that. Before they left Vera called Sarah and John aside. "I'd like to see her alone if that is alright with you."

"I don't think that would be problem. Chloe used to see Jordan alone and it helped her,' Sarah replied.

Vera nodded then she asked, "That's good, will next week at this time be alright?"

Sarah and John agreed that it was so they made the appointment. On the way home Sarah told Chloe about the additional session.

Chloe replied, "I'll do whatever it takes to get over feeling this way. Just promise me that you do whatever you need to do to keep safe."

Sarah and John both said together, "We promise." The family shared a laugh at that as they went to pick up the babies at Ann Marie's.

As the autumn went on, the initial sting of the attacks was replaced by the resolve of righteous retribution as President Bush authorized action against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Sarah and John as well as Harm and Diane were deeply involved in contributing to the efforts.

October 15, 2001

To

November 1, 2001

Barents Sea

In October those efforts were somewhat interrupted. Sarah was a bit inaccurate when she told Chloe that she would be deployed to a 'safe' ship. On October 15 Sarah was ordered to serve on the US Submarine 'Watertown' for three weeks. Sarah was sent to the Watertown because she and Bud assisted female Ensign Terry Childers in testifying before Congresswoman Latham's committee regarding her wanting to serve on submarines, despite policies against it. During the hearings Latham
shanghaied Sarah into taking a "fact finding" sub cruise on the Watertown with Flagler and reporting to her.

Also during that time Harm was also invited for a Public Relations cruise on the Russian sub Minsk, coincidentally in the same area of ocean as the Watertown.

Harm's participation came about when his friend from Russia, Capt Alex Volkonov, came to the US to ask Harm for assistance. The Russians were proceeding with their military exercises as if nothing was amiss elsewhere in the world. Volkonov was investigating the demise of the Russian sub "Vladivostok" that occurred during one of those exercises just a week after the '9/11' attacks. Volkonov was saying that the Watertown rammed the Vladivostok.

Reluctantly Harm promised to assist in any way he was allowed. When Harm went to see Capt. Baxter at the Norfolk Docks, he showed Harm the undamaged bow of the Watertown, proving that Volkonov's claims of ramming were baseless.

After seeing the undamaged bow, Harm went and spoke with Volkonov. Volkonov finally admitted that that the experimental Russian Shkval 2 torpedo did a 180 and sunk their own ship. It was after this that Harm was invited to go on the 'public relations cruise.'

Captain Baxter was present as Sarah and Harm was briefed. Captain Baxter said to Sarah, "Colonel Marshall I will need to see your complete report on your experience on the Watertown."

Turning to Harm he said, "And Commander I will need a complete report on everything you see and hear on the Russian sub. That will include sailor morale, their capabilities and equipment."

Sarah and Harm both chorused, "Aye, aye sir."

During the cruise Sarah heard some sailors speaking in Russian about what was served for dinner, which she thought was inaccurate. When she went to correct them they clammed up. She mentioned this to Flagler who told her that the sailors were fluent in Russian and that they were listening to the conversations on the Minsk.

Sarah asked, "How is that possible?"

Flagler said, "Our sonar listening capability is that good."

"Oh wow!" was all Sarah could say.

That capability came into play during the middle of the cruise

They heard that the Russian Captain was firing another Shkval 2 torpedo. When they went to retarget it, the torpedo did a 180 degree turn and homed in on the Russian sub.

Sarah was able to convince Flagler to break radio silence. Sarah told the Russians that US agents placed listening devices aboard all Russian ships trying to convince him not to fire the defective torpedo.

The Russians fired anyway. Flagler fired a drone (toward the Minsk) so that when the torpedo finally did its 180 and came back at the Minsk, it acquired the drone at the last minute and prevented it from hitting the Russian sub.

After 3 weeks on the cruise Sara and Harm returned home via Andrews. They were met by their families. Sarah did not elaborate to Chloe how dangerous the mission really was.
Saturday, November 3, 2001

1415 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., DC, NW

Sarah was extremely glad to get home in time for this weekend. It was Patrick’s first birthday party. Sarah and John went all out for their son just as they did for Caroline’s first birthday a year ago August. The Matthews, Rabb and Roberts children were there. John locked the utility room and set up the basement playroom as the party room. Sarah draped olive green and red crepe paper streamers along the ceiling. It was John’s concession to her Marine theme. Caroline’s first birthday party was done with a Navy theme. Patrick was even dressed in a baby Marine outfit. Sarah did not let any of the Navy men rib John on Patrick becoming a Marine.

It happened when AJ commented, "John if you're going to let your son become a marine you'll be out numbered."

John just gave him a look and pointed back over AJ’s shoulder. When AJ turned to see what John was pointing at he immediately regretted his comment. That’s because unfortunately for him Sarah had just come down the stairs with some more cups. When she gave him her Marine glare AJ immediately backtracked with, "Not that there is anything wrong with that."

Sarah said, 'Damn right." Then she put the cups down and turned around smiling sweetly at the other children as she got them ready to play the next game.

Sydney came up to rescue her husband. She gave him a drink of punch and reminded him, "This is her house AJ, not your office. Being in the navy all these years you should know better to engage your brain before your mouth."

The older children played the usual games as Patrick crawled around after them. Sometimes Chloe was holding her brother up as he tried to walk. John took a lot of photos of that as well as Patrick with the other children. There was the usual photo of Patrick in his high chair with chocolate cake smeared all over his face and his formerly clean uniform.

The party ended with a lot of smiles.

That night after the children were all asleep, John and Sarah lay holding each other. As she lay with her head on his chest Sarah said, "I would consider today to be a success, wouldn’t you?"

"I sure would, though Patrick had no idea what was going on. I think he just enjoyed all the extra attention," John replied.

"Yeah he did. I loved his smile when he smushed the cake into his face. That's one picture we'll keep and show to his girlfriend," Sarah replied.

John chuckled, "Just like we'll do with Caroline's picture."

John and Sarah shared a laugh at that. Then she settled down on his chest. As she played with the hair on his chest, she asked her husband, "John do you want our children to follow us into the military?"

John pulled her closer, kissed the top of her head before he answered, "No I don't. I mean if they want to, unlike my mom with me, I'll support them whole heartedly, but in light of what's happening
today, no I don't want them in the military."

Sarah wasn't surprised by his declaration, but she had to ask, "Could you tell me why? I want to see if we're on the same page."

John elaborated for his wife, "When we went in during the Eighties, Iran was a clear enemy, not that we did anything. Then in the Nineties there was Iraq in the Gulf War and then the Serbs in Bosnia. The enemy was always clearly defined, they had a face and they were over there. But now the enemy isn't as clear to define today. They are anywhere and everywhere. Anyone with a grudge is gunning for us and not just on some foreign battlefield, but right here in our city, using our own aircraft. How are they supposed to fight that?"

Sarah answered, "We fight by using all the assets we have, you as the Navy's intelligence chief and me as a lawyer. We do the best that we can. That said I agree with you. We're like every other generation before us wishing that when our children grow up, there be no more wars that force them to join up and fight."

John said, "Well I hope that that happens. In the meantime it's still early enough in the evening. How about some exercise?"

"What do you have in mind Mr. Marshall?" Sarah asked seductively.

"Oh just this," John replied just as seductively. At that he turned them over so that Sarah was lying in his arms under him. He laid a deep kiss on her, which she returned with equal fervor. They went right to removing each other bed clothes and making long languorous love. After they brought each other to culmination a couple of times they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Saturday, November 10, 2001

1530 Local Time

Rock Creek Park, DC

John pushed the double stroller with Caroline and Patrick in it through the park. Sarah and Chloe walked on either side of him, each with a hand hooked through either of his elbows. The two women were totally disheveled. They were wearing sweat suits. Their hair was matted to their skulls by sweat and sweat made their tee shirts stick to their chests under the sweat suits. The tee shirts were gray and had "JAG-A-Thon" emblazoned on the front. Sarah just finished running a 10K race for charity in the park.

John wore the same tee shirt, but he wasn't sweaty, because he wasn't eligible to run in the race. The only other participants were from the JAG Corps. The First Place Prize was command of the JAG Office for a day.

So John as well as Diane, Bobby Austen and the other JAG spouses lined the course to cheer their loved ones on. They all met at the finish line to await the winners.

Chloe assisted Harriet in giving out the water to the runners along the course. She worked so hard at it she felt she that used up as much energy as the runners themselves. It was amusing to watch as Harm and Sarah struggled for first place, crossing the finish line together thinking they won. Just as they decided to flip for the command prize, Sturgis came over and said, "What took you two so long, I finished the race 5 minutes ago."

Harm and Sarah were chagrined to find that they had only achieved second place. Turner's first order was for them to go back down the course and cheer Bud on to the finish. Bud would finish last.
After the post-race activities were completed all the participants went their separate ways.

As they walked along, Chloe asked, "So who do you think won the pool?"

"What pool?" Sarah asked.

"The pool the new lieutenant JG was running. What was his name oh yeah Greg Vukovic. You know I heard that you and Uncle Harm were the favorites to win until Commander Turner decided to join the race. I also heard that Lt. Roberts was the favorite to finish last."

"That's awful! That's one more reason why I don't like him," Sarah said.

John just had to ask, "And what was the first reason?"

Sarah answered, "He's hitting on every other unmarried female in the office. You know if I wasn't wearing my wedding ring, he would hit on me. If he's not careful, he could end up facing fraternization charges. Still Just wait till Monday, I'll kill him."

"Oh don't worry about that mom. Lt. Simms gave him such an earful that he ran away scared," Chloe said with a laugh.

Sarah snorted saying, "That's good. You don't need to get Harriet riled at you. Still he's mine Monday."

Getting in on the act John suggested, "Well you could use the Commander Burke approach on him. You know give him all the hard and scutty cases and ride his back until he cracks."

Sarah smiled at that saying, "Yeah that sounds good."

Then Sarah had another thought, "Or I could send him to Afghanistan with a Marine platoon."

Sarah smiled as she envisioned the look of terror she would evoke on Vukovic's face.

John just commented, "Oh, that's cold Mackenzie, just cold."

"Yeah isn't it now," Sarah said smiling devilishly.

The family shared a good laugh as they got to their car and drove home.
Chapter 76

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 76

Thanksgiving Day 2001

1400 Local Time

Matthews Residence

Silver Spring, MD

Since air travel was still difficult to arrange in the wake of the attacks, Ann Marie had Thanksgiving at her home. So she got together with Sarah, Diane, Harriet and Sydney to plan the holiday. James and Maureen Marshall were driving down from New York on Wednesday and stay at Silver Spring. Deanne would come in with the John Marshalls. The weekend before the holiday Ann Marie asked Harm that since his parents could not fly in if his Grandmother Sarah would like to attend. Harm called her and she said she would be delighted to be there.

That meant besides the 13 adults, there would be 10 children attending. It promised to be a festive day, and it was. Ann Marie and Peter really enjoyed having a very full house.

On Monday Harm drove up to his grandmother's farm in Belleville, PA. He stayed the night and drove back down with her to DC early on Tuesday. Grams really enjoyed it when she was left alone with the Rabb children on Wednesday as Diane and Harm went to their offices.

The senior Marshalls arrived at Ann Marie's house on Wednesday. For the holiday the younger Marshalls and Roberts arrived at the same time. They were quickly followed by the Rabb family and the Chegwiddens.

When Grams came in Ann Marie greeted her with a handshake. "Happy Thanksgiving Mrs. Rabb, welcome to my home, it's so good to have you here."

Sarah Rabb enveloped her in a hug saying, "Now none of this Mrs. Rabb stuff child. Call me Grams, everyone else does."

"Okay Grams would you like to do?" Ann Marie asked.

Grams said, "You younger women don't need me in an already overcrowded kitchen. I'll sit here with the great grandchildren and watch football with the men."

And that's what happened. While the men alternately watched the games and the kids, Grams sat back and drank in the familial holiday cheer. A few times she would see that Patrick was feeling left out as he was the youngest and unable to really keep up with his cousins. So she asked Sarah for one of his bottles. She put Patrick on her lap and gave him his milk. When he eventually fell asleep, she took him upstairs and laid him in one of the portable cribs set up in Peter and Ann Marie's room. Ann Marie had the baby monitor set up in there with the receiver in the kitchen.

Grams also found it amusing that whenever John or Harm came into the kitchen to see their wives, each of them would pause to ensure he was wrapping his arms around the correct Mackenzie sister.
When it came time for dinner the mothers got their children into the playpens or to keep them occupied or asleep in their cribs while the adults ate. Ann Marie sat Grams at her right hand.

The glasses were filled with sparkling cider as Peter stood up to give the blessing and the holiday toast. "We have a very big family here with us today. We are glad that Grams is here with us for the first time. This is also the first Thanksgiving that AJ and Sydney are experiencing as a married couple. On top of that our children are together for the umpteenth time this year. I hope that we will always be able to get together in the coming year to celebrate our good times. Also in light of what is going on, may AJ, Sarah, John, Diane, Harm, Harriet and Bud be safe as they endeavor in keeping our country safe. And finally may God bless us all."

Everyone clinked their glasses together in acknowledgement. Being that there were so many children, the adults had to eat their dinner rather quickly as the babies became quite cranky, demanding their parents attention.

That meant that the guests left almost immediately after the holiday pies were served.

Friday, December 21, 2001

1945 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., DC-NW

The Marshalls' living room was decorated for the Christmas holiday with a brightly lit and decorated tree set in the recess of the front window seats. John really admired how Sarah threw herself into getting the house ready for Christmas. He only put up the outdoor lights and the tree lights. Then he stood back and watched as the decorating force of nature that was his wife, go to town on the house, inside and outside. Along with the Nativity set on a small table near the tree, there were several Christmas figurines adorning the mantle shelf and the other shelves that he installed on the living and dining room walls. The stockings were hung from the front of the fireplace grill. Sprigs of holly and mistletoe were hung strategically. The crackling fire going in the fireplace added to the warm and homey Christmassy theme.

In the kitchen Sarah and Chloe were baking cookies and brownies while John was in the living room with Caroline and Patrick. John and the babies were watching Sleeping Beauty, one of the myriad Disney videos that they purchased in the years since Caroline was born.

Sarah and Chloe were wearing matching sets of flannel pajamas. They were light blue with a cowboy motif. Every day that Sarah came home from work, she shucked her uniform as quickly as she could. She always felt that once she was home she always wanted to stay home. So if she wasn't going anywhere later in the evening, she always put on a set of pajamas, be they flannel or satin, to lounge around the house in.

John on the other hand always put on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt when he came home from his office. He and Sarah agreed that if they needed something from the store, John would be the one to go out.

As the house filled with the aroma of baking cookies, John sat with his two children. He was sitting in his arm chair. Caroline and Patrick were watching the movie as they sat in his lap.

Their attention to the movie was diverted by the ringing of the front doorbell. Before John could get up, Caroline bounded off his lap and yelled a very babyish, "I got it."
Sarah yelled from the kitchen, "Wait for your father!"

John hoisted Patrick up as he got up to follow his daughter to the door. As he got closer to the entrance foyer, Caroline was bouncing up and down saying, "It's Uncle Harm, it's Uncle Harm."

John could see Harm through one of the stained glass windows that were on each side of the doors. John opened the door to let his brother in law in. Harm turned and motioned his companion to precede him into the house. It was a young woman about 25 years. She was dressed in a Navy female overcoat and white cover.

Harm did the amenities, "Petty Officer Jennifer Coates meet my brother in law, Captain John Marshall."

After closing the door, John shook her hand saying, "Please to meet you."

Jennifer said, "Likewise I'm sure."

"Petty Officer Coates is a client of mine who needs a place to stay till her court appearance next Wednesday," Harm explained.

"The brigs were closed for the holiday weekend," Jennifer furnished for him.

Harm rolled his eyes at her saying, "Miss Coates has been charged with unauthorized absence and petty theft. Her charges are not severe enough for the brig and the restrictive barracks have been closed for the holiday weekend. I'd have her stay at my place but with Grams already in the guest room and my parents coming in on Sunday I haven't got the room."

At that Sarah came to the front door. She took Patrick from her husband. John introduced Jennifer to Sarah, "Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall, Petty Officer Jennifer Coates." As the two women shook hands, Harm explained the circumstances of the visit.

Without batting an eye Sarah said, "We can fold out the sofa bed in the den upstairs." Addressing Jennifer she said, "It's warm and comfortable there."

"I've slept in stranger places. I'm sure that will be fine ma'am," Jennifer replied.

"Well come on and let's get you settled then." Sarah said giving Patrick back to his dad and led the way upstairs. Jennifer took her overnight bag from Harm and followed Sarah.

Harm and John went into the living room. After he put Patrick on the floor in front of the TV John took Harm's coat and cover asking, "Need a beer?"

"Yeah just one, then I need to get home. Diane and Grams are keeping dinner warm for me," Harm said as he wearily collapsed onto the sofa. He grunted as Caroline launched herself and landed onto his lap.

Caroline stood on his knees and gave her uncle a hug and a kiss. Smiling Harm squeezed her back saying, "How're you doing Little Mac." Little Mac was the nickname Caroline's Aunts and Uncles gave her. She looked so much like her mom. Sarah didn't mind that they called her that, she just didn't let anyone outside the family to do so.

"I'm alright Uncle Harm. I'm gonna watch Sleeping Beauty now," Caroline said.

At that announcement Caroline slid off her uncle and sat on the carpet in front of the TV to watch her movie.
"Hey Chloe, could you please bring your Uncle Harm a beer?" John called back into the kitchen.

"Okay Dad," they heard Chloe acknowledge.

As they waited for Chloe John asked, "So what's the story with the petty officer? Should I be worried?"

"No you shouldn't. She's a kid who just needs a break. The petty theft charge stems from her impersonating a 'sidewalk Santa. (John chuckled at that.) She doesn't want to be in the Navy. She has a history of insubordination and unauthorized absence. She was in front of a Captain's Mast for the insubordination once before," Harm explained.

"So why was she in the Navy?" John asked.

"A couple of years ago she was forced to join the Navy by a judge when she was caught floating some bad checks and shoplifting. Her father didn't want to even help her out then." Harm explained.

"Why wouldn't her father want to help her?" John asked incredulously.

At that Chloe came in and gave Harm his beer. She bent to give him a kiss, "Hiya Uncle Harm."

"Hiya Chloe," Harm returned.

After he took a swig he sighed and explained, "He's a preacher, real fire and brimstone. She embarrassed him before his congregation, thus he deemed her unworthy of his help or attention. I saw that when we went to see if she could stay with him. He told her that her room was rented and she had to sleep on the sofa. He started saying things like he knew she was in trouble and it was bound to happen, you know the rest. (John nodded.) One look at her face though, I knew I couldn't leave her there. We saw some of her friends earlier and they were not trustworthy, so we came here," Harm explained.

John nodded in acceptance. He turned to Chloe and said, "Chloe go upstairs and give mom a hand with our guest."

"Okay Dad," Chloe said as she went upstairs.

Upstairs Sarah cleared the coffee table from in front and then she and Jennifer opened the sofa bed. Chloe came in and asked, "Anything I need to do?"

"Yeah sweetie, get me the extra linen set for the sofa bed. Then get me some clean towels and a wash cloth." Sarah instructed.

When Chloe left, Jennifer said, "Thank you for putting me up tonight. You have a lovely home ma'am."

"Thank you and your welcome petty officer or would you like me to call you Jennifer?" Sarah asked.

"Jen is fine ma'am. Every time I hear Jennifer, I expect to see my father," Jen replied.

Sarah smiled at that and said, "Okay Jen, change out of your uniform, settle yourself in and if you like you can join us downstairs. Chloe and I are baking cookies and brownies for the holiday. Oh and by the way, the babies usually get us up between 0600 and 0630. They still don't understand the concept of sleeping late on the weekends. So feel free to try and sleep through that."
Jen smiled as she answered, "That's fine ma'am. Uh Commander Rabb said he would come and pick me up about 1100. I have to stay in his custody during the day until my court appearance next Friday."

"Well we'll deal with that tomorrow. Tonight just get some rest," Sarah said.

"Thank you ma'am, I'll come down as soon as I change. I do have some experience in a kitchen. I used to have a job as a short order cook." Jen replied.

"Okay see you then," Sarah said as she walked out.

Chloe came back in with the clean towels and linen set for the sofa bed. As she helped Jen make the bed, Jen said, "You guys have the perfect life here. Your mom, dad and Commander Rabb are the perfect recruiting posters. I can just picture their childhoods."

Chloe was a little irritated that this women was making assumptions and she felt the need to explain, "You don't know anything. For starters they are not my real mom and dad. My birth parents are dead and before he died I didn't know my father until I was eleven. Mom and Dad adopted me. Mom's mother left her when she was 15 and her alcoholic father threw her out at 17.

Dad had to fight with his mother just to go into the Navy. It was only after he became a lawyer, that they started to get along again. He almost died when some maniac shot him. It took him 4 months to get better.

Then when Harm was five his dad was shot down on Christmas Eve in Vietnam and he has a brother in a Chechen prison. They all had to work hard to get to where they are now. You're not the only one with problems."

Chloe saw the look of embarrassment on Jen's face and she said, "I'm going to help my mom." She turned and walked out and downstairs.

After Jen changed into her civilian clothing she went downstairs and into the kitchen. She asked, "Anything I can do?"

"Yes you can sit down and eat. The commander told me that you hadn't anything to eat while you went around looking for a place to stay. I put some of tonight's leftovers in the microwave. It should be ready in few minutes." Sarah said. After the microwave dinged signaling that it was done, Sarah checked the temperature. Seeing that it was still too cool, she put the plate back in for another few minutes.

As she waited for the food to heat up Sarah asked, "You know Jen if you wanna talk."

"Talk about what?" Jen asked

"Oh I don't know your future maybe? You're an electronics technician right?"

"How did you know that ma'am?"

"Commander Rabb told me. And you're pretty good at it. You have all 4s and 5s on your evals’ except for conduct."

"Why did he even bother to look’ Jen sniffed derisively.

"Because he cares."
"He cares so much he spent the day trying to get rid of me?"

You know my guess is that you can be pretty annoying Petty Officer Coates. My sister, his wife, tells me that is a department my brother in law doesn't like to be junior in." As Jen laughed at that Sarah asked further, "What are your goals anyway?"

To stay out of jail ma'am," Jen said sardonically.

"Hmm lofty ambition," Sarah replied with a smirk. Her look said more should be added.

Embarrassed Jen added, "I don't know, I want a job that I like, the right guy, a couple of kids. Two out of three would be alright," Jen replied.

"Do you know what that makes you?" Sarah asked.

"No ma'am," Jen answered.

"Just like the rest of us," Sarah replied.

They heard a screech from the living room. When Sarah and Jen looked in they saw Caroline sitting in Harm's lap while John had Patrick in his. 'Sleeping Beauty' was up to the part when Prince Phillip was fighting his way through the wicked witch's barriers and fire breathing dragon in order to reach Princess Aurora. Even though the two babies saw the movie many times before, they were still intimidated by the cartoon actions in the movie. They were cowering in John and Harm's arms and peeking out at the movie through their fingers they held in front of their faces. Eventually the prince did reach Aurora and kissed her awake.

When they got up to the part when Aurora and Phillip started their waltz, Caroline got off Harm's lap, grabbed his hands to try and pull him up and asked, "C'mon Uncle Harm dance with me."

Harm, being the good uncle, got up and picked his niece up and started to dance with her in his arms.

When Sarah and Jen saw the tender scene they couldn't help but smile.

Sarah grabbed her camera and snapped a few photos.

Eventually Harm had to leave for home. John said, "See you at the party Monday evening ace."

"I have to stop by tomorrow at 1100 to pick up the petty officer,' Harm informed John.

Sarah spoke up, "I'm a responsible officer of the court. Jen can stay here during the weekend in my custody. It'll save you the trips of coming to get her every day."

"Are you sure Sarah?" Harm asked.

"Yeah she'll be fine and so will we," Sarah said.

"Okay I'll see you at the office Monday," Harm replied. He gave the kids each a kiss and bent to kiss Sarah's cheek before he walked out.

The evening ended when Caroline and Patrick began to get cranky as they started to get tired. John went to warm a bottle for Caroline while Sarah took Patrick up to her bedroom to breastfeed him. As he waited for the bottle to warm, he changed Caroline's diaper and put her pajamas on. He picked her up and carried her downstairs to get her bottle. He carried her through the house checking the door and windows. Before he went back upstairs he set the house alarm for the night. He saw Chloe in the hall and he gave her a kiss goodnight. He went into the nursery and sat on the rocking chair.
He sang a lullaby to his daughter as he rocked and she drank her milk. Eventually Caroline fell asleep and John put her into her bed. On his way into his room he knocked on the door of the den.

When Jen answered the door John asked, "Do you need anything Miss Coates?"

"No sir I'm fine," she replied.

"Alright then good night," John said with a smile.

"Good night sir,' Jen returned.

After she shut the door, she sat down on the bed and thought, 'This is a really nice family. Mrs. Marshall just took me in as if it was the natural thing to do and Mr. Marshall takes care of his children as if they were the most precious things in the world. My father never treated me like that. He wanted a son and my mother had the temerity to die before she could give him one. So he took his frustrations out on me. Then there is Commander Rabb. He cared enough to look up my record. He could have just taken any deal and just disposed of the case, but he didn't. Also he could have left me at my father's, but he didn't. Even though I told him not to pity me, he still was concerned enough to make sure I could stay in a nice place for the night. The Navy has treated them right. Maybe I'm not doing the best thing rebelling against that. I'll have to see about that.'

With that she went to sleep.

Christmas Eve 2001

1815 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah and John were hosting a Christmas Eve open house. The Rabbs along with Harm's parents and Grams, Deanne Mackenzie and the Matthews were staying at the party. Ann Marie, Trish and Diane were busy helping Sarah and John host as the staff and their spouses / significant others from JAG headquarters, NCIS and John's office of Naval Intelligence were coming in and out.

Ann Marie, Diane and Sarah were making sure all those that visited had something to eat or drink. John and Harm had pushed the dining room table against the wall. Hot meals and dessert dishes were laid out for serving. They as well as Peter were keeping a father's eye on their kids as they all were all running around pleasantly underfoot. There were certainly enough adults to ensure they stayed out of trouble. Grams was sitting with Deane in one corner enjoying the holiday atmosphere.

Besides the cookies and brownies Sarah also baked a cheesecake the day before. She sliced it into equal portions and put serving paper in between the slices to better facilitate self-service, much like one would see at a restaurant or bakery.

Jen Coates was a help as she alternately answered the door and replenished the buffet table. She answered the door as the Chegwiddens entered. Jen was really amused at the look AJ gave her. As he raised his eyebrow, Jen cut the question off at the pass, "I'm in Colonel Marshall's custody sir and I'm helping her out with the party."

"Uh huh, well keep up the good work petty officer," AJ replied gruffly.

She was tickled at meeting Diane and did the usual double take when the Rabbs came to the door. On another trip to answer the door she came face to face with the prosecutor of her case, Loren Singer, accompanied by her fiancé Robert Austen.
Loren was totally taken aback to see Jen. She greeted her civilly if not coolly. After Robert took her coat she saw Harm and went over to him. She asked him, "Commander what is your prisoner doing here?"

Sarah came over to Harm at that point and explained, "Because Loren, the restrictive barracks were closed and her ship was deployed so Harm brought her here to stay in my custody."

Loren was mollified at that point. Then she remembered why she was here in the first place. She opened her arms to Sarah saying, "Merry Christmas Sarah."

Sarah hugged her back saying, "Merry Christmas to you also Loren." Then Sarah went over and hugged Loren's fiancé, "And I didn't forget you Robert, Merry Christmas." She kissed his cheek then wiped away the lipstick mark she left there.

Loren went over and placed the three presents for the Marshall children she brought with her under the tree. She walked around with Robert and soon encountered John. He was holding Patrick. When Loren went to hold him, as she usually did whenever she visited the Marshalls' home, he was being very clingy.

"Oh what's the matter with my favorite boy?" Loren said as she made a pouty face to Patrick and stroked his silky black hair.

John explained, "Patrick hasn't had his afternoon n-a-p yet. We're trying to keep him and Caroline up for a little while longer so that we don't have to worry when we go to Chaplain Turner's service later. We figured that they'll sleep better for their grandmothers when they sit for them while we're out."

"Good idea captain. That's one I'll save for when Loren and I have our little ones." Robert said.

"Robert, drop the captain crap. It's Christmas and we're not in uniform," John said in friendly chastisement.

Loren proudly spoke up at that point, "Well Robert won't be wearing his uniform for much longer. He has some news John."

"Really what news is that?!" That question came from behind them as Meg came to join the group and to greet her brother and his fiancé. She and her family came in during Loren's conversations.

"So little brother what news do you need to share?" Meg prodded him after she kissed him, Loren, John and Patrick hello.

"Well I do have a Bachelor's Degree in Forensic Psychology and I got to working with the guys in the FBI while I was at Quantico. So I applied to become an agent and I was accepted. I resigned my commission and I'll be on terminal leave as of January 1 and I start at the FBI Academy on February 1."

"That's wonderful Bobby!" Meg said enthusiastically joyfully hugging him.

"Congratulations Bobby," John said as he offered his hand.

John heard the doorbell ring and went to answer it. He stood aside as the Roberts family came in. Harriet was holding little Sarah Elizabeth as Bud was carrying little AJ with Mike following.

"Merry Christmas Harriet, Bud, Mike, AJ and how are you little lady?" John said as he bent to give Sarah Roberts a kiss on her head.
"Merry Christmas sir," Bud said. John was about to give him the usual 'drop the formalities' shtick, but he thought better and just let it slide.

Bud said, "My dad is parking the car he'll be here in a minute."

"Yeah parking is at a premium around here if you don't have your own driveway," John added.

As Bud put AJ down and Harriet put Sarah down to take off their coats, Patrick brightened up as he saw his playmates. He squirmed out of his father's grasp and toddled after the Roberts children. The whole retinue paraded into the living room. John saw that Patrick and AJ were grabbed up by their Uncle Harm. John went to put the coats with the others in his bedroom. When he came back down he saw that Little Sarah Roberts was being held by her namesake as big Sarah gave many hugs and kisses. Before he could walk away into the living room he heard the doorbell ring again. He opened the door to find Big Bud Roberts standing there.

"Ya know captain, parking..." Big Bud began before John cut him off, "I know master chief it's at a premium. Let me take your coat."

As John went back upstairs, Big Bud started to mingle. He came up to Loren as she stood by herself under a sprig of mistletoe. He said to her, "This is your lucky day lieutenant."

Loren immediately showed him a look of extreme distaste as she said, "Not if you want to keep your pension and your teeth master chief. My fiancé is the only person who gets to catch me under here."

Big Bud snorted in amusement "You're getting married, the Ice Queen of JAG? Who's the unlucky schnook?"

At that Robert Austen walked up with a cup of eggnog for Loren. "That would be me master chief." He gave Loren a tender kiss as if to show Big Bud where he stood. Then he said, "Because it's Christmas I'll refrain from personally teaching you some manners."

At that AJ came up and said, "Master chief you have to learn to tone it down. You're not doing your sons any good acting like a bore."

Big Bud walked away with him totally mortified.

Robert turned to Loren and saw a tear rolling down her cheek. He also saw that she was smiling tenderly at him. He used his thumb to wipe the tear from her cheek and leaned in to give another tender kiss.

Meg came up and said, "Hey you two give some other people a chance under there."

Robert and Loren broke apart laughing in embarrassment.

Sarah and John looked on from the living room. Sarah turned to her husband and said, "That's why I put it there."

"Well do I still get to kiss you even if we're not under the mistletoe?" John asked.

Sarah put her arms around his waist and said, "You get to kiss me with or without mistletoe."

At that she laid a nice kiss on him. They forgot that they were in the middle of their living room which was full of guests. They all started to good naturedly give them a hard time saying, things like, "You got a room upstairs', or 'Hey we're eating here."
Sarah turned to them all and stuck her tongue out at them. Then she and John burst out laughing.

The laughter was interrupted as Harm's cell phone rang. He put his hand to his other ear to listen better as he said, "Webb? Where are you now?" He listened for a little while until he pulled his phone away from his ear as the call was lost.

Diane asked him, "Was that Clayton again?"

Harm explained, "Yeah, I'm glad to hear that's he's alright. When he called earlier today I asked him if he was in Kabul because I was hearing explosions and they were getting closer. He said something about giving his nephew a chemistry set. Then there was a bigger explosion and the call was lost. I wonder what he's got going."

"I'm sure we'll find out soon enough," Diane reassured him.

During all this Jen Coates sat in the kitchen. She was enjoying herself as she watched the familial good times happening around her. She also witnessed Big Bud's crass behavior and AJ chastising him. Mike Roberts came in, got a beer from the fridge and sat across the table from her. Sticking out his hand he introduced himself saying, "Hi I'm Mike."

Jen reached her hand over and grasped his saying, "Jen Coates."

"Are you a relative of the Marshalls?" Mike asked.

"No just a Navy friend," Jen said. She then realized what she said. She really was a friend of theirs. She felt this because they treated her as no less than one. When they went to church, shopping and generally gone out as a family together they automatically made room for her. During those times on Saturday and Sunday when Harm came to check on her she related what she had discussed with Sarah. Harm told her, "You know life in the Navy is not so bad. It's like everywhere else. You only get from it what you put in. If you go in with a miserable frame of mind of, 'I'm only here because I have to be.' Then you'll get nothing out of it. And when you do finally get discharged, what then?"

That's when it hit her. What then? What do I do when the Navy gets rid of me?"

That question was partially answered by Mike Roberts when Jen asked him, "What do you do Mike?"

"I'm in the Navy. I enlisted and I'm applying for admission to the Naval Academy."

"Are any of your relatives in the Navy?" Jen asked.

"Oh yeah my big brother Bud and his wife Harriet are, (Mike pointed the couple out.) And my dad is a retired Master Chief. (He indicated his dad standing with AJ.) He doesn't like that I'm going to be an officer. He thinks officers are there only to order the enlisted around."

"Is that why he was so insulting to Lieutenant Singer and her fiancé?" Jen asked.

"Well he thinks he's the funniest guy in the world. Also being retired he thinks that he doesn't have to filter himself. Bud and I are always telling him to knock it off around the officers we work with. He comes back with 'Hey I'm your father. I'll knock you two around like I did when you were kids.'

"He was abusive to you and your brother?" Jen asked with a look of distaste.

"Yeah to a point, he always said he was doing it to make us tougher," Mike answered.
"Well it's still wrong!" Jen almost yelled.

"Yeah well he's our father and we love him," Mike said as he shrugged. He took a swig of his beer and left the kitchen.

Jen was astounded by that. As she sat there pondering Big Bud came in to get himself a beer. As he stuck out his hand Jen said, "Hello Mr. Roberts I'm Jen Coates."

"I guess my son told you when you were speaking with him," Roberts said.

"Yeah he did. He told me a few other things about you," Jen added with a small grin.

"Yeah like what?" Roberts asked.

"Like he and your other son love you despite what you do to embarrass them or how you treated them through the years," Jen added.

Big Bud was embarrassed himself when he asked, "He said that?"

"Mmm, mmm," Jen answered.

Big Bud just walked out to the living room.

1930 Local Time

Navy Yard Chapel

Washington Navy Yard, DC-SE

Ann Marie and Peter went home with their children. Jim and Maureen Marshall were flying in on the shuttle at about 9:00 o'clock that evening. They were staying over at the Mathews' house for the holiday. A big dinner was planned at Ann Marie's for Christmas day.

It was planned that the Chegwiddens, Marshalls, Rabbs, Burnets and Roberts were going to Chaplain Turner's service together. Because the Rabbs lived the farthest away, Grams and Deanne were staying at the Marshall's to babysit both sets of grandchildren. Harriet and Bud brought their AJ and Sarah Elizabeth home where Petty Officer Tiner would babysit them.

It was easy for Grams and Deanne because the plan to delay the babies' sleep time worked. The younger children were asleep in the various cribs set up in the upstairs bedrooms. Sarah Rabb, Chloe and Jennifer were going to the service.

It was a beautiful service as Chaplain Turner spoke of the role fathers have especially Joseph as his role in caring for Jesus before he began his ministry.

During the service as well as throughout the whole weekend, Jen had a glimpse of how a father should really act. All through the weekend and that night at the Marshalls, she saw the fathers being nothing short of loving toward their children. Chloe was nestled into John's side with her head in the crook of John's shoulder. Harm had his own Little Sarah on his lap as she lay her head on his chest, sucking her thumb. That's when she felt that she wanted to get to know them better. She came to a decision.

When the congregation came out of the chapel, Jen went up to Diane saying, "Excuse me Mrs. Rabb I have something I need to give your husband." Diane stepped aside and watched in amusement as Jen gently kissed Harm's cheek. After which Jen withdrew in embarrassment saying, "Can I get in
trouble for that?"

Harm smiled in his own embarrassment as he answered, "Yes you can. I have to ask, what was that for?"

Jen shyly answered, "Well for caring enough about me to leave me in the company of very good people and for looking out for my situation, understanding that I may have needed a break. Is there a way I can stay in the Navy?"

"I think so. What changed your mind?" Harm asked.

Jen answered, "You did sir, or rather you and everyone else. You're right. I only get out what I put in. I saw that all the people here enjoy being in the Navy. I think I could to, if given the chance."

"Well we'll see what we can do about that on Wednesday," Harm answered.

2100 Local Time

Vietnam War Memorial, 'The Wall'

As per the new tradition, the Rabb family was all assembled at 'The Wall'. Harm was truly gratified that he had his whole family there, including the Marshalls. After Chaplain Turner's service concluded, they went back to Florida Avenue to pick up the babies and the two grandmothers. Each one of the adults came forward to rub their fingertips across Harm Sr.'s name and say a few words. Trish and Grams were especially emotional as their fingers lingered over her Harm Sr.'s name. Harm held up Les or Little Sarah Rabb and John held up Caroline so they could rub their fingers across there also. Then they all stood in a tight group bowing their heads in remembrance. As such they did not see or pay close attention to the footsteps approaching from behind them. They all assumed that another visitor was coming to pay their own respects to another name on the wall.

It was the words and the accent of the speaker that brought everyone's head up, "Now we are all together brother."

Harm was the first to look up and speak, "Sergei?"

"Yes brother it is me,' Sergei replied with a smile. He went and embraced Harm.

Harm was so stunned that he stammered, "B-but how? When?"

Sergei broke out of the embrace. He pointed over Harm's shoulder and said, "Ask him."

Harm as well as everyone else present turned to see, "Webb!"

Harm went and shook his hand saying, "This is what those phone calls were for? How did you do it?"

"Well I traded a couple of boxcars full of wheat and other foodstuffs to the Chechens for Sergei. Then it took me a whole day and a half to get here. You weren't home in Fairfax so I figured we'd catch you here," Webb simply explained.

Harm went forward and grasped his hand saying, "Clay you really came through this time. I owe you big time."

"How about that," Webb smugly said.

Harm was unperturbed as he said, "Merry Christmas Clay."
"Merry Christmas Harm," Webb returned. He turned to greet the rest of the family standing there. He shook John's hand and gave each of the Mackenzie sisters a holiday kiss on their cheeks. Then he turned and walked away into the night.

Then Harm said, "Sergei, meet the family."

Sergei seemed a bit overwhelmed as the Rabbs and Marshalls started to gather around him. It was Grams who said, "Give the boy some room people." Then she went to hug him saying, "Welcome to the family." As she held him she said, "Child you are one skinny young man. We'll just have to fatten you up some."

Everyone shared a laugh as they turned to walk back to their cars.

Christmas Day 2001

The rest of the holiday went very well. Christmas morning was the usual getting up super early to open presents followed by lying around in pajamas until mass at 12:30.

As she sat on the couch watching the unwrapping Jen was surprised when Caroline came up and gave her a wrapped box. She had her own watery smile as she read the card taped to the wrapping. It was written in Sarah's elegant script and it simply said, 'To Jen, From the Marshalls.' Sarah came up behind her and softly said, "Everyone should have a present to open on Christmas." When Jen opened it she found a beautiful Christmas green scarf and glove set.

Tears welled up in Jen's eyes as she got up went around the sofa and enveloped Sarah in a tight hug. She was shedding tears of joy for being remembered at Christmas as well as shedding the chip on her shoulder. She thought to herself, 'No matter what I do I have to find a way to stay in the Navy as well as getting assigned to JAG.'

After mass the Marshalls went to Ann Marie's for dinner. Dinner at Ann Maries was nice also as usual. She was very happy to set one more dinner plate out for Sergei.

The Marshalls all slept soundly that night exhausted from enjoying the holiday.
Timing Is Everything
Chapter 77

Wednesday, December 26, 2001

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Washington, DC

It was a light day at the office being it was the day after the holiday. It was a silent understanding of the JAG Corps that unless they were absolutely necessary, no trials were scheduled in the week between Christmas and New Year's. Being that was the case there was only a skeleton staff present to handle cases that were pending or any that may come through the door.

Harm was in the break room fixing his first office cup of coffee. Bud came in smiling from ear to ear. Harm just had to ask, "Get an extra special Christmas gift Bud?"

"You could say that sir," Bud answered.

Harm gave him a look that said, 'elaborate please lieutenant.'

"Well last night Commander Lindsey called Mike to notify him that his admission to the Naval Academy was accepted," Bud gushed.

Harm brightened at that saying, "That's great news Bud. Tell Mike congratulations from Diane and me."

"Congratulations for what?" Sarah asked coming into the room.

"Mike's been notified that he's going to the Naval Academy,' Bud explained.


"Thank you ma'am, sir," Bud said as he got his coffee and left.

Sarah prepared her coffee and asked Harm, "How's it going with Jennifer's case?"

"Well Loren is prepared to accept non judicial punishment with a fine and some extra duty and career counseling," Harm explained.

"That's great Harm I'm happy for her," Sarah replied.

"Well that's great to hear. After the case she has another problem," Harm began.

"And that is?" Sarah asked as she sipped her coffee, half knowing what was coming.

"Being that her ship is still deployed and there are no flights other than the most urgent scheduled to go out between the holidays, I was wondering, could you put her up for the week?" Harm asked
sheepishly.

"I had a feeling that you would ask. I had Loren keep me apprised of the case and the agreed to disposition. John and I have no problem having her as our guest till after the New Year. John, Chloe and I like having her. While she's staying here we can put her to work at the office," Sarah explained.

"Great I'll tell her when her case is disposed of," Harm said.

"That's good to hear Harm," Sarah replied.

Monday, January 7, 2002

0230 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah was having such an intense dream that she suddenly sat bolt upright in bed. She realized that she was soaked with sweat and was breathing heavily.

She was startled when she felt a hand on her shoulder as John was awakened by his wife's suddenly sitting up in bed.

"Honey, what's the matter?" John asked anxiously.

Without offering explanation as to why, Sarah got out of bed saying, "I need to see the kids."

When she went into the babies' room, she saw Patrick lay with his comforter wrapped in his arms, sleeping on his side. Sarah smiled as she saw that he had his thumb in mouth. Caroline was snuggled up under her covers in her juvenile bed. She bent and gave each of her children a kiss on their temples. She went into Chloe's room next and saw she was still asleep. It was odd that she slept the same way as Patrick, wrapping her arms around her covers and sleeping on her side. The only thing missing was Chloe wasn't sucking her thumb. Sarah bent and kissed her oldest and went back out to the hallway.

John was following her around. As she checked each child, John waited in the doorway of each room.

When she came out of Chloe's room John took her into his arms and gently asked his wife, "Want to tell me what that was all about?"

"I had a dream. I saw a woman dead. I think it was me. I just had this overwhelming need to see the kids one more time. I don't know what it means, but I think it's related to work," Sarah explained.

"Okay, it's 0300. What don't we go back to bed? You sleep in my arms like you always do when you're troubled or can't get to sleep."

She leaned up and lightly kissed him saying, "That sounds good to me." With that they went back to bed.

1015 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE
Sarah looked over who had what case. She saw what she needed to see and made her decision. She picked up her phone and dialed the interoffice extension for, "Sturgis, could you please step into my office?"

When they entered her office Sturgis asked, "What's up Mac?"

"I need your help, but we have to keep it discreet." Sarah said.

"Okay I can do that,"

Turner immediately regretted agreeing. He was astounded that, without any evidence besides her dream vision, Sarah took him all around Rock Creek Park until they eventually found the body of Commander Laura Aikin. Aiken and Sarah were working together on a nuclear disarmament treaty. Sturgis was further confounded when Sarah was speaking with the police she pointed to a map. Acting on her tip, police found Yuri Lentov. Lentov was an itinerant Russian cab driver. Lentov also had Aikin's pack, wallet and credit cards in his possession.

Their subsequent investigation found that Aikin was pregnant with the child of one Morgan Deitz a Director of a disarmament company. Dietz lied to Aiken about leaving his wife. Also that Aiken was harassed by Deitz's wife after she discovered the affair.

They also found that she uncovered some weapons grade uranium missing from her inspections of the Nerpa shipyard in Russia. That got John's department involved. John sent Commander Faith Coleman to assist Sarah and Sturgis.

They discovered that Lentov called a security officer at Nerpa shipyard several times; smuggled arms to Chechen Islamic fundamentalist rebels. Lentov converted to Islam while in the Russian army. When Lentov was threatened with deportation he eventually gave the whereabouts of his accomplices & a SEAL team captured the ship.

Wednesday, January 9, 2002

1645 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

John secured his office as usual so that he could meet Sarah at JAG to go home together. Until their part of the Pentagon was rebuilt John's department was temporarily set up in a section of the NCIS headquarters building. It was a natural for J2 to be at NCIS. NCIS was deeply involved with intelligence gathering anyway.

Even though it was bitterly cold, he really enjoyed the short walk. It reminded him of when he was working at NCIS before his promotion. During his walk over to JAG he was stopped by the call of, "Hey Dad wait up!"

John turned and smiled as he saw his daughter Chloe walking quickly toward him. He opened his arms and grunted as she playfully collided with him. He gathered her in a bear hug and kissed the top of her head. As they turned and walked down the street Chloe hooked her hand into John's left elbow so that he could return the salutes that he was being given.

Before they entered the JAG building they met Loren Singer, who was on her way out. After
"Saluting they stopped to exchange small talk. John asked her, "So lieutenant how are your wedding plans progressing?"

"Well we set the date for Saturday, April 20. Besides captain, you should know since Colonel Marshall is my matron of honor and all the wedding materials are spread out on your pool table," Loren explained in a cheeky but still respectful tone.

"Yeah I know and you, Meg and Sarah have taken over my man cave. I'm not getting involved or touching that organized mess until my wife says so. If I even look at it sideways, Sarah will chop my fingers off. Besides it gives me a glimpse of what I'm in store for when my two daughters get married."

Loren laughed at that saying, "Well sir you can have your man cave back after the wedding."

"I'm looking forward to it Loren, that and the wedding," John said sincerely.

"Thank you sir, for that and your friendship, it means a lot to Robert and I," Loren said sincerely.

"You're welcome Loren. Have a pleasant evening," John acknowledged her.

"You to sir," Loren returned.

They saluted each other and went their separate ways.

As John and Chloe walked into the JAG Operations' bullpen Sarah was watching as she leaned on the lintel of her office door. John exercised his 'captain's privilege' as he laid a quick kiss on his wife. Sarah gave Chloe a kiss on her forehead and then took hold of John's hand as she turned to walk back into her office. Chloe turned and took a seat at the empty desk next to Emma Gardiner's. She knew that her parents were prone to discuss classified stuff.

"How's school Chloe," Emma asked as she got ready to secure for the day.

"Oh it's fine Chief. I got my French test back today. I got a 95," Chloe answered proudly.

"That's great sweetie," Emma exclaimed.

"I think I got mom's gift for languages. We're always practicing some Farsi, Spanish and Russian. Now we're learning French together," Chloe said.

"Well, keep it up and maybe you can work for the State Department," Emma said facetiously.

"Yeah wouldn't that be a hoot," Chloe said rolling her eyes.

Chloe and Emma shared a laugh before Emma got up and knocked on Sarah's door to say, "Ma'am I'm secured for the day. Is there anything else you need me to do?"

"No Chief that's fine. Have a good evening and give Teresa a kiss for me,' Sarah replied.

Emma smiled and said, "Aye, aye ma'am, sir. Good night then." Emma closed the door softly and got her things and left.

Inside Sarah's office John asked, "How was your day dear?"

"Oh, just some psychic visions that lead to convictions and nuclear arms retrieval, you know the usual," Sarah deadpanned.
"Yeah I know just another day at the office," John answered with a chuckle. Then he asked, "Listen did you hear of another collision of one of our surveillance planes colliding with another Chinese fighter?" John asked.

"Yes the admiral just assigned Harm to go with Admiral Boone to negotiate the crew and the plane's release. They're leaving from Andrews tonight," Sarah answered. She continued, "Diane and her kids are coming over tonight for dinner. Les is wrangling for a sleep over this weekend."

"Yeah that sounds good. She, Chloe, and Caroline can sleep on the sofa bed in the den. That way their giggling won't keep Patrick up all night," John acknowledged.

He and Sarah shared a laugh. Then John saw that there was another open case folder on her desk and asked, "What's your next case going to be?"

Sarah looked down and answered, "This one is so stupid. Two Annapolis midshipmen were arrested for dueling with their sabers. They're 5th generation grandsons of civil war ship captains, one was Confederate and the other was Union. They were arguing over their grandparents battles and decided to resolve it on the "field of honor". I'm prosecuting. In light of what's going on today, they should be expelled for such foolishness. Turner is defending. He wants to chalk it up to the usual academy competition."

"Oh that should be interesting to resolve," John commented wryly.

"Oh yeah, Sturgis is being overbearing," Sarah wryly replied. Just then there was knock on her door. Sarah saw through the blinds that it was Sturgis and announced, "Come in Sturgis."

When Sturgis entered, John politely got up to greet him. Sturgis snapped to attention before John could say, "At ease Commander."

Sturgis asked, "Mac, any chance we can resolve the dueling cadets today?"

"Not today Sturgis, this case can wait until tomorrow. It's late and I just want to go home and be with my kids," Sarah replied.

"Okay in that case I'll say goodnight then," Sturgis said turning to the door. He was stopped when Sarah said, "You boys stay here and chat. I have to visit the ladies room before we pick-up Caroline and Patrick."

After Sarah left the room Sturgis told John, "I have to say captain that working with the colonel is always an adventure."

John smiled indulgently as he asked, "Why do you say that commander?"

"Well I have never worked with anyone who is driven by psychic visions of a murder. I can see why Harm told me to always keep an open mind when working with her," Sturgis replied.

"Yeah you're right. Sarah and I worked well together when I was here. I miss that at times," John said.

Sturgis nodded at that as John continued, "But it does not match with the fact that I get to go home to her every day."

Sarah came back in. As she started to clean her desk for the night, she said, "Goodnight Sturgis. We'll talk tomorrow about the two duelists."
"Goodnight Mac, captain, have a pleasant evening," Sturgis replied as he walked out.

Sarah started to get dressed to leave. After she put her scarf on the way she wanted it, John held her overcoat for her as she shrugged into it. She buttoned it up and put her cover on. As she grabbed her purse and briefcase, John took her computer case and they walked out into the bullpen. They collected Chloe and went to collect their other two children and went home.

Tuesday, February 19, 2002

1845 Local Time

Andrews Air Base Arrivals Terminal

Winter still had strong grip on the DC metropolitan area as the day was still bitterly cold. John and Diane were standing with their winter coats bundled up as they waited for their spouses to return from their latest assignment.

Sarah and Harm were gone two weeks to Saudi Arabia. They were assigned to defend a female Navy pilot, Lt. Joanne Donato. Donato disobeyed orders that prescribed that she wear an abeya while she was off duty. She had rebelled and after many attempts to broker a deal were scuttled due to tempers flaring and misunderstandings, Harm and Sarah came away with a satisfactory conclusion. One that kept Lt. Donato flying without having to have any reprimands appearing in her record.

Now the two were debarking from the transport jet and walking quickly across the tarmac. As they entered the terminal, they immediately saw John and Diane. They separated and as they each rushed to their respective spouses.

Harms and Sarah asked each of spouses, "Where are the kids?"

"Your mom is watching them at our house. It was easier to do that ten to bundle them into the car in this cold," John explained.

"And Sergei is watching ours. He's probably telling them some Russian fairy tales," Diane explained. Sergei was staying in the Rabbs guest room since his arrival on Christmas Eve.

"When do you need to report back to JAG," John asked the two as they all walked out to the parking area.

"We have to report back tomorrow. I hope there aren't any new cases waiting for us. I could use a little admin work to finish the week," Sarah said. She was still JAG Chief of Staff and some of her admin work had fallen behind.

Harm had to laugh at that. "Wow times have changed. When you came back from your excursion into civilian law, you were so mad at being given Admin and Legal Assistance work. What's changed?"

Sarah explained, "Well I'm a little older and the admin skills gained then have enabled me to see the whole picture. I do love the court room and investigating, but so that I'm fresh for that, I like to delve for a while into the admin part of my job."

Harm nodded his understanding.

They got into their separate cars and drove to their respective homes.
Harm and Diane arrived home to a scene of familial merriment. The 'Twister' mat was on the living room floor. Sergei and Les were on the mat in one would consider impossible to hold positions. The twins, Trey and Samantha, were taking turns spinning the dial.

Harm heard Trey as he announced, "Right foot blue."

Sergei and Les both try to move their right feet to the correct spot. Les succeeded while Sergei did not. He had to reach clear across the mat, over Les. As he fell he yelled, "Oh, oh look out." His rear end hit the floor with a loud thump that made Harm and Diane wince with the perceived pain it brought.

"Oh bosh moi, that's going to leave a mark,' Sergei groaned rubbing his rear at the point of impact." He looked over to see the three Rabb children rolling on the floor in laughter. Then he looked up and saw Diane and Harm standing in the living room archway chuckling along with the kids.

"Ah brother, you have returned and with a tan. I am so jealous," Sergei said as he got up to greet them.

After hugging Harm he turned to the table at the entrance, "Ah Diane, Harm this came UPS special delivery after Diane left." He handed over a bulging manila envelope. He took Les and twins out of the room into the den to watch some TV.

After Harm saw the return address was his mother's, he tore the envelope open. He poured out more envelopes. They were marked with the red, white and blue borders of military mail. They were the letters that his dad sent his mom while he was deployed in Vietnam. He opened another envelope that he recognized as Trish's personal stationary. He sat down in his armchair to read the enclosed letter written in Trish's familiar script.

Dearest Harm,

As you will see you now have your father's letters that he sent to me. I sent them onto you for two reasons: one so that your children may read them when they get older. Second, you need to know if Sergei is really your brother. The DNA left behind when your dad licked them closed will determine that.

It took me a long time to forgive your father when I first found out about him possibly being Sergei's father, but seeing Sergei at the wall last Christmas, brought it home to me. I could see immediately that he is definitely your father's son. Even your Grandmothers saw it. It's in the eyes. All you Rabb men share that characteristic.

I believe that you need to have a real life sibling. I know that you consider John Marshall as the brother you never had and so do I. I love him and Sarah as much I love Diane and you. That being said he still does not replace the brother you never had but almost did.

I never told you this, but Frank and I did try to have a child of our own. It was about a year after we were married. I was about three months along, still not showing when I miscarried twins. You may remember that you were sent to Gram's farm for that summer so that I could deal with the loss without overwhelming you. Harm they would have been a boy and a girl, just like your twins.
So with that in mind, use the DNA from the envelopes to finally determine Sergei's parentage. I know that when you find out for sure, it will ease your mind as well as mine.

Kiss Diane and the children for me and we'll see each other at Easter.

All my love,

Mom

Harm was shedding some tears as he read him mother's letter. He showed it to Diane. She sat on the arm of his chair as she read it. She was also shedding some tears.

Les came in looking for a toy and saw her parents crying. She went over and asked, "What's the matter daddy, mom?"

Diane gathered her daughter into her arms and said, "Nothing sweetie. Grandma Trish just sent some letters that your dad needed. We're just happy about it. Les slid off her mom happy at the explanation. She skipped into the next room to join Sergei and the twins.

Harm wiped his eyes saying, "I should call Terry Coulter. She'll be able to match the DNA."

Diane said, "Do it tomorrow dear. Tonight I want you all to myself. I missed you."

She gazed at her husband with a look that spoke of deep longing.

Harm swallowed hard and said, "Then we better get everyone to bed early, because I missed you to."

It didn't take long for dinner to be served and consumed. Then everyone got cleaned and ready for bed. Diane was in the master bathroom preparing herself. She knew what Harm liked and she was going to give him just that.

For his part Harm was waiting patiently on their turned down bed wearing only his boxers. Every time he went abroad with Sarah, he was constantly reminded of what he had at home. He couldn't wait to get back home so that he could have his wife.

Sarah saw this also. She knew what Harm was going through. John confessed to her that during her 6 month duty cruise that whenever he saw Diane, he ached to be reunited with his Sarah.

Now as Harm lay on the bed Diane came out of the bathroom. She stopped at the lintel of the bathroom door. She kept the light on in the bathroom so that she was lit from the back. Diane had on a shear pink silky robe that went down to her ankles. She was wearing 4 inch stiletto sandals, with shear pink stockings. They were held up by garters that were attached to a shear pink camisole that had a lacey bra. A lacey set of string bikini panties barely covered her nest of dark curls.

Harm could see through the lace of the bra cups that Diane's nipples were fully aroused. He sat on the edge of the bed and held his hand out to his amazing wife. She willingly came forward. Harm stood up and lovingly embraced her. Then he bent his head and claimed her lips in a deep and passionate kiss. Diane stood and enjoyed the feelings that were running through her from her head to her toes, especially deep in her core as Harm peeled her ensemble off piece by piece. She knew Harm liked to see her in a sexy lingerie ensemble. He wasn't one of those who saw women's underwear as an impediment and tore it off to get it out of his way. She stood there as he took his time, slowing peeling off one piece at a time and worshiping her body in the process.

When he finally took the last piece of silk off her, he picked up and laid her gently on the bed. He
knelt down between her legs. He bent down and proceeded to devour her, giving her as much pleasure as she could stand. He knew that he had brought her to her breaking point as she moaned, "Harm I want you know."

He kissed his way up to her. He lingered at the valley of her breasts, mashing them together and twiddling her nipples in the process. He positioned himself to enter her. As he dipped his tip into her he felt that she was very wet. As he slid the whole length all the way into her, she gave a small gasp as he penetrated her. He held himself there until he felt her get used to him being there. When she bucked her hips up into him, he knew that she was ready. He started stroking her slowly at first. She kept up with him until she begged, "harder, faster". He was more than willing to accommodate her.

He felt that she was getting closer to her climax and he was more than willing to join her. He gasped out, "Come on baby, just a little more." Her only replay was a gasp of, "Oh Harm! I'm ready! Bring me home!"

Harm held himself back until he felt her walls tighten around him.

"Oh Harm!" Diane cried as she felt herself go to the edge. She willingly fell over as her orgasm engulfed her. Harm was good for only two more strokes as his own climax came upon him. He cried out her name as he slammed himself into her up to his hilt, pumping his seed into her. They held each other tight until they came down completely from their sexual high.

Harm rolled off then gathered his wife into a loving embrace. Diane willingly snuggled into him. They exhaled simultaneously saying, "Wow!" They both shared a laugh at their mutual satisfaction.

After as Diane lay in his arms and played with the hair on Harm's chest. She said, "You know Harm I was ovulating."

Harm picked up his head, looked at her and said, "So that means?"

"It means that we may have just made another baby." Diane answered.

Harm could only smile as he tightened his arms around Diane. He kissed the top of her head saying, "I'm very glad to hear that."

Diane was very happy at his reaction. She had stopped taking the pill last December. After the twins were born Harm and she decided that the children they had were enough. Diane was using birth control. But after the September 11 attacks, Diane changed her mind and confided that with Harm. He had agreed to try to make another baby with her after the holidays. So, Diane began checking herself as to when she was ovulating. By sheer coincidence her cycle coincided with Harm's return from his latest assignment.

"I'll give it a week until I start checking. Until then it wouldn't hurt to make sure we got it right." She said this as she reached for him. She felt her husband harden in her gentle grip. In a husky voice she whispered in his ear, "I feel something developing now."

Harm could only groan as she gently stroked him. She told him, "Lay there, I'll take care of everything."

She got up and bent to him. He gasped out loud as her mouth engulfed him. She took him all the way into her mouth up to his base. She held him there twirling her tongue around him and sucking gently. She felt him tickle the back of her throat. She withdrew some and swirled her tongue around his tip. She stroked her mouth up and down his shaft until she felt him swell. As she tasted the first drop of pre cum, she withdrew completely and straddled him. She quickly guided him into her. She
sank down onto him until she felt that he was completely into her. Then she started undulate on him, stroking him. He bucked his hips into her in an effort to keep up. It took a little longer for their mutual climax to come so when it did, it was spectacular for both of them. As she climaxed Diane held herself down onto Harm as she felt him pump into her. For his part Harm felt as Diane’s walls clenched onto his shaft. After they had spent themselves, Diane collapsed onto her husband. They lay there gasping at their effort. After a short time, Diane yawned. Without dislodging her from him Harm reached for the bed clothes and brought them up over them. He arranged them just right and settled Diane more comfortably onto him. He tightened his hold on her as they both slipped into a blissful sleep.

When Harm walked into JAG the next day, he had the biggest smile on his face that anyone had ever seen.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 78

Monday March 4, 2002

Life at JAG was running true to normal in that there were cases to be investigated and tried. One case in particular though had the office very much on edge.

As Harm was returning to his office from court he met Sarah as she was returning to her office from AJ's. Harm asked, "How's the admiral doing?"

AJ was at a high school to give a speech when he tried to correct the insolent behavior of a cocky student James Oliphant. Unfortunately the encounter was caught on videotape. Defiantly Oliphant spit on AJ. AJ reflexively slapped the boy. The SECNAV demanded AJ's resignation & threatened him with a flag mast. AJ refused and Admiral Drake held the mast with Lindsey "advising" and authorized to speak for both SECNAV & CNO.

Sarah offered to defend AJ, which he reluctantly accepted.

"He's running purely on emotion Harm. I had to rein him back from committing career suicide. We're going to have a meeting tomorrow with the boy, the SECNAV and the CNO. I hope we can resolve this stupid thing," Sarah told her brother in law.

Harm replied, "Me too." Then he asked, "Any plans for lunch?"

"No, usually I go see the babies at daycare but they're home with my mom. I didn't want to take them out in this cold. What do you have in mind?" Sarah replied.

"I saw the menu for the commissary. They have a choice of hot minestrone soup, Manhattan clam chowder or vegetable beef along with your favorite, BLTs." Harm said waggling his eyebrows.

"Oh that sounds good on a day like this. Let's go," Sarah enthusiastically replied.

"After you," Harm said allowing her to precede him out the door.

As they settled in with their soup and sandwiches, Harm spoke of Sergei, "My mom sent me Dad's letters for DNA testing. I told Diane we would call Teri Coulter but Diane reminded me that we have a very competent scientist closer to home."


Harm confirmed, "Right, Diane also reminded me that we have to establish a chain of evidence so that the Immigration Customs Enforcement Bureau (I.C.E.) can verify the findings. So Diane called I.C.E. and had one of their agents present when Abby drew Sergei's blood. I went out to La Jolla and had my mom sign an affidavit in front of another I.C.E. officer swearing to the authenticity of Dad's letters and Abby went forward with the tests. The whole process took us the whole of the last two weeks"

"When will you know?" Sarah asked.

"Sometime by next week, ICE says that after paternity has been established, Sergei can be formerly
certified as a US citizen."

"That's great Harm. After that what does Sergei want to do?" Sarah asked.

"He's thinking of joining the Marines to fly helicopters for them," Harm said with a note of mischief.

Knowingly Sarah took the bait, "Oh boy the marines will never be the same with a Rabb as a member."

She and Harm shared a chuckle at that.

Harm continued, "On another note, I set Sergei up with his own e-mail account. He said he wanted to know Jennifer Coates' e-mail address."

"Really, is she interested in seeing him?" Sarah asked.

"Sergei doesn't know. I mean they were pretty cozy with each other during the Christmas holiday there might be something there," Harm replied.

"What are you going to do?" Sarah asked.

"Well Jennifer still has another month to go on her paralegal course at the Navy Justice School across the street. She tells me she's doing well. Tomorrow she has an appointment to see me and the JAG career counselor to solidify the plans for her next duty. I'll give her Sergei's address and let her e-mail him. That way she can decide for herself if she wants to see him," Harm said.

"Sounds like there may be a new addition to our extended family,' Sarah said smiling.

"We'll see," Harm replied wryly.

"On another topic, what did you think of Bud's performance as a juror?" Sarah asked proudly.

"I thought he did great. I thought you'd get a conviction, but Bud really had the other jurors stick strictly to the evidence. He's going to develop into a top notch attorney," Harm replied.

"Yeah we taught him well didn't we?" Sarah added.

"We sure did sis," Harm replied.

They finished their lunch and returned to work.

Monday, March 11, 2002

1621 Zulu

USS Seahawk

The Northern Arabian Sea

On the previous Friday Harm and Sarah were sent out to the Seahawk to help refine the Rules of Engagement. The Fleet JAG Lt. Commander Jack Hilliard was only allowing air strikes when there was a hundred percent certainty of zero civilian casualties. As a result of his vacillation, Al Queda targets were getting away.

They took Saturday and Sunday interviewing Hilliard and the other crew on the bridge, including Captain Johnson. They prepared a lecture for the crew to be presented on Monday afternoon. After
they gave a lengthy lecture on the rules, the two took a meal break. After dinner while Sarah was on the phone with her family Harm went to his quarters. He left there and took a walk to Vulture's Row to watch flight ops. He was in a great mood. After he had stood out there for a while he heard the door open and shut then he heard Sarah say, "Hi"

Harm asked her, "Hey how did you know where I was?"

Sarah replied, "Where else would you be on a carrier during flight ops?"

Harm smirked as he replied, "Maybe in the front seat of an F-14."

Sarah shook her head and said, "Not this trip."

Harm chuckled as he returned, "I can dream."

Sarah nodded saying, "You know I'm starting to understand why you like when you come out to sea Harm. When I was aboard the LHA I got a sense of that. Everything else, whatever personal problems you might have, it all goes away. Nothing seems important in the face of what you're doing.

Harm smiled indulgently as he said, "There was a time that you hated it here."

Sarah returned, "Nothing stays the same."

Harm rolled his eyes saying, "Tell me about it."

After he finished speaking he looked down. Sarah saw a change in him and asked, "Harm what's wrong?"

Harm waited until a Tomcat catapulted off the ship before he could speak. He turned to Sarah and said, "I'm glad you're here, I need to tell you something."

Now Sarah was worried. She asked, "What's wrong Harm?"

"Nothing's wrong. I just have some news. Before I came out here I checked my e-mail. Diane told me that she went to see the doctor today. She had some tests done."

Now Sarah was getting worried as well as impatient as she yelled, "Come on, out with it!"

Harm loved stringing his sister in law along when he wanted to deliver this kind of news. Harm smiled a small smile as he said, "Diane's pregnant."

Sarah squealed with happiness as she jumped into his arms to give him a fierce hug and a big sloppy kiss on his cheek.

As she wiped her lipstick from his cheek, she happily said, "Oh Harm I'm really happy for the two of you. How far along is she?"

"About three weeks," Harm replied.

She sobered up then thinking of Diane's last pregnancy, "What about the placenta previa problem? Will she be able to carry this baby better or even full term?"

"Diane said that Eve Baldwin was also concerned about that. Eve needs to wait until the pregnancy progresses before she can determine if the baby is in a better position that the last one or I should say last two were. Still she is advising less stress and no long trips on the weekends. She wants Diane to
"Well I hope everything works out a lot more calmly than the last one," Sarah said hugging him tighter.

Harm asked her, "Have you and John thought of having more children?"

"Well while I was carrying Patrick, we discussed that. We both agreed to give making babies a rest for the time being. We may decide later to have more children, but not right away" Sarah explained.

The rest of their time on the carrier was not as calm. Harm did get to fly a Tomcat on a mission. Mac was the JAG who ordered that he prosecute the target. It became rather stressful when Harm took the target out. While he managed to avoid a stinger shot from the shoulder of a terrorist, he sustained damage to one engine when it automatically exploded upon not hitting its target. The flying shrapnel hit one engine which he needed to shut down. When he tried to refuel, he didn't have enough power to stay attached to the tanker so he couldn't take on much fuel. He had to land with one weak engine and, despite the LSO shouting "eject, eject," he didn't eject; and had just enough power at last second to land.

Upon exiting the Tomcat, Harm's RIO Lt. Jorgenson said to him, "They were right about you commander."

"Right about what lieutenant?" Harm asked with a raised eyebrow.

"That it would be an interesting flight," Lt. Jorgenson said sardonically.

Harm walked inside chuckling to himself.

Up on the bridge Capt. Johnson asked Hilliard, "Did you see how it was done?"

Hilliard said, "I would have requested more information."

Johnson replied, "You may be a good attorney but you make a lousy wartime JAG. I am recommending that you be relieved from this duty."

Hilliard could not offer any argument.

The next day Harm and Sarah flew home on the next COD.

Monday, March 18, 2002

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard

Sarah and Harm were in Harm's office discussing Harm's latest case. During the week while Sarah was dealing with her 'chief of staff' chores, Harm defended Bud on a dereliction of duty case.

Bud was defense counsel opposing Loren Singer as she was prosecuting, PO Jeff Massuco for hit & run driving. During the trial, Bud and Harriet were dealing with little AJ's flu at home. As a result of overdoing it and being sleep deprived, Bud fell asleep in the courtroom and missed a motion filing date. Then to top that off even after Loren had provided all the witness statements she was required, one statement was missing. That was the most important as Loren had also prioritized them, placing that one on top. Loren knew that based on the evidence in those statements, she had a very good chance of losing the case. But because of the missing statement and the missed deadline, she won.
Then Massuco's convening authority got new evidence & believed that Bud's defense was incompetent. Admiral Chegwidden authorized an inquiry into his defense as preliminary to article 32 hearings. Harm stepped up to defend Bud. Turner was assigned as prosecutor. Turner angered Harm because he wouldn't make an offer commensurate with alleged wrong doing.

During this Bud was foundering in guilt. Seeing this AJ called him into his office and suggested to Bud, "Lieutenant you need to find the same confidence in yourself and your ability as an attorney as I do."

To add to the uneasy feelings, Turner called Sarah to testify against Bud. Sarah was forced to admit that Buds falling asleep and missing a filing deadline and not contacting a defense witness, Sandra Connor, was not up to standards.

Eventually Harm got Connor to admit to having an affair with Massuco. Furthermore Harm was also able to determine that Massuco took the exculpatory cover letter from Singer's packet himself because he thought that all the other evidence was circumstantial and doing so would save his shaky marriage.

As a result Bud was not court-martialed.

Sarah said, "Loren was so startled that she won the case in the first place. She knew that Sandra Conner would exonerate Massuco. She felt better knowing that Massuko contributed to his own conviction by removing Conner's statement."

"Yeah Loren told me that herself. We both got a laugh when Massuco asked Bud to defend him again, this time charged with tampering with an investigation and Bud turned him down," Harm replied.

"Where are Bud and Loren now?" Sarah asked.

"They're in with the admiral," Harm answered.

Inside AJ's office Bud and Loren were listening to him explain how they could advance their careers.

AJ began by saying, "Lieutenants in this conversation I am going to use your first names so you know which one I am addressing."

Both Loren and Bud nodded in agreement.

AJ began, "Bud even though you faced a dereliction of duty charge earlier this week, I still see that you are a capable attorney. And you Loren have grown personally as you've been partnered with Bud these last few months. So I took steps to advance your careers"

Loren and Bud sat up straighter at that.

"Bud, I'm recommending sending you out to the Seahawk to replace Commander Hilliard as the Staff Judge Advocate for the fleet."

Loren almost suppressed a smile, but AJ caught it.

"Come on Loren get it over with," he said.

"Geez, I guess the penalty for falling asleep in court is being sent out to sea," she replied with her tongue firmly planted in her cheek.
Bud could only bow his head and moan while AJ chuckled and said, "Even though you were exonerated from your dereliction charges it was not your finest hour, but still that was not irreparable. The new duty station is two years long with a six month cruise at sea every year. As you saw with Commander Rabb and Lt. Colonel Marshall, it wasn't detrimental to their careers. Before you decide, go home and speak with Harriet."

Bud sobered up and replied, "Aye sir, I'll have an answer for you on Monday."

"Good, as for you Loren between now and the two months after your honeymoon I'm partnering you up with Colonel Marshall. She has specifically asked for you. You are going to assist her in running Administrative & Legal Assistance Sections. And no I'm not putting you on a path to strictly Administration. When I assigned Colonel Marshall there they were in need of a complete command overhaul. Now I'm using those sections as a teaching ground. Take the three months and work exclusively there. Learn the in and out of running this corps. After that I believe you'll have a new appreciation for how the overall JAG Corps works. I know it will help you attain your ultimate goal."

Loren started in surprise at that and asked, half knowing the answer, "What goal is that sir?"

"Why becoming JAG lieutenant," AJ replied with a twinkle.

Now it was Loren's turn to bow her head in embarrassment while AJ and Bud shared the chuckle.

"I overheard you when you expressed that desire to Commander Rabb," AJ said confirming her suspicions.

"Yes sir. You've given me a lot to think about, may I also take the weekend to mull it over with Bobby?" Loren asked.

"Of course you may Loren. I never expected a snap decision on any of that. Let me know Monday," AJ replied.

In conclusion AJ said, "If there is nothing else dismissed and have a nice weekend."

Both Loren and Bud stood at attention, bellowed, "Aye, aye sir," about faced and marched from the office.

Loren and Bud separated after they left AJ's office. Bud went to find Harriet while Loren went to Sarah's office. Just as was about to knock Harm opened the door to leave. He came up short as he almost ran Loren over.

"Excuse me lieutenant," Harm apologized, he stood back to allow Sarah to see her. Then he sidled past her and walked out.

Sarah knowing why Loren was there said, "Come in lieutenant and have a seat."

Loren began, "Admiral Chegwidden told me that I'm going to be working exclusively with you or in Administration and Legal Assistance Departments."

"That's right. That's also why you haven't been overwhelmed with cases. Are you alright with that," Sarah asked not unpleasantly.

"I'm fine with that ma'am. It will give me a chance to learn. Will I also have to handle building services?" Loren asked in return.
"No Chief Gardiner and Harriet already coordinate well with the head of the Navy Yard's Facilities Manager. So you won't need to deal with that or any other safety issues, such as fire and disaster drills," Sarah replied.

When would you like me to start there ma'am?" Loren asked.

"On Monday, you Chief Gardiner and Commander Rabb will be working on the budget. Emma and Harm have been doing that for the past couple of years and he always gets eight or more percent increase, so pay attention and don't be afraid to ask questions," Sarah instructed.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Loren acknowledged.

Sarah took a breath as if to gather her thoughts before she said, "There is one more thing lieutenant.

Loren sat up straighter at the change in tone as Sarah continued, "When you start working in those sections, remember the people already working there know what they are doing. As such they will be very quick to let you know if something you may tell them to do isn't correct or against the regs. So don't take that for disrespect or rudeness. Allow them to advise you and lead you to the proper conclusions. While you won't have to lean on them, you will find that their assistance will be invaluable.

Also I noticed that when you give orders, you never say please or thank you. We both know that in the military, those amenities are not required, but they are appreciated. John told me one time that his grandmother once told him that those words will get you anything you want so don't be so reluctant to use them. You'll find that using those words people will get done what you want done a lot quicker."

"I'll keep that in mind ma'am," Loren replied.

"In the meantime, what time do you want to meet tomorrow for the dress fittings?" Sarah asked segueing to the subject of Loren's wedding.

"I called the dress shop and made an appointment for 1000. I already told Meg, Harriet and Traci. We can meet at my house and go to the shop from there if you want," Loren replied.

"That's fine. Chloe and I will meet you there by 0930," Sarah said. Then she asked, "Have you told your parents about your engagement yet?"

Loren answered, "Yes I did when I called Mom last January. She was so happy for me. She surprised me with some news about her and dad."

"What news was that," Sarah asked.

"That they were in an accident this last New Year's Eve," Loren asked.

"Oh my God were they hurt?" Sarah exclaimed.

Loren replied, "No, at least not seriously. They were riding home from a party with one of their friends. Their friend was driving. Well he ran a light and another car practically t-boned them. The other car was going about fifty miles per hour when it hit theirs in the front. It spun their car around and they were thrown around pretty good. They both had concussions. If they were further out into the intersection they would have been killed or more seriously injured."

"So what was the ultimate outcome?" Sarah asked.
"Well both drivers were charged with drunk driving. Mom and dad were also drunk, but being they were passengers, they were not charged. It did wake them up though. They told me that the accident really shook them up. While they almost squandered their money when I was younger, they started turning their lives around. Mom started going to A.A. meetings while Dad kept on drinking. It was mom who insisted that they not drive to the party that night. Well the accident really sobered Dad up. Now he's going to the A.A. meetings with mom. He said he wants to meet Bobby and give me away at my wedding." Loren finished.

Tears welled up in Loren's eyes as she had become somewhat emotional in telling her story. Sarah pushed the box of tissues she had on her desk closer to Loren.

As Loren dabbed at her tears Sarah asked, "Are you going to do that?"

"Yeah I am. Bobby and I are going out there next weekend to tell them," Loren answered.

"Well that's great to hear Loren. I'm happy for you," Sarah said.

"Thank you ma'am,' Loren replied.

Sarah smiled sideways as she said, "What did I tell you in moments like this, you're allowed to use first names."

"I'm sorry Sarah," Loren acknowledged with a watery smile.

"That's better. Okay go secure for the day. Chloe and I will see you tomorrow," Sarah said in gentle dismissal.

Loren got up and said, "Aye, aye Sarah."

Sarah smiled and waved her hands in a shooing motion and said, "Go on get out of here smart alec."
Bud and Loren talked the admiral's proposals over with their significant others. After weighing all the pros and cons they both decided to accept their new assignments.

While it was easy for Loren to start right away in the Administrative and Legal Assistance Departments, Bud had to wait two days for the orders for his new assignment to be processed. So he was scheduled to depart for the Seahawk on Wednesday, March 13. On his last day at headquarters he was working in his office. He thought that he was not going to get any kind of send-off. No one was preparing the bullpen with farewell decorations.

Bud was kind of disappointed. He thought that he was too low a rank to rate a farewell like Harm and Sarah did when they went off on their duty cruises.

He was brought out of his introspection when Tiner came in and said, "Lieutenant, Admiral Morris requests your presence in courtroom one."

Bud looked up and said, "Right away Tiner."

Courtroom one was the largest courtroom. It was the room that was used to televise trials.

As he walked to the courtroom, Bud was so lost in thought that he didn't notice that there was no one in the bullpen and nor in the halls. When he opened the door he was assaulted with, "Surprise!"

He was totally taken aback by that and what he saw. Harriet, AJ, Sarah, John, Harm and Diane were standing in the front of the whole of the JAG staff gathered behind them. A banner stating 'Good Luck Lt. Bud J. Roberts, Staff Judge Advocate – USS Seahawk' was hung from the ceiling in front of the judge's bench.

Tiner wheeled a tray table with a sheet cake. On it was written 'Bon Voyage Lt. Roberts'.

Bud stood in awe of the display. Harriet went forward and took his head in her hands and gave him a tender kiss. That brought Bud out of his stupor. Harriet took hold of his hand and led him into the group.

As he made his way through the crowd accepting everyone's well wishes, he was surprised to come upon Ann Marie and Pete Matthews. "Wow even you guys came. I'm so glad to see you," Bud gushed as he let Ann Marie engulf him a tight hug then energetically pumped Pete's hand.

"How could we not be here Bud? You and Harriet are practically family," Ann Marie told him.

All too soon it was time for Bud and Harriet to leave. They bid their goodbyes and walked out of the courtroom, got their things from Bud's office and went home.
Sergei's bid to be certified as a U.S. Citizen was successful. The DNA testing proved him to be Harm Sr.'s son. Harm helped him to obtain the necessary documentation stating that, even a Social Security Card. Upon receiving his documents, Sergei went to Sarah to ask her to help him enlist in the Marine Corps. Sarah went about to have his Russian Army training records sent to her. It was easy for her as she called Mark Sokol. He was more than happy to send them along.

When she received them Sarah took the records to the Marine Recruiting Division. She successfully argued that because of his training and time served in the Russian Army, he could forgo Marine Boot Camp. So based on that and the review of his Russian records Sergei could be sworn in at his Russian Army rank of Sergeant and sent to helicopter training to be properly certified to maintain Marine choppers. One had to a Marine Officer to fly them. He was supposed to report to MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina on Monday.

The Rabbs and Marshalls were at Quantico to attend the swearing in. They even brought along a special guest. Petty Officer Jennifer Coates was standing with Harm and Diane as Sergei was sworn in.

Harm gave Jennifer Sergei's E-Mail address and they began to correspond regularly and had started dating. They found that they had a few things in common. They were both brought up by single parents and they both had an affinity for Italian food. They shared many a night walking hand in hand around Rock Creek Park.

Coincidentally Sergei and Jennifer had apartments in the same building in DC, north of Union Station. It was the same building where Roscoe Martin lived and died. Shortly after his death the building changed owners and the apartments rented out during the intervening years. The owner was Harm. He bought the building and renovated all the loft apartments. Each floor had two apartments, a one bedroom and a two bedroom. Harm was recouping his investment by renting them out at reasonable rates to service men or women stationed in DC. The three two bedroom apartments were all rented to young military families with one or two children. Harm knew that military families would not trash the apartments. The service men and women were grateful to find private living quarters at rates that Harm gladly adjusted to accommodate their pay grades. Harm also didn't need to have leases signed as he rented them out month to month knowing there was always the inevitability of the tenants being reassigned to another station.

At the time Jennifer decided to stay in the Navy, one of the single bedroom apartments opened up as the serviceman who was there was rotated to another duty assignment away from DC. Jennifer moved in immediately.

Sergei was living at the Rabbs through to February. In that time he was mapping out his possible future in America by researching which colleges he could go to achieve a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautics. Virginia Tech offered the best set of courses for that. With Sarah's help through Sokol, he was able to have his Russian college transcripts sent to VT for evaluation for admission. In the meantime since he now had a paying job, he decided that he needed a place of his own.

When another single bedroom apartment in the building was vacated, Harm offered it to him. Sergei
immediately jumped at the offer. It was only after he moved in that he found that Jennifer lived in the floor below. Harm on the other hand already knew this. He and Diane were eager for the two to get together.

When Sergei found out he good naturedly chastised his brother for interfering with his love life. But as he and Jennifer got to know each other more and more, he quickly forgave Harm for his interference.

Being near the completion of her paralegal course, Jennifer already received her orders for her new posting. She would be leaving from NAS Oceana a week from Monday on her way to the Persian Gulf. She was being assigned to the Seahawk as Bud's legal aid. Only she and even Bud didn't know it.

At the completion of the ceremony Sergei joined his family. Jennifer stood at his side holding his hand.

Harm asked him, "So Sergei how does it feel to be in the Marines?"

"It feels fine brother. This uniform almost looks like my old army uniform," Sergei replied puffing his chest and rubbing his free hand down the front of his uniform.

Diane asked him, "Are you going to keep Zhukov as your name? Harm mentioned that you might change it to Rabb once your paternity was verified."

"Yes I am going to keep Zhukov for now. Sarah, excuse me, Colonel Marshall, told me that it would be quite a while to reconcile all my records from Russia before I decide to change my name. She also mentioned that two Rabbs in the military were quite enough for now," Sergei finished with a smile.

Sarah blushed in embarrassment as John and the 'two' Rabbs shared a chuckle.

Sarah recovered enough to say, "Just remember sergeant after today, you can be brought up on charges for disrespecting an officer."

She was semi-serious when she said it. John just pulled her in and kissed her temple. Sarah smiled at his attempt to calm her.

John then asked, "Are you considering OCS?"

Jennifer spoke up at that point, "I hope not right away. If he did that we couldn't be able to see each other." As she said this, Jennifer clasped her hands around his arm.

Sergei turned to her and said, "Don't worry moy lyubimaya, I still have to reconcile my Russian university credits with Virginia Technical to see how many courses I need to take to get my bachelor's degree. Besides I would wait for you to graduate college or us to be married before I take that step. I would not like to be without your love and affection."

Jennifer felt a tingle at his endearment. She was thrilled that he wanted a lasting relationship. She'd gladly wait to let him be ready to surprise her with a proposal.

Sarah and John dropped their jaws in surprise. They understood that moy lyubimaya was Russian for my sweetheart. Harm and Diane just smiled.

Diane turned and whispered into her husband's ear. "And so ends another successful conspiracy."

Saturday, April 20, 2002
The time for Loren's wedding came upon her and her friends almost before they knew it. Sarah was particularly glad that AJ allowed her and Loren to take the prior week off to finish the wedding plans.

Loren's parents arrived in town on Thursday evening. Loren was very happy to see them looking so healthy and robust. It seemed that giving up alcohol was very good for them. Loren understood how one could be so dependent on alcohol from her Ala-Teen meetings and the time spent opening up to Sarah. In turn Sarah was very gracious in discussing her own issues with drinking with Loren.

Bobby Austen asked his gunnery sergeant from his last Marine company, Arturo Castillo to be his best man, Harm, John and Meg's husband Bob to be groom's men. Naturally the maid of honor and best man, Sarah and Arturo were matched up. The rest of the couples were matched with spouses, Meg and Bob Pike, or colleagues. Since Bud was on his sea duty, Harriet and John were matched up, while Traci was matched up with Harm. Meg's daughter Catherine was to be the flower girl while. Loren and Bobby didn't have any young nephews to be a ring bearer so they decided to do without one.

Bobby's friends from the FBI, Marines as well as John and Harm and Loren's male colleagues from JAG went to the bachelor at McMurphy's the previous Friday. Since John's own bachelor party the owner acquired the small store next door. He installed a doorway and made it a private party room. The Austen party rented the room for the evening. Arturo arranged for two strippers dressed as police officers for entertainment. They came into the bar in full police regalia, all toys, in response to a complaint of someone being a 'bad boy'. They handcuffed Bobby with the toy cuffs and sat down in a chair in the middle of the floor. They turned on the stripper music and stripped down to their skimpy bikinis. They each planted a kiss on a cheek before they left.

The ladies all went to the local Chippendale's for the bachelorette party. Sarah thanked her lucky stars that it wasn't like Harriet's party.

The rehearsal dinner was at Benzingers in Falls Church. During the dinner Harriet played a video toast from Bud on the Seahawk.

For the day of the wedding it was decided that since all the wedding paraphernalia was at the Marshalls, Loren would sleep over there the night before and get prepared for the wedding there also. The Singers would sleep over at Loren's house, while Bobby stayed at the Pikes. A limousine would pick both Bobby and the Singers. Bobby would be dropped off at the church and the Singers at the Marshalls for the pre-wedding photos with the bride and bridesmaids.

Since Bobby was no longer in the Marines, it was a non-military wedding. The groomsmen were wearing traditional black tuxedos with vests. Consequently there would also be no 'sword line'.

After John got himself ready, he and Chloe loaded Caroline and Patrick into the 'Blazer and drove to the Rabbs to pick up Diane and Harm. Diane would drive Chloe in John's car from the church to the reception while Harm and John rode in the limo with the wedding party.

When John pulled up to the Rabbs' he and Chloe got Caroline and Patrick out and ushered them into the house.

Harm met him at the door saying, "Got away cleanly from the ladies fairly easily I see."

"Oh yeah. I got a glimpse of what it's going to be like when Chloe and Caroline get married. I can wait a while," John said with a sigh.
"How's Sarah doing?" Harm asked.

"Oh she's having a ball. I haven't seen her this happy planning something since AJ and Sydney's wedding. When I left she was snapping orders to the photographer and his assistant while also keeping Loren calm," John acknowledged with a smile.

"Come on in and meet our baby sitter. She's going to have her hands full watching ours and Harriet's Sarah," Harm said with a laugh as they walked into the living room.

Harriet already dropped her children at the Rabbs. The Roberts children were happily mingling with the Rabb and Marshall children under the watchful eye of a young lady standing in the living room. She was 15 years old about five feet tall with shoulder length kinky blonde hair. She turned around when Harm addressed her.

"Mattie, this is Mister Marshall, Caroline and Patrick's dad. John this is Matilda Grace Johnson or Mattie. Her family lives ten blocks from here. We know them from church," Harm explained.

Mattie went over and took hold of John's outstretched hand saying, "Please to meet you Mr. Marshall."

"Likewise I'm sure Miss Johnson," John returned.

"Oh please call me Mattie. Everyone else does," Mattie replied self consciously.

"So you think you can handle this brood of rambunctious children?" John asked with a smile.

"Oh this is nothing. I was a councilor at a day camp last summer. I ran a group of twelve 10 year olds. Mrs. Rabb gave me instructions on what everyone likes and dislikes so I can handle it. Also my mom and dad are only five minutes away if I have a problem," Mattie said with a chuckle.

"Well that's good to hear," John acknowledged.

Just then Diane came into the room. She was wearing a black silk loose fitting dress with a matching shawl. It showed her back down to just below her shoulder blades and was held up by spaghetti straps. The front was cut low enough to show her cleavage to a modest degree. The rest of the dress below the bodice was pleated and hang down to just above her kneecaps so that her bust was accentuated but not her small baby bump.

After she kissed Chloe and John hello she said, "Harm, go finished getting dressed. We have to be at the church in 45 minutes."

Harm scurried away to his bedroom. While Diane said to Mattie, "Now you have mine and Harm's cell numbers and your mom and dad are coming over later to help you get the kids asleep and..."

Mattie smiled and said, "Mrs. Rabb go have a good time. We'll all be fine."

With that Harm came out carrying his tuxedo jacket over his arm. He announced, "I'm ready, let's go."

The three went in to kiss their children goodnight with the usual instructions of minding what Mattie said and to be good. Then they trooped out to John's car and drove off.

2130 Local Time

Mt. Vernon Country Club
Mount Vernon, VA

The reception was winding down as Harm and John were sitting by the bar enjoying a couple of beers as they waited for their wives to finish saying goodbye to the other women. They were dancing with their wives and other female colleagues all during the night. After the beautiful wedding ceremony in the church, it had really been a fun reception. The food and the music were good. There were the usual wedding reception traditions of removing and catching the garter and the feeding of the wedding cake.

Then there was the 'Texas' tradition. The scene was right out of "Oklahoma". Instead of the bride and groom slipping away, they were each hoisted onto the shoulders of the strongest men there, four of Bobby Austen's cousins, and carried out to a specially decorated limousine. The entire retinue from the reception followed them out and cheered them on their way.

As they sipped their beer, AJ came over with his own bottle and sat down. He sighed expansively and said, "So our little Loren is finally married. Do you think this will mellow her out?"

"I think she's already done that AJ. From what Sarah tells me, she's already taken her new assignment and done well with it. The people working in Legal Assistance and Administration have been telling her that Loren is a breeze to work for. So polite and everything," John said.

"Really, that doesn't sound like the Loren I know! "exclaimed Harm.

AJ and John looked at him cross eyed. AJ said, "Wasn't it you who said last year that she was being nice around you and the other officers?"

"Yeah I did but around superior or equal ranked officers. The officers who were junior to her still felt like she growled at them, especially the ensigns new to the office," Harm explained.

"Well Sarah told me that before Loren went down to L.S.A., she had a talk with her. She told her politeness to junior officers wouldn't kill her but only help her. I guess she took it to heart," John replied.

At that Sydney, Diane, Chloe and Sarah walked over. Harriet was already on her way to the Rabbs to pick up her little Sarah and AJ. Sarah had that look of tired satisfaction on her face. She went right over and sat in John's lap. "So hot stuff, are you ready to go and collect our children and go home?"

As he wrapped his arms around her waist John answered, "I certainly am Ninja Girl. I'm beat. I haven't danced or moved like that in a long time."

Sarah bent down and whispered into his ear, "Well I hope you have some moves left for after we put the kids to bed."

John tightened his hold on her and replied, "I think I'll have some energy left for that."

At that he stood up. Sarah slipped easily off him to stand and walk away with him.
Chapter 80

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 80

Friday May 3, 2002

1830 Local Time

Andrews Air Force Base arrivals Terminal

The Monday after Loren's wedding Sarah and Harm were assigned to prosecute a very rare military tribunal being held aboard the USS Seahawk. Mustafa Atef, an al Qaeda leader was being charged. AJ didn't get anyone to volunteer to be defense counsel, so he did it himself. Then Turner volunteered to be AJ's second chair.

Harm and Sarah had a disagreement over who should be first chair for the defense. While they were at dinner in the Rabbs' kitchen, John suggested, "Why not flip a coin?"

"Okay why not," Harm said producing his JAG coin. Sarah chose "tails" and lost. So she became second chair.

The tribunal panel consisted of Capt. Sebring and six others. Atef’s involuntary confession was obtained by Webb during psychological duress and was not allowed. A local warlord, Gen. Hassan Abdullah, was leading a detention camp of Taliban and al Qaeda captives. He tipped off army Capt. Dale Alexander, who captured Atef, but first running into a lone sniper.

Webb and Sarah went to the detention camp to see if Atef’s brother, Kabir, the sniper, was there. While there Sarah was taken hostage at knifepoint by the detainees ironically while she was trying to get them water and aid to treat their injuries. She was saved by Webb and Gunny Galindez, who was also at the camp.

Back on the Seahawk Harm played on Atef’s vanity during the trial and he arrogantly testified, admitting to being the Mohandes who trained men and planned 9/11. He was convicted but committed suicide in his cell before he could give info about Kabir.

Sarah and Harm were able to fly out immediately after the trial. Now John was waiting for them at the terminal. Diane was at home resting as her obstetrician Eve Baldwin instructed her to. While she didn't have the placenta previa problem as her last pregnancy, Eve wanted her to keep to regular routine of eight hour work days to reduce her stress. Deanne was stopping by the Rabb home occasionally to be with her daughter to help out as much as possible.

John also had another reason to meet his wife and brother in law. He needed to hear their evaluation of the intelligence they gleaned from the trial.

He saw Harm exit the C-130 first then reach back and take Sarah’s hand to help her hop out. The each had a folded garment bag hanging from their shoulders. John shook Harm’s hand and laid a nice kiss on Sarah.

"Welcome home marine," John said with obvious affection.

"Nice to be home sailor," Sarah returned with the same affection.
"Let's wait till we get to the car before we speak. Walter is waiting for us now. He's been read in on the trial and whatever intelligence comes from it. You'll find that he has a keen mind for this sort of thing," John informed them proudly.

John continued, "Also Thomas is waiting for us at NCIS. While we have dinner there we'll write up a preliminary report and we'll get together over the weekend to polish it for presentation to the Joint Intelligence Board on Monday."

"That sounds good to me John. How's mom doing with the kids?" Sarah asked.

"Well your mom is at Harm and Diane's minding their children and my mom is at home with our children. She came down earlier in the week to visit. She's staying in the study," John explained.

"You didn't tell me Maureen came down. Not that I mind," Sarah replied.

"Well she came down when you were in Afghanistan with Webb. Then with what was going on with the trial, I didn't get a chance to get on my home E-mail to tell you," John explained.

"Well it will be nice to see her. I haven't spoken to her a long time," Sarah said.

After they went to NCIS to do what they planned, then they all went home.

2330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

When Sarah and John entered their house they found Maureen on the living room sofa asleep on the in front of the TV with the volume down very low. She was covered in a blanket and she had a book open on her chest.

While John took the remote and turned the TV off, Sarah went over and knelt in front of her. She gently took the book away and nudged her shoulder saying, "Maureen?"

Maureen woke up with a slight start. As her vision came more into focus she saw Sarah's smiling face. She smiled in return and said in a sleepy voice, "Sarah! It's so good to see you. It's been a while."

Maureen sat up and opened her arms which Sarah in turn leaned into as they shared a welcoming hug.

Sarah said, "It's late why don't we go to bed and we'll catch up in the morning."

"That's sounds like a good idea," Maureen replied as she got up from the sofa. After she yawned she added, "You know it's so easy to care for the babies with Chloe here. She has their routine down to a tee."

"Yeah she's really good with them. They really look up to her and listen when she tells them what they need to do," Sarah explained.

"It's cute that Patrick only wants her to read him his bedtime story," Maureen said.

"He got used to that while I was on my cruise. He won't even let John read to him," Sarah said.

Maureen asked, "What are you doing tomorrow?"

"Well after breakfast John and I have to meet Harm and Diane at NCIS to go over some stuff from
the trial we just finished and then the afternoon is free if you want to do something," Sarah explained.

"We'll that gives me something to think about before I fall asleep. We'll decide in the morning," Maureen said with another yawn.

Sarah laughed and said, "Okay see you then. Goodnight mom, I love you," Sarah said as she gave Maureen a hug.

"I love you to dear," Maureen said as she hugged her daughter in law back. She had to hold back some happy tears as she heard Sarah calling her 'mom'.

Sarah and John checked the children before they went to bed. They didn't get to sleep at first though.

After John put on his bed clothes which consisted of a tee shirt and long pajama bottoms, Sarah went into the bathroom with what John saw was a towel draped over her arm. John didn't notice that she had something hidden underneath the towel. Sarah spent time primping herself. As she took a short shower she shaved her legs and armpits and trimmed her pubic hair. After she dried herself she dabbed drops of John's favorite perfume onto her at the spots she knew he would visit. First at where her swan like neck met her shoulders then between her breasts and then in the dark nest of curls at her apex.

She stood and admired herself in the full length mirror on the back of the bathroom door. She marveled at how firm her breasts and buttocks still were. As she ran her hands all along and around her breasts she could see the nipples become erect and pebbly with her arousal. She ran her hand down her tummy sighing with pleasure at how her waist still had that nip to it but now with a well-earned little pouch that belied her having children. Her thighs and calves were still toned from her regular exercises of kickboxing, ballet and running. She said in a whisper, "Not bad for having two babies."

She went and sorted out the lingerie items she snuck in under the towel. She put them on slowly and languorously, indulging in the feel of the silk and lace as it slid and settled against her skin. Then she put on her favorite satin robe and walked slowly out of the bathroom.

John looked up and the sound of the bathroom door opening. He smiled at her coming out and going to the bedroom door to ensure it was locked. Then he watched as his wife seductively slinked over toward the bed. When she reached the side of the bed on which he lay watching her, she bent over and gave him a long slow kiss. Just as John raised his hand to embrace her she broke the kiss and brought his fingers to his pursed lips.

"Shhh, just lie back and let me take over. I've missed you sailor," Sarah said as she stepped back. She loosened the sash and shrugged the robe of her shoulders, dropped it and let it pool at her feet.

John just stared in wonder at the vision before him. Sarah stood as John elevatored his eyes up and down her body. She had on a black satin camisole with an attached lace demi-cup bra. He could see through the lace that her nipples were very erect, practically straining to be set free from their lace prison. As he moved his eyes downward he saw that the bottom of the camisole had garter straps that held up black stockings. He stopped at her apex and saw that her thong panties were all lace. He could see through the lace at her dark curls nestled neatly underneath the transparent fabric.

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Sarah drank in his admiring gaze for a short time before she said, "Sailor one of us is over dressed." She climbed onto the bed and straddled him. She let her apex settle onto his stomach. She reached for the bottom of his tee shirt and pulled it up over his head. When she had it completely off, she dropped it on the floor beside the bed. Then she took hold of the waist bands of his pajama pants and
his boxer briefs. She crawled backward on her knees, bringing the obstructing garments with her. She also dropped them on the floor. When she had him completely naked, she knelt at the foot of the bed and admired her prize.

Sarah thought to herself, 'For a man that sits behind a desk all day, John was in great shape. While his abs were not a washboard, they were firm.' John did the same exercises as Sarah did. They both enjoyed that they could work out together.

Sarah smiled as she saw that his 'little sailor' was rising to attention. She reached down and gently took hold of it. John gasped at her touch.

Sarah brought her mouth down, licked it and said, "Sailor I hope you're up to it because I'm going to give you the best blow job you have ever had. Then we're going to really test your stamina."

John gasped again as her mouth completely engulfed him. Sarah was true to her word. She knew exactly what to do. John's cock pulsed with power in her mouth. She loved how in her mouth it was a tame creature, basking in the pleasure she bestowed and responding eagerly to her every ministration. She so wanted it to become the predator when it plunged into her.

John loved how Sarah took her time. Her movements while not tentative, were gentle. He lay back and enjoyed her flutterings against his throbbing member. But as his desire grew, he encouraged her, both with his praising words and with his entirely involuntary responses to her efforts. Sarah always paid attention to every reaction her husband had when she did this to him as she focused her concentration on doing the things that pleased him. Before long she was giving him more pleasure with her mouth than she ever had before.

John wanted Sarah to take him all the way to culmination. So when the moment came, her hot, sucking mouth felt so good, his mounting pleasure so strong. He grasped her bobbing head tightly in both hands just as his loins began to surge, his throbbing cock swelling even larger. "Oh baby I'm coming, take me all the way!"

It was no sooner said than done. Gasping out a loud groan John came into his wife's sucking mouth as Sarah swallowed all the reward. With a final shudder, John's strong hands released her head, and she sat up. Sarah loved that she had successfully pleasured her husband. She went up and lay down beside him. He reached down and gathered her into his arms and laid a deep kiss on her. Then they lay back for a time, sighing with pleasure.

After they rested John took hold of Sarah's hands and led her to her dresser. He stood behind her and proceeded to remove her lacy outfit one piece at a time. As he slid the silk down he laid kisses all down her body. He saved her thong for last. By the time he got there Sarah was breathing very hard. John gathered her into his arms and brought her back to their bed. He lay her down he reached for the thong straps at her hips and pulled them down to expose her treasure. He knelt between her thighs and lifted her legs over his shoulders. Sarah felt utterly naked, terribly open and vulnerable and yet greatly cherished. He brought his lips down to her and proceeded to return her favor.

His tongue moved in a long slow curve starting at the base of her spine. Sarah thought, 'I love how he does this.' He licked along the cleft of her buttocks, pausing to push deep into her vagina, then lifting to tease the sensitive skin where the lips met and the tingling clitoris between them. After seven or eight long licks Sarah held her husband's head over her clit, making him concentrate there. She began to lift and lower her hips, telling him by the pressure of her fingertips on his temples to lick harder or more lightly, higher or lower, left or right. She felt as he pushed three fingers into the moist interior. He withdrew them and then them plunged them back in.

As all the muscles of her body began to tense for her climax, Sarah thought, 'Oh I love it when we
have 'welcome home sex'.

She started to come, shaking like a tree in a storm. John knowing what his wife liked removed his hand and thrust his tongue deep inside her while she ground her sex frantically against his face.

It seemed to go on forever. Each time the sensations eased, he would lick her clitoris, or bite the lips and it would start all over again; until, out of sheer exhaustion Sarah pleaded, "Stop, stop. I have no more energy left, you'll kill me." John at last lifted his face from her and lowered her legs to the bed.

John leaned over her, resting his weight on his hands and kissed her mouth. She tasted herself in the kiss. She lay prone, too tired to open her eyes, too tired even to kiss him back. She felt his hand on her sex, opening it then felt him nosing in. She groaned loudly as he penetrated her.

John began to move in and out, slowly at first and then faster. Sarah opened her eyes. His face was above hers and he was gazing at her. Then he bent his neck and looked down to where their bodies were joined. His eyes widened and his mouth opened as he watched his cock going in and out of her. The sight so inflamed him that Sarah wished she could see it to. Suddenly he slowed his pace, thrusting deeper. Sarah remembered that John did this before the climax. John looked into his wife's eyes. "Kiss me while I come," he said. As their lips met Sarah thrust her tongue into his mouth. She loved it when he came. His back arched and his head lifted and he gave a cry like a wild animal as she felt him spurt inside her.

When it was over John lowered his head onto her shoulder and moved his lips gently against the soft skin of her neck, whispering words of love which she heard and brought them deep into her heart. After a minute or two John gave a deep sigh of contentment, kissed her mouth and then slumped beside her. Automatically they moved into the position they always assumed after making love: his arm around her, her head on his shoulder, her thigh lying across his hips.

John yawned hugely and Sarah giggled at him. They touched one another lethargically. She licked his chest and tasted the salt perspiration on his skin. She looked at his neck and asked aloud, "Why are you such a great lay?"

John was almost but not quite asleep and he was able to reply, "Hell woman we've had enough practice."

Sarah giggled a bit more then said, "I love you dear, sleep well." This time John was unable to reply at all. He had fallen asleep.

She leaned up and kissed his cheek. Then she settled back down onto him, closed her own eyes and fell into her own peaceful sleep.

Saturday, May 4, 2002

0845 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, DC, NW

John stood at the stove making pancakes. He was holding his cup of coffee, sipping it in between flipping the pancakes and pouring new batter for more. He really needed the coffee. He and Sarah did not get much sleep the night before that is not a steady sleep as they napped on and off all through the night. In between naps, Sarah, as promised, really tested his stamina.

At the first time Sarah woke up she felt the sticky feeling between her legs, and the slight soreness of
muscles that hadn't been used in a while and was completely satisfied. She smiled a lazy, contented smile and began kissing her husband awake. He was half asleep and his response was to wrap his wife in his arms and kiss her back. He rolled them both over until Sarah was lying under him. He was still half asleep as if he was in a dream he maneuvered himself until he was able to enter her. Sarah sighed in deep contentment as he filled her. She locked her legs around him to hold him in as deep as possible. As he lay on top and inside her, John became more awake. He began to rain kisses on Sarah. He tenderly kissed both her eyes and started to nibble on her ear lobes. Then he moved to her neck. He inhaled the scent of her. All through the kissing he was beginning to stroke himself in and out. Soon Sarah was undulating underneath him in the same rhythm. Sarah began using her vaginal muscles to clench herself tight around him.

"Oh Sarah don't stop doing that," John groaned.

As Sarah did that, John increased his tempo. Sarah went right along with him. She put her arms above her head and gripped the rungs of the metal headboard. She clung on for dear life and went along with her husband as he pounded into her. "John… faster… harder… oh! Yes! Harder… oh, god… deeper, John! Yes! Don't stop! Oh John!"

Her breasts bounced and swayed as she welcomed the pounding. She knew right when John was about to climax. His body tensed as he gave a final thrust and slammed all the way into her. He cried out her name in pleasure, vaguely aware of her screaming his own name.

After they came down from their sexual high they assumed their favorite post coital positions and fell back into another nap.

The sun was shining into their room when they woke up again. Sarah was the first to awake. She noted that it was 0645. Sarah moved slightly, wincing at the flow of sticky fluid that was collecting between her legs. She knew that she needed a shower. Without waking John she got up and went into the master bathroom. As she stood under the warm spray she sighed with pleasure as it cascaded down her body. She was facing away from the shower door and didn't notice it being opened. She was momentarily startled when she felt two arms snake around her waist. She turned her head and received John's kiss. They made love again in the shower. He held Sarah up against the wall and pounded into her. Sarah's cries of ecstasy reverberated in the bathroom's natural echo chamber. After they climaxed for the fourth time in eight hours they took turns washing each other. They exited the shower and got dressed in their sweats and went to face the new day.

As John was doing the pancakes, Sarah was dealing with getting Caroline and Patrick up for the day. Chloe came in and poured herself some coffee. Maureen followed close behind. She got herself a mug and sat. "Here you go Nana," Chloe said as she poured coffee into her grandmother's mug.

"Thank you sweetie," Maureen said. Turning to her son she asked, "So John did you and Sarah get any sleep last night?" She had a smirk on her face as she asked.

She saw the blush as it rose up John's neck to his cheeks. "Uh we got some. Sarah needs to adjust to the time change from her trip to the gulf. So she slept on and off."

"Is she adjusted now?" Maureen asked cheekily.

"Uh yeah she is," John stammered.

"Uh huh," Maureen simply said.

She smiled as she sipped her coffee. She got up earlier in the night to use the bathroom. She heard Sarah and John in their room as they had their second go around. Then later that morning she was in
the hall bathroom. She heard them making love in the shower which was just on the other side of the wall. She thought to happily to herself, "Even after a few years of marriage, they still acted like newlyweds."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 81

Monday May 13, 2002

NCIS Headquarters

A growing appreciation of the changing threat facing the Department of the Navy in the 21st century, culminating with the terrorist bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen and the attacks on September 11, 2001, led NCIS to transform the Antiterrorist Alert Center (ATAC) into the Multiple Threat Assessment Center (MTAC) earlier this year. Diane Rabb was the driving force in reorganizing the assessment center to those changes. Right now she was in that center as it went about assessing an ongoing operation.

Investigations into the aftermath of Atef's tribunal revealed that nuclear material was stolen from Russia; a Russian submarine captain was recruited by Kabir, Atef's brother.

The fact of Kabir's existence came about from the investigations started as a result of the after trial reports the Marshalls and Rabbs submitted.

On top of that a civilian vehicle was mistakenly targeted. It was bombed because it was believed that no one but Kabir was to be on the road. As a result of this SECNAV Nelson sent Harm and Sarah back to Afghanistan to 'keep a watch for the Navy's interests.'

When they arrived in country they found that Gunny Galindez was still in Afghanistan. Gunny's Marine Unit was attached to Naval Intelligence. They were working with Clayton Webb trying to find Kabir. Sarah and Harm were pleased that John's department was taking an active hand in the operation. That almost assured that Webb wouldn't turn it into a real clusterfuck.

Webb related to them that informants in Russia told the CIA that Kabir was in Minsk recruiting Capt Mikael Yerastov, a Russian submariner for an Iranian mission.

What Webb didn't know was that the informants were also working for Naval Intelligence. When John received the information he relayed it onto the CIA, as was directed by the new intelligence sharing rules implemented in the wake of the September 11th attacks.

Webb also related to Harm and Sarah that he found out that Ahmad Hakim, the Pakistani Embassy Security Chief was a double agent with the Iranians. Webb found this out when he bugged Hakim's embassy office with transmitter hidden a cigar box. It also came out that there was a $250 million payment for the submarine Najvayi. He also said that they knew it was retrofitted for SS-25 cruise missiles. Webb flipped Hakim when he baited him with information that the US knew he was a double agent.

When Harm and Sarah sent that information in their initial progress report to AJ he forwarded copies to Nelson and to John's Boss Admiral LaPorte. LaPorte, John, Nelson and AJ meet to discuss how to deal with the situation. LaPorte ordered John to coordinate the Navy's intelligence assets in the operation. Nelson and AJ agreed. They presented their plan to President Bush. The President approved the measures they recommended.

It was decided that since Navy personnel were already in the midst of the investigation they would
stay on point, working closely with the other intelligence units already in country. John was placed in charge of the operation. Since his office was still in the NCIS building he and Diane set up the operation in MTAC. John had the directors of the CIA, NSA, all in the line. The giant video screen was split to show each director. NCIS Director Magnum was standing alongside John as they all discussed what needed to be done.

CIA Director Watts was being very abusive in his insistence of keeping the operation a CIA only job. "The CIA is better able to handle this. We have the people already in country to track down Kabir and run him to ground."

"Director Watts may I remind you that was Navy Intelligence operatives in Minsk that saw Captain Yerastov taking the payment from Kabir. The only reason the CIA knows about that is because my department was required by law to inform you so that we all could decide what further action needs to be taken.

Also the President has ordered all of us to fully cooperate and take whatever measures WE all deem necessary to resolve this crisis. If you have any problems with how this operation is being handled, take them up with him; after it is concluded," John insisted almost shouting.

John was breathing hard in an effort to control his temper. Diane came to his side and surreptitiously gripped his arm. When John looked at her he visibly softened. Taking a calming breath he continued. "Now that aside there are people already in country, Navy Intelligence, CIA as well as Navy JAG, in hot pursuit of any and all leads leading to the capture of Kabir and whatever he is planning to do with the nuclear material and any cruise missiles he may acquire. We will share all information we get so that we can better coordinate our responses. I hope that you will do the same."

Watts and the NSA director, William Griffin both agreed. John and Magnum were amused that Griffin didn't say a word during Watts's rant. He just went along with whatever the operation dictated.

After Diane signaled that the technician could end the transmission, the rear door to the MTAC Studio opened. AJ and Loren Singer-Austen walked in.

John turned along with everyone else to greet the new comers. After greeting everyone else John held out both his hands as Loren approached him. Smiling she took both his hands in hers to greet him.

"Lieutenant, how have you been? I haven't seen you since your wedding. You haven't been over. Patrick keeps asking for you," John said.

"Well captain, I've only been back a week from my honeymoon. Between Bobby and I having to stay late to catch up on work and trying to organize the house and the wedding gifts every evening and last weekend, we haven't had the time. Tell my boyfriend that we'll stop by next weekend to give him and the girls some souvenirs from Hawaii," Loren announced with a cheeky smile.

John smiled at that. Having disposed of the amenities, John got down to business asking, "What brings you and Admiral Chegwidden here?"

AJ answered him saying, "I assigned her as my aide in this matter. I thought that the lieutenant would be valuable to the operation. I cleared it with the SECNAV and read her in on what is going on."

"Well we're damned lucky to have her then. She has a gift for keeping even the most obscure facts organized in the big picture of any operation. She may see some things and patterns that the rest of us may miss," John said sincerely.
Loren blushed at the complement.

They all got down to business tracking the crisis.

1745 Local Time

On the road to Qarqin

Afghanistan

Sarah and Harm were driving back to the base camp. They were returning from a village where they were interviewing the family members of the victims killed in the vehicle bombing. The family should have been warned to stay home by Gunny's native friend, Fareeza. She was at the village, but she was unable to warn anyone. They had found a young boy who recognized her picture. He said that she was with a man with one brown and one blue eye. That was the main feature that described Kabir. The villagers didn't suspect anyone but Kabir would be on the road.

While they were there Harm and Sarah also found out that the vehicle was purposely targeted by a local warlord and informant, Zumai Fureeq. He tried to get Webb to take out his competition by giving a false location of Kabir. After the bombing when Webb realized that he was duped he didn't follow through with the payment.

As they were driving Sarah commented, "You know I don't know what irritates me more, the fact that Kabir is still out there after we've practically bombed the province trying to get him or that an uppity warlord is using our pursuit of Kabir to get rid of a rival."

"Yeah I know what you mean. It seems that the Afghan warlords are taking advantage of the confusion and are trying to consolidate their power base. They were unable to do that when the Taliban was in power. The warlords don't understand that they can't go back to business as usual before the Taliban," Harm replied.

In an attempt to change the subject, "That even hurts our chance of catching Kabir."

"How far behind him do you think we are?" Sarah asked.

Before Harm could answer he shouted, "Lookout!"

Sarah saw the goat in the road at the same time Harm did. She swerved to the right. That maneuver only took them from the frying pan into the fire. The Humvee left the road and went about ten more feet. They were suddenly rocked by an explosion. They went into an unmarked mine field. The armor under the vehicle saved them from injury when the mine exploded. But the explosion severely rocked the vehicle. As a result of that Harm was thrown out of the vehicle into the middle of the mine field.

After hitting the ground Harm lay still taking personal inventory. He stood up slowly and thanked his lucky stars he wasn't injured. Forgetting where he was he took two steps to walk back to the car. At the second step he heard and felt a click under his foot. He stepped on a mine. He knew it would detonate when he lifted his foot.

"Uh sis I have a problem," Harm softly exclaimed.

"What?" Sarah asked.

She was still in the car. Her holding onto the steering wheel during the explosion kept her in the vehicle, though she was still a bit stunned by the explosion itself. She vaguely acknowledged Harm's
speaking of a problem. As he continued she listened more closely.

"I'm standing on a mine. If I move my foot, it'll explode," Harm softly explained, trying to stay calm.

"Hold on Harm," Sarah said as she hopped into the back of the Humvee.

In the back of the Humvee Sarah picked up the ammo boxes up one by one. Harm had no idea what she had on her mind until she came up and exclaimed, "Here's the heaviest!"

As Sarah stood up in the back of the Humvee, Harm knew what she intended. Before he could tell her to be careful, Sarah hopped down onto the ground. Harm winced and closed his eyes readying himself for the explosion that he was sure should have happened.

Thinking only to save her brother in law Sarah looked around and carefully approached. "Okay this ammo box should do the trick. Your whole weight is not on the mine. This should be enough weight to hold the switch down so you could jump to safety."

Sarah carefully slid the ammo box over the mine. Harm moved his foot away in time with Sarah sliding the box over the mine. When Sarah had it in place she held it down a bit. Harm put his foot lightly on top to ensure it stayed down. He said, "Okay you back away to the other side of the Humvee. The box should hold it long enough for me to jump away. If it doesn't, at least you'll be safe."

Sarah was about to protest, but thought better of it. She retraced her steps out of the minefield by stepping onto her own boot prints and took cover on the side of the Humvee opposite Harm.

Harm took a few steadying breaths as he said, "Okay here we go, one, two."

Before he said three, he launched himself toward the Humvee. He managed to reach the vehicle in a single bound and scrambled over it to where Sarah crouched. Just as he landed and lowered his head down behind the truck, the spring switch of the mine forced the ammo box up and it exploded.

When the dust settled Harm looked at Sarah and asked, "Where'd you get the idea to do that?"

Sarah shrugged and said, "I saw it in a movie."

Harm nodded in grateful exasperation.

They retrieved their amazingly unscathed weapons and packs from the rear of the Humvee and walked in the tire tracks back onto the road.

"We better find a place to camp for the night. It's almost nightfall and we won't be able to make it back to base camp before then. I don't like walking around here in the dark. I have no intention stepping on another mine thank you," Harm said.

Sarah agreed adding "Let's not get too far away from the Humvee in case anyone comes looking for us." She pointed up and added, "Let's go up on that bluff. I see a nice overhang we can lie under."

They hitched up their packs and weapons and hiked up. They only stepped on boulders, knowing that there were no mines embedded there. The bluff they settled on overlooked a small group of huts. They were able to set up a crude camp by laying out their ponchos as mats and their packs for pillows and start a fire before night completely engulfed them. After they had partaken of their MREs, they settled down on their mats to sleep.

Sarah rolled over away from Harm. Harm was very amused by this and said, "Would you like me
ask room service to send up a privacy curtain?"

Sarah looked back at him and said, "I didn't know if you would be comfortable if we lay together."

"Get over here sis. We need to share body heat if we're going to make it through the night without freezing," Harm explained.

Sarah moved over and they proceeded to wrap their arms and legs around each other. Harm asked, "Are you good now?"

"Yeah, would you mind if I pretended John was holding me? Except for my mother and Uncle Matt, no one but him has ever held me like this." Sarah asked sounding almost like a scared child.

"That's fine with me as long you don't mind I pretend I'm holding Diane," Harm returned instantly comforting his sister in law.

Smiling Sarah reached her head up to kiss Harm's cheek. As she snuggled deeper into his embrace, she said, "I love you Harm. You're the best brother in law a girl can have."

Harm kissed the top of her head and replied, "Well you're a pretty nice in law yourself sis. Rest easy we'll be fine."

She sighed with the comfort and then asked, "I wonder what they're doing now?"

Knowing who 'they' were Harm replied, "Diane and John are probably working." Then he asked, "How many hours ahead are we to them?"

"Well it's 2045 here and if we're eight hours ahead of DC's time zone it's 1245 there. Either they're in MTAC tracking this operation or they're at lunch. With Diane being pregnant, you know she'll be sticking to a regular meal schedule," Sarah answered.

"Yeah you're right," Harm said. Then asked half in amusement, "You think they'll mind how close we're laying?"

"Nah as long as we keep our clothes on we'll be fine," Sarah said in the same tone. They both shared a laugh.

When they stopped laughing Harm said, "Shhh listen."

Sarah lay still and did that. She said, "I don't hear anything."

"That's just it. It's totally quiet. We're in some remote country. I wonder if there are any places left in the states that are this quiet," Harm said in a reflective mood.

"You know Red Rock Mesa's this quiet. Maybe when we get back we can go there and camp out," Sarah said.

"Yeah that sounds like a good..." Harm began but was unable to finish the sentence. That was because he heard the unmistakable sound of approaching explosions. It was an air strike.

Sarah had heard the same thing. They sat up instantly and started gathering their things. They ran away looking to take cover. They saw which way the path of destruction was heading and ran the other way. They managed to find some cover in between some boulders. They were lucky as the bombs dropped very close but not directly on them. As they were hunkered down they listened as the explosions moved away. It was only after the last explosion that they came up from their cover.
As they checked each other out, they saw that they both had numerous and thankfully minor scratches and lacerations on their faces, hands and arms. They turned each other around to check each other's backs, finding no wounds there. They heaved a collective sigh of relief at their close call.

"I wonder who called for that airstrike." Sarah asked rhetorically.

"I don't know but I'd like to wring his neck," Harm replied bitterly.

Sarah said, "Calm down flyboy. It's not like they knew we were here. C'mon let's go check our camp site."

"Yeah okay," Harm replied somewhat mollified.

When they got back to the site they said a little prayer of thanks for their luck. The overhang under which they pitched camp was totally collapsed. If they hadn't run, they certainly would have been lying dead under the rubble.

Same time
USS Seahawk
Arabian Sea

During Mustafa Atef's trial and the time after, Bud and Coates were arguing with Dale Woodley, a CIA agent over his using inappropriate tactics of interrogation. At one point Woodley stormed out telling Bud that this one is all yours. Bud was able to get the location of Kabir's camp from Atef by talking of Star Trek. It seemed that the prisoner was a fan of some of the ideals put forth in the series. This caused him to inadvertently reveal information of Kabir's location.

Based on that, Webb called in the massive strike. He wouldn't listen to Gunny who tried to get him to change it into a rescue mission, of Fareeza. Webb tried to ignore him, so Gunny decked him to get his attention. Finally Webb listened but couldn't get the strike changed. Webb told Gunny of a woman he knew in South America before an uprising, intending to commiserate with Gunny but claimed what happened to her was "classified."

Bud advised the captain and approved the strike.

Tuesday May 14, 2002
0830 Local Time
NCIS Headquarters

When Diane and John arrived in her office, they each had a cup of their morning beverage. They were still awaiting word on Sarah and Harm's location. The night before after receiving the initial assessments of the air strike, they received word that the two were overdue reporting back to the base camp.

As they both sat down Diane asked, "Do you think that they got caught up in the air raid?"

"I hope not," John replied. He didn't voice his greatest fear. It was confirmed by the marine platoon targeting the village that was bombed that it had Al Qaeda militants therein. Coincidentally, the marine platoon was on the opposite side of the village from the bluff where Sarah and Harm made camp. Of course John and Diane had no way of knowing that.
John came out of his reverie and asked Diane, "What have you told the kids?"

"Nothing yet, I drove them to school and daycare without telling them. Besides only Sarah Cate is old enough to understand what's going on and I still haven't told her," Diane replied. She then asked, "What about yours. Surely you think that Chloe knows something is up."

"No she doesn't. She does know that Sarah and Harm were traveling back and forth across Afghanistan on an investigation. She just doesn't know that they are missing. I got the call last night while I was in my office at the same time you did. I didn't mention anything at home because I wanted her and the babies to get a good night sleep and not worry today. If we don't hear any more news today, I'll tell her when I get home tonight," John replied. Then he put a sly grin on his face and said, "And stop calling me Shirley."

Diane looked at him with eyes wide open and then burst into laughter. John was glad she got the 'Airplane' joke and his attempt at humor was successful.

Just then Diane's phone rang. She snatched it up very quickly. John only heard her side of the first part of the call as she said, "Captain Rabb! Yes sir he is. Let me put you on speaker." She told John, "It's the SECNAV."

John greeted him saying, "Mr. Secretary what can you tell us?"

Nelson began to explain, "Well I just got a call from CENTCOM in Tampa. They received a flash report on the whereabouts of Colonel Marshall and Commander Rabb. The marine platoon that targeted the village that was bombed last night was sent out on patrol to help find them. They found them near where their Humvee was alongside the road. It had apparently been forced into a mine field. While the marines were there the colonel and commander showed up, looking none the worse for wear. The lieutenant said that they would call as soon as they got back to the base camp."

Diane and John heaved a great sigh of relief. It was Diane who said with a slight choke in her voice, "Thank you sir that's great news."

"You're welcome. I'm glad everything turned out alright for them and you," Nelson said sincerely before he ended the call.

1630 Local Time

Outside Kandahar

Afghanistan

Sarah and Harm spent the night at the base camp, being checked out by the medical corpsmen and were deemed healthy to continue their duties. After breakfast they called their respective spouses to ensure them that they were fine. Then they went to the village where Webb and Gunny were helping sift through the bodies. They pulled Fareeza from the rubble.

Before Fareeza died in Gunny's arms she said to him, "I ran into Kabir at the first house I went to warn. Kabir convinced the family that I was a CIA agent and they needed to flee in the same direction he was going."

To at least show his sympathy to the grieving Gunny Webb said, "Nuestro amor de es el nino del padre (our love is the child of a cruel father)."

Forensic Pathologist Commander Teresa Coulter was in charge of identifying the bodies.
Teresa shared her initial findings. "A few of the dead died from radiation poisoning and one of the huts was still hot. I also found this"

She pulled out a lab tray with a severed finger with a ring next to it and said, "I found an inscription inside. It was addressed to Kabir."

"So is he dead?" Harm asked.

"I don't know. Here take a look through the magnifying glass."

Harm and Sarah did so and then looked questioningly at her.

Teresa explained, "See the edge, it's too clean. If it was blown off, it would be very ragged."

"What does that mean?" Sarah asked.

"It means this finger was cut off," Coulter said.

Sarah and Harm looked at each other. Sarah voiced the obvious, "That means we keep looking."

After they left the village Sarah and Harm found a truck driver with radiation poisoning. They chased down a lead which led to his town where many Chechen's were also dying from radiation poisoning.

Sarah told Harm, "You know the Aiken case about the stolen nuclear material?"

"The one where you and Sturgis convicted the guy based on your premonition?" Harm answered.

Sarah smirked as she answered, "Yeah that one. Aiken was killed by a Chechen. His confession led to the recapture of 30 kilos weapons grade uranium bound from Russia. I don't believe all of it was recaptured."

Harm nodded grimly at that deduction. Knowing that they did all that they could in country, they set off to return to the Seahawk.

Wednesday, May 15, 2002

USS Seahawk Battle Group

Arabian Sea

In an effort to better combat the threat of a possible attack from Yerastov's submarine Sturgis Turner was sent to the Seahawk battle group's submarine, the Watertown. His orders were to assist Captain Flagler acting as the 'wildcard' that Yerastov didn't expect.

In order to convince Flagler to trust him, Turner said, "Yerastov is the only commander to have ever eluded US boats who were trailing him. I am the only sonar operator who has never lost Yerastov. Also Yerastov has made a study of you. He knows what you will do and he will capitalize on that knowledge."

When Flagler tried to argue with him over a next step, Turner told him, "I am Alec Baldwin. I'm the guy that knows how Yerastov will think."

Flagler smirked at that, but he had to go along with Turner's logic.

Back on the Seahawk Bud was assigned by Capt. Johnson to redo the rules of engagement for
submarines. Bud presented his plan for a "rolling sovereignty" (Cordone Sanitare) around the battle
group with authorization to shoot if any ship entered into it. It was accepted through JAG, 5th fleet,
CENTCOM, SECDEF and the Joint Chief's!

The perimeter was initially set at 10 miles. However this was changed when the operational task
force in Afghanistan started piecing all the pieces of the puzzle together. They realized Yerastov was
armed with a submarine launched nuclear tipped cruise missile. Captain Johnson had to extend the
perimeter accordingly.

On board the Watertown Turner deduced that the Najvayi was heading for the Arabian Sea. They
were able to acquire it on their sonar and began trailing it. Flagler initially didn't follow Turner's
advice and nearly got them killed. The Watertown did finally torpedo the Najvayi; but, it was just
after it shot the cruise missile.

After Sarah and Harm arrived back to the Seahawk they were put through the radiation
decontamination process. Because they knew that they were now dealing with a possible nuclear
tipped cruise missile attack, it was determined that if the Watertown didn't sink the Najvayi, the
missile would have to be shot down before it reached within ten miles of the battle group.

When Captain Johnson looked at the files detailing who was best, he discovered that Harm still held
the top score as the all time "missile X" champ, shooting down missiles from a Tomcat, for the
Seahawk.

Harm was ordered to fly. Again Harm's RIO was Lt. Jorgenson. His wing man Lt. Cdr. Chaidez.
After launch they took up station right before the cruise missile was launched.

"Tally ho, we have a missile leaving the water" Harm called out.

Chaidez was the closest on in position to engage. He wasn't able to lock onto the missile until it was
too close to the Watertown to take the shot.

At that Harm called, "Stand down and take up station on the wing!"

Harm maneuvered his Tomcat until he was directly in front of the missile. He sighed as he heard the
tone telling him that the missile had locked onto his 'six'.

As they flew on Jorgenson asked him, "What if the missile explodes sir?"

Harm replied in a nonchalant tone, "Well lieutenant that would ruin our whole day."

Inside Harm was nothing but nonchalant. He kept looking in his rearview mirror, muttering to
himself, "C'mon, c'mon."

He was concentrating solely on the missile on his 'six' that he didn't notice that his flight of two
Tomcats and cruise missile passed the Seahawk. He heard over his radio, "Bandit One, you have
passed ten miles from the battle group."

Shortly after the missile flamed out and crashed into the Indian Ocean.

Thursday, May 16, 2002

0605 Zulu

Kandahar, Afghanistan
Bud and Coates left the Seahawk to investigate the collateral damage to a school that was damaged when an airstrike was carried out in its village. The Navy was going to rebuild it. When they went together to the ribbon cutting ceremony Bud saw a boy playing in the mine field and tried to save him. What happened next would totally traumatize his family and friends in the JAG Corps.
Chapter 82

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 82

Thursday, May 16, 2002

0605 Zulu

Kandahar, Afghanistan

Earlier in the month Bud went to Afghanistan to investigate the collateral damage to a school. It was damaged when an airstrike was carried out in its village. After Bud completed his investigation he recommended that the Navy rebuild it. In the interest of winning the local population over the Navy agreed. Bud and Coates left the Seahawk by chopper that morning to go to the ribbon cutting ceremony.

As they were walking down the road Coates asked Bud, "So what does Lt. Simms think of me being your Legalman sir? I hope she's not jealous."

"No Jen she's not. I told Harriet you were my Legalman in the first e-mail that night after I saw you. She was thrilled for you. Lt. Singer was also thrilled for you. They both hope you'll do well. There was one thing that Harriet was reluctant to tell me though."

"What was that sir?" Jen asked.

"That she bought a house." Bud said.

"Really, why would she be afraid to tell you sir?" Jen asked again.

"Well we always said we could live on our Navy pay and not depend on her family's money. Harriet's parents are wealthy. While Roland, Harriet's dad was always willing to help us out before he passed away, Lydia is such a shrew. She never liked that Harriet joined the Navy or that she married me. She once told Harriet that she wouldn't be seeing her trust fund any time as long as she was married to me,' Bud began.

"She sounds like my father sir," Jen voiced her observation.

"So after her dad's will was read she found out that the trust fund had a codicil that stated that when Harriet had children, she could access it whenever she wanted, which she did. So deciding that she had enough of living in an apartment and running out of room for our two children and their stuff, Harriet used some of the funds to put a substantial down payment on a house in Rosslyn, VA. Then she set up the mortgage payments that fit our combined Navy income. The rest of the trust she rolled over into a fund set up for AJ, Sarah and any other children we may have," Bud explained.

"Well that's great sir congratulations," Jen said.

"Thanks Jen," Bud said.

"You're welcome sir," Jen said.

Bud then asked her, "Enough about me how's Sergei doing?"
Jen practically lit up at the question as she said, "I just received an e-mail from him last night. He's finished his training at Cherry Point and he may be deployed to Afghanistan with his unit. I may be able to see him when we go in country, sir."

"That's great Jen. Any chance the Rabbs will have you as an in-law?" Bud asked smiling.

"We'll see sir," Jen answered shyly. Then her tone changed as she remembered that they were not out on stroll on the Mall in DC. She asked, "Sir, speaking of the Rabbs do we have to worry about mines. Commander Rabb and Colonel Marshall told me of their encounter with a minefield."

"Well they said as long as we stay on the roads we shouldn't have any problems," Bud explained.

"That's good sir," Jen replied with a sigh.

They walked on for a few minutes. As they rounded a bend they stopped and looked on in horror. They saw a little boy playing in a minefield.

Jen said, "Sir didn't you say that the mines are off the road? He could be killed."

"Go get some help and I'll try and distract him from the minefield," Bud ordered her.

While Jen ran off Bud tried to coax the boy out. "Hey buddy come to me, watch where you're stepping."

Unfortunately Bud failed to follow his own advice. Not watching where he was going he took two steps into the minefield. On the third he stepped on a mine. Instead of standing still he kept going. The mine exploded. Bud was tossed head over heels and he landed on his back. He had shrapnel wounds to his body. What was worse, his right leg below the knee was blown off.

0845 Zulu

USS Seahawk

North Arabian Sea

Sarah was in her quarters sitting at the desk in just her underwear. She was instant messaging with John. She heard his greeting ping on her computer as she was getting dressed. She and Harm were scheduled to leave on the COD in the next ninety minutes so she took advantage of the time to 'chat' with her husband. She was having fun baiting him as she typed.

SM – 'Hey sailor, your timing couldn't be better I just got out of the shower.'

JM – 'Oh I wish I was there to help you get dressed.'

SM – 'More like help me get undressed.'

JM – 'What are you wearing now?'

SM – 'Oh just my brown cotton panties and bra. You know the un-frilly, comfortable stuff I always take when I go on a ship. I was going to put my uniform on, but I can 'chat' with you first. It has to be quick though because Harm will be here any minute.'

JM – 'I bet you still look sexy as ever.'

SM – 'Just thinking of you makes me feel sexy.'
JM – ‘I can't wait till you're home so that I could welcome you home properly.’

SM – ‘Oh I love it when you welcome me home. It keeps me up half the night. At least it helps me get adjusted to the time difference.’

JM – 'Well hurry home so that I can adjust you well and proper. I love you ninja girl.'

SM – 'I'll be home for my adjustment as soon as I can. I love you to hot stuff.'

With that she signed off and shut her computer down. She stepped back to her bunk and bent to continue her packing. She got everything away except for the two books she was reading, Nelson DeMille's 'The Lion's Game and Tom Clancy's 'The Sum of All Fears'. She realized she would only be able fit one of the books in her bag. She was reading them both at the same time and she was half way through them both and she didn't want to leave either of them behind.

Just then there was a knock on her stateroom door. "Yes who is it?"

"Hey Sarah it's me, open up," She heard her brother in law say from the other side.

"Just a second I'm getting dressed," She replied as she pulled her slacks from the hanger and started putting them on.

As she started to put her blouse on Harm said, "I can help with that to."

Sarah buttoned the last button and went to open her door. She said in a humorous chastising way, "Harmon Rabb wait till I tell your wife, my sister, that you are..

She opened the door and saw that Harm was holding the deck vest and safety helmet she would need to wear when they boarded the COD. She finished her sentence softly, "flirting with me."

Harm smiled at his sister in law pleased with his 'gotcha' moment.

She smiled back at him saying, "If it wouldn't make my sister a widow I'd kill you for being so immature."

"Yeah I know. But you still think I'm the best brother in law a girl can have, right?" Harm replied smugly.

"Right, but keep it up and I may change my opinion," Sarah mock threatened as she put her shoes on.

She turned to try and find a way she could pack both her books.

Harm saw that she was having trouble with this and stepped over. As Sarah tried to make more room for the both of them Harm picked them up. "Ah 'The Lion's Game' and 'The Sum of All Fears'.." He looked more closely at them before he continued, "And you have them both marked half way through."

"Yeah I've been reading them at the same time. When I get tired of one, I pick up the other. I just can't seem to find room to fit them both into my bag."

As Harm held both books he said, "Well I can think of a way."

What he did next greatly infuriated his sister in law. Before she could reply a petty officer came to the door of Sarah's stateroom. "AH you're both here sir ma'am. Captain Johnson requests your presence on the bridge ASAP."
As they walked out Sarah said to Harm, "John is going to be furious at you for that."

"Why's that?" Harm asked.

"You do not just tear books in half. John's priorities are this, God, family, duty and books. He gave me those two as a going away gift for this trip. He gives me two books to read every trip. I have always brought them home for him to read. Hell he's practically got a library set up in the basement of all the books he's bought," Sarah explained.

"Well sorry, I'll know for the next time," Harm said.

Before Sarah could reply to that the met up with Sturgis. As they continued onto the bridge, Sturgis couldn't resist getting a ribbing into Harm. "I read the after action report. I can't believe that you flew like Superman half way across the Arabian Sea leading a dirty nuke until it flamed out."

"What I can't believe is that you thought you were Alec Baldwin or Jack Ryan acting like some great submariner strategist on the Watertown."

Before Sturgis or even Sarah could reply they reached the bridge an. As they three stood at attention, Sarah being the senior officer said, "Sir JAG officers reporting to the bridge as ordered."

Johnson turned and from the look he gave the JAG officers they knew it was bad news. "At ease, I have some bad news. There's been an accident. Lt. Roberts has been injured. He's been stabilized in the field and he has been brought to the Guadalcanal for surgery. Petty Officer Coates is with him. His condition is critical."

"How critical is he sir?" Sarah asked.

"He stepped on a land mine and his right leg below the knee has been blown off. He has other shrapnel wounds in his left leg and chest. That being the case, and I know it's still very soon, duty calls. I am going to need someone to replace him as the fleet's force judge advocate," Johnson explained.

Before anyone could reply Harm spoke up, "Aye sir. With your permission, we need to call Admiral Chegwidden so he can make a determination."

"Of course carry on," John son said.

Sarah, Harm and Sturgis saluted and left the bridge and made a beeline to CNC.

0635 Zulu

JAG Headquarters

Washington Naval Yard, DC,SE

AJ hung up his phone with shaking hands. When Tiner announced that Harm was calling the first thing he said, "Tell me it's not Bud!" He was very disappointed that it was.

He called Tiner in and said, "Tiner get me Lt. Simms."

Tiner was keeping up on the news from the gulf as ZNN reported that a JAG officer was seriously wounded while in country in Afghanistan. He had watched as Harriet was frantically e-mailing Bud trying to determine that it wasn't him. So when AJ told him to get Harriet, Tiner slumped and his face clearly showed his distress.
AJ saw that and said in a gently gruff tone, "Tiner go get her."

Tiner straightened up and replied, "Aye sir."

Harriet was there in thirty seconds. Tiner shut the door and sat down at his desk. Two minutes later he heard Harriet as she wailed.

0650 Zulu

AJ's office

No sooner did AJ get Harriet calm enough to leave the office for home with Tiner as her escort, his phone rang. He recognized the caller ID as being from the NCIS headquarters and knew it could one of two people.

He picked up the phone and said politely, "Chegwidden."

"AJ it's John what have you heard?" John was following the same ZNN reports.

AJ thought that the unspoken question in the question was, 'Was the injured JAG Officer my wife?' AJ didn't know that John e-mail chatted with Sarah less than an hour ago.

"It's Bud. He's in critical condition with his right leg blown off below the knee," AJ explained.

"Oh my God, does Harriet know?" John asked.

"Yeah I just finished telling her. I sent her home with Tiner to be with her children. I also called the academy and had Mike out on leave to be there to help Harriet," AJ explained.

"That's good. What are Sarah and Harm going to do?" John asked.

"Well Turner is there with them. One has to stay and replace Bud while the other two have to go or they'll miss movement."

"So who ever stays will monitor Bud."

"Yeah I just finished telling her. I sent her home with Tiner to be with her children. I also called the academy and had Mike out on leave to be there to help Harriet," AJ explained.

"That's good. What are Sarah and Harm going to do?"

"Well Turner is there with them. One has to stay and replace Bud while the other two have to go or they'll miss movement."

"Yeah that's the gist of it. Harm told me that Turner is going to leave and he and Sarah will determine which one of them stays," AJ explained.

"Oh God, they'll both want to stay to see how Bud is. You know Sarah is the senior officer, but Harm won't let her pull rank. He'll make her stay to replace Bud and then he'll fall on his sword and take the consequences of missing movement," John said in exasperation.

"Yeah you got it. How do we avoid that?" AJ asked half knowing the answer.

John looked at his watch and said, "So far neither of them is scheduled to move yet. Give me ten minutes. I'll call you back," John said before he hung up the phone not waiting for AJ's reply.

John called in his yeoman Senior Master Chief Carolyn Turner and told her, "Carolyn cut orders for Commander Harmon Rabb to be TAD to Naval Intelligence as of this hour. Due to the injury to Lt. Bud Roberts, the Force Judge Advocate on the Seahawk, all navy intelligence data gathered by Lt. Roberts has been left unsecured. Commander Rabb will ensure that all such data has been secured. Furthermore after he has done that and insured that the replacement for Lt. Roberts is up to speed on that data, he is to stay with Lt. Roberts during the course of his treatment and accompany him on his journey to his various treatment stops. He will be on this duty until further notice."
After writing her notes Carolyn replied, "I'm on it boss."

She got up and went to relay the orders. John called AJ back and he agreed with the plan.

1605 Zulu

USS Guadalcanal

North Arabian Sea

Sarah and Harm sat outside the surgery room of the sickbay. That just got word from Bud's surgeon, Dr. Ferraro that while they had operated to remove his spleen, he coded and after a long process of trying to revive him, he was pronounced dead.

Sarah and Harm's grief was short lived however when while Dr. Ferraro was giving them the bad news, another doctor came out to tell her that Bud had revived on his own and was showing signs of improvement.

As they sat and digested the now good news, Harm began to cry. He was trying to keep it in for the sake of being strong for Sarah and Coates. Now he could let it go. Sarah moved in closer to offer comfort. She took his hand and stroked the back of his head as her brother in law had his cry.

After he had calmed down he said, "Leave it to John to cut orders to keep me from being charged with missing movement. I guess that means you stay."

"Yeah well John couldn't cut orders for his wife to be under his command after all that would be against regulations," Sarah said with a chuckle.

Harm pointed out, "Of course you know that because of that, you're not going home until another replacement gets here."

"Yeah I know," Sarah sighed half in disappointment. She added, "Thank goodness I have an understanding husband."

"Yeah there's that. I'm sure the admiral already has someone lined up as a more permanent replacement," Harm replied.

"I'll find out who it is when Coates and I get back to the Seahawk. Listen, keep me in the loop on how Bud is doing and when you get home buy me the books that you ripped up," Sarah said.

"Aye, aye ma'am, your wish is my command," Harm replied in a mock serious tone.

Just then Coates came up to them carrying a cup tray with 3 cups of steaming coffee. After they heard that Bud was going to pull through and seeing Harm's reaction she volunteered to go for the coffee. "Her you go ma'am, sir, just the way you like it," she said in a cheery voice.

Sarah and Harm accepted the coffee gratefully.

Coates asked, "What's next ma'am, sir?"

"Well you and I are going back to the Seahawk to continue Bud's work and secure the NI data he's gathered. Commander Rabb is going to stay with Bud and accompany him onto Ramstein and then home. I'll be the acting Force Judge Advocate for the fleet until a replacement is sent out. Admiral Chegwidden is working on getting one out to here ASAP," Sarah explained.

"I'm sure that Captain Marshall would be grateful for that ma'am," Coates said.
"Yes I'm sure he would," Sarah said in a wistful sigh.

Just as she said that the doctor came out. She told the trio, "Lt. Roberts' condition has been further stabilized. Still it will be about 36 hours before we can move him to an evacuation hospital on the mainland, so with that in mind why don't the three of you go find some quarters and get some rest. Umm who is going to accompany the lieutenant to the mainland?"

Harm answered, "I've been ordered to do that."

The doctor smiled at the fact that the Harm was 'ordered'. She knew Harm would stay by Bud's side until he went all the way home. She replied, "Good get your gear ready to go and come back here tomorrow at this time. That way we have time to settle you and the lieutenant for the trip."

"Is Bud awake? Can we see him?" Sarah asked anxiously.

"Let me check. We only just revived him twenty minutes ago," the doctor replied then walked back in. a little bit later she came out smiling. "I gotta tell you, that lieutenant is one tough cookie. He woke up asking for all of you. It seems he's remembers your last visit after his first operation. You can all go in but for only five minutes. He's been shot up with pain killers and you all have to scrub and gown, because of the risk of infection."

The three went in, cleaned their hands and had gowns and gloves put on them. They approached Bud's bed rather tentatively. They held back because they saw Bud still had his eyes closed. Sensing that he had company, Bud opened his eyes rather suddenly and looked right at them. The three friends were startled at first and laughed nervously before they got closer. It was Sarah who began. Stroking his hair out of his eyes she asked in a tender loving tone, "Hiya Bud how're you doing?"

Bud weakly said, "I've been better Mac."

Sarah laughed and took hold of his hand as she said, "After all the times I told you to call me Mac or Sarah when we're away from the office, only you could pick now."

Bud smiled and laughed softly and then he said in a stronger voice, "Yeah timing is everything."
Chapter 83

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 83

Saturday, May 18, 2002

0800 Local Time

Roberts Residence

Rosslyn, VA

Loren and Bobby Austen were sitting in the Roberts' living room keeping little AJ and Sarah Roberts occupied. Harriet was scurrying about the house as she was getting everything ready for her trip. She was going to meet Bud at Ramstein Military Hospital in Germany. He was going to stay there to get further surgery to prepare his lower right leg to receive prosthesis. Harm was there waiting for her. She was grateful that Bud had at least one friend around him as he recovered.

After Harriet set down the last piece of her luggage in the front foyer, she went into the living room to give her children last minute instructions. "Now AJ you mind Mr. & Mrs. Austen. I do not want to hear of any bad reports from them about you, understand young man?"

AJ looked up at her with his big baby eyes and said, "Yes momma, I be good."

"And that goes for you to Sarah." Harriet added turning toward her daughter. Little Sarah looked up at her mother with the same wide eyed look and nodded her head vigorously.

"Don't worry Harriet, they'll be fine. It will be like a special trip for them staying at our place. Besides, Bobby and I want to practice taking care of them so that we know what to do when we decide to have one or more of our own," Loren said. Bobby nodded in agreement.

"Believe me Loren you will never know what to do. No parent ever does. They will always do something that will the surprise you. That's what makes it fun," Harriet said.

Bobby replied, "Well we'll take lots of notes then and save them for later."

Before Harriet could reply she heard the doorbell ring. She opened it to reveal, "Admiral Chegwidden and Sydney! Thanks for taking me to the airport."

As the Chegwiddens stepped in AJ replied, "No problem Harriet. There is a change of plans though."

"Oh what change?" Harriet asked.

"Sydney is going with you," AJ said.

"Oh Sydney that's not necessary I'll be fine alone," Harriet said half in embarrassment.

"I need to go Harriet. I've been assigned to Landstuhl Hospital in Germany," Sydney said.

Harriet was startled at that and asked, "Assigned? What? How?" She did have the sense to get everyone out of the door and into the house.
As they walked in Sydney began to explain, "Right after the attacks on September 11 AJ told me of an Officer Program where civilian doctors can join the military to be on call doctors to supplement the doctors already in the military. So I joined as a Navy doctor. If I didn't pick the Navy AJ would have divorced me."

AJ smirked indulgently at her as Sydney continued, "So in January they sent me to a modified OCS course so that we could learn all we needed to know as officers including weapons training and correct behavior and the UCMJ. I graduated OCS on April 12. Since then I was working at Bethesda and just yesterday I received orders assigning me to Germany. I'm an ensign Harriet," Sydney explained.

(*AN: I have no idea if such a program exists. Go with me on it. This is fiction after all. :)"

"Wow that's great Sydney. So that's why we didn't see you right after Christmas. But where's your uniform?" Harriet asked.

"Well my BDUs and some of my other uniforms are in my sea bag but my khakis are hanging in the car. AJ and I just picked them up from the cleaners. We were on our way here so we didn't have time to put on the accoutrements. I'd like to change before we get to Andrews,' Sydney answered.

"Well you can do that here. Why don't you get them and you can change in my room upstairs," Harriet offered.

"That a good idea. You can help me make sure everything is on right and properly squared away. I'm still not used to doing that," Sydney agreed.

"Sure I'll wait here for you,' Harriet said.

When Sydney came back in they both went upstairs. Harriet said with wonder in her voice, "Oh boy I out rank a Chegwidden!"

AJ chuckled at that as he went into the living room. He waved at Loren to remain seated as she attempted to automatically pop to attention.

"Relax Loren, we're not in the office," AJ said pleasantly.

Loren said, "Admiral I didn't know Doctor Chegwidden was going to become an officer. I think it's great though. Was there a problem with her age?"

"No there wasn't. The Navy raised the age requirement to well above her current age and modified the OCS physical fitness requirements to accommodate her and the other doctors. They all understood that they need doctor/soldiers not soldier/doctors," AJ explained.

Loren nodded her head then had a thought, "You know it will be interesting when as a doctor she gives orders to a nurse that happens to have a higher rank than her."

"The instructors at OCS told her that her officer grade has nothing to do with her authority as a doctor and the nurses already on the job know that," AJ explained.

AJ then bent and spoke to his namesake, "So little man are you going to behave and watch out for your sister?"

"Yeah Unca AJ, I watch Sarah to make sure she does what she's supposed to do," little AJ said earnestly.
Sarah had other ideas as big AJ had to smile as she stuck her tongue out at her older brother. "I don't need you to tell me to be good. I can do it all by myself."

Sarah Roberts was rather precocious. Harriet was always telling everyone that her daughter was born older than she actually was.

The adults in the living room laughed at that. In the middle of that Sydney and Harriet came down and walked into the living room. Sydney turned around to display her uniform. The ranks and medical insignias on the collar were put on correctly. The only adornment on her chest was her name plate. It said 'Chegwidden'. It was one of the extras that AJ had in supply. Sydney was not in long enough to earn any campaign or meritorious ribbons.

Loren couldn't help it as she said, "Wow you look great, Ensign. Good enough to pass inspection."

Sydney snapped to attention and said, "Thank you lieutenant. Would you like to inspect this officer's uniform ma'am?" She was having a hard time keeping a straight face.

Loren looked to AJ as he smiled widely and nodded his head in approval. He was having too much fun with this.

Loren got up and walked around Sydney. She tugged on the blouse and said, "Not too loose just right. The rank and caduceus are fine. The shoes are shined nicely. Nameplate looks a little worn." She turned to AJ and asked, "One of yours sir?"

"Yes it is," AJ answered. AJ was very touched that Sydney took his name and that soon after their wedding Sydney went about the task of changing all her personal and professional documentation to reflect that.

Loren finished her 'inspection' and said, "Looks good to me, at ease."

"Thank you ma'am," Sydney said as she relaxed.

AJ spoke up and said, "Are we all done playing around? We have a plane to catch."

With that Bobby and AJ went to put Harriet's luggage in AJ's car.

Saturday, May 18, 2002
2230 Local Time
Ramstein Air Base VOQ
Germany

Harriet and Sydney's plane landed at Ramstein Air Base after a seven and a half hour flight from Andrews. After they checked in with the arrival clerks at the terminal, the two went to the VOQ to settle in. AJ already arranged that the two share accommodations, that is private rooms with an adjoining bathroom between them. They were both very nervous, Harriet about seeing Bud for the first time since the accident and Sydney about acting properly as an officer.

No sooner had they settled in then they heard a knock on Harriet's door. She opened it to see, "Harm!"

Harm immediately opened his arms to gather her into a tight hug.

As Harriet hugged him back she came out with a series of questions, "Have you seen Bud? How is
he? How is he dealing with this?"

Harm released her and walked into her room before he answered. Just as he was about to begin he saw Sydney enter the room from the bathroom. He was startled to see her in uniform.

Sydney saw his startled and then questioning look and said, "I'll explain later. Tell us about Bud."

Harm cleared his throat and began, "Well when I left he had just been moved back to his room from recovery. He just had surgery to remove the shrapnel from his good leg. Once he's recovered from that they'll operate on his bad leg. They need to repair the ligaments in that knee because they were damaged in the explosion and do some more reconstructive work on the stump so that it can heal properly to receive a prosthesis. As far as him dealing with everything, his only complaint is that he's missing you terribly. I told him before he went into surgery that Admiral Chegwidden told me that you were coming today."

Turning to Sydney he said, "He didn't tell me you were coming to Sydney and that you would be in uniform."

Sydney laughed and said, "Come over here and give me a hug and I'll explain."

After she had finished Harm said, "Right now Bud is asleep. When the anesthetic wore off he was awake for a few moments, but then he fell back to sleep. The nurses told me that he'll be more alert in the morning. Why don't we grab a bite to eat and then we'll go to the hospital so that you can see him, Harriet before you go to bed. I know you two must be exhausted after that long flight."

"Yeah we are but I really want to see him first," Harriet said.

Harm could see the pleading in her eyes. He expected this and said, "Landstuhl Hospital is only ten minutes up the road from here. We'll go there first then get a bite to eat."

Harriet and Sydney both agreed and got their purses and covers. They went in the base Crown Victoria that Harm was issued.

Landstuhl Regional Medical Center

2300 Local Time

Harm dropped the two women at the front entrance with directions on where Bud's room was. When Harriet went up to the desk she told the nurse there, "I'm Lt. Harriet Simms. Lt. Bud Roberts is my husband. I'd like to see him please."

The nurse was very kind and polite when she said, "Of course lieutenant, come right this way."

Harm and Sydney followed her to Bud's room. Sydney stood back and let Harriet walk in alone to give her the alone time with her husband. When Harriet walked in she was surprised at who was already there. She exclaimed delightedly, "Colonel Marshall!"

Sarah arrived at the hospital just after Harm left to get Harriet. She was sitting in a chair beside Bud's bed, holding her friend's hand and talking softly to him. Bud was laying there looking at her with half closed eyes. He opened them wide when he heard and then saw his wife. He exclaimed softly, "Harriet!?"

Sarah got up to let Harriet get closer to the bed. Harriet bent to take Bud's face between her hands. She leaned in and gave him a deep kiss. As she pulled back she scanned down the length of Bud's bed. She started to choke up when she saw the sagged blanket over where the lower half of Bud's
right leg should have been.

Bud was still too out of it to say or do anything. Sarah on the other hand saw her friend start to shake with the shock of finally seeing the reality of Bud's injury. Sarah gently came behind her and put her hands on Harriet's shoulders and gently led her out to the hallway. She understood that even though Bud was out of it, he still would sense Harriet's distress. Out in the hall Harriet cried into Sarah's shoulders for a good five minutes. Sarah just held her tightly.

As Harriet calmed down Sarah asked, "Are you alright now Harriet?"

Harriet wiped her eyes and her nose before she answered. "Yeah Mac, now I am." She squared her shoulders and went back into the room.

When the door closed Sarah turned to look for the waiting area. She was glad to see Harm and surprised to see Sydney standing at the nursing desk looking at her. She went right over and let herself be enveloped in Harm's embrace. She quietly and tightly held on to her brother in law for a good long time. She broke away and then gave a shorter hug as she greeted Sydney.

As she broke her embrace she said, "You look good Sydney."

"Thanks colonel, ma'am," Sydney replied sheepishly.

"Knock it off Sydney," Sarah said with a smirk. Then she asked, "Have you been assigned here?"

Sydney replied, "Yes I flew in with Harriet. When did you get here? AJ told me that you were stuck on the Seahawk as the Force Judge Advocate."

"I just flew in tonight. I came right here from the air base. Lt. Aldrich replaced me yesterday. He was in Italy. He just finished a case and the admiral had him rushed to the Seahawk to replace me until a more permanent replacement is sent out," Sarah said. She then asked, "How was OCS?"

Harm had to speak up as he asked, "You mean you knew about Sydney going into the Navy?"

"Of course I did silly. I am the admiral's chief of staff and Sydney came to me to ask for my advice," Sarah replied.

"Geez it must be nice to be kept in the loop," Harm replied sardonically.

Sarah and Sydney gave him a light slap on each of his arms as they chuckled. Sydney said pointing to Bud's room, "Want to check on them?"

"Yeah let's see how they're doing," Sarah replied.

They went in and saw Harriet holding up a cup of water with a straw for Bud to sip from. Bud had his fill and lay his head back down saying, "Thanks sweetie. I'm so tired now."

"It's okay Bud, go to sleep. I'll be here when you wake up," Harriet said as she stroked his cheek.

"Sleep with me Harriet. I don't want to sleep without you tonight," Bud said weakly. He was able to shuffle over to give her room.

Harriet kicked off her shoes and lay down next to her husband. After she ensured that she wasn't laying on any injured part, she draped her arm across Bud's chest. After she kissed his cheek she snuggled in and closed her eyes. Bud sighed in pleasure at the contact as he closed his eyes.

Sydney came forward and placed a blanket over Harriet and pulled the safety rail up. Then the three
friends softly walked out of the room.

Out in the hallway Sarah pulled out a sheet of paper from her purse. Here are your new orders. The admiral e-mailed them to me before I left the Seahawk. We're going home tomorrow. Now that Harriet's here, you don't need to monitor Bud's condition all the way home. Before Aldrich came aboard, Coates and I secured the NIS information that Bud collected and I have electronic copies with me to give to John's department," Sarah explained as she pulled out a flash drive.

"Did you call John and tell him you were coming home?" Harm asked.

"No I figured I'd surprise him," Sarah said mischievously.

"Maybe I can do that with Diane," Harm added.

"You better not. As pregnant as she is she'll probably give birth at the shock," Sarah admonished him.

"Yeah you might be right about that. Either way it'll be nice to get home," Harm added. He then asked Sarah, "Have you eaten since you landed?"

"No not yet. I so wanted to see how Bud was doing that I haven't thought of eating yet," Sarah said.

"Wow you must be tired. You're always hungry," Harm said. Then he had to duck as his sister in law took a playful swipe at him.

Sydney spoke up and said, "Harm said we were going to get a bite to eat. I don't know about you guys, but I'm still on Washington time. I could use a bite and then some sleep."

"Well then ladies let's go," Harm said as he put his elbows out for each lady to latch on as they walked out of the hospital.
Chapter 84

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 84

Sunday May 19, 2002

1945 Local Time

Navy Transport over the Atlantic Ocean

Sarah was lost to introspection. She was thinking of Bud's injury. She and Harm waltzed out of their own minefield unscathed with a movie gimmick and a few flippant remarks. It wasn't fair that Bud was not so lucky. Bud paid the price. Things like that weren't supposed to happen to guys like him. Her guilt also stemmed from the feeling of helplessness. There was no way to ride in and save the day with something like this. That rankled and then exacerbated the survivor guilt she was feeling.

As she sat in silence Harm took hold of her hand and asked, "Penny for your thoughts?"

Sarah sighed, "I'm usually the one asking you or John that."

"Question still goes," Harm replied.

"I'm thinking of Bud. It's just not fair he's the one hurt. You and I are the one's getting in trouble. Granted we had our spouses with us a few of those times, but Bud was always standing on the side or back in headquarters. I mean look what he was doing. He was at a school dedication ceremony for God sakes!" Sarah exclaimed.

"Sarah you can't make this about you or I, what happened to Bud was totally unrelated to what we went through," Harm tried to explain.

"It's still not fair. It seems that fate wasn't satisfied with letting us come out of our own minefield, it had to get Bud as a consolation prize," Sarah said in exasperation.

Harm sighed heavily. He knew that when his sister-in-law was like this, the only one that could speak with her or talk her away from her present attitude was her husband.

Sunday May 19, 2002

2200 Local Time

Andrews Air Force Base

Arrivals Terminal

As Sarah debarked from the C-130 with Harm, she saw into the terminal and sighed. AJ was waiting for them along with their families. John's surprise at her arrival was ruined because AJ called him as soon as he heard that Lt. Aldrich arrived at the Seahawk. Even so, she rushed across the tarmac as quickly as decorum allowed. John enveloped her in a tight hug and kissed the daylights out of her. He was so glad to finally see her home safe and sound. Sarah disengaged from her husband to greet her children. First she enveloped Chloe in her own tight hug, kissing the top of her head and then she picked up first Caroline and then Patrick to give them each their own hug and kiss.
"I'm so glad to see all of you!" Sarah exclaimed. She had to fight the happy tears that welled up. She was able to wipe her eyes quickly before turning to AJ and snapping to saying, "Sir!"

"At ease colonel, glad to see you back," AJ responded.

Relaxing Sarah answered, "Thank you sir. I'll report for duty tomorrow."

"That's fine colonel. It's late now and there are no cases waiting for you so take the morning off and come in after 1200. Besides your husband and I need to be at Capitol Hill at 0900."

Really sir, why?" Sarah asked.

John explained as he picked up her sea bag and the group started walking to the exit, "We need to give our report on the dirty bomb case to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Senator Sheffield is presiding and he's out for blood. I think he's wrangling for the SECNAV's job."

"What's Nelson have to say about that," Harm asked.

"He's pretty much resigned to the fact that he's done his time. He told me that if Sheffield wants the job it's his after the present fiscal year ends," AJ announced.

"Working under Sheffield should be interesting. He's a real political animal. Bobbi Latham once told me that he's tough to deal with. If he doesn't like a bill he's not afraid to filibuster it to death," Sarah said.

"Let's see what he'll do or say if any of his friends in the Senate filibuster an appropriations bill if he becomes SECNAV," Harm commented.

"You mean 'when' he becomes SECNAV," AJ said.

"Well enough of that let's get home," Diane said concluding the discussion as they reached their cars.

Monday, May 20, 2002

0930 Local Time

Senate Hearing Room

The previous Friday during a prep meeting with Nelson, AJ, Loren, Diane and John, it was decided that John would present the order of the events that unfolded in the whole dirty-nuke affair. In his presentation he gave special attention to the fact that the investigation and pursuit of Kabir was a combined effort of the CIA, NSA, Naval Intelligence and NCIS. It was agreed that they leave out Sarah and Harm's incident in the minefield. As John read his narrative, AJ, Loren, Diane and SECNAV Nelson sat around him. After his recitation of the case he sat back to take questions. It started with Sheffield.

"Captain, are you saying that this case started with the JAG-man investigation of the murder of Commander Laura Aikin back in January?" he asked.

"Yes senator."

"And Lt. Colonel Marshall was the prosecutor as well as the lead investigator for that case?"

"Yes senator."
"And she was in country following up and actually pursuing Kabir with Commander Rabb?"

"Yes senator."

"Weren't she and the commander reported missing for a short time during the incident?"

"Yes senator."

"Isn't she your wife?"

"Yes senator, your point?" John asked his annoyance evident in his tone.

"My point is how can you sit here and tell this panel that you turned your wife out on a dangerous mission," Sheffield practically shouted.

The 'turned your wife out' part of Sheffield's sentence really got John's Irish up. The other senators on the panel squirmed at Sheffield's poor choice of words. They all could see the look on John's face as he fought to control his temper. Diane was sitting beside him. Surreptitiously she reached for his upper arm and gave it a reassuring squeeze in an attempt to keep him calm.

It worked as John sighed deeply. He said, "Senator Sheffield, Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall is an exemplary Marine officer, an exceptional attorney and an experienced investigator. She will follow any and all leads to the conclusion of every investigation. The fact that we are married is immaterial as to how she does her job. Also I am NOT her commanding officer. I don't order her to go anywhere or do anything," John practically shouted.

He paused, took a breath and added, "It kind of works that way at home to."

That broke the tension in the hearing room as there were chuckles heard from the audience as well as the other senators. Sheffield just looked red faced and embarrassed. He was bested by an experienced debater and he didn't like it.

Eventually AJ, Loren and Diane and the other agencies' representatives gave their testimony and the hearing was concluded.

2100 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Sarah and John were lying on the living room couch dressed in jeans and sweat shirts. Sarah was nestled in his embrace with her head on his chest and their legs entwined. They were enjoying the solitude and the quiet as their children were not present. Caroline and Patrick were asleep in the nursery and Chloe was reading in bed in her room on her way to sleep.

When they arrived home the previous night, Sarah was too exhausted to do anything but take a short shower, change into her pajamas and practically fell into bed to snuggle with John. They were both asleep before they could think of doing anything else.

Now John was rubbing lazy circles in his wife's back as she lay on top of him. Eventually Sarah sighed with pleasure saying, "I missed this in the three weeks I was gone. The closest I came to this was when Harm and I had to cuddle to share body heat that night after I drove our Humvee into the minefield."

"From what you told me that was short lived because of the air raid," John said kissing her hair. He was also reveling in holding her close.
"Yeah but after the bombing we were able to move some rocks around and make a shelter. We didn't get much sleep though. Shortly after that we met the marine patrol looking for us," Sarah explained.

"Well I'm glad you came through in one piece," John said.

Sarah glanced up at him as he didn't mention he was also glad Harm came through as well as her. "What about Harm?" Sarah asked mischievously.

"Let Diane be glad for him. I saved all my joy for you," John answered in the same vein.

They both shared a kiss at that.

After disengaging, Sarah asked, "I heard that you were quite upset with Sheffield at the hearing today. Want to tell me about it?"

"He's an ass. He made me sound like I was your pimp. He asked and I quote, 'how can you put your wife out for a dangerous mission?' unquote," John said in evident disgust.

"Well he's an ass that may be our new boss and I don't think you want to make him an enemy. I know after you yelled at Nelson during Boone's case he didn't hold it against you because he knew he was wrong, but Sheffield is another matter all together. He could cause a lot of trouble," Sarah said.

John could tell she was worried. He said, "Don't worry about that. I'll do the same thing I did with Nelson. I'll kill him with kindness. When I got to NI, Nelson couldn't have been nicer. If Sheffield becomes SECNAV, Nelson will set him straight. He'll know what kind of work I do. Beside I did a little research on him. He is well acquainted with Senator George Manetti."

"Traci's dad?" Sarah asked.

"Yep, the same, you know how good friends we are with him," John said.

Sarah nodded. Traci had them over to her dad's home many times.

"Well if Sheffield gets on our case too much, I could resign and go work for Senator Manetti. He's always asking me to go work for him as his military expert," John said.

"You'd go into politics?" Sarah asked.

"I could do that or go work in my brother-in-law Pete's law firm. He told me that they need someone who knows maritime law," John said.

"Well it seems that you have your options mapped out pretty well. Still I hope you can stay in the Navy. It's the one thing you know and love more than anything else,' Sarah said.

"Yeah me to," John agreed.

They cuddled for a short time and their closeness to each other was having the expected reaction. Sarah reached behind John and slid her hand under his sweat shirt, untucked the tee shirt and started rubbing his back. She then commenced kissing along his jaw line. When she got to his ear she whispered, "Want to make out?"

"Oh you know I do!" John said before his lips claimed hers.

John slid his own hands under Sarah's sweat shirt. He was glad that she wasn't wearing a bra as his hands found her breasts. As he started kneading them, Sarah stopped him and sat up. She made a
show of crossing her hands in front of her and grasping the bottom hem of the shirt and slowly lifted it up to take it off. When she had her arms straight up, ready to discard the garment, John sat up and seized her. He brought his lips to the nipple of her right breast. He knew from experience that this one was the more sensitive of the two. Sarah gasped and her arms up, still sheathed in her shirt. She arched her back to give her husband better access.

He suckled there for a short time and soon went to the other breast to give that the same attention. During this Sarah discarded her shirt and she embraced John's head and held him to her breasts. John left her breasts and started to work his way down. Just as he started to unbutton her jeans, she stopped him and said, "Let's take this upstairs."

John nodded and Sarah hopped off him. She was very glad to see that his jeans were starting to look a bit more filled in. She threw her sweatshirt back on so that she could go in and check the kids. She started at Chloe's room she knocked softly and when she didn't hear an immediate response she softly opened the door and crept into the darkened room. Sarah leaned over and gave her oldest daughter a soft kiss on her temple. Then she crept back out and went to the nursery to check Caroline and Patrick. She found them sleeping on their sides in their juvenile beds. She gave them each a kiss, left the room and met John in the master bedroom. She found him sitting on the bed with his legs stretched out clad in only his jeans.

Sarah knelt at the foot of the bed. Taking the sweatshirt off in the same slow manner as before, she shuffled slowly on her knees toward her husband, keeping his closed legs between her knees. When she reached him she slowly sat down on his hips. She laid a deep kiss on him. When they broke apart for air she said, "John I want another baby. Nearly being killed over there made me realize that I want to create a new life with you again. I didn't take my birth control pills with me on the mission so I'm ready to make one now if you want."

Sarah saw and heard the joy in his response as he pulled her closer into his embrace and said, "Well what are we waiting for?"

Sarah giggled like a school girl as he took control of her, rolled her over until he was on top and had his way with her.

Wednesday, May 22, 2002

1200 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah was waiting at the elevators for her guest to come up. AJ was just passing by when he stopped and asked, "Looking at the elevator won't make it come any faster colonel."

Sarah smiled at that and said, "I'm waiting for my guest to come up sir. The corporal at the gate called me to tell me that she was here. She's a Shakespearian scholar and college professor."

AJ brightened up and smiled saying, "Oh really!"

Sarah was bemused by his reaction as she went on to explain, "She teaches at Chloe's school. Chloe is taking her course and she's having trouble grasping some of the concepts of the stories and she needs some help to pass the final. John or I couldn't make an appointment to meet her because of our work load, so since I couldn't go to the school and she has a free period, I asked her to meet me here for lunch."

"I see," AJ replied.
Before Sarah could say anything else, the elevator door opened. Sarah was totally surprised when AJ said, "Meredith! How are you?"

"AJ I didn't know you worked here," Meredith exclaimed.

Knowing why she was here AJ turned to Sarah and said, "Colonel Marshall, meet my cousin Meredith Cavanaugh."

With a bemused smirk on her face that she directed toward AJ, Sarah shook hands saying, "Professor Cavanaugh, it's nice to meet you."

"Oh please call me Meredith, let the students call me professor," Meredith said being totally disarming.

Meredith turned to AJ and said, "So Albert how's Sydney?"

AJ grimaced a hearing his given name saying, "She's fine. She's still at Landstuhl in Germany until September."

"Oh darn, I was hoping to finally meet her," Meredith said. Turning to Sarah she added, "I was in Italy when they got married and I only got back to the states last February. I was so busy getting acclimated to living in the US again and setting up my courses that I didn't have a chance to meet her before she went overseas," Meredith replied.

"Well I'm going over there in a week to see her. I'll tell her you're asking after her," AJ told her.

"You do that Albert." She turned back toward Sarah and asked, "So Mrs. Marshall where can we discuss how we can help your daughter?"

"Right this way Meredith," Sarah said as she let Meredith precede her as she guided her to her office. She was very glad to get away from AJ. She never heard anyone call him by his given name and it was taking all her self-control not to laugh at his obvious irritation.

Saturday, June 1 2002

1030 Local Time

Roberts Residence

Rosslyn, VA

During the two weeks Harriet was in Germany dealing with Bud and his recovery, the Roberts children had a nice time staying at Loren and Bobby's place. Every now and then they came back to Rosslyn and, with Bud and Harriet's blessing, had slept at the Roberts home.

Bud and Harriet returned to DC the previous day. Bud was in Bethesda as he went about his recovery. They went there the previous day after they drove by the house so that Bud could at least see it before he had to stay in the hospital for the next four weeks. He still had to be closely monitored for signs of infection as his amputation site recovered enough to accept the prosthesis.

Again Harriet was scurrying around getting ready to see Bud in the hospital. John and Sarah were playing with little Sarah and AJ as well as their own children while Harriet was getting ready to go. She put down the overnight bag that had Bud's clothing at the front door.

"Okay that should be it. I can't think of anything he needs besides sweats, socks and sneakers,"
"I'm sure you've got everything Harriet," Sarah said.

"I hope so," Harriet said with some trepidation. She gathered herself a bit and went to say goodbye to her children. "Now you be good for your Auntie Mac and Uncle John."

Again her children gave her the wide-eyed stare promising to be good. Harriet then left for the hospital.

1330 Local Time

Bethesda

While Harriet presented a good outward picture to her friends, things between the Roberts were not going so well. They were having arguments about the attitude he had toward his rehab and recovery. Harriet became so exasperated at the circles that their arguments were going that she left the room in a huff. While she was out of the room she decided that she needed a snack and to call home to check on the kids.

At first when she called the house, she got her answering machine. Then she called Sarah's cellphone, which Sarah answered, "Hello Harriet, is Bud alright?"

"Yeah colonel he's fine, but he is so stubborn. He won't go to rehab while I'm there. He's so self-conscious about his stump that he makes me so mad. What are guys up to? I called the house and got my answering machine."

"Well the kids took a nice nap and now we're in the backyard because Harm, Diane and their kids came over. We're all watching Harm and John put together the wooden jungle gym set you bought."

"Oh that's great ma'am. I was gonna ask, but I didn't want to put you guys out," Harriet said.

"You're welcome Harriet and how many times have I told you drop the ma'am's and sirs when we're not in the office?"

Harriet rolled her eyes. A, she was getting tired of hearing that and B, she knew that she would have to remember that for future use. She then said, "I keep forgetting. I've had so much on my mind lately."

"I wonder what," Sarah said facetiously. She continued, "Look Harriet, everything is good and we're all going to have dinner here. After dinner Harm and John will take our kids home, while Diane and I stay here to watch your brood until you get home. When you get here we'll engage in some adult girl talk. So don't worry about anything."

"Okay Mac that sounds good and thanks a lot and thank the Rabbs for me also please," Harriet said.

"Will do Harriet, take care of Bud. We'll see you soon. Goodbye," Sarah said.

"Bye Mac, see you soon," Harriet said as they disconnected.

When she returned to Bud's room, she found AJ talking to Bud. AJ came to the hospital to give Bud the Purple Heart.

"Sir I refuse to accept it. I lost my leg because I did something stupid, like not looking where I was walking," Bud told him.
AJ sighed. As he turned he saw Harriet and said, "Harriet you talk to him. Whether he agrees or not, according to the rules, he deserves the Purple Heart." He left the room giving the medal case to Harriet.

Harriet nodded as she took the case. She turned to Bud saying, "Bud don't be disrespectful. Whether you agree or not, you deserve to get this medal and I'd be honored to pin it on you," Harriet argued.

Bud let out a sigh of resignation. "Well in that case I'd be honored to stand up to receive it," Bud replied as he got out of bed. Harriet took the medal and ceremoniously pinned it on the lapel of his robe. She gave him the customary peck on his lips to complete the ceremony.

AJ waited outside the door of Bud's room and he had heard the whole discussion. He smiled at how formidable Harriet was. 'She should have been the lawyer of the family,' AJ thought to himself.

Monday, June 3, 2002

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harriet returned to work as she set up a schedule for visiting Bud. She knew that her constantly hovering around him during therapy made him uneasy. She found this out during his first therapy session in Germany. Bud became rather upset when he was hearing encouragement from two different people. He stopped moving and said, "Enough one person at a time. I'm getting tired hearing everything in stereo." After that Harriet only spoke with his therapist. She agreed that Bud would do better without someone yelling in both his ears. It would be better for Bud if Harriet did her encouraging in private.

Harriet was working at her desk when AJ came through the bullpen on his way back from a meeting with the SECNAV. He stopped at Harriet's desk and asked her to accompany him to his office.

When they went in AJ closed the door. He went around behind his desk before he asked Harriet point blank "Harriet do you resent me?"

Harriet was confused at the question so she didn't answer right away.

AJ rephrased his question, "Harriet do you hold me responsible for Bud's injury?"

Harriet then saw what he was asking as she answered, "Only for getting him out there to advance his career. It was only him being out there that he was injured. You also have to know if Bud had to choose between his leg and having you in his life he would choose your leadership."

AJ sighed at that and said, "Thank you lieutenant. That will be all."

"No thank YOU sir," Harriet said as she turned to leave.

Bethesda Naval Medical Center

1530 Local Time

Loren walked through the corridor with a decorative bowl of fruit on her way to Bud's room. When she got to his door she saw that his privacy curtain was pulled across his bed. She knocked and announced, "Bud?"

"Loren come in," Bud replied from behind his curtain.
She entered. She smiled at Bud's roommate who almost sat at attention at the sight of an officer. She went behind Bud's curtain and saw him wrapping the end of his amputation.

Bud saw her glance, almost staring at it and he said, "It takes some getting used to, doesn't it?"

"Ah yeah it does. Bud I'm so sorry this happened to you," Loren said.

"Loren don't worry about it, it certainly wasn't your fault," Bud said facetiously.

Loren smirked indulgently at him and presented him with the fruit basket. "If it's too much, you can share it with your roommate," she told him.

"Thanks Loren. Listen I want to thank you for taking care of AJ and Sarah while Harriet was in Germany with me," Bud began.

Loren waved her hand saying, "It was no trouble. Besides Bobby and I had a ball with them. I'm sorry we spoiled them a little. Harriet told me that they kept asking for the sweets that Bobby and I let them eat after dinner."

Bud chuckled as he said, "Yeah well that's what godmothers are for. Harriet got them back on their regular diet in no time. Sarah came in to visit me last Saturday. She asked me where my leg was."

Loren's eyes widened as she asked, "What did you tell her?"

"I told her the truth. I said that I had an accident at it was blown off," Bud said.

"How did she take it?"

"Well she asked if God was going to give me another one. I said He was helping the technicians here make me a new one. Then she said that was good and that they'd better hurry. She wants to dance with me," Bud replied.

Loren laughed at that. She then said, "Admiral Chegwidden told me today that I've been assigned to replace Lt. Aldrich on the Seahawk. I'm due to report on Friday. He gave me the rest of the week off to get my affairs in order. Is there anything I need to know?"

"Well you have Coates as your legalman and she's very good. She received high marks from her paralegal course at the Navy Justice School before she was assigned there. She is infatuated with Sergei Zhukov as they have been instant messaging each other at every opportunity. She won't stop talking about him."

Loren smiled at that as she said, "Another JAG romance. Is there anything else I need to know?"

Bud took a breath and began. He and Loren spoke about her duties for almost an hour. During that Loren sat at the foot of his bed in rapt attention. She was sitting on the side of the bed where his missing leg left space. She didn't even think about it as she was talking. Bud opened up a lot. He was very at ease speaking with Loren. Eventually they exhausted the topic of his sea duties and were catching up on the goings on at JAG headquarters.

"Tiner is considering OCS. I heard him speaking with his detailer about it one day when I had to report to the admiral," Loren informed Bud.

"That's good to hear. What did you say to him," Bud asked.

"I told him that when he was ready, let me know and that I would write a letter of recommendation
for him. He was rather surprised to say the least. I guess my rep as the "ice queen" (She held up her fingers in quotes.) is still not completely dead. I mean I've been trying but sometimes it just so hard," Loren complained.

"What do Colonel Marshall and Commander Rabb say about that?" Bud asked.

"They told me to just keep plugging along, being genuinely sincere and eventually everyone will warm up to me. Meg and I share lunch together a lot and everyone sees that. Still a lot of the new officers come to me when they have questions so that's encouraging," Loren explained.

"See there you go. Not everyone thinks you're unapproachable," Bud said enthusiastically.

Loren brightened at that. Bud saw an opening and asked, "Want to hear a good joke?"

Loren rolled her eyes but said, "Yeah go ahead."

"What do you call a woman with one leg shorter than the other?"

Loren's eyes widened. She could not believe what he was saying, making fun of his own condition. Still she indulged him and said sarcastically, "No what?"

"Eileen." Bud said with a smirk pointing at his missing leg.

"Buuud, you're horrible," Loren exclaimed. Still she shared in his laughter. They spoke some more for a long time before Loren looked at her watch and said, "Oh boy it's almost 1700. I have to get going. I have to get home and make dinner. If Bobby gets home before me he'll just make soup from a can and grilled cheese."

"And that's so bad?" Bud asked.

"Well it wasn't the first few times he did it. But after a while it got so boring. I think we'll do what the Marshalls told me they did," Loren explained.

"What did they do?" Bud asked.

"They took cooking lessons," Loren explained.

Bud chuckled and said, "Well I better let you go then."

She went to him and placed her hands on his shoulders and took a deep breath. She seemed to gather her courage before she said, "There's something I need to tell you and I don't want you to interrupt me before I finish."

Bud nodded as Loren continued, "I love you Bud, not romantically of course, but as the best friend that I have ever had. When Admiral Chegwidden first partnered us I thought 'oh no I'm working with a bumbling, socially inept misfit'. But you changed all that with your kindness and dedication to our partnership. Your almost encyclopedic knowledge of the law always astounded me. While other officers would have been quick to correct and chastise saying 'that's wrong, do it this way, you took the other approach. You always went with, 'I don't know, let's try this'. When I heard how seriously you were hurt I had a feeling of dread and fear that I would lose my best friend. I was very happy to hear that you were going to be alright. Well minus your leg of course, but I know you'll do well despite that. What I'm saying is the world is a much better place with you in it Bud Roberts. I hate to even contemplate one without you."
Loren took a breath as she finished speaking. Bud could see the unshed tears glistening in her eyes. He opened up his arms and said, "Come here."

Loren leaned over and let herself be engulfed in a tight hug. She sniffled a little as Bud held her. He released her and she pulled away, giving Bud's cheek a quick kiss on her way. When she looked down at Bud he was wiping his own tears from his eyes. They both looked at each other and started laughing lightly.

Loren wiped her cheeks at the tears that had fallen, took his hand and gave it a light squeeze saying, "Take care Bud. I'll write you, Harriet, AJ and Sarah from the Seahawk."

"You take care also Loren. Thanks for coming by," Bud said.

"You're welcome Bud. I was glad to be here," Loren said walking out.

Monday, June 17, 2002

JAG Headquarters

1130 Local Time

The previous week Senator Sheffield was appointed as the new SECNAV upon Nelson's retirement. He was walking through the bullpen on his way to AJ's office. Commander Traci Manetti came out of her office just as Sheffield was passing. She nearly got run over by him in his haste to see AJ.

"Oh excuse me sir, I should have been looking where I was going," Traci apologized.

"No I'm one who was at fault commander. I should be aware that doors have a habit of opening at the most inopportune times," Sheffield said. How are you Traci? I haven't seen you since your promotion to commander last month. That was some party your father through for you. I was honored to attend," Sheffield said.

"Yes sir it was. I was honored that you came, even though you didn't stay long enough to be introduced to my friends. Congratulations on your appointment," Traci returned. She was uneasy being seen to be familiar with him.

"Thank you commander," Sheffield replied.

Before he could continue, AJ announced his presence in the bullpen. Tiner received a call from the guard at the parking entrance that Sheffield arrived. He in turn informed AJ. AJ left the office wondering what was taking Sheffield so long to arrive. He said, "Mr. Secretary, I see you know one of our best officers here."

Sheffield turned to AJ and said, "I've known her since she was a baby. Her father and I were very close from way before I was elected to the senate."

Seeing Traci's obvious discomfort AJ made to smoothly usher Sheffield into his office saying, "Mr. Secretary we can go into my office to discuss what you came here for."

When they entered AJ's office Sheffield got right to the point, "I need you to cooperate with my efforts to get our Navy leaner and more efficient. To that end I am conducting audits on all phases of the Navy, including JAG. You will need to set up your auditor in an office for whenever he or she gets here."

"When will one be here sir?" AJ asked.
"I don't know yet. My staff is setting up a schedule. I'll inform you when they complete it,' Sheffield said.

"Yes sir," AJ said. He wasn't very comfortable with auditors or anyone else looking over his shoulder.

Friday, June 28, 2002

JAG Headquarters

1530 Local Time

Harm knocked on the lintel of Sarah's open office door. She looked up, smiled and waved him to enter as she returned to typing on her computer, "Give me a minute I want to finish preparing my closing arguments."

"Well that's why I'm here. I have some new information," Harm said.

Harm was assigned to investigate the death of Commander Phil Zuzello by asphyxiation due to LOX (liquid oxygen) system failure. He was the RIO and long time friend of Lt. Sam said that Zuzello had "barely passed his O2 demonstration" and it was his last mission.

Sarah turned from her computer and asked, "Did you find out something new from when you were out to the carrier?"

"Yeah I found out that Albrecht lied. Remember when you told me that Zuzello's wife said that he had a close call?"

Sarah nodded yes.

"Well that's when I knew things didn't add up. While I was out on the carrier, I convinced Albrecht to replicate the flight looking for a roll-sas failure, a wing rock or anything that could explain the O2 System malfunction. But I uncovered that Albrecht had vertigo which nearly killed us."

"How did you prevent that?" Sarah asked incredulous.

Harm replied, "I took over the plane. Remember when Zuzello told his wife that he had had "a close-call" before he died. (Sarah nodded.) Well that was because of Albrecht's vertigo. When I examined the plane after we landed I discovered that Albrecht had a back-up supply of oxygen piped into only his in his part of the cockpit. He was using this backup O2 for 4 minutes before he reported the oxygen failure and began a slow descent. When I looked at his file I saw that he had also been a LOX tech before becoming a pilot. So it was easy for him to rig up his own private supply. Albrecht killed Zuzello to prevent him from reporting his vertigo problem.

"So you need me to drop the negligent homicide charges against your client Petty Officer Moritz?"

Sarah asked.

"Yes, but you also need to file capital murder charges against Albrecht," Harm answered.

"See aren't you glad that you didn't go off half cocked when the admiral asked you to defend Moritz?" Sarah asked him playfully.

"Yeah if it wasn't for Tiner's flying program, I never would have figured out the time line of the Albrecht's descent and deceit," Harm answered.
"It's the same thing I told Loren one time. No matter what client we get assigned to defend, we have to maintain our objectivity. You didn't let your pilot's bias take over your thinking," Sarah chided.

"Yeah it took you and me remembering that I defended Buxton's plane captain against him when I was out on the Patrick Henry a few years ago," Harm said in agreement.

Harm had another thought and asked, "Do you think the admiral assigned me to defend Moritz to see if I could be objective?"

"Yeah I know he did because he told me so. Also Moritz asked for you specifically because you defended that plane captain you mentioned." She went on to explain further, "The admiral is trying to test us out for the judiciary. He may assign one or both of us there as the judiciary is spread a little thin because of the war. Also remember I'm 'chief of staff' and as 'chief of staff', I will recommend to the admiral that you passed with flying" (Sarah held her two hands up in quotation marks at 'flying'.) "colors,' Sarah said in reminder.

Harm smirked indulgently at her pun as she continued, "Give me all the information and when we go into court tomorrow, I'll move to dismiss the charges. You can give the good news to Moritz in the meantime."

Harm nodded in acknowledgement as he said, "Well I'll let Turner defend Albrecht since I need to testify against him."

"Good idea Ollie," Sarah said in Stan laurel's accent. Harm laughed as he left her office to find his client.

Monday, July 8, 2002

JAG Headquarters

1930 Local Time

Sarah and Harm arrived at AJ's office at the same time. Tiner summoned them to discuss a new case. Over the weekend they just returned from Naval Air Station, Point Magu, California. There Harm defended a female pilot, Commander Beth O'Neil who was accused of sexual harassment by a member of her crew. He claimed that she ruined his future in the military because he rebuffed her advances. Harm was skeptical of his client's denials of the charges, while his co-counsel, Lt. Cmdr. Manetti, was sympathetic. It caused tension between the two lawyers.

Prosecutors Sarah and Sturgis seemed to have an open and shut case with their star witness testifying until Harm threw them a curveball that threw the case wide open.

He was able to show that Cursey was still making mistakes under his new commander and suggested that he was so used to being defined by his looks that he had overlooked the real story. Harm asked him if it was possible he misunderstood O'Neil's intentions. Cursey finally admitted that it was possible. The judge dismissed the charges. Turner argued that Cursey was mistaken. Sarah had argued that Harm had snowed Cursey into thinking he was mistaken. Sarah asked Harm and Traci if O'Neil was hiding something. Both Harm & Manetti answered her at once: "Don't ask!" You see O'Neil came out to them as a lesbian. She had told Harm and Traci under the protection of privileged conversation between client and advocate.

Now their new case was being given to them. They would be working it together, but with a twist.

After they came in and sat down, AJ began, "Commander you will defend Marine Maj. Gen Lucas West. He has been charged with disobeying orders of Army Lt. General Anthony Manzarek."
"Yes sir, what orders did General West disobey?" Harm asked.

"General West was part of a war game. He won, which is what got General Manzarek started. West was the leader of the red team. He claimed the war game was rigged. Manzarek wanted to run the war games his way, and West did not go along with that. Manzarek wanted to put a punitive letter in West's record. West refused wanting his day in court."

"This should be interesting," Harm commented.

"More than you know commander," AJ said sardonically. Turning to Sarah he said, "Colonel, you will be the judge for this case."

Sarah's face showed her astonishment. Before she could say anything AJ asked, "Will the fact the Commander Rabb is your brother-in-law influence any decisions you will make?"

"Ah no sir, it won't. We have both opposed each other before and our familial relationship was never a factor. It will make interesting dining situation on the weekends though," Sarah said with a smile.

"Good, never the less, your trial will be closely observed by Admiral Morris for any such signs of over compensation of favoritism toward either side," AJ stated.

"I'll keep that in mind sir," Sarah acknowledged.

"Good colonel. You're dismissed. I need to speak with Commander Rabb a little longer," AJ said.

"Aye sir," Sarah said as she got up and left.

After Sarah closed the door AJ said, "The same question I asked the colonel holds for you as well."

"Well after hearing that I passed my objectivity test with flying colors I have no problem with Sarah being the first one to become a judge. Besides she's been at O5 rank almost a year longer than me," Harm said.

"That's good to hear commander. Try to keep the proceedings civil. Also let me give you a bit of advice," AJ said.

Harm nodded as AJ said, "Keep whatever happens in the courtroom in there. Don't bring it outside. As Sarah said, your family gatherings can become a bit strained."

"I'll keep that in mind sir," Harm said before AJ dismissed him.

Thursday, July 11, 2002

JAG Headquarters

1130 Local Time

After the initial proceedings, the trial began smoothly. Turner was the prosecutor. During the trial it was shown that West used small zodiac boats, troops had shoulder fired missiles and corporate jets loaded with fuel and TNT. They ran directly at the battle group and disabled it.

The Blue team Admiral Tucci whined that he was killed unfairly so he had to be reconstituted to finish the game. He said that West targeted their communications which is what the games was scripted to test.

Manzarek claimed West disobeyed orders to stand down.
West said they had no communications as they were being jammed. Colonel Haller, West's chief of staff, told Harm that they did have an emergency channel to communicate only real world emergencies. Turner brought up a previous incident of West's 10 years earlier when his battalion killed a column of Republican Guard who were "retreating" after having fired on West's men, after the cease fire was called but before he had received the message. Harm found that Manzarek testified against him back then as well and was angry when West was cleared.

As the judge Sarah wasn't letting Harm get away with his usual courtroom strategies. She was bound and determined that he followed proper procedure. She knew that this was the only way that fairness could be guaranteed. It came to the point that when he did step outside of her judicial box one too many times to which Turner objected, he said "I know, sustained" before she had the chance to say it herself. She didn't even let Turner get away with things that she wouldn't allow Harm.

After the first day Harm received a gift of sorts. Haller came to Harm's office and gave him a copy of West's complete battle plan.

Haller said, "Five months before the game I gave this to Manzarek. I did it because I believed Manzarek when he told me that West was a loose cannon but now I changed my mind."

"What changed your mind?" Harm asked him.

"General MacArthur did." Harm looked confused as Haller continued, "While I was at West Point I passed his statue every day. On the base it's inscribed, 'Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the Nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty, Honor, Country'.

General West showed me that what he was doing was getting us prepared to fight the enemy that is aligned against us at this time. I'll go on the stand and testify to that."

"Of course this will hurt your career," Harm stated.

"It might, but I'll get over it. General Manzarek won't be in the Army forever,' Haller replied before he walked out of Harm's office.

After that and despite the personal tensions, the trial proceeded smoothly. That is until the middle of the trial's third day morning session.

Monday, July 15, 2002

JAG Headquarters

1030 Local Time

Harm had just finished questioning Manzarek on the stand. Harm had Manzarek admit that he rigged the game to get rid of an officer who he had branded as corrosive and disruptive.

It was after Manzarek left the stand that Sarah suddenly declared, "This court will be in recess until after lunch at 1300."

She banged the gavel and rushed out of the courtroom before the clerk could give the 'all rise' instruction.
Chapter 85

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 85

Monday, July 15, 2002

1130 Local Time

Sarah’s Office

JAG headquarters

Sarah sat sipping her green tea. The brew tasted good after not having it for so long. She was smiling as to the reason why she was drinking it. She just got off the phone telling her husband that reason. As she sat contemplating her near future, Harm knocked on the lintel of her open door. She bade him to come in and sit down.

"Are you okay? You called a recess and ran out of the courtroom so fast, I thought you were sick," Harm asked concerned.

Sarah looked up over her cup and simply said, "I was, but I'm better now."

Harm could see that she was trying not to smile so he said, "Come on, out with it."

"Well remember when we were at the Roberts' for their open house on Saturday?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah I do," Harm answered intrigued.

"And what I said about the crab cakes, that they looked dangerous?" Sarah asked again.

"Yeah and I asked, if that was ruling or an opinion and Diane slapped my arm," Harm answered with a smile.

"Yeah that. The reason I said they were dangerous was that the smell of them was making me slightly nauseous. I didn't think anything of it until I felt really nauseous in court," Sarah explained.

"Uh huh," Harm said thinking he knew where she was going.

"Well after I threw up, I used the EPT I brought with me. Well my suspicions that I had on Saturday were confirmed. I'M PREGNANT," Sarah happily exclaimed.

"Wow that's great sis. About how far along do you think you are?" Harm asked sharing in her happiness.

"I don't know. John and I have been trying since you and I got back from that dirty nuke incident so I would guess maybe a month and a half. My last period was during that time," Sarah speculated.

"I'm going to see Eve today after the end of business here. I already told John and Admirals Chegwidden and Morris. Morris was a little distressed that I called a recess a bit too soon for lunch."

"Was he at least understanding when you told him why?" Harm asked.

"Yeah he was. He did say that anyone related to you has a habit of disrupting proceedings," Sarah
said with a smile.

Harm smirked back indulgently at that saying, "Well at least no one shot holes in the ceiling."

Sarah chuckled as Harm continued, "You know I need to apologize for being so snarky in court and at the Roberts."

"I can understand your frustration. You had a tough day in court on Friday." Sarah tried to finish but Harm interrupted.

"Oh you noticed," he replied, then continued, "You know, I wasn't expecting any favors. With any other judge I'd have won this case long ago."

Sarah smiled indulgently and replied, "I'm sorry I'm not complying with your schedule."

"Every time I worked an advantage you slapped me down," Harm said.

"That's because you asked for it," Sarah replied.

"You're relentless you know that?" Harm continued.

"So I've heard. I'm the hanging judge, the source of all your problems right?" Sarah replied, still smiling.

"That's right, but as much as it pains me to admit it, again, you're good. You don't let me get away with the stuff I've pulled with other judges. You really do know my playbook. But most of all Sarah you know the law and I hate you for it," Harm said sincerely.

"I'll take that as a compliment," Sarah said as she sipped her tea again.

"Good just remember this magnanimity when I'm on the bench," Harm said.

Sarah smiled as she replied, "I'll try to remember." As she sipped her tea again she had a thought, "What do you mean again? You've never admitted that to me before."

"Yeah you're right. I said it to your husband," Harm answered.

"When was that?" Sarah asked intrigued.

"When we were in jail at Bud's bachelor party John asked me which of you Mackenzie sisters will be more angry with us being arrested," Harm said.

"What did you say?" Sarah asked.

"I said it was a toss-up. We both knew about the Mackenzie temper," Harm began.

Sarah laughed as she interrupted saying, "It's not that bad."

Harm went on to explain, "You're right it's not, but I told him that he was lucky. He only has to deal with one of you. I have to deal with the both of you, Diane at home and you here. (Sarah smiled at that.) Just like now, you never let me get away with anything and that's because you know the law better that anyone who ever worked here. Even John said that then. He's very proud of you."

"He is?" Sarah asked acting surprised. She already knew he was as he had told her so on numerous occasions, but it was always nice to hear it from someone other than her husband.
"Yeah he is," Harm said sincerely.

"Wow I never knew he told you that. He told that to Traci and his cousin Gale when we worked that case together, but I thought he only said that to reassure Gail about me defending her brother," Sarah said with a watery smile.

"Ah well you can thank him when you see him later," Harm said getting a bit embarrassed by her show of emotion.

"Oh you know I will," Sarah said, getting a distracted look on her face.

Harm brought her back to earth as he got up and said, "And seeing as I was about to rest my case before you called a recess, I'm ready to go to closing arguments as soon as we return. So if you're lucky we may have a verdict by the end of business today also."

"That's good to hear," Sarah said as she finished her tea. She got up and continued, "I'll see you in court after I used the ladies room again."

"You got it," Harm said as they both left her office.

Back in court West was found not guilty on all counts.

Turner said to Harm, "I'm glad this one's over."

Harm said, "You and me both. An appeal before this judge would be murder."

1815 Local Time

Bethesda Naval Medical

Office of Commander Eve Baldwin, OB/GYN

John's office was moved back to the Pentagon at the end of June. Even though the reconstruction of the wedge that was hit on September 11 was well under way, it wasn't until after Memorial Day that the Department of Defense finalized the reshuffling of offices in the rest of the building.

When he heard from Sarah about the appointment, John called Deanne and asked her to watch the kids while he took Sarah to Bethesda. John told her why she was minding the kids when he had picked her up. The Marshall home was right on the way from Alexandria to Bethesda and he met Sarah there after she dropped the kids off. Then they went to her appointment.

Now Eve had just completed her examination and Sarah was putting her uniform blouse back on while John stood holding her purse and cover.

She informed the expectant parents, "Well Sarah based on when you said you had your last period and my examination, I'd say you are about three weeks along, I calculate that you are due right on tax day, April 15, 2003."

"Well that will make for a happy return," John said.

Sarah and Eve smiled at the joke as Eve continued, "You know the drill, prenatal vitamins, low impact exercise, little or no caffeine, good diet, and etcetera. Set up your monthlies with my yeoman and I'll see you next month."

"See you then Eve," Sarah said as they left.
On the ride home John was driving as Sarah turned in her seat to face him full on. She had a smile on her face and in her voice as she said, "I'm proud of you to."

John took her hand, raised it to his lips and gave it a tender kiss. He asked, "Now what did I do?" It was the usual affectionate sparring they engaged in when they started their conversations like this.

"Harm told me what you said."

"I said a lot of things honey. Could you be more specific?"

"Does the time when you two were in jail at Bud's bachelor party ring a bell?" Sarah asked coaxing him along.

"Ah yeah now it does," John said as he remembered that night.

"Well today Harm told me about that evening and that you told him you were very proud of me because you thought I was the best lawyer in JAG."

"It still goes," John said smiling.

"Well let me tell you something sir. You were the best lawyer that JAG ever had. You worked very hard on every case and you are more detailed oriented person than I ever was. Your winning percentage is still the highest that office has ever seen for the length of time you were there. If it wasn't, AJ would not have recommended you for Asst. Director at NCIS and Thomas would not have recommended you for Deputy at Naval Intelligence. So don't ever sell yourself short," Sarah said as she cuddled close to his shoulder as the center console would allow.

"Yes ma'am," John said as he bent to kiss the top her head when they stopped at a red light.

1930 Local Time

Marshall Residence

When they got home, they told Chloe, Caroline and Patrick that she was going to have a baby. There were mixed reactions. Chloe was overjoyed, Patrick just looked on and said, "Where?"

Sarah laughed and patted her belly and said, "Right in here."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Caroline asked.

"We don't know yet sweetie," John said.

"Is that where I came from?" Patrick asked.

"Yes sweetie that's where you came from," Sarah answered.

"How did I get in there?" Patrick asked.

Caroline piped in and said, "They made love silly." Caroline was almost three years old and she was wise beyond her years.

"What's making love?" Patrick asked.

Sarah and John just looked at each other in total embarrassment. While they were open with their daughter, they had not yet been that open with their son. After all Patrick did not walk in on them making love as Caroline did one night just a few months ago.
Flashback:

February 2001

At just over one and a half years old, Caroline demonstrated the ability to climb out of her crib. John came home late from work one night. As he passed the nursery he heard a thump. When he went inside to investigate, he found Caroline standing on the floor with her finger in her mouth and a bemusedly guilty expression on her face. He correctly surmised that Caroline climbed out of the crib. As with most babies, it was easy to get the legs over and straddle the top of the rail, but she had yet to master the technique of lowering herself to the floor. As a result, she let herself drop the almost three feet to the floor. Fortunately she landed on her diaper padded backside and not hit her head. She stood up before her father opened the door.

"Hey sweetie are you okay?" John asked as he went over and checked to see if she injured herself in the fall.

Caroline didn't say or do anything in response as John picked her up and brought her into his room to her mother. Sarah also heard the thump as she sat in bed reading. She met John at their bedroom door as he entered with Caroline.

"What happened? I heard a thump," Sarah asked as she took hold of her daughter and settled her on her hip.

"I think our first born has developed climbing skills. When I was walking by her room I heard the same thump you did. When I went inside to investigate, I found our little princess standing on the floor. She obviously climbed out of the crib and fell. She doesn't seem to be hurt," John said.

"Oh boy how do we deal with that?" Sarah asked.

"Well Bud once told me that when AJ demonstrated his climbing skills, they just bought him a juvenile bed. They reasoned that it was safer to have him crawl out of his bed when it was six inches off the floor than fall 3 feet from the top of the crib."

"Well we better go and get one this weekend," Sarah said. John readily agreed.

Flashback

March 2, 2002

John and Sarah tried to spend as many nights making love as they could. Most times they would couple and fall asleep and then wake up early the next morning and couple before they got out of bed for the day. Being that they had two infants and a teenager in the house they ensured that they locked their bedroom door during those times. A lot of times though they forgot to lock their bedroom door as their passion for each other took over the reasoning parts of their brains. That happened one night in particular.

As Sarah and John were making love, they coupled with Sarah on top. Sarah loved being on top as she loved how John always gazed at her. The thought of him looking at her as she moved above him thrilled her.

As they moved in their love making, John watched Sarah intently as she straddled him. When she was above him, she took hold of his erection so that she could ease herself onto him. John groaned in response. The sensation of him sliding into her made her inhale sharply.

You're so wet, Sarah," he noted breathily. "You so love being on top?"
"Yes I do," was all she could say.

"I'm glad because I love looking at you," he said lovingly.

The look John directed up at her made her so excited that it was not going to take her long to find release. Slowly she began to move, savoring the feeling of his hardness sliding in and out of her. With each downward stroke she rotated her hips, rubbing her throbbing clit against him. John's hands touched the sides of her breasts. She loved that he always did that. Rolling her head back, she moaned as she continued to move on top of him.

"Do you like that?" he asked as he squeezed her breasts again.

"Yes, always" she panted, picking up her pace.

He was rolling her nipples between his fingers, sending jolts of heat straight to her center. Every inch of her was screaming for release. With every stroke she ground herself against him harder.

"You are so beautiful," her husband panted.

His loving words sent a surge through her and the next time her clit rubbed against him, she exploded calling out his name. As always seemed to happen with them, her orgasm triggered his and she heard him call her name to.

"What are you doing?" A voice close to her asked.

Sarah gasped in horror and quickly lay down on top of John. Caroline was standing next to the bed, looking at them.

"Go back to your room, Caroline." John instructed. "We will be there in a minute to talk to you, alright?"

"Are you mad at me?" her voice quivered.

"No, sweetie," Sarah assured him. "Just give us a minute, okay?"

"Okay," she answered quietly and left the room.

"Oh my God, John," she cried when he was gone. "How much did she see?"

"Enough, I think. Come on, we have to go and talk to her," he told her.

"What will she think?" Sarah asked as she eased herself off of him, missing the feeling of him inside her already.

"I don't know, but don't worry, she'll be fine. Kids walk in on their parents all the time. Besides it was inevitable. She's not in a crib anymore," John said.

"That doesn't make me feel any better," she groaned.

Sarah pulled on her robe and John put on boxer briefs and pajama bottoms. When they got to her room, Caroline was sitting on her bed looking scared.

"Don't worry, Caroline, nothing is wrong, you didn't do anything wrong, okay sweetie?" Sarah tried to reassure her daughter.

Caroline only nodded slightly.
"Do you have some questions?" John asked his daughter.

Caroline nodded again but remained quiet.

"You want to know what we were doing?" he asked further.

Again she nodded.

"It's called making love. It's something that people do when they love each other the way mommy and I do. It's a way of showing each other how we feel," John explained.

"Oh," Caroline said quietly.

"But it's something that we do in private," John continued. "So if our door is closed, you should knock first, okay?"

"Okay," she agreed.

"Do you have any other questions?" Sarah asked now.

"You're not mad at me?"

"No, we're not mad, Caroline. It was an accident. Just make sure you knock from now on and wait until we say you can come in," John added.

"Okay daddy," she nodded.

"What happened, sweetie? Why did you wake up?" Sarah asked her.

"I heard a noise. So I got out of bed to check where it came from," she informed her.

"Well, I'll go make sure everything is okay. Do you think that you can go back to sleep?" John asked her.

"I think so," she said snuggling under her covers.

"Sweet dreams," Sarah said and bent down to kiss her daughter's cheek.

"I'll go look around," John said when they were back in the hall. "But it was probably just us that she heard. You were pretty loud, Sarah," John said with a smile.

"I was?" she asked in amazement.

"You were," he nodded. "And I think you are the most beautiful thing I've ever laid my eyes on. I love the way you look when you come," John whispered into her ear.

"John!" she protested, blushing furiously.

"I'm surprised you're not used to it yet, Sarah," he grinned.

While John made a show of checking the house, Sarah checked to see if Patrick stayed asleep, which he did.

Sarah wondered half aloud, "That boy takes after his dad. He can sleep through anything."

She checked on Chloe and saw that she was also sound asleep. She met John back in their bedroom and to sleep the rest of the night.
Shortly after that Caroline's curiosity came to the forefront again when she asked the inevitable question, "Where do babies come from?"

Sarah explained the basics to her. "When parents make love the daddy plants a seed in the mommy's tummy."

Caroline then asked, "Is that what you were doing when I saw you, making love?"

"Yes sweetie that's what we were doing when you saw us that time," Sarah confirmed.

"How come you haven't made a baby yet?" Caroline asked again.

"Well it's all in the timing. She went on to explain about a woman's cycle and the times that were right for a baby to be made. Caroline came away from the explanation very satisfied.

End Flashback

Deanne stayed to share in the joy. She was having a good time trying to control her laughter.

"Okay that's a story for another time," she said as she took hold of Patrick and Caroline's hands and ushered them out of the room to cover Sarah and John's embarrassment.

Wednesday, July 24, 2002

1330 Local Time

Roberts Residence Rosslyn, VA

After Bud recovered sufficiently he was discharged from the hospital and sent home. He would continue his therapy as an outpatient. While he was happy to be home, he was somewhat disappointed that he was still without his permanent prosthesis. So during Harriet's housewarming party, he was still using his crutches. This was because his good leg was still not fully recovered from the injuries he sustained and his stump was not healed enough to accept the prosthesis.

During this time Harriet was constantly hovering after him. Bud began to chafe under her constant scrutiny and he was very grateful for the fact that she went back to work.

While Bud wandered around the house, he became bored. He was e-mail chatting with Coates and Loren from the Seahawk. Bud was telling them that he was getting used to standing with one leg. At that Loren asked him,

"Bud, are you typing while standing?"

"Yeah, but I'm fine," he typed back.

"SIT DOWN BUD!" Loren typed all in caps to emphasize her order.

"Yes ma'am," Bud typed sitting down.

After a few more exchanges, they signed off from each other. Bud got back up and started moving around the house. He came to the bottom of the staircase. He remembered when he stood there with Admiral Chegwidden during the house warming. AJ demurred when Bud allowed him to go check the upstairs for himself.

AJ told him, "We'll see that later when you're able to show me."
Now Bud wanted to see upstairs for himself. Before he could move to act on his urge, the doorbell rang.

"Just a minute," he said moving to open it.

When he opened the door he came face to face with "Captain Marshall! What a surprise."

"Hey Bud, how's it going?" John asked as Bud ushered him in.

"I'm doing alright. I'm a little frustrated though. I want to get on with everything, but I still have to heal a little more before I can get my prosthesis permanently. They already built it and it fits correctly, but my stump is still to tender to accept it properly," Bud explained.

"Yeah I know the feeling. You felt that you want to get it all over with and get on with your life, but your injuries are getting in the way. I went through the same thing twice. I had to relearn to walk both times," John explained.

"That's right you were hurt in that helicopter crash during the First Gulf War and then when you were shot," Bud acknowledged.

"That's why I'm over here. I saw some of your frustration when you were speaking with the admiral. So I brought you these. I think they'll help," John said holding out two vinyl bound books. They were black and white note books covered with the vinyl slip cases to better preserve them.

"What are these?" Bud asked opening one.

"They're my journals that I wrote detailing each of my rehabs. The psychologist I saw during the first one suggested that I write one and I just decided to write the second one on my own. As you'll see the first one was harder because I pretty much rehabbed by myself. The second one was easier because I had Sarah with me all along the way. Read them and then let me know if they helped or not."

"I'll do that sir," Bud said. He then asked, "Would you like to stay for lunch? I still have some left over egg salad that Harriet made this morning."

"I can't stay Bud. I was on my way to Quantico for a visit with the Sarah's uncle. I'm working on getting him a pardon. Your house was on the way and I wanted to get these to you. Maybe another time," John said.

"Wow do you think that you can get a pardon?" Bud gushed.

"Well things look good. But don't you tell Harriet because the first thing she'll do is go right to Sarah. It's a surprise and I don't want Sarah to get her hopes up in case it falls through, okay Bud," John ordered.

"Don't worry sir, my lips are sealed," Bud promised.

"Thanks Bud, I'll see you around," John said as he turned to leave.

"You're welcome sir. I hope things work out. I'll get these back to you when I finish reading these," Bud said indicating the journals.

"Take your time Bud. There's no hurry. Good luck," John said.

"Thanks sir, good bye," Bud returned before closing the door.
After John left, Bud put the journals in the den. He still wanted to see what the upstairs of his house looked like. So he made momentous decision. He sat on the stairs and heaved his crutches up the stairs. He was satisfied that they landed cleanly on the floor above the stairs. He could see the ends peeking out from above the top steps.

Then he started up the stairs. After much starts and stops, he made it up to the second floor. He managed to stand with his crutches and go into his room. He liked what he saw. Harriet bought a new bed set. Well now that he was up there, he had a plan for christening the set.

Same time

JAG Headquarters

Harriet was worried about Bud and his rehab. She thought that he was not following his doctors' and therapists' orders. Armed with that supposition, she did not really believe him that day when she said she would take him to his regular rehab appointment. Bud told her that he had a week off.

When she got to the office she was thinking about that for most of the day. So she decided to call Bud's therapist. She found out that Bud had overworked his good leg and had to give rehab a rest for a week.

"When I get home I'm gonna kill him," Harriet said.

1830 Local Time

Roberts Residence

When Harriet got home that night with little AJ and Sarah, she was going to get on Bud's case for lying to her. But when she entered the house she didn't find Bud where she expected him to be, somewhere on the first floor. Instead she found him in their upstairs bedroom. She was immediately frightened then she wondered how he got up there.

When she entered the bedroom she was holding AJ and Sarah by their hands. Both children were very tired.

Bud stopped her and asked, "Why don't you put them in their rooms?"

"But they've been sleeping here with me since we moved in,' Harriet explained.

Bud countered with, "Well they belong in their own beds, not ours."

"Okay," Harriet said as she left and put the children in their respective rooms. She assured herself that they were asleep. She went back in to confront Bud.

When she reentered the room, she saw that Bud had straightened the turned down covers. He was sitting up against the headboard.

Before she could say anything, Bud took hold of her hand and pulled her gently onto the bed and said, "You know this is the first time I've seen the new bed set or even the upstairs bedroom."

"Well I thought since we now have a new house, a new set would be appropriate," Harriet said. The sight of Bud lying in their bed had dissipated all of her anger.

"What do you say we do something about breaking it in," Bud said kissing the palm of her hand.

"What do you have in mind?" Harriet said kicking off her white shoes and kneeling on the bed and
getting closer to Bud.

"Well I haven't been with my wife for almost six months and I was thinking of making up for lost time." He said this as he was unbuttoning Harriet's summer uniform blouse.

"Oh Bud," Harriet moaned as she got on the bed and let him have his way.

When he had it completely unbuttoned he pulled it from her skirt. He pulled Harriet so that she straddled him. As he kissed the valley between her lace covered breasts, Harriet unhooked the front clasp of her bra and pulled it open until her ample breasts spilled out. She let Bud play with her now unfettered breasts as she reached behind to the small of her back and unzipped her skirt. Harriet helped him hike up so that she could sit more fully in his lap. As Harriet settled onto Bud's lap she cried out with joy as she felt him getting hard under the cloth of his gym shorts. She pulled his tee shirt off over his head. Bud helped her remove her blouse and bra before she pulled her skirt up and off over her head. She was now in only her panties and her thigh band white nylons

Before he could undo anything else, Harriet put a finger to his lips and moved away from him.

Bud was a little dismayed but Harriet reassured him with a long kiss. She stroked his erection just to ensure him that she was still interested. Then she crawled backwards until she was over his amputation. She bent and gave it some tender kisses.

It was so sensitive that Bud let out some very involuntary gasps with each kiss. It didn't hurt, it just felt different, pleasurable.

Harriet got up, shimmied her panties off and straddled his stump. She began gently rubbing herself there. "Let me know if anything hurts Bud," she said breathlessly.

"Harriet everything you're doing feels so good, don't stop," Bud said.

As she humped herself on Bud's leg, she reached for his shorts and pulled them down, revealing his erection.

Harriet was so overjoyed at that, she immediately moved to re-straddle Bud's lap.

As Harriet positioned herself back over his hips, she kissed Bud deeply. She took hold of him positioned his tip at her entrance and lowered herself onto him. She cried out a little as he penetrated her. It was a long time for her as well. She slid down on him until he was completely inside her and settled down onto his hips. He held her still so he could again get used to the almost forgotten sensation of being inside her. As they sat still Bud began weeping with the joy of finally being with his wife. Harriet just held him to her tightly. As she felt his tears course down her breasts, she too let her own tears of joy flow.

They were both doubly grateful as first it was a long time and second that he could still act as a man after his horrific injury.

They sat still, holding each other in their intimate connection for a time, letting their weeping run its course. Harriet was the first to move as she started undulating on him. Bud helped her as he lay back and pumped himself up into her. Being experienced lovers they tried to take their time, mutually agreeing to hold off their fulfillment for as long as they could. Still it wasn't that long before their need for that same fulfillment overtook the both of them. She was pumping up and down on him faster and faster. As she pumped herself energetically on top of him Harriet could feel as Bud was getting closer and closer.

She bent down next to his ear and said, "Come on baby just a little more. Oh that's it, that's it!"
She felt him swell to his fullest and pump hard up into her. She clenched her walls tightly around him and slammed herself down onto him. They both cried out with ecstasy as they climaxed together. They pumped against each other as they exhausted themselves. As Harriet felt the last shiver of her orgasm pass, she collapsed onto Bud. They both lay there, panting catching their breath. They were both too tired to speak.

Harriet recovered her self control first. She kissed Bud deeply. As they came up for air, Harriet embraced Bud as tightly and closely as she could. She whispered into her husband's ear, "Welcome home my love."

Thursday, July 25, 2002

2030 Local Time

Marshall Residence

USS Seahawk Arabian Sea

Sarah was e-mail chatting with Loren as she tried to do every week. It was her way as JAG Chief of Staff to officially/unofficially keep tabs on her.

S-Loren how's sea duty treating you?

L-Fine got sick for the first week, but I got over it. It was a flu, I think I it in caught in transit. Not only was I nauseous, I was congested with a fever. The doc gave me some antibiotics and acetaminophen and I was fine after 4 days.

S-Well that's good. It wouldn't do for the fleet's judge advocate to be laid up with a bug. Make sure you eat right and get the rest you need. That's one thing I learned when I was on my sea duty.

L-Thanks ma'am, I'll remember that.

S-Loren we're on our personal e-mail accounts. You can call me Sarah or Mac you know.

L-I know, I forget sometimes. Listen Sarah!. I chatted with Meg this morning and she said that you had some wonderful news. She said you would tell me, so spill please..

S-Yeah well I'm pregnant again.

L-Wow that is wonderful news! When are you due?

S-On or about April 15.

L-Cool, talk about a happy return.

S-That's what John said.

L-How do the kids feel about that?

S-Chloe is ecstatic and Caroline is fine, but Patrick is confused. (Sarah relayed the conversation the two children had when she told them the news)

L-Oh, that was too cute. I'm almost peeing my pants I'm laughing so hard.
S-Yeah I almost did the same thing when it happened.

L-Jennifer came in. I told her your news and she says congratulations.

S-Thanks Jennifer, how's it going?

J-Just fine ma'am, once Lt. Singer got over her flu, it was smooth sailing.

S-That's great. Listen you two play nice now, I have to go tuck the children in for the night.

L-Well goodnight Sarah, we'll chat later. Oh, please tell Commander Turner that the Mezuzah he gave me is securely on the lintel to my quarters. Every time I touch it, I think of him.

S-I will Loren, goodnight.

Sarah was totally bemused as to why Sturgis would give Loren a Mezuzah. She would ask him when she saw him in the morning. She went to put her clan to bed.

Friday, July 26, 2002

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Friday, July 26, 2002

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Sarah sat sipping her green tea as she went over her notes for the case she was presiding over at 1000. She was happy that she was a judge now.

When she informed AJ that she was pregnant again, he called Admiral Morris into the meeting and asked if she could be assigned there for the duration of her pregnancy.

Admiral Morris readily agreed, but went one step further. "Your duty as a judge, colonel, should be permanent."

"Really sir?" Sarah asked bemused as well as thrilled.

"He's right Sarah. Remember when I told you that I was looking into you promotion?"

"Yes sir," Sarah replied.

"Well I spoke to your career monitor. He told me that you were due to leave your present billet anyway. Except for the sea cruise on the Guadalcanal, you've spent more time in this billet than in any other. You're just below the zone. Now becoming a judge could be the thing that the promotion board needs to see in your file when they finally meet," AJ reminded her.

"Okay I can see that sir," Sarah said in happy agreement.

"So I guess it's decided. We'll cut the orders for your transfer today. Though the only drawback is that you have to hand over your JAG Chief Of Staff duties and move your office to the fourth floor. But that shouldn't be a problem, right AJ," Morris said in conclusion.
"There is that, I'm sure the colonel can recommend someone just as qualified to assume those duties," AJ agreed.

"Aye sir, I'll have a list of recommended officers on your desk first thing in the morning," Sarah said before she was dismissed.

She first recommended Meg as her replacement as Chief Of Staff, as she did that duty in Sarah's absence before, but AJ told her that Meg was going to be assigned to the Department of Defense's new Cyber Warfare Section. The next senior officer was Harm. He already told Sarah and AJ that he didn't want it so it fell to Sturgis. She sat wondering about Sturgis and Loren and how he knew she was Jewish. Loren had kept that part of her life very private, telling only her closest friends, of which the Marshalls, Rabbs, Roberts and Chegwiddens were included.

Sarah remembered when Loren was shipping out.

Flashback

Thursday, June 6, 2002

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

As with any other officer who was being deployed away from JAG Headquarters, AJ arranged a very nice spread and cake in the bullpen for Loren's departure party. Everyone from the staff was extremely polite at her party, but right after the cake was distributed they were all gone so fast with excuses she couldn't even finish her "goodbye and thanks for the party" speech.

Sarah felt bad for Loren and had wanted to call them to attention to make them listen to Loren's remarks, but when she took the breath to do so, Loren had said, "It's alright Sarah. I know that my real friends stayed."

Her husband Bobby, sister-n-law Meg, AJ, Harm, Bud, Harriet and John were still there, with Sturgis Turner hovering on the fringes of their group.

Loren thanked them all and then excused herself from her friends and relatives before she stepped toward Turner. "Commander is that for me?" Loren asked seeing the small wrapped box he was holding.

"Yes it is lieutenant. It's one of two," he said.

"Oh really, sir?" Loren asked as she tore the wrapping.

"Well this one for the doorway of her quarters," Turner explained.

Loren opened the box to find a Mezuzah, then she asked, "This is nice and the second one?"

"I won't tell anyone about your lie of being Jewish," Turner said smugly. Too smugly Loren thought.

Loren rolled her eyes and instead of challenging the higher ranking officer, she said, "Thank you sir, you're very kind."

Turner walked away at that thinking he had something over Loren. He didn't know that the gun he held was empty. Turner may have been a 'higher ranking' officer, but he certainly wasn't a 'superior' one. His 'superior' attitude usually irritated the other officers at headquarters.
End of flashback

While Sarah sipped her tea and read, Turner knocked on her door. Sarah bade him to enter.

"Mac you wanted to see me," he started.

"Yes Sturgis I do. Have a seat," Sarah answered.

As Turner sat, Sarah picked up a list she prepared and handed it across her desk to him, "Here is a list of things I take care of as JAG Chief of Staff. I'm taking Chief Gardiner as my clerk. I have assigned a new person as your yeoman. She is Petty Officer First Class Angela DeMarco. Here is her file. As you will see she has very good paralegal and organizational skills. She will be invaluable to assist you in running this corps of attorneys and the other workings of this building."

As he scanned the list and then DeMarco's file he said, "Thank you Mac. I'm sure this will be fine.

Mac continued with her briefing, "Also Harm is taking over this office. If you want you can take his or stay in yours. It makes no difference. As it is with Bud out and Meg going to the DOD's Cyber-Warfare Section we're getting three new attorneys assigned here. Two will fill Bud and Meg's positions while the next will fill yours as you are replacing me because of my reassignment."

"I would think you were irreplaceable Mac," Turner said in complimentary humor.

Sarah smiled at that in gratitude, handed him another list and continued, "Lt. Eileen Nestor is coming back to headquarters. She started here as an ensign when she was in her last year of law school. Since she graduated, she's served with distinction at various other staff JAG posts throughout the Navy.

Then there is Marine Major Michael McBurney. He has racked up quite an impressive record, mostly as a prosecutor since he came out of law school three years ago. It'd be nice to have another Marine here finally."

Turner chuckled at that as Sarah continued.

"And Lt. Commander Faith Coleman is finally being assigned here. She's been working out of John's office at Naval Intelligence and then before that in the SECNAV's office for a long time. Despite that she's a very good litigator. She's represented the Navy in various civil cases and she's been itching to sink her teeth into criminal law. I would partner her with Major McBurney for a while. They know each other as they served together as lawyers in Naples a few years ago."

Lt. Commander Manetti was supposed to rotate to Pearl, but Bud's injury delayed that. She will go there right after Labor Day. You'll need an attorney to replace her at that time. Here's a list of possible replacements. Though you'll see that I crossed out the name Lt.j.g. Gregory Vukovic. I did discuss his record with Admiral Chegwidden. We both decided that with his record, he would be unsuitable for this office unless he shows improvement in his next annual fitness report."

"That sounds good Mac. I think I won't have any trouble hitting my stride," Turner replied.

"Also when Lt Singer arrives back here after her duty cruise, you be able to fit her into her old office as we didn't replace her position when she left. I think she'll do well for you. She's certainly come a long way since she first arrived here,' Sarah said.

She continued, "Also last night I was cyber chatting with her. She said to tell you that the Mezuzah you gave her is firmly affixed to her quarters' lintel. Why would she need to inform you of that?"
"Well that would mean she's living up to her claim," Turner said.

"What claim?" Sarah asked.

"That's she's Jewish," Turner stated.

"Why would that be a claim, she is Jewish," Sara said.

Turner was totally at a loss for words. He did manage to stammer out, "Y-you mean she really is?"

"Why would you not believe that Lt. Singer was Jewish?" Sarah asked.

"But her record shows that she is Methodist," Turner claimed.

"Well her father is Methodist, but her mother is Jewish. Her parents celebrated all the Christian and Jewish holidays. As a young girl Loren's parents decided it was easier for them if she went her through Methodist religious education only. As we both know, Christianity teaches that the Jewish and Christian God is the same and you learn both the new and old testament. Loren's mom kept a kosher household and taught her all the Jewish traditions that Christian schooling didn't. And because that she only had records detailing her Methodist religious schooling, she put down Methodist in her records.

She speaks Hebrew much better that I do. Heck we've even had whole conversations in Hebrew. She still celebrates all the Jewish holidays. John and I as well as the Rabbs, Roberts and Chegwiddens have been over to her home for Passover Seders and the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur holiday dinners. She gave my children, the Rabbs and the Roberts' children gifts for each day of Chanukah."

"Really, I had no idea," Turner said, totally mystified.

"Yes really. It's like me respecting that my grandmother is Muslim. Even though we're practicing Catholics, I've taught my children about the Koran and everything that goes with that as a way of honoring their great grandmother when they see her daughters, my aunts," Sarah explained.

"So that's why she felt so deeply about why Corporal Mars was persecuted for switching to Judaism I thought she claimed that just to counter Harm's try at mitigation," Turner said.

Turner was speaking of one of the last cases Loren was involved in before she went to sea duty. Harm and Sarah defended a deserter, Marine Corporal Peter Mars. Loren and Turner were the prosecutors. Mars was found fighting in the Israeli army. He converted to Judaism to be closer to his fiancée a Jewish girl. But because of that he was picked on by the members of his Marine unit. Mars was relieved as Fire Team Leader after breaking Corporal Fogal's nose after Fogal threatened Mars with circumcision. The straw that broke the camel's back for Mars though and caused him to desert was being rejected by his mother & his Jewish fiancé. Turner being the ultra by-the-book officer was being totally boorish, almost anti Semitic.

That became apparent when during the process of the case Harm tried to mitigate Mars' conduct but Loren countered him saying, "I'm Jewish and I never felt put upon enough in the service to desert, commander.

Harm correctly conceded her point and didn't think anything of it as he knew of Loren's religious duality. But Turner thought different. Thus he checked her record, thinking he had something he could use against Loren when the time suited him.

Now Turner sat in Sarah's office totally chagrined.
"Commander, as incoming JAG Chief of Staff, you better learn to have a little more faith in your fellow officers here. We are the elite attorneys in our service. Lying is simply not tolerated. Also checking up on someone behind her back as a way to get an advantage will simply not do here either. Think about that as you sit in court before me today and later as you perform your duties as JAG Chief of Staff, hmmm," Sarah said in chastising tones.

As Sarah was the senior officer in time in rank to Turner, he could only sit there and take his punishment. All he could do was stand at attention and say, "Yes ma'am, will that be all?"

Sarah knew she got through to him, but she still needed to ensure that she had the upper hand, "Yes that's all, dismissed.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Turner said as he turned and left Sarah's office.
Chapter 86

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 86

Saturday, August 31,

Labor Day Weekend 2002

1130 Local Time

Marshall Cabana

Sun Point Beach Club

Atlantic Beach, NY

Sarah and John wanted to wait until they saw John's parents on the Labor Day weekend to tell them of her latest pregnancy. They planned the trip well in advance of her finding out she was pregnant.

They arrived at the older Marshalls' home very late the previous evening. Maureen and Jim were attending a season's end dinner at the beach club's restaurant, so they slept over at the cabana. Now John was pulling into the beach club parking lot and up to the unloading zone.

Caroline & Patrick were so excited to see their grandparents they were bouncing in their toddler seats. Sarah and Chloe stayed in the car to keep the children occupied as John unloaded. Once John and the attendant got their beach gear out of the car and onto the dolly to be taken to the Marshalls' cabana, John tipped the attendant and he went to park the car.

Once the children were out Sarah had to stop them and say, "Hold onto Chloe's hands while you walk through the parking lot. You can let go once you reach the boardwalk."

She got the usual, "Yes mommy," from each of them before they set off. As soon as they reached the boardwalk Patrick turned to his sister and said, "Race ya!" Then he took off not waiting to see if Caroline was behind him, which she was.

As the two children ran up onto the boardwalk to their grandparents' cabana, Sarah and John didn't worry because Chloe was following close behind. Sarah and John followed at a more sedate pace romantically holding hands.

Maureen and Jim were sitting waiting for John and Sarah's family to arrive. They were looking down the row of cabanas and got up when they saw two dark haired whirlwinds coming their way. Patrick was the first to reach them. Jim Marshall scooped his grandson up and held him high before he enveloped him in a bear hug and gave him a loud wet kiss. Maureen let Caroline collide gently with her as she bent to give her a hug and kiss. The grandparents exchanged children as Chloe walked up. She received her own dose of affection from her grandparents. Sarah and John walked into this affectionate melee.

"How are you mom," Sarah asked.

"I'm fine dear how are you?" Maureen asked back.

"Oh a little nauseous in the morning, craving some things, you know the usual," Sarah said in a
Maureen's jaw dropped in shock then she squealed and pulled Sarah back in a hug. She practically screamed, "You're having another baby? When is it due?"

Sarah smiled her watery smile reveling her mother-in-law's joy and said, "Yeah, we're having another one and he or she is due around April 15."

"Oh that's so wonderful dear," Maureen said as she enveloped Sarah in another hug.

"What are you hoping for," Maureen asked as they sat down.

"We'll be very happy for either. I had one of each and then there's Chloe. Patrick is hoping for another boy so that he's not outnumbered," Sarah said with a smile.

"What about your assignments, won't this pregnancy hold you back from promotion. And what about going overseas?" James asked.

Sarah explained, "Well that's the good part. Before I found out I was pregnant, I was temporarily assigned to the judiciary because there was a shortage of judges due to this new war we're fighting. As a matter of fact I had to cut short the morning session of one case I was presiding over because of morning sickness. Anyway after I told Admiral Chegwidden and Admiral Morris, the CO of the judiciary, they decided that my duty should be permanent. So I'll be a judge for the usual duration of 3 years, which is the norm for a shore tour in the continental U.S. It will still keep me on the path to being promoted and I won't have to leave DC until after the baby is born. Besides my career monitor told me I was due to leave headquarters any way. Except for the sea cruise on the Guadalcanal, I spent more time in that assignment than in any other."

"Well that's great to hear dear. Does Deanne know?" Maureen asked.

"Oh yeah she took care of the kids when Sarah and I went for her examination. We told her when we came home from that," John said.

John came out of the changing room. He was in the process of putting sun block lotion on Patrick while Chloe was doing the same for Caroline.

John got up and said, "Dad and I will go to the ocean with the kids and then we'll go to the pool. We'll see you in about an hour. You stay here and relax okay sweetie." John bent and gave Sarah a kiss to punctuate his statement and request.

"Okay John, Mom and I will chat all about what you're up to at NI," Sarah said facetiously.

"You do that," John said with an indulgent smirk.

As John, his dad and the kids walked to the ocean, Maureen asked, "Is John working on anything dangerous?"

"Oh no he's not, but you know the world of 'Intelligence'. (Sarah held her fingers up in air quotes.) He has to coordinate his stuff with the other agencies to ensure there is no duplication of efforts. It's funny when he was at JAG and NCIS, he always carried a briefcase and took some work home. Now he leaves the house and office empty handed and leaves all his work at work. He has to, it's all classified," Sarah explained.

"Well that's good dear," Maureen replied assured at John's safety.
She laughed and voiced another thought. "You know when John was a kid he always wanted to be a secret agent. He got addicted to that right after he saw his first James Bond movie. He couldn't get enough of the TV shows 'Secret Agent', 'The Man From U.N.C.L.E.', 'The Wild, Wild West'. His aunt bought him the Napoleon Solo gun for his birthday one year. He was always trying to hide toy guns and gadgets in his sleeve or sneaker top like Jim West did. Now he's the boss of secret agents."

Sarah had to laugh at the image of John playing secret agent as a kid. As she thought more of it, he really turned into one. What with his becoming a SEAL, his two missions to Russia, his running of intelligence operation first at NCIS and then at Naval Intelligence, he had truly found himself in his childhood dream profession.

The Marshalls enjoyed the rest of that day and the weekend before they returned to DC to face whatever was to come next.

Monday, October 7, 2002

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

John was working in his office when his yeoman, Senior Master Chief Carolyn Pierce, (she got married to Bruce Pierce during the Memorial Day weekend) buzzed his intercom. "Captain, Congresswoman Lillian Dorming is here to see you sir."

"Send her in, chief," John said.

He stood and went around to the front of his desk up to greet the lady in question. When he shook her hand, he felt that she had a very firm and dry grip. He asked the usual, "What can I do for you congresswoman?"

"Well captain Secretary Sheffield sent me here to Naval Intelligence with this letter," Dorming explained.

She handed the letter across John's desk and said, "He owes me. I helped him become the SECNAV as you all call him."

John smiled at that as he read the letter. After he finished he looked and asked, "Why me?"

"When I spoke to Admiral LaPorte, he told me that you were the man to help me to declassify the mission named in that letter," Dorming explained.

John was wary but polite as he asked, "Why would you need that mission declassified congresswoman?"

"My father was the captain of the sub for that mission," Dorming said.

John cocked his head to one side to let her know he understood. He said, "Okay I'll help. Give me a few minutes to get the file." He called Carolyn and ordered, "Get me the file on Angel Shark please Chief."

"Right away, captain," Carolyn almost sang over the phone. John wondered at that.

"While we wait can I offer you some coffee?" John asked Dorming.

Before she could reply though, Carolyn marched in with the file. She smiled cheekily as she said,
"Admiral LaPorte sent it over right after he sent Congresswoman Dorning here. He knew you would need it."

As John took the file he said, "Next time send Walter in with it. The doctor told you to stay off your feet."

Carolyn was 4&1/2 months pregnant. While she was healthy and the pregnancy was going normally, her doctor found her blood pressure to be a little high at her latest examination. After keeping her home a week to get it down, he allowed her return with only light duty. As a result, after her husband dropped her off at the Pentagon's entrance closest to her office, she was only allowed to walk to and from there and to use the elevator instead of the ubiquitous ramps that General George Marshall, (no relation to John) ordered the designers of the building to install when it was built during World War II.

Carolyn stood in front of his desk and defiantly told him, "Captain, I'm pregnant not sick. The five paces it took me to come in here will not drop this child out any sooner or raise my blood pressure an iota, sir. Besides after your wife's two and a half pregnancies I would think you'd have learned not to coddle a pregnant woman, sir."

Then she turned on her heel and walked out. She had a satisfied grin plastered onto her face.

The congresswoman smiled at the amusing exchange. She had a better feeling toward John as he was looking out for the welfare of his subordinate, though she had to ask him, "Two and a half pregnancies?"

"My wife, a Lt. Colonel in the Marines, is having our third child. She's due in April," John answered.

"That's nice captain," Dorning said.

"Thank you ma'am," John said as he started to read the file.

The file he was reading concerned the submarine USS Angel Shark. It went down with 129 men aboard during a compartmentalized mission (black-ops) in 1968.

Dorning sat silently as he read the file. When he finished he said, "Let me call the SECNAV." John picked up the phone and he was connected with the SECNAV. Dorning heard only his side of the conversation.

"Mr. Secretary we need to get JAG involved with this incident with the Angel Shark."

"That's correct sir."

"Will you call over to JAG and get it authorized?"

"Yes sir, thank you sir."

After he hung up he asked Dorning, "How did you come here?"

"My staff car brought me here. My driver is waiting in the VIP lot for me," Dorning said.

"Good call him and tell him to pick us up where he left you. We have to go to the Navy Yard," John explained.

He and Dorning got up to leave. As they passed through the office John said to now Staff Sergeant
O'Reilly, "Walter I'm going to JAG with Congresswoman Dorning in her car. Go home for lunch and spend a couple of hours with your wife and my godson and meet me at JAG at around 1400. You deploy to Iraq next week, you need as much time with them as you can get."

"Aye, Aye sir," O'Reilly said.

At that John and Dorning left the office.

On the ride over Dorning began asking a few questions. She began with, "So your wife is a Marine?"

"That's right we met when she came to JAG in 1996. We got married after I left there and went to NCIS," John explained.

"You have two children?" Dorning asked again.

"No three. We adopted a teenage girl," John explained.

"So why are we going to JAG, to see if your wife can help us?" Dorning asked again.

"No we can't use my wife because she is a judge there. We need to see the JAG himself, Admiral Chegwidden, to get his permission to use an official attorney," John explained.

"Why do we need an official attorney? Aren't you one?" Dorning asked.

"We need an official attorney because we need to hold a second board of inquiry into the incident. While I'm more than capable of litigating, by rule we need to get the JAG Corps involved," John explained.

"A 'second' board of inquiry? Why was there a first one and what did it find out?" Dorning asked.

"The published results of the first one stated that they didn't know how the sub was lost or sunk. If we want to provide closure to the families we need to conduct a second board to get the classification lifted so we can find out what really happened. The SECNAV will have called over there to authorize one," John explained.

"I see. Do you have one of those attorneys in mind?" Dorning asked.

John smirked as he said, "Yes I do. It's my brother in law."

1100 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When John and Dorning arrived at JAG they went right to AJ's office. After they spoke and AJ told them they had the authorization, they went to Harm's office.

John politely knocked on the lintel of the open door before he entered. When Harm picked his head up he said, "Hey John how's it going?"

"Great Harm," John said as he ushered Dorning in and shut the door. He made the introductions, "Commander Harmon Rabb, Congresswoman Lillian Dorning."

Harm got up to shake hands. As he ushered the two guests into the chairs in front of his desk he asked, "It take it that this not a social visit?"
"No it's not. We need official attorney help," John said then he explained about the Angel Shark.

"So we need the board of inquiry to declassify the incident. We may have a bit of trouble since Watts is not fond of me or the Navy." John finished.

"You know from what you told me we may also need Sturgis in on this one. He is a bubble head after all," Harm said with a smile.

"Bubblehead?" Dorning asked incredulously.

"Commander Sturgis Turner was a submariner. We call them bubbleheads as a joke," Harm explained.

John continued, "Before he went into law he started in submarines. He will be able to shed light on why things happened the way they did on the Angel Shark."

Harm called Sturgis in as John explained. When he came in, he brought an extra chair. After John made the introductions and explained the matter at hand they began to plan what they needed to do for the board of inquiry.

After a while Harm glanced through his window blinds. He smiled at who he saw and then he said, "John I think the scuttlebutt that you're in the building got out. Your wife is making a beeline for here."

Before John could turn and look, Sarah knocked on Harm's door. John got up and opened it for her and gave her quick kiss.

Sarah said, "I called your office. Carolyn said you were here so I thought we could go to lunch."

John made the introductions with, "Congresswoman Lillian Dorning, my wife Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall. Sarah the congresswoman is trying to get a sub mission her dad was on declassified. Harm, Sturgis and I are helping."

"Well congresswoman you couldn't be in better hands," Sarah said as she shook her hand.

Dorning smiled at that and commented, "The captain tells me that you are expecting."

"Yes I am and now I need to get to lunch because junior is telling me that's he's hungry," Sarah confirmed unconsciously rubbing her belly.

She wasn't showing that much yet so she could still fit into her regular uniform coat, while wearing just a slightly bigger skirt. She wasn't too anxious to get back into the maternity smock uniform just yet.

"Well then don't let me keep an expectant mother waiting. I know what that's like, I have two of my own. Gentlemen I'm sure the three of you will get the case going much better without me getting in the way. But please keep me informed," Dorning said.

"Yes ma'am," Harm, Sturgis and John said in unison.

As Dorning left she shook Sarah's hand again and said, "It was very nice to meet you colonel."

"Likewise congresswoman," Sarah returned.

Wednesday, October 9, 2002
Sarah was presiding over a case of computer fraud. Faith Coleman was defending a Chief Petty Officer who used credit card numbers not his own to buy all the furnishings in his beach house in Myrtle Beach. Unfortunately for him, the owners of those credit cards did not consent to his using them. Carolyn Imes was prosecuting. The case was going smoothly with no legal histrionics. Carolyn presented her case as well as she could, while Coleman did her best to defend her client.

There was a pause in the presentation when the rear door opened. Sarah looked up and smiled a small discreet smile. Her mom Deanne and John's mom Maureen entered quietly and sat in the rear row of chairs. They exchanged discreet looks with Sarah as they sat down.

As the trial continued Sarah was able to write and slip a note to her bailiff instructing him to escort the two mothers to her office immediately upon the break for lunch.

When Sarah adjourned for lunch, she waited outside her office for Deanne and Maureen. When they entered Sarah exchanged hugs with the two. She exclaimed, "It's great to see you Maureen and Momma. What brings you here?"

Deanne explained, "Well Maureen was in town visiting Ann Marie's family and while she had some time she called and asked me if I could go with her to see our children in action."

Maureen picked up the narrative, "When I called John's office this morning to let him know I would like to visit him, Carolyn told me that he was at JAG litigating. Unfortunately after I paid my respects to Admiral Chegwidden, he told me that his courtroom is sealed to the public because he is litigating on a classified case. So being that I couldn't get in to see his case I called your mom to see if she wanted to see you in a case."

"I told her sure since in all the time I've been living here, I have never seen you at work so I jumped at the chance," Deanne happily finished.

"Yes that's right, John's case is very hush-hush. Even I don't know what his case is about. Don't worry it's nothing dangerous," Sarah said in reassurance.

"I didn't think otherwise dear. After all it's a courtroom, not a battlefield," Maureen said.

"Sometimes you'd be surprised," Sarah said sardonically. She was thinking of when her brother in law shot holes in the ceiling. She added, "Anyway I am glad to see the two of you. What do you say we do Italian for lunch?"

"Sounds wonderful darling," Deanne said.

"Great! Let's go to Giovanni's. It's not far from here. Admiral Chegwidden took me there once. The food is terrific," Sarah said happily.

Deanne asked, "If we're going to lunch away from here, why don't we call Diane and see if she wants to join us. Her office is on the way. We can pick her up and make it a girls' only lunch."

"Sounds good momma, let me call her," Sarah said. After Sarah spoke to her sister and confirmed her availability, they walked out together to the JAG section of the Navy Yard parking lot and got into Sarah's Trailblazer.
Diane met them outside NCIS headquarters. Being that she was just about eight months pregnant, Maureen got out and let her sit in the front.

After they were seated at Giovanni’s and ordered, Diane was telling them about her pregnancy. "I tell you I can't wait for this one to be over. While there are no complications like when I was carrying the twins, I am starting to get a little impatient. I think I'm bigger this time. I have heartburn, a lot. My boobs seem to have their own zip code. I'm not getting a lot of sleep. Harm has found me in the living room more mornings than ever because of that," Diane complained good naturedly.

"Oh I think that happens with a lot of third and fourth pregnancies. It was like that when I was carrying John's younger brother Mark and then with Ann Marie," Maureen said in commiseration.

"At least I have only one more week, then I go out on maternity leave. Tom Magnum has been a doll. He's been having Jenny Shepherd working with me so that she can take over as acting assistant director when I'm out. She practically pushed me out the door when you called inviting me for lunch," Diane said with a chuckle.

The rest of the lunch time passed pleasantly. All too soon it was over. Maureen picked up the check and the ladies got up to leave. As they stood outside the restaurant waiting for Sarah's car, Diane gasped, "Uh oh."

1245 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

While the ladies were at lunch Sturgis, John and Harm were working their case. When they came out of court for lunch, AJ met them to tell them, "You mother and mother-in-law were here earlier captain, commander, they took Sarah and Diane to a 'girls' only' lunch."

Harm and John smiled at that. Harm commented, "Well that means we're on our own." Turning to Turner as he went to pass them Harm said, "Hey Sturgis how about a 'boys' only' lunch."

"What, are we in the 'he man women haters club'?” Turner asked in amusement.

"Nah we were going to call our wives for lunch, but their mom and mine shanghaied them first," John explained.

"Man I envy you guys. You got it all together," Turner said in admiration.

"Listen no sense in going out. Let's order pizza and have lunch in the conference room. We need to work out some issues we're having with our esteemed opponents," John suggested.

Harm and Turner readily agreed.

As they settled into their meal they discussed what they were going through in their attempts to declassify the Angel Shark mission.

"I tell you the CIA's attorney, Catherine Gale is really tough," Turner stated.

"Yeah she is very dogged. She has an answer to our every move. She tosses out her secrecy level rhetoric so much that if I didn't know better I'd say that she is trying to intimidate our witnesses into silence," Harm observed.

"On top of that Watts is in a power struggle with the SECNAV. Watts has been pissed at him for NI getting the intelligence on the Kabir incident before the CIA did," John replied.
"But as the CIA was the Original Classifying Agent (OCA) for the Angel Shark mission, Watts has the upper hand. He can keep blocking every inquiry by claiming that the new hearings were only Level One security cleared and the operations were Level Two so no one could reveal anything," Turner pointed out.

Harm spoke up, "Earlier I spoke to Gale. She doesn't even know why the ops were classified. I asked her if she was blindly doing her job, how did she know she was doing the right thing."

"What did she say to that?" John asked.

"She told me because "I'm doing my job right and that makes it the right thing," Harm answered.

"Any chance Webb can help us? You've had a working relationship with him at times," Turner asked.

"I already tried that and he told me that Watts gave him a direct order to keep out of it and not even see me. He did tell me that Gale asked him for information on John and me," Harm answered.

"Really why?" John asked.

"Webb says she was trying to find a way to rattle us. He did tell her that what you see is what you get with us. We (Harm motioned between himself and John) never quit. He then asked her to leave him alone as well," Harm said with a smirk.

"Too bad, he should have told her that we can't be rattled at all. We've already been rendered immune to that," John said.

"Oh really, how is that?" Turner asked.

"Harm and I have each witnessed a Mackenzie sister giving birth. I tell you the profanity that comes out of them during labor should be used by drill instructors ever where," John said.

The three men shared a chuckle at that.

Turner then asked Harm, "Speaking of which, isn't Diane due to give birth any day now?"

"She's not due for three weeks yet. She's going on maternity leave after this week," Harm answered.

After they finished their lunch the three men went back to court.

Just as they were about to begin, the proceedings were delayed by Sarah entering the court. Admiral Morris looked up at her as she stood at the back of the courtroom. He asked, "Colonel Marshall, do you have something to add to these proceedings?"

Sarah had a knowing smile as she answered, "Not per say your honor, I do have an announcement that will affect Commander Rabb. May I approach the bench?"

Morris waved his hand in a 'come forward' motion.

When Sarah arrived to the front of the bench Morris said to her, "You may make your announcement colonel."

Sarah turned so that she was facing the bench as well as the prosecution's table and putting a big smile on her face she began, "Harm I am very happy to report to you that you are the father of a beautiful healthy baby girl. She came in at 1315 via natural birth after thirty minutes of labor. Being three weeks premature she is small at fifteen inches and five pounds, eight ounces. She's in the NICU
purely for precautionary reasons, but the doctors say she is making quite a healthy fuss. Diane needs you at Bethesda ASAP so that you two can decide on a more proper name for her other than 'Baby Girl Rabb',' Sarah said happily.

Morris smiled at the announcement. Then he put on a mock stern face as he said, "It seems that you have done it again Commander Rabb."

"What's that sir?" Harm asked in stunned confusion.

"You've disrupted my courtroom," Morris said trying to be stern but not succeeding.

Finally cracking a smile he said, "I hereby order you to report to Bethesda and proceed with the baby naming process with your wife. I'm sure Captain Marshall and Commander Turner can continue the case in your absence." He offered his hand across the bench to congratulate Harm.

Harm wasted no time in taking it and in complying with Morris' order. On his way out he accepted congratulations from Sarah, John and Sturgis as well as Catherine Gale who said, "I'm very happy for you commander. Please give my best to Diane. We've worked well together in the past."

As he walked out Harm had to wonder about that as Diane never mentioned working with Gale before. He correctly assumed that the work his wife and Gale did was classified anyway.

After Harm left, Sarah turned to Morris to say, "And sir I apologize for not being in my own courtroom. I'll go to my own case right now."

"Don't worry about it colonel. I'm sure your reason was perfectly legitimate" Morris told her.

Sarah smiled at that as she turned and left for her own courtroom.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 87

Wednesday, October 9, 2002

1425 Local Time

Naval Medical Center

Bethesda, MD

When Harm arrived at Bethesda, he found Diane sitting up in bed. She was a little woozy from the pain killers she just took.

"Hey Harm," Diane said wearily. She bent her head up to receive his loving kiss.

"How are you feeling honey?" Harm asked.

"Well I've been better," Diane answered.

"What happened? Why didn't you call me?" he asked.

Diane told her story, "Well it happened so fast. We were leaving Giovanni's when I had a very strong contraction. You know like I had when little Sarah was born. (Harm nodded in remembrance.) Well by the time my sister's car came around my water broke. We went right to Bethesda. They just got me settled in the bed when Eve Baldwin examined me. She saw that the baby was crowning. Right at that point, she told me to push and twenty minutes later Deanne was cutting the cord."

"Wow, I guess there was no time to call me," Harm surmised.

"You're right. Sarah tried to call after the baby was born but Tiner told her that you were already in court. So being that she was going back to JAG anyway, she decided to give you the news in person. Were you surprised?" Diane finished mischievously.

"Yeah I'd say so. Though Admiral Morris told me to stop disrupting his court sessions," Harm said ruefully.

Diane smiled wearily at that. Before she passed out completely she asked her husband, "Have you decided on a name yet. We agreed that you'd keep it a surprise. Just tell me so that you can go see her and I can get some sleep."

"Well I like Natalie Amanda Rabb," Harm said with his own watery smile.

"Oh, that's nice," Diane said happily. Right at that point her battle against sleep was finally lost. She dropped off with a beautiful smile.

"I thought you'd like it," Harm said as he bent to kiss his sleeping wife on her forehead. He went to the nursery to see his newest daughter and bestow her name to her.

Thursday, October 10, 2002
While Harm was on three days Paternity Leave enjoying being a new father, John took over first chair as he and Sturgis worked the Angel Shark case. They enlisted Buds help in their efforts.

As they were sitting in Turner's office discussing what their strategy would be, Bud informed them of some new information. He found a cross reference on the internet that a CIA agent committed suicide two days after the Angel Shark went down.

"He must have been a double agent. I bet that the Russians may have had a Victor-class Hunter-killer sub waiting for them. Since it was a cable tapping mission they would have been in the Sea of Okhotsk- not where the CIA had said it was," Turner concluded.

Later that morning they resumed the trial. The John called former Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) at the time of the mission, Admiral Windom to the stand.

John asked him, "Admiral Windom. Why is it that the commander of COMSUBPAC didn't know where the sub was?"

"The mission was on a need to know basis. As CNO I had the need to know. Due to the sensitive nature of the mission I couldn't say anything," Windom replied.

"What did you do when it became apparent that the Angel Shark was lost, sir?" John asked.

"We searched for, and found, the sub," Windom replied.

"How was that possible sir," John asked. He like everyone else in the courtroom was astonished at this revelation.

"It had released a radio buoy before it went down," Windom replied simply.

After this revelation and Admiral Windom leaving the stand, John then called Director Watts. That was fruitless. Watts was totally evasive with his answers. John then asked for a court order that Watts produce the required documents detailing the recovery. Watts immediately classified even the recovery as Level Two to block John's inquiry.

When John asked him to explain Watts said, "It wasn't the level of clearance that determined who could see information but the 'need to know'. Even with those rules I could even keep secrets from the president!"

After the session with Watts, Morris adjourned court for the day.

1445 Local Time

CIA Headquarters

Langley, VA

After John, Sturgis and Budd conferred in Turner's office, John left for the day. Sarah took their kids and her mom Deanne to the hospital earlier that afternoon to see Diane and Natalie. So since that was
the case, John decided to take a detour. He called Webb and asked him to meet him at CIA Headquarters.

Webb met John in the lobby of CIA at the Wall of Stars which represented those CIA agents who died in the service of their country.

After they shook hands Webb asked, "Catherine told me that Harm and Diane have a new baby girl? What's her name?"

"Natalie Amanda Rabb. She looks just like her mom," John said.

"Thank God for that," Webb said with a chuckle.

John shared the laugh and said, "You know I'd rather be at Bethesda to see her, instead I'm here trying to do what's right for the families of the crew of the Angel Shark. What is it going to take to ends this pissing contest between Watts and Sheffield? Because that's what it is."

"You know Watts is afraid that you or Rabb will go to the press," Webb said in evasion of the question.

"Watts shouldn't worry about Harm or me going to them but about the Congresswoman that started this quest for closure," John explained.

Webb just sighed. John stepped into the verbal gap and pointing to the stars on the wall he asked, "What star designates the men lost on that mission?"

"I don't know. You know as well as I do that their names are confidential," Webb replied.

"Oh really, not to their families it isn't. The men on the Angel Shark are not anonymous to them!" John exclaimed.

Before Webb could reply, John turned on his heel and fixing his cover squarely on his head, marched out of the building.

1745 Local Time

Naval Medical Center

Bethesda, MD

John stopped at his home to change out of his uniform before he went to visit the Rabbs' newest addition. When he got there he saw that Sarah also changed into her civvies. She had Chloe, Caroline and Patrick gathered at the viewing window to the nursery. They were looking at Natalie Amanda as she lay in her isolette on the other side of the window. They were so engrossed at the new baby, they didn't see him as he walked down the hall.

John saw that Chloe was holding Caroline up so that she could see. Patrick was jumping up and down trying to get a glimpse of his new cousin. He reached his hands up to his mom and whined, "Mommy I wanna see Nattie. I don't wanna wait for Chloe to pick me up. You pick me up." At almost two years old, he was still too short to see over the window sill.

Sarah just said, "I can't sweetie. The doctor said no lifting."

Right at that point John came over and scooping his son up said, "How about now champ?"

At the sound of his booming voice Sarah, Chloe and Caroline all turned toward him in delight.
Patrick just shrieked in his own delight as John lifted him up very high and placed him on his shoulders. As Patrick wrapped his arms around John's forehead, John held on to his legs as they dangled on either side of his neck.

"Thanks daddy, that better," Patrick exclaimed.

John bent and received his kisses from his three girls.

As they all turned back to look at little Natalie, Sarah wrapped her arms around John's waist. She asked, "What took you so long? I called JAG and Harriet said that you left over two hours ago. You got another woman on the side?" Sarah asked cheekily.

"Nah you're more than enough woman for me?" John said.

Sarah leaned in and gave him a quick kiss and said, "And don't you forget it."

John explained, "I went to Langley. I wanted to see if Webb could do something to resolve the thing Harm and I are working on."

"What did he say?" Sarah asked.

"You know Webb. He doesn't say or commit to anything," John said in exasperation.

"Well I wouldn't worry about him now. Let's go see the new momma," Sarah said as she took her husband's hand and led him and their family to Diane's room.

When they arrived at Diane's room they met Frank. After greeting him John asked, "Where's Trish?"

"She's inside with Harm and the other grandmothers and his children. I had to leave Harm in there alone so I could take a bathroom break. I was just about to go in and rescue him from the cacophony."

"How was your flight Frank?" Sarah asked as she received his hello kiss.

"Oh you know those corporate jets," Frank said. He and John shared a chuckle.

Sarah rolled her eyes and said, "Now boys, let's go in to see the new mom."

When they went in they saw that Trey was sitting on Harm's lap while, Samantha and Les were sitting on Diane's bed. Samantha was sitting in the crook of her mom's arm while Les was at the foot of the bed. Trish, Deanne and Maureen were sitting in other chairs around the bed.

"Hey you guys," Diane exclaimed as the Marshalls filed into the spacious private room. After Chloe greeted her aunt with a kiss, John lifted Patrick and Caroline to receive their own hello kisses from Diane.

The Marshall children stood around the bed while Sarah and John stood at the foot of the bed.

For the next thirty minutes everyone settled in to chat about the newest Rabb. It was this scene that the nurse came upon. She concealed a small smile at the general babbling and laughter before she turned all business like saying, "Alright everyone but dad out! Momma needs to eat her supper before she can feed her new daughter. You can all see her tomorrow. When they go home."

All the children groaned as the parents and grandmothers chuckled indulgently. They all lined up to kiss Diane goodnight. Soon only Harm and Diane were left alone. After sharing a deep and loving kiss Harm said, "I'll take the kids home and I'll come back and see you."
Diane said, "Harm it's a 90 minute roundtrip to Fairfax and back. I'd rather you stay home and get some sleep."

"But what about you and the baby?" Harm asked in protest.

"I'm fine and Natalie is fine. She's been out of the NICU since this morning and she's taking her milk very well. She's gained a few ounces since then. After I have my dinner and I feed her I'm going to get some sleep. I won't be able to do that if you're hovering. I'll get enough of that when I get home tomorrow.

Harm had to concede her point. He laid another kiss on her and said, "Gee you Mackenzie sisters are tough. I get the same logical arguments from Sarah at work. You should have been a lawyer yourself."

"Yeah we could all leave the Navy and start our own firm. We'll call it Rabb & Marshall," Diane said mischievously.

Harm was chuckling at that as the nurse brought Diane's dinner. As she dug in with gusto Harm kissed Diane on her forehead before he said, "I'll see you tomorrow then."

"MMM mmm," Diane mumbled with her mouth full.

Saying goodnight to the Marshalls on his way, Harm gathered his children and parents and went home for good night's sleep.

When he arrived at his house he found a package addressed to him and John. It was wrapped in plain brown paper and had no return address. He brought it inside and after feeding and putting the kids to bed, he opened the package. He found a video tape. He took it into his home office and played it there. After it finished he called John at home. When he connected he said, "John meet me at JAG tomorrow morning. I need to show you something before I go to the hospital."

After he hung up with John he called Admiral Chegwidden and Catherine Gale and asked them to meet in AJ's office in the morning.

Friday, October 11, 2002

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

AJ, Harm, John, Sturgis and Catherine Gale were watching the tape on the TV in AJ's office. The video showed the burial at sea of recovered bodies from the Angel Shark. It was recorded by the CIA. Watts himself was shown supervising the recovery.

John had effectively shamed Webb because even though he didn't mention it, Webb secretly delivered the tape to Harm's home.

After the video was completed Sturgis spoke up saying, "Now we know what happened. The Angel Shark collided with a Russian sub. The Russians were there waiting for the sub because they were tipped off by a CIA double agent. As the Angel Shark sat immobilized they sent up the buoy hoping for a rescue. Before any rescue could arrive, the Angel Shark started to sink and their pressure hull collapsed. Homing in on the buoy the Navy found the ship, secured the wiretapping devices, recovered the bodies and videotaped their burial at sea."

Gale asked Harm, "How did you get this commander?"
"I found it in my mailbox last night when I got home from visiting Diane at Bethesda. There was no postal stamp or return address," Harm explained.

Gale sighed and said, "Well faced with the obvious conflict of interest on Watt's part, I'll talk to him about it."

"I have a suggestion," Harm said.

"What's that commander?" Gale asked.

Harm went on, "We could keep some of it secret. Just tell the surviving families and show them the tape."

"I'll see what Watts says about that," Gale said as she was leaving.

After Gale left, John spoke up, "Since this case is wrapping up, Commander Turner and I will prepare the report for Congresswoman Dorning sir. Of course the pertinent classified parts will not be included."

"Very well captain. You and Commander Turner are dismissed. Give my regards to Admiral LaPorte and thank him for letting us avail ourselves of your assistance. Commander Rabb stay a minute."

"I will sir," John said as he and Sturgis snapped to and turned to leave.

After the door closed AJ said "Commander I thought you were on paternity leave until after the weekend?"

"Yes sir I was just thinking that. I already called Diane and told her that I needed to be here this morning. With your permission sir I'll also take the two weeks leave that we planned," Harm asked hopefully.

AJ didn't disappoint him saying, "Well seeing that this case is apparently over and I took the CO's prerogative to reassign all your other cases as soon as I heard that Little Natalie was born, that won't be a problem. Go on get out of here Harm. Since Diane is going home this morning, would you mind if Sydney and I stopped by your place after work to see mom and the new baby?"

"Not at all sir, Diane would love to see you. Oh FYI sir, Sydney has been in to visit Diane already. She left the present that you two bought for Natalie."

"Good that will save me a trip to the store. Okay Harm dismissed," AJ said pleasantly.

"Aye sir," Harm said as he also snapped to and turned to leave.

As Harm walked out the door AJ sat down behind his massive desk and thought out loud, "Well everything around here should settle down to the normal dull roar."

Unfortunately he wasn't going to get his wish.

Saturday, October 12, 2002

1300 Local

Hotel San Paolo

Naples, Italy
Loren was making all the sounds of love that her husband enjoyed to hear. Bobby was contributing his own voice to their sexual cacophony as they moved energetically and passionately, their enthusiastic movements shaking the bed.

Their violent undulating was causing the furniture to hit against the wall of their hotel room, but Bobby didn't care. Either did Loren. She was just too incoherent to even register anything else past her ecstasy.

Loren was moaning constantly, "OH Bobby it's been so long. That's it sweetie, that's it, right there, oh Bobby don't stop."

Bobby threw his head back, his jaw clenching from the exquisite pleasure he was feeling and he started thrusting even harder. He added his own encouragement, "Come on baby that's it, sing for me."

Loren's moans and groans and cries were continuous now, never-ending, one moan continuing in another. He'd never heard a song sweeter, a symphony more pleasing than this.

She wailed, "OOH BOOBOBY I'm so close, SOOO CLOOOOSE. Just a little more bring me all the way home Bobby."

Meanwhile he was grunting in unison with her, barely holding back his surrender to what he was feeling. It was so long for him. It was like this on their first time.

"OH,OH, OOOOOOH HERE I COME, BOBBYYY." Loren's cry turned into a savage, primal scream that tore out of her throat. A scream so high-pitched, loud and piercing that it almost burst her husband's eardrums at the same time as she tumbled over the edge into her own oblivion.

Bobby joined her in ecstasy a second later, his triumphant yell echoing inside the hotel room as he thrust his whole length into her and nailed her to the bed. He continued to pump his seed deep into his wife's womb for almost half a minute. Well, it was a nice fantasy that he was pumping it into her womb and it was turning him on even more, but he knew that wouldn't happen, because he'd put a condom on.

Finally they both went still and he slumped forward over his stunning, flushed and sated wife.

They lay there in silence for a few minutes until Loren wriggled uncomfortably. "Bobby!"

"Ungh?" was all he could muster from his near-stupor.

"Bobby!" her voice grew more insistent. "You know I love you and I'm enjoying this, but you're getting heavy."

Bobby only grunted and tried to move, but didn't have enough energy, so he just stayed where he was. Not that he wanted to leave his shelter anytime soon. It was warm and wet and tight where he was hidden and just the emotional and spiritual bond he was getting from it was enough for him to be rebellious to the idea of ending it. Besides, it really sounded nice to go to sleep still inside her and wake up in that way. But he was sure that in his sleepy mind he was forgetting the reason why she might protest to this. Then he heard her reason. He was too heavy for her. 'Damn, have to move now.'

"Bobby. Move!" she grunted and thumped him in his side once.

With a grunt he managed to find the energy and pulled out of her. When he suddenly felt a cool draft where latex should've protected him from it he looked down and wished he hadn't.
Loren heard his gasp and looked as well. She gasped in horror at seeing the condom having been ripped apart by the frictions of their movements, some pieces still clinging to his manhood. Looking down at herself she saw a few more pieces on her groin and a little of his sperm, mixed with more latex, oozing out of her. Oozing out of where the condom was meant to keep it from.

"Oh shit." Bobby muttered and she looked at him in disbelief.

"'Oh shit'? That's all you've got to say?" she snarled and, picking up the pillow, she hit him over the head with it. "I'm right in the middle of my cycle, you idiot! Meaning, I'm OVULATING today! When a woman is ovulating it's the most dangerous, she's the most fertile, and once it all it takes to get pregnant! Why the hell do you think I asked you to use a condom!

Her aggression suddenly left her and she slumped back on the bed, whispering softly. "I didn't want anything between us when we make love, but I also didn't want to get pregnant. Now it seems that it's a moot point, since I still got pregnant. And I cheated myself out of really feeling you inside me, could've passed the condom and done it without it."

Idly she reached over to the bedside table and picked up the torn condom wrapper. Her eyes widened when she saw the expiration date. She exclaimed, "This expired two months ago!"

Then tears came to her eyes and she covered her face with her hands, sniffling. "This is terrible! I have two months left on my duty cruise. I didn't plan on getting pregnant this soon. I can't cut this cruise short cause if I do I can kiss my career goodbye."

"I'm sorry, Loren." Bobby murmured sadly, hating himself for causing her distress and ruining her career.

"Why didn't you buy new condoms? Why did you take ones that were expired for 2 months?" Loren said.

"I didn't have the time! When you called and said that you had 4 days off for leave, I just packed enough clothes for the weekend and grabbed what we had in the bedside table drawer," he said desponded.

Bobby also thought that it would probably get him hit again, or even castrated, if he pointed out to her that he'd been the one reluctant to use them in the first place. He told her that the condoms he had were from their home, left over from before she departed for her duty cruise in June. Also it was Loren, so under the control of her passion, that claimed that they would probably still work, not even looking at the expiration date at all. In the end she'd persuaded him with some very effective ways to just stop worrying and go with it.

In the end Loren realized that she was getting mad for the wrong reasons. I wasn't her husband's fault that out of love for her he rushed to get ready when she called to tell him about her leave. Loren was waiting at the terminal at Naples International Airport when Bobby debarked less than 90 minutes earlier. The yellow sun dress she was wearing left little to his imagination. It had just enough buttons and it was tight in all the right places. The hemline was half way up her thighs and the décolletage showed a lot of her ample breasts. When they arrived at the hotel room Loren registered them in the previous day, they wasted no time stripping and falling into bed to have their way with each other.

Loren brightened up and said, "You know if I am pregnant, I won't know for at least two weeks. Also it's not like I'll be charged with conduct unbecoming. I mean Captain Johnson knows I'm on leave with you since I told him we were meeting here."

"Go on sweetie," Bobby said in encouragement.
"The Seahawk will be ready to be relieved for replenishment by the Abraham Lincoln in the two months I mentioned and I won't be showing until well after that. So I'll just go about my business as if nothing happened," Loren finished triumphantly.

"Oh so you won't mind if you really are pregnant?" Bobby asked hopefully.

"Now that I've come to grips with it, no I don't mind that I am or could be," Loren said as she reached for her husband and laid a deep kiss on him.

As he moved on top of her, she felt him getting hard again.

"In that case why don't we make sure," Bobby said in his best bedroom voice.

"Bring it on Marine," Loren growled back as she positioned herself to receive his attentions again.
Chapter 88

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 88

Friday, November 1, 2002

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters Parking Lot

Sarah was walking through the parking lot on the way to the Trailblazer leaving early for the work day. She presided over a case that ended early that afternoon. That's what she liked about being a judge. No matter the time of day a case ended, another one wasn't scheduled to begin until the next day.

She had her briefcase and purse straps slung over one shoulder. That left her hands free to carry the large box with Patrick's birthday gift. His second birthday party was the next day. John was going to pick up Caroline and Patrick later that day and she was going to pick up Chloe from her high school on the way home.

As she approached her car Commander Ted Lindsey came up beside her.

"Colonel let me get that for you," Lindsey said.

"I can handle it commander, thank you" Sarah said.

As they continued walking together, she asked Lindsey, "What can I do for you commander."

"Well I've just begun to conduct an audit of the JAG Corps. I spent the whole day yesterday and all this morning going over records. You are my first interview. I tried to catch you before you left, but your yeoman told me that since your case ended early, you would be gone for the day," Lindsey began to explain.

Sarah was taken aback by that. She hid it well though as she asked, "Why are you coming to me first? I'm in the judiciary now."

"Well you were Chief of Staff at JAG for over three years. I thought you would have insight on how things are done," Lindsey explained.

"Well for the time I was Chief of Staff, Commander, I oversaw the renovations and repairs of the mistakes that the original builders of the headquarters made. We also upgraded our computer and communication systems. We kept to our budgets as well as we could. For anything else you'll have to speak with Commander Turner. He is Chief of Staff now. Besides, why don't you use your own observations from the time you were there?" Sarah asked.

"Well as you know I left JAG under somewhat negative circumstances. As a matter of fact it was after you replaced me in Administration & Legal Assistance," Lindsey lamely explained.

"So why did the SECNAV send you of all people back here to conduct an audit?" Sarah asked.

"Apparently the SECNAV has more faith in me than some people," Lindsey replied.
"Ah the admiral, are you still sore about not making Captain?" Sarah responded.

"Oh no not at all, however I do find it odd that your career and your husband's have flourished. I mean he made captain after only a very short time as a full commander. Also despite the fact that your husband threatened former SECNAV Nelson, he still appointed your husband as the XO in Naval Intelligence. Also there's your quick adoption approval for a troubled teenage girl. How did you two pull that off?" Lindsey snidely asked.

Sarah was incensed as she responded, "How dare you. Leave my daughter out..."

Lindsey rolled right over her as he interrupted with, "I wonder what it is that the promotion board sees in you two that they don't see in me. Perhaps it's the fact that your husband was a personal friend to the former president and that makes you and him more promotable?"

"I don't like that implication Lindsey?" Sarah said in a dangerous tone.

"No I don't suppose you do. Perhaps we can meet later for a drinks colonel and work it out over a beer," Lindsey snidely suggested.

Sarah got the feeling that he was speaking about her alcoholism. Ignoring that she responded, "John and I have earned our ranks. Our work speaks for itself. I think we're done here."

As she made a move to walk away, Lindsey grabbed her arm.

As she stopped and stared at where he was holding her, he let go saying, "I'm sorry."

"You touch me like that again and you will be," Sarah warned him. She walked away from him to her car.

Saturday, November 2, 2001

1330 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW, DC

Patrick Marshall's birthday party was going well. As with his and Caroline's previous parties it was held in the basement playroom or John's 'man-cave'. All his aunts, uncles, godparents, grandparents, cousins, including Natalie Amanda Rabb, and the Roberts children and the Chegwiddens were coming. That was more than enough kids for the party Sarah thought. At three months pregnant, she was glad that all the accompanying adults were also there to help out.

John went off near 0600 that morning. When Sarah asked him where he was going he said, "Don't worry it's a surprise for the whole family and yes I'll be back in time for the party."

Smiling Sarah asked, "Can you tell me what it is? Is it bigger than a breadbox?"

"No I won't tell you and yes it's bigger than a breadbox." John answered. He kissed his wife goodbye and set off.

Now the guests were arriving and congregating in the playroom. The only person missing was Patrick's father.

Just as they were about to begin, Sarah heard John call from upstairs, his voice booming as he yelled, "Woman of the house!"
Sarah had two thoughts as she heard that. 'He sounded like John Wayne in The Quiet Man' and he has the surprise."

"I'm down in your 'man-cave',' she hollered. The adult guests shared a chuckle at that.

Sarah was intrigued as she heard two sets of feet on the stairs. John was the first to come in sight. As he reached the bottom of the stairs he stood to one side and gesturing back he said, "I've brought a relative home for supper!"

Sarah and Diane both gasped when they saw who was coming down the stairs after John. It was Les (Little Sarah Rabb) who yelled as she rushed into his hug, "Uncle Matt!"

Colonel Matthew O'Hara enveloped Les in a hug as he said, "Hiya sweetie." He gave his grandniece a big hug and a kiss and he said to her, "I heard you were having a party."

The pigtails on either side of Les' head waved merrily as she shook her head and put on a cute serious expression as she corrected him saying, "No Patrick is having a party. It's his birthday."

"Oh really!" O'Hara chuckled indulgently at that as he put her down. Right at that point Sarah and Diane both went to him and engulfed him in hugs of their own.

Soon Harm, Chloe, Caroline, Patrick, Trey and Samantha and Ann Marie's children all came forward to add their greetings. As he finished with Samantha, Diane brought over her newest baby, "This is Natalie Amanda that I wrote you about," Diane said as she handed her over to him.

O'Hara had tears in his eyes as he looked down on his newest grandniece. "Oh Diane, she's beautiful," he gushed.

As Matt sat down in the easy chair of the sectional set, Natalie was making cooing noises, wriggling in his arms as she got comfortable. Sarah and Diane were touched as he made soothing noises at the child who looked up at him with wide eyes.

In the meantime as Sarah and Harriet were gathering up the children for their first game, big AJ came up to John and asked, "So what's the deal with the colonel?"

It was O'Hara who answered, "Oh you don't have to talk as if I'm not in the room admiral. My sentence has been commuted."

Sarah turned to John in surprise. She immediately saw that he had a smile on his face. She asked in a warning tone, "What did you do?"

John pulled Sarah in a hug as he explained, "Well last spring I presented the case to our new attorney general. In the brief I presented, I emphasized the entrapment part of the incident and the fact that Matt had a change of heart about the theft. He concurred with me and sent the case file onto President Bush. He went over it with his house council. He came to the same conclusion that the attorney general did that he was entrapped. Though he still felt that since he did commit the theft, he couldn't in all good conscience grant a pardon. Being that he was already working with NCIS and the FBI to help root out the other militia groups, the President did the next best thing. He granted him clemency and commuted the sentence to time served. He even arranged for his marine pension to be restored."

"Well that's great," Sarah said.

Diane nodded in agreement but still asked, "Well now that you're out are you going to go back to live in Arizona?"
"No I figured that I would be close to my family and stay here," Matt said.

"Really where are you going to stay until you find a place?" Deanne asked.

"Well John and I just came from doing that. I'm selling my house in Yuma and I'm renting a loft in the apartment building that Harm owns. John set me up there right after we heard of the President's decision," Matt explained.

"So you're the one that answered the ad for the vacant apartment the building manager told me about," Harm said to O'Hara and John.

"Yeah I'm glad that Shelly knows me so well and agreed to keep it a surprise," John said.

"So with the proceeds from the sale from your house and your marine pension restored you should be well set up," Harm said.

"Well while John was working on the clemency, I did a lot of thinking. After I retired from the Marines, I had a lot of time on my hands. That's how I got involved with that militia group. They were looking for an advisor or mentor and I stupidly agreed to join them. You know what they say about idol hands being the devil's playthings. So I figured that I've been working with NCIS anyway I would continue with that."

"Well that's great Uncle Matt. When I get to the office on Monday, I'll speak with Director Magnum and set something up."

"Uh Diane that's already been done," John explained sheepishly.

Diane looked at John with that angry look he thought he only got from Sarah as she asked, "What did you do John and why wasn't I informed?"

"Well we were going to get you into the loop once we heard from the President, but you went on maternity leave earlier than expected. It was handed down while you were out. So that being the case I worked with Jenny Sheppard and Director Magnum. They set Matt up in the unit for dealing with the militia groups that he was already working with. He'll be a special advisor. Being that it was a family thing, Jenny and Tom also agreed to keep it a surprise," John explained.

Mollified, Diane added with a smile, "You are so devious Captain Marshall."

"Comes from being in the intelligence business," John said.

2230 Local Time

Sarah and John's bedroom

The parents who attended the party were a big help in cleaning up. After getting the kids cleaned up and ready for bed, John and Sarah just changed into their pajamas, brushed their teeth and practically fell into bed, John lying on his back and Sarah's head resting on John's chest. John wrapped his arms around her as she draped her arm across his chest.

As John rubbed her back in a soothing motion, Sarah sighed with pleasure, saying "Hmmm, it feels so good just to lie down and know you don't have to get up early the next morning,"

"Yeah it does especially after the day we had. Having a birthday party for a two year old is a lot of work," John said.
"And what about you, you've been on the go all day with Uncle Matt," Sarah reminded him.

"Yeah there's that. I'm glad Harm and Diane drove him and your mom home. After driving from Quantico and back in Saturday traffic, I wasn't looking forward to driving once I came back for the party," John said appreciatively.

"Do you know how happy you made Diane and me by working to get Uncle Matt out of jail?" Sarah asked.

"I think I have an idea. I loved the look on your faces when he came down the stairs," John said.

"Well if you're up to it I'd like to show my own gratitude," Sarah said seductively. She snaked her hand under the covers and under his pajama waist band. She was very pleased at the reaction that brought forth.

"Ah I see that you are up to it." Sarah said as she felt him harden in her grasp. She started to kiss up his jaw line.

"Oh marine you get me up for it all the time," John said as he rolled them over and laid a deep kiss on her.

They giggled and sighed and moaned as they divested themselves of their pajamas and had their way with each other. This time they also remembered to lock the bedroom door before they fell into bed.

Sunday, November 3, 2002

0115 Local Time

Sarah and John's bedroom

As Sarah lay on her back she stretched languidly. They just completed their second love making session of that night. She was combing her fingers through John's hair as he had his head nestled between her breasts. He was looking at and gently rubbing her burgeoning baby bump. And that's what it was, just a bump in her stomach.

As John rubbed her belly, every now and then he would slide his hand down to her soft curls and dip his finger into her still wet core, gently stroking her swollen clit. He loved the sudden intake of breath and the lift of her hips as he did that.

"John you'd better stop doing that or we'll never get to sleep," Sarah gasped.

John rubbed his hand there one more time, getting the desired reaction before he settled back up onto his own pillow. He gathered his Sarah into his arms and held her tightly for a short time. As Sarah lay with her head now on his chest, she was soothed by the beating of his heart under her ear. She listened as it slowed to a normal rate. She thought that now was as good a time as any to tell him about her encounter with Lindsey in the Navy Yard parking lot.

"John something happened on Friday," Sarah began in trepidation. She immediately heard his heart rate increase in anticipation.

"What happened on Friday sweetie?" John asked.

"Ted Lindsey met me in the parking lot. He's doing an audit at JAG and he said some unpleasant things," Sarah replied.
"What did he say?" John asked quietly. She heard his heart rate increase slightly.

Sarah went on to tell the story of the encounter. Now she heard John's heart race in anger as he said, "That son of a bitch!"

Tightening her hold on him she said, "Now calm down. We know that what he said doesn't hold water. He's fishing for something to take to the SECNAV to justify his position."

"But why go after you and in the parking lot. Why didn't he just come interview you in your office?" John asked.

"Well you know he's always been an 'ambush bully'. He probably felt he had an advantage in the parking lot, thinking he could control the situation. You told me that when Admiral Brovo left he used his rank and position as temporary JAG as a club as a way to try and keep all the subordinate officers in line. He has no leadership ability at all. It's no wonder he didn't make Captain, despite Nelson pushing for him."

"Yeah you're right, he's just jealous about being passed over and he doesn't know how to leave the Navy gracefully or that he just can't because that would mean topping out at Commander, which would give him a lower pension when he retires," John agreed.

"That's right so as long as he could justify staying in, he keeps his O-5 pay grade," Sarah added.

John asked another question, "I wonder, how did he find out about Chloe's adoption? The Family Court adoption records are always sealed. He wasn't there at JAG when it all happened. We certainly didn't keep him in the friends and family loop."

"I don't know. He must have an inside source to JAG. It's probably someone still at JAG that he trusted or got along with while he was there," Sarah speculated.

"Well no sense losing sleep over a knucklehead like Lindsey," John added as he settled down into his sleeping position, pulling Sarah closer to him.

"Yeah you're right about that, goodnight John," Sarah said as she reached her head up to kiss her husband goodnight.

"Goodnight Sarah," John replied in kind. After their kiss they spooned, with John nestled into her back and his arms wrapped protectively around her and their hands stacked over her baby bump.

Just before they drifted off into sleep, John thought, 'I'll just have to do something to keep Lindsey in line.'

Tuesday, November 5, 2002

1000 Local Time

SECNACV's Office

John bypassed the chain of command to see Sheffield, except for his boss. He told Admiral LaPorte of the incident and that he needed to see Sheffield on the matter. LaPorte agreed with John that the matter was a personal on that didn't need to involve the other admirals. So with LaPorte's blessing, John made the appointment.

Sheffield met him at the door shook his hand saying, "Good morning Captain. That was a nice job you and Commanders Rabb and Turner did on the Angel Shark case. Congresswoman Dorning was
very pleased with it. Oh and tell Commander Rabb and his lovely wife congratulations on their new baby girl. What did they name her?"

"Thank you Mr. Secretary I will and her name is Natalie Amanda," John acknowledged.

"That's very nice. So other than that what can I do for you?" Sheffield asked, getting right to the point.

John sighed as he began, "Mr. Secretary I need to inform you of Commander Lindsey's inappropriate contact with my wife."

"Really how inappropriate was this contact Captain?" Sheffield asked.

John went on to explain, "Well sir in the course of conducting his audit at JAG he felt it necessary to ambush my wife in the Navy Yard parking lot to attempt an interview. Sarah told me that he implied some rather spurious allegations. Casting aspersions on how fast we were promoted and other personally private matters which were inappropriate for him to comment on, much less know about."

"What personal matters would that be Captain?" Sheffield asked in honest curiosity.

John felt he could at least tell Sheffield as he answered, "It had to do with the adoption of our teenage daughter Chloe. The Family Courts from California, Virginia and DC all concurred that the adoption went along the guidelines that they set. Commander Lindsey had no business asking about or even mentioning that matter. I've yet to determine how he found out about it, but I will. While he has the right to conduct the audit you ordered, he needs to know where the line at inappropriate is drawn and not to cross over it."

"I see. I'm sorry about him stepping over the line in harassing your wife. I'll straighten him out Captain," Sheffield gracefully acknowledged. He continued as he asked, "Captain, in the course of his audit do you mind if Commander Lindsey interviews you?"

"I don't mind at all, sir. He knows where my office is. He just has to call and make an appointment. Though I don't understand what any interview with me would accomplish. He was at JAG before I got there and he was still there when I left for NCIS just before I got married," John explained.

"I see your point, still Captain there is one thing I'd like to know," Sheffield requested.

"What's that sir?" John replied, half knowing the answer.

"Why did you come to me instead of going to the Inspector General's Office?" Sheffield asked.

"Mr. Secretary, Admiral LaPorte asked me the same thing. The answer I gave him was I didn't have enough besides an impolite conversation to justify going to the Inspector General to start a lengthy investigation into a personal matter. Also I know how the game is played in this town. When my sister was President Bartlett's Press Secretary, she more than once told me that you get more bees with honey than with vinegar," John explained.

"Well put Captain. Our conversation was enlightening and I'll keep Commander Lindsey in line," Sheffield said as he rose and offered his hand.

John rose and shook Sheffield's hand saying, "Thank you sir. I do have to say that Sarah and I would still cooperate with any audit that was being done."

"That's good to hear Captain," Sheffield said.
After John left, Sheffield called his secretary and said, "Get me Commander Lindsey."

As he slammed down the phone he cursed his predecessor for letting Lindsey weasel his way into his office.

Sheffield said to himself, "I'll let him finish the audit and then I'll ship him to the Aleutians."

Wednesday, November 20, 2002

2015 Local Time

USS Seahawk,

South Atlantic Ocean

Two weeks prior, the Seahawk was relieved of duty in the Arabian Sea by the Abraham Lincoln. It rounded the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost part of the African continent the previous day. Even though it was still two weeks out from Norfolk, Flight operations had to be continued so that the ship and the accompanying fleet were protected because it was still a ship of war.

Petty Officer Jennifer Coates was on her personal time. She was sitting at her desk in the JAG office, e-mail chatting with her boyfriend, Sergei Zhukov. He was still in Afghanistan with his Marine Helicopter unit.

J-Sergei even though the Seahawk has been relieved by the 'Lincoln, we're still busy here. It won't be long until we're home though.

S-I'm so happy to hear that Jen. My unit is still in the thick of things. We average about 2 sorties a day fighting the Taliban. It's funny I left Asia to become an American citizen. And after I do, and join the Marines, they send me back to Asia.

J- I know my love. Life is funny sometimes

S-I hope I can see you this Christmas.

J-I hope so too. Speaking of Christmas I also found out that my next assignment request has been approved. After the Seahawk docks I'll have two weeks leave and then I'll be assigned to JAG Headquarters. I start there on Christmas Eve.

S-That is very good. I know you'll do well there.

Before she could type a reply, Loren Singer-Austen came in. As Jen went to stand at attention, Loren waived her back down.

Loren asked, "Jen I thought you had down time?"

"Well ma'am, you know I only have a rack in the enlisted quarters. There's also a big line to get on the computers there. Here I have my own, no waiting and I can chat in privacy."

"Who are you chatting with?" Loren asked, acting like she didn't know of Jen and Sergei's long distance romance.

"Aah, Sergei ma'am, he's still in Afghanistan," Jen replied.

Jen glanced down and saw, 'S-Jen are you still there?' typed in the received box. Loren glanced over her shoulder and told her, "Well continue, I just came in here looking for that Nutter-Butter bar I left
in my desk."

Jen typed her reply 'Sergei I have to go. I love you, be safe.'

S-I love you too Jen. Don't worry, I will try my best.

After she exited out of the e-mail chat program Jen asked, "You get over your seasickness ma'am? You were puking a lot the last three days."

"Yeah I'm fine thanks for asking," Loren replied. She was opening the drawers of her desk as she cried, "Ah hah here it is!" As she unwrapped and happily devoured the candy bar, she had a look of bliss. She was craving sweet and salty things for the last two weeks. Loren suspected she was pregnant, but she didn't want to take the test and she sure as shooting didn't want to confide with Jen about it either.

Jen wondered what was up with her superior officer. Ever since she came back from her weekend leave, she'd been acting strange. She thought to herself, 'Maybe she's pregnant. I mean she did go on leave with her husband. When she isn't sick, she's been eating like a horse. She also sent her uniforms to the tailor to have them let out a little.' She looked at Loren and thought again, 'Well it's not my place to say anything. Besides we'll dock in Norfolk in a little over two weeks and whatever condition she's in will be a moot point by then anyway.'

As Jen was lost in her thoughts, Loren finished her candy. She stood up and said, "I'm going out to get some air. I'll be on Vultures' Row if you need me. Good night Jen."

"Aye ma'am good night to you as well," Jen said as she stood up to attention as Loren left. Deciding that she didn't need to be there any longer, Jen shut the computer down and left the office for her own quarters.

While Loren was up at Vultures' Row, she was thinking, 'God I don't know what to do. I think I'm pregnant, but if I find out then I have to tell the Captain. He'll follow regulations and send me ashore as quick as he can.'

As she was lost in thought, she was watching a Super Hornet on its final approach to land. Just as it landed, she gasped in horror at what she saw.

Friday, November 15, 2002

1045 Local Time

USS Seahawk, Arabian Sea

Harm and Faith Coleman debarked from the COD to see a smiling Jennifer Coates waiting for them. After the customary exchange of salutes, the officers followed Jen inside. When they closed the door Jen said, "Welcome aboard sir, ma'am. Commander Rabb, I hear you had a new addition to the family, congratulations sir."

"Thank you for that petty officer. Her name is Natalie Amanda." Turning to Faith, Harm made the introductions, "Petty Officer Jennifer Coates, I'd like you to meet Lt. Commander Faith Coleman. She'll be interviewing you about Lt. Singer-Austen."

"Aye sir though I don't believe that it is necessary. The conduct unbecoming charge the captain laid on the lieutenant is total crap. She was with her husband for God's sake," Jen commented.

"Let's save it for the interview in a more private setting petty officer," Faith said in a warning tone.
"Aye ma'am, sorry ma'am," Jen said apologetically.

The three set off to report to the Captain.

Harm and Faith each went about their investigations. For Harm's investigation all the men refused to talk to him about the incident. Loren was falling back on her habits of being very heavy handed and she turned all of the witnesses into suspects.

Eventually everyone started to talk to Harm. After he got his evidence together he called everyone to the bridge to explain his conclusions.

Harm began his presentation, "Apparently a Tomcat made a heavy and off center landing. But the LSO wrote it up as normal. The F18 Super Hornet landed but arresting cable workers misdialed for a Hornet, which was 8,000 pounds lighter. It added the equivalent of 15 traps to the wire but it still was within Navy guidelines. The chief in charge of the wire monitoring realized the excessive run out on the prior landing to 184 but regulations don't call for in depth inspection until 185. Technically ALL the personnel involved with the incident were responsible but no ONE person was to blame."

As for the investigation into the charge of Loren behaving in conduct unbecoming, that charge was leveled by Captain Johnson. He saw her sway and stumble from the bridge. Upon seeing that, he ordered her to report to sickbay for a full medical examination. The examination showed that what she feared was true, she was pregnant. The conduct unbecoming charge was leveled because even though Captain Johnson believed that she conceived during her leave with her husband, he thought that Loren was deliberately hiding her condition. Faith was able to show that even though Loren may have suspected she was pregnant and kept her suspicions confidential, she didn't do anything wrong by not checking to confirm.

Faith was able to salvage Loren's career by saying to Captain Johnson, "Sir you're on the way back to Norfolk. You'll be there in two weeks. Why not let Lt. Singer-Austen stay aboard to finish out her sea duty. She's not showing yet and she is in good health. There are no hazards aboard ship that are not there in shore life. She knows to avoid them and to take care of herself. Leaving now would damage her career and her next chance at promotion."

"Let me speak to the SECNAV, the CNO and her CO and see what they say. I'll let you know after that," Johnson told her.

After conferring with Admiral Chegwidden and the CNO and the SECNAV, they all agreed to allow Loren to complete her cruise, but under some conditions.

Loren and Faith stood at attention in Captain Johnson's stateroom as he notified them of the decision. He said, "Lieutenant, since we're only two weeks out of Norfolk and you've probably been pregnant for about a month now anyway with no adverse effects, you will be allowed to stay aboard to complete your duty cruise. Being that you are confirmed to be pregnant, you are to avoid the munitions area, the HAZMAT area and any other hazardous areas on the ship that includes the flight deck. You are to conduct your duties mostly in the JAG office and the bridge area. I will assign another JAG officer from one of our escort ships to assist you here."

"Thank so much sir," Loren said almost in a sigh. She was holding her breath fearing the worse.

"You're welcome lieutenant," Captain Johnson said with a smile. He added, "Just breathe normally and have a seat there's more." He waited until Loren and Faith sat.

He continued, "The reasons you are allowed to complete your duties under the conditions stated, is that the CNO and the SECNAV want to use you as a test case. They want to see how a woman
with child deals with life at sea on a warship. You are to keep a journal of all your activities and experiences as a sailor with child. That includes entries about your health, ill or otherwise. They give you the month after we dock to submit the complete report. Am I clear?”

"Aye sir, crystal clear sir!” Loren said happily.

"Your record will show that you are pregnant, however, hence the reason for writing that journal,” Johnson said in conclusion.

"Thank you, that was very generous sir,” Loren acknowledged.

After getting through the investigation, Loren couldn't wait to get home to tell Bobby. She wanted to wait until the ship docked to do that. 'Boy will he be surprised to hear. I know he'll be happy', Loren thought happily.

Harm and Faith left the ship the next day. While Faith went right home to DC, Harm was diverted to Naples to assist Tracy Manetti in a serial murder investigation. Traci was pulled from Hawaii because she was more experienced in dealing with this sort of case because while she was an assistant DA in Virginia she took an FBI course on profiling serial murderers.

The murder investigation ended when they caught the perpetrator who happened to be the stepson of the captain of Navy Ship that was at the ports every time the female victims were killed. The killer justified his actions by saying he was abandoned as a child by his father.

While detailing the profile of the killer Manetti made a joke saying, "That profile also describes you Harm.”

Harm laughed it off as an attempt to lighten the somber mood between them and the Italian detective. Inwardly it made Harm want to solve the case and get home as soon as he could.

After dealing with that Harm was overjoyed to see Diane and his children lined up waiting for him at the end of the boarding ramp at Dulles.

Friday, December 6, 2002

1915 Local Time

Skyway Motel

Alexandria, VA

The man and woman arrived at the hotel room fifteen minutes ago. They wasted no time as they stripped each other and fell into bed. They coupled with out much foreplay. Now the man grunted as he reached his climax. He quickly disengaged from her and rolled to his side. As he caught his breath he asked, "So Carolyn tell me what else is going on at JAG."

Carolyn looked disgustedly at the man before she asked, "Why is it that you always ask those questions post coital?"

When she didn't get an answer right away Commander Carolyn Imes asked another question, "And when are you going to finish that damned audit? I've been feeding you the information just like you asked for the past five weeks. I want to get on with my life Teddy.”

"If I don't do what I have to, you won't have a life. I'm not the one who didn't pass her bar exam. That was one of the first things I found when I began the audit," Commander Ted Lindsey said
snidely.

Imes sighed. She'd had this discussion with Lindsey before. When he approached her about her bar exam failure, she pleaded with him to keep it quiet. She was scheduled to take another one the next month and if she could pass that, her troubles would be over. But Lindsey had other ideas. He told her the price for his silence was her giving him any and all information she could get about the officers at JAG. She gave him everything that she knew. But he wanted more. That was why they were shacking up in cheap motels for the last four weeks. She knew that if she threatened to tell his wife about the affair, he would blow the whistle on her lack of being bar certified. That being the case she faced a federal conviction for practicing law without a license.

Lindsey was talking while she was lost in thought saying, "Everything you gave me on them proved to be done very legal and on the up and up. There's nothing that I can use against anyone. Their budgets have been in line with the usual cost of doing business and their personal lives are above reproach."

"Well what are you hoping to do? I mean you're like a dog with a bone. You won't stop until you find something, anything wrong," Imes whined.

"I'm hoping to justify my work to the SECNAV. He's already up my ass for ambushing Colonel Marshall in the parking lot. If I don't give him something he'll jettison me quicker than a Tomcat can drop a bomb," Lindsey said.

"Well I wish you used someone else as your quisling," Carolyn harrumphed as she went about gathering her clothes so she could leave.

"Don't you walk out on me," Lindsey said as he grabbed her arm.

"Let go!" Imes said as she broke away. She had her clothes all gathered in a bundle and she retreated to the bathroom, where she was able to get dressed. When she exited the bathroom, Lindsey was sitting on the bed. She ignored him as she walked out the door.

Lindsey said out loud, "I have to do something about her."
When John walked through the back door with groceries in his arms he didn't have to wonder where Sarah was. He could hear her playing her drums in the basement. He brought them for her as a surprise the Christmas after she came home from her duty cruise on the Guadalcanal. He knew that she loved to come home and bang on 'the skins' as a way to relieve the tension of the day. If he listened he could hear some tambourine being played. Caroline and Patrick would often sit and play the tambourines along with their mother's drumming.

Before he could say anything Chloe came into the house behind John. She smiled when she heard the drums.

"Mom's on the tom-toms again," Chloe said cheekily.

"Yeah why don't you go downstairs and let her know we're home while I put the groceries away and change out of my uniform," John suggested.

While John put the stuff away and changed, Chloe went downstairs. There she saw Caroline and Patrick with sound deafening earphones on, dancing and jiggling their toy tambourines. They weren't perfectly in time with the beat, but they were having a good time.

Sarah was dressed in Marine sweats as she sat on the drum stool. She was lost in her own world. Drumming away with her eyes half closed. She had on a set of her own headphones. She was playing her drums along with the music she was hearing. Every now and then she'd glance at her babies to make sure they weren't wandering away.

Chloe unlocked the safety gate at the bottom of the stairs and stepped into her mother's line of sight.

When Sarah saw her oldest daughter, she didn't stop playing. She just pursed her lips and offered her cheek for a kiss. Chloe went over and obliged. Sarah stopped playing when she came to the end of the song. She removed her headphones and asked, "Is dad upstairs?"

"Yeah he's changing out of his uniform," Chloe replied.

Sarah smiled as she got up. She put her arms across the back of Chloe's shoulders and said, "Good now I can start getting dinner ready. C'mon kids, music time is over. It's time to wash up for din-din."

"Aw mom we want to play some more," Caroline whined.

Sarah smiled as she said, "You had your playtime, now it's family time. Now scoot upstairs, wash your hands and face for diner. After dinner and after you change into you jammies, we can watch a movie in the living room or you can play in your rooms."
Sarah was one to have fun now and then, but she was pleasantly stern with her children. She indulged them to a point as she set firm limits. She was never one to get angry when the kids whined about not getting things exactly the way they wanted.

"No whining, you know the routine, dinner, wash-up, jammies and then relaxing. Now move," Sarah said as she gently patted both their fannies on their way up the stairs.

When Sarah reached the kitchen, she almost ran into John as he was coming down after he changed into his regular home wear of jeans, sneakers and a sweatshirt.

As he came down the last step, John caught Sarah and gathered her into a tight hug. Mindful of her baby bump, he bent her slightly backward in a dip and laid a deep kiss on her.

As they broke apart Sarah said breathlessly, "Wow no wonder we have so many kids. You keep greeting me like that, we won't stop making them."

John smile brightly at that, but before he could reply, Chloe spoke up in typical teenage exasperation "OMG you two are impossible. You just can't wait until you can get it on."

She walked away before her mom and dad could reply. Sarah and John didn't see her smile. She was only teasing them. She enjoyed seeing them be so in love with each other. As a youngster who didn't see that until she was a teenager, it made her feel so secure. She hoped she would be just as lucky as her mom.

When Sarah and John broke apart she asked, "Is Uncle Matt coming over?"

"Yes he called me and said he's stopping at Donatella's Bakery to get the semolina bread. He should be here within the hour," John replied.

"Good I like having him come over. It reminds me of when I was a girl. When he was over it was the only time my parents were civil," Sarah said.

"Well he'll only have to see how affectionate I am with you," John said as he gathered Sarah into a warm hug. He kissed the top of her head before he released her.

"He'll probably run out of the house saying something about using our bedroom for that," Sarah said with a laugh.

John shared in her laughter as they began to get dinner ready. Sarah put the chopped meat John bought into a bowl and started to prepare the mixture for meatballs while John went about preparing the marinara sauce.

As they went about their preparations, John asked, "So your honor how was your day?"

Sarah had to smile as she answered, "I had to preside over the funniest case today. Bud was defending a seaman who was caught installing a video camera that looked into the women's head on a ship. This guy was trying to say that he was looking for obstructions in the conduit pipe. He so much as said that he admired the female form. Bud tried to explain that what he meant to say that he respected and admired women."

"What did you tell him?" John asked smiling.

"I told him I was totally incredulous as his defense. I then asked him if he really wanted his client to stay in the Navy. To which he had to agree, no. So he made a plea bargain to discharge the guy with no jail time," Sarah explained.
"So Bud's doing well since he came back. I know he was a bit distressed when he came to help Harm and I on the Angel Shark case and found that Faith Coleman was assigned his old office."

"You didn't tell me about that. What did Faith have to say?" Sarah asked.

"She was totally gracious and apologetic about the whole thing. AJ put him in one of the other vacant offices," John explained.

"Well that's good," Sarah said. She continued on another thought. "I spoke with Diane today. You know some old lady stopped short in front of Harm's Corvette on the way to work yesterday. Harm couldn't stop in time and now he has thousands of dollars' worth of fiberglass to repair."

"What's the insurance company saying?" John asked.

"That's just it. When Harm went to show his insurance card, he saw that it was expired by a week. When he got home, he found that they hadn't received the new one yet. Well Diane was incensed. She called the insurance company and they said that they sent one out two weeks ago. They agreed to e-mail one out to her today," Sarah explained.

"So problem solved. Here taste," John said as he offered a spoon of marinara for Sarah's inspection.

Sarah took a taste before she continued, "Mmm needs more salt and oregano. No, problem not solved. Today the little old lady came into JAG Headquarters with her ambulance chasing lawyer. She had a neck brace on and was claiming severe pain. Harm didn't have an insurance card yet so he called Bud in when he saw him returning from my trial. Bud went to work immediately on the case. The shyster and his client left. Harm and Bud will deal with them tomorrow."

"Why didn't the Rabbs receive their insurance card on time?" John asked.

"They don't know. But Diane is having the NCIS Fraud Squad investigating the case," Sarah explained.

John acknowledged Sarah with, "Oh yeah The Fraud Squad. I remember setting them up after a few sailors complained of being defrauded out of their savings. Tom Magnum decided to keep them in play because they found a lot of our sailors and marines were victims of shady insurance deals and phony investment schemes. He even started sharing it with the Army & Air Forces CID's"

"Well well'll see if it bears fruit. Harm is going to let me know after Bud's hearing on his fitness review this Monday," Sarah said.

"I hope Bud gets recertified for full duty. Sturgis has been working him like he's at boot camp. He's even got me to join them in the gym and the pool. Bud's been putting up good times. He almost beat me swimming a few times," John said.

Sarah dropped the meatballs she made into the simmering sauce. She was about to say something when they heard the doorbell. John went to answer it. He opened it to greet, "Hey Matt! You're just in time for dinner."

"Great I got the bread you asked me to get," Matt said holding up the loaves of semolina bread he had in his grocery bag.

Just then the kids all came running as they chorused, "UNCLE MATT!"

O'Hara gratefully endured the collisions as Caroline and Patrick ran into his embrace. He kissed Chloe on her cheek as she was enveloped in her own hug. John hung Matt's coat up as the kids
retreated to watch TV until dinner was ready.

Matt collected his niece's affections when he met her in the kitchen. The adults sat down at the table to talk so that they were close to watch the simmering sauce.

"So how is your other niece treating you Matt," John asked.

"Oh she's got me doing so much computer research that I feel like I'm back in college. I had no idea the stuff you can find on-line," Matt complained good naturedly.

"Well that confirms it Diane is definitely a Mackenzie. It's either all or nothing at all," Sarah said.

Yeah tell me about it," Matt acknowledged.

The adults spoke of things in general until the sauce and the meatballs were ready. Then they all settled into a relaxing evening of movie, ice cream and popcorn.

Monday, December 16, 2002

1045 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE, DC

Harm picked up the phone and called Diane at NCIS. Diane was back to work from her six week maternity leave for a week now. Being surrounded by her siblings and the Marshall cousins Natalie was thriving at day care. Diane and Harm could not be happier. Whenever they were in JAG headquarters on the same day, Harm and Sarah would call the other to arrange their lunchtime rendezvous and walk over to the Navy Yard Daycare Center. They would meet Diane as Harm would call her to notify her that he was on his way over with Sarah, as he did today.

Harm was in a good mood. He and Bud just finished exposing the fraud Mrs. Motley, the little old lady from his accident, and her lawyer were perpetrating. They found that Harrick, Motley's lawyer, used an insurance company accomplice. The accomplice didn't send renewal notices out. Then he set up an accident with actors and filed fraudulent whiplash lawsuits. Diane dove right into the criminal aspects of the case. Harrick and Motley were facing serious charges.

"Just goes to show, don't mess with a wife's money," Harm told Bud. Bud couldn't agree more.

While he was waiting for Diane to answer her phone, Harm asked Bud, "How do you think we did at your review board today Bud?"

"I think you and Colonel Marshall did fine sir. I hope to hear from them before the holidays. If not I'll make the best of things until after the New Year," Bud replied.

"Well I also hope it's before the holiday. That would be a nice Christmas present. After Sarah and I presented your case at the hearing, I really didn't appreciate that captain referring to you as 'dead wood,'” Harm said disgusted at the memory.

"Yeah well that's all behind us. We just have to hope for the best," Bud replied.

Harm was going to reply to that, but Diane had picked up her phone.

"Hello gorgeous," Harm said with a smile. Bud only heard Harm's end of the call.
"Sarah and I will be there in about ten minutes."

"Okay see you there. Love ya."

Harm wanted to use the lunch time to tell his wife some not so inconvenient news. He had just been assigned to go out to the Coral Sea to provide legal advice to Tom Boone, of all people. After his and Harm's trip to China and the ensuing trial Boone had finally retracted from from active duty for good. Now he was an advisor for a company that provided avionics to the military. He was going out there to demonstrate the latest upgrades. If the upgraded avionics met with the approval of the Navy, Boone's company would stand to realize a hefty profit. Harm was along for legal advice. His orders required that he leave that night. He did thank his lucky stars that Diane had a lot of family around to help her get ready for the holidays what with the shopping for presents and food.

Tuesday, December 17, 2002

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

AJ's office

Carolyn Imes was marching across the bullpen on her way to see her commanding officer for the appointment she made earlier that day. She didn't know how AJ would take the news she was going to give him, but she knew he had to hear it from her so that he would not be blindsided by Lindsey's biased audit of the JAG Corps. She entered after knocking and hearing AJ bellow, "Enter".

"Lt. Commander Imes reporting sir," Carolyn said as she stood at attention in front of AJ's desk.

"At ease and have a seat commander," AJ said pleasantly. He began after Carolyn was settled, "Now what's on your mind Carolyn?"

"Well sir I need to inform you of my new personal status. I'm about a month pregnant." Carolyn informed him.

"I see, so that means no undercover work and or sea duty and only eight hour days," AJ said. He was surprised but not distressed at the news. What his officers did in their private time, as long as they don't violate the UCMJ, was their business.

AJ pursed his lips because he knew what he was going to say next could be insulting to Carolyn. "Please don't be insulted at this next question, but I am required to ask it. Do you intend to keep it?"

"That's okay sir, I do intend to keep it and I do need to notify the father," Carolyn replied.

"Anyone we know?" AJ asked.

"I'd rather not say sir, as I said he doesn't know yet. Though it's not someone assigned to this office or our chain of command, sir." Carolyn replied.

"That's good and that certainly is your prerogative Carolyn," AJ replied nonplussed.

Now Carolyn squirmed as she went into the next part of the reason for her visit. "Ah sir there is another matter that you need to know."

"And what's that?" AJ said a little nervously.
"Sir I came upon the regulation of needing to have a law license to practice Navy Law. Sir I didn't pass my Michigan Bar Exam. I missed the passing grade by two points when I took it right out of law school," Carolyn said bracing for the worst.

AJ was surprised and somewhat angry at the news, but he held himself in check as he managed to say, "I seem to recall that the regulation was placed in about four years ago. You've been here for five. Why didn't you go back and take it then? Anyone who didn't pass a bar exam by then had one year to study and do so.

"There's no excuse for my delay in rectifying that situation sir except to say there were the two years since then that I spent abroad and then coming back here and getting caught up, I didn't make it a priority," She tried to explain.

AJ sighed and said, "Okay there's nothing I can do about the past, but I will place this in your record. I will decide on any punishment at a later time, whether it's a Captain's Mast or an article 32 for a possible court martial. You're going to need counsel for both possibilities."

"Yes I thought of that. I would like Commander Rabb for when it comes to that sir," Carolyn answered.

"That's fine. I'll let him know when he comes back from the 'Coral Sea'. Hopefully he'll be back before the holiday," AJ told her.

"Thank you sir," Carolyn said.

"Oh don't thank me yet. You are still in some big trouble. Though coming forward to tell me may mitigate that,"

"Yes sir I understand," Carolyn said contritely.

"I will suggest this though that you take an extended maternity leave. While you are getting ready to welcome your new baby, you use the time to study for the bar and get that law license. I will need you available to answer questions as we now have to review all your cases."

"Yes sir I'll help in any way I can. I would like to go home to Michigan during the holidays to tell my folks that they're going to be grandparents again," Carolyn hopefully requested.

"That will be fine. Just be back here immediately after the New Year so that we can go forward with your case review and your legal disposition," AJ told her.

"Thank you for that sir," Carolyn said gratefully.

You're welcome. Just don't make me come looking for you, or all this good will goes out the window," AJ warned her.

"I will definitely keep that in mind sir," Carolyn replied just a seriously.

"See that you do. That will be all, dismissed," AJ said gruffly.

Carolyn stood up at attention and said, "Aye, aye sir,"

Before she could turn and walk away AJ softened and said, "Oh and Carolyn?"

"Yes sir?" she asked.

"Merry Christmas and good luck with the baby," AJ said with a smile.
"Thank you sir," she returned with a matching smile. Then she turned and walked out.

When the door closed, AJ muttered to himself, "Never a dull moment around here."

Carolyn returned to her office and began to clean out her more personal belongings. She would leave her office stuff there as she knew that the admiral would be in to begin reviewing her cases. She was glad that she didn't have any more cases pending.

For her part, Carolyn felt a lot better. The Sword of Damocles had certainly fallen upon the notification to her commanding officer of the baby and of not passing the bar, but she had dodged it with her head intact.

"We'll deal with your daddy after the holidays," she muttered determinedly to herself as she patted her belly.

December 24, 2002

2035 Local
Roberts' Residence
Rosslyn, Virginia

The Roberts were having an open house Christmas Eve party in honor of having a new home and Bud surviving his injury. They almost didn't have the party because they lost track of their money due to Bud's constantly changing posts and designations as the result of his injury. The affair was saved when they had an unexpected culinary benefactor.

As a result of that happy circumstance it was a very merry atmosphere at the Roberts household. Their children as well as the Matthews, Rabb and Marshall children were running around being kids. The parents were spread out in every downstairs room, keeping their eyes and ears open for mischief. It was a pleasantly noisy place. The only noticeable absentees were the Pikes and Austens. Loren and Bobby Austen as well as Meg & Robert Pike were in Texas at Meg & Bobby's parents' ranch for the holidays.

As they stood around the grand piano, Harriet was relating the story of how the food for their buffet arrived in the nick of time. "So there we were out of money to pay for dinner, listening to Warrant Officer Scoggins at dispersal telling us why we couldn't get our money right away when I yell Shut up! Then I run into the ladies' room to throw up. As we sat waiting for my stomach to calm down I said, "I hope the ghost of Jacob Marley drops his chains on your foot."

Bud took up the story, "Scoggins said that it was the banging of the old radiator pipes and a stopped watch that convinced him that Harriet's curse came true. He totally surprised us with the hot buffet dishes he brought over. It was more than enough to feed the amount of people who stopped by."

"On top of that when we went to the hospital to find out why I was sick, we had a doctor dressed as Santa come in and tell us that the reason I was throwing up wasn't from the five day old Chinese food I ate, but that I'm pregnant."

Everyone cheered and gave Bud and Harriet the usual hugs, kisses and other sentiments of congratulations on her good news.

Harm's timely arrival made the evening a success with all concerned, particularly Diane. She hadn't seen him since before he went out on the Coral Sea with Tom Boone. They didn't even had a chance for three private words.
Though from the moment they sat down next to each other at the dining room table, they had found ways to connect physically. First she slipped her stocking-clad feet riding up under his trouser legs. Then it was her hand in his or his hand at the small of her back as they walked around the house. Now she sat nestled against him, his arm rested comfortably across her shoulders and their new baby Natalie asleep in her arms. It would do for now, but each knew that there would be many words spoken later.

They all settled in the Robert's den to talk and let their meal settle before they would go home. As they related more stories of their day, the men and women who were a very extended family, related by blood and very close friendships, laughed together, because, really, when you strung it all together, it really was just a day of Christmas parodies.

Eventually it came to Harm, as he related the story of his day. "First of all Tom and I couldn't get off the carrier because the tailhook of the COD broke as it tried to land. Then I had to beg for a ride on a Tomcat. I wasn't having any luck because the CAG there had a real hate on for me because it was his ride that I had to ditch in the Atlantic last year. He was waiting for it at Pax River the night of my crash. Well anyway, we managed to get a flight because his squadron had to stay aboard for an inspection and the Tomcat we did get had to be at Lakehurst for someone else. The CAG told me that if I landed it anywhere else but Lakehurst, he would very gladly pull my wings. Well on the flight in, we were directed to fly lead for a C-130 that had fried its navigation system. It was flying through the fog with a cargo of toys for the Marine Corps 'Toys for Tots' campaign. After getting hit by the base's weather balloon, I found them in the fog and led them to a landing at Pax River."

Diane was, gazing at Harm with a smile that one knew was between husband and wife as she said, "You know, Rudolph, I'd bet that the Commandant of the Marine Corps might be willing to intercede with the Aviation Review Board, since you did save Christmas."

"Very funny, dear," he shot back, hugging her and their baby noticeably closer.

"Yeah, so, Rudolph, where are your wings, anyway?" Sturgis asked. He just couldn't leave that one without comment after all the Alec Baldwin jokes he'd heard in the past five months.

"Well since it was snowing so much and we weren't planning to take the whole family to the wall, I took Tom there. It was his first time there. That's when we met this Lt. Clarence," Harm began to explain before he was interrupted.

Harriet and Bud looked at each other and burst into giggles. That is so "It's A Wonderful Life". We had it on TV just before we left to go find out why we had no money in our bank account," Harriet said.

Harm told the story over their laughter, including the bell jingling in the wind after the young man announced his plans to become a Blue Angel.

AJ spoke up saying, "And we had the whole Nativity scene in my office, including the sheep and The Three Wise Men, although I don't think we actually had shepherds."

Jen Coates smiled as she spoke up, "Unless you count Tiner, sir."

"Does the fact Jason's parents, Mary and Joseph were evicted because he was practicing the drums make him the Little Drummer Boy, too?" Sydney queried, having heard a far more detailed version of the story from AJ on their way to the Roberts. At that time Sydney told AJ that he was a facilitator of women giving birth. Then she told him so other news, which AJ was glad to hear.

Ann Marie pursed her lips and said, "No, I don't think Joseph and the boy can be the same."
Sarah nuded John as they traded looks. She said, "Harriet, we need to make a clean sweep of this. Let Little AJ open the smaller package from John and me."

A few moments later, AJ, the Little Drummer Boy, along with backup singing from his cousins, serenaded the grownups on his brand new toy drum. They were perfect all the way down to the "rum pa pum pums."

As the adults all cheered the kids' performance AJ and Sydney stood and looked at the men and women gathered there. They were either under of his command, related to those that were. They had all become near and dear to them. He looked at Sydney knowingly. She nodded as he said to them, "There is one part of the biblical story that was left out."

"What part is that AJ?" Ann Marie asked.

The part about Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth after the angel Gabriel told Mary she was going to be the mother of Jesus," AJ said leading them on. He paused to make sure all were listening.

Sydney just smiled a knowing smile as she prodded her husband saying, "Get on with it dear."

AJ smiled thoroughly enjoying himself as he continued, "We all know that Elizabeth was going to have a child late in her life."

"Yeah," Sarah said, as she and everyone there was guessing where he was going.

"Well on the way over here today Sydney informed me that we are going to.." AJ began.

But before he could finish Jennifer voiced her guess as she interrupted him saying, "You're going to have a baby!"

AJ gave her a mock stern look for spoiling his surprise but he softened as he said, "Yes we are."

At that everyone got up and hugged Sydney. The men shook AJ's hand as the women all gave him a good hug and kiss.

"When are you due Sydney?" John asked.

"The doctor said that I'm about two months along, due in late June or early July and even at my age, everything looks good. I was totally surprised. He ran two tests to be sure. I didn't think I could get pregnant at 43 years old," Sydney explained.

"At your age does he expect any complications?" Diane asked.

"No not at all. As a doctor I'm very healthy and I don't smoke or drink. He said that if I take care of myself and take it easy, everything should be fine," Sydney said.

John couldn't resist as he said, "Okay, all the mothers to be find the nicest wall for portraits."

Sarah smirked indulgently as she, Harriet and Sydney posed at the bottom of the stairway for their portraits.

After a while all the visiting parents started corralling their youngsters for the trip home to meet the Santa deadline. Sturgis was going to meet his father and sisters before his dad's service, while AJ and Sydney would be going at the same time to meet some of her friends for a while.

As they started putting on their coats AJ asked them all, "Do you know what happened to us today?"
Mumbles of "no, sir," and "sir?" swept the front hall and den.

He had a knowing smile as he said. "A Christmas episode for a television show, a damned well done one, as a matter of fact."
Chapter 90

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 90

January 6, 2003

0815 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Naval Yard, SE

Admiral AJ Chegwidden walked through the bullpen as if he was dragging a piano on his back. Harm and Bud were standing at attention outside Harm's office when the call of "attention on deck" was sounded upon AJ's arrival.

"As you were," AJ called in an exhausted tone. He looked over at Bud and Harm and saw the knowing smirks on their faces. As fathers of still young children, they knew why their commanding officer was dragging.

AJ pointed in their direction as he said, "You two my office now."

Harm and Bud wasted no time in following AJ into the office.

When they passed AJ's yeoman PO 1st class Jason Tiner, AJ ordered, "Tiner coffee for the three of us."

"Aye, aye sir," Tiner said before he scurried off.

As AJ, Harm and Bud entered, AJ said to them, "Have a seat. We need to talk about something personal."

The two officers looked at each other and barely held their smiles.

AJ caught them smirking and said, "Go ahead get out of your system. There is some humor in this."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm and Bud said in unison and started chuckling as AJ collapsed into his desk chair.

At that Tiner came in with a tray holding three steaming cups of black coffee with the sugar bowl and milk pitcher on the side. The three help themselves making their cups to their liking.

AJ asked, "I am so out of practice dealing with a pregnant woman. I was barely there when Marcella was pregnant with Francesca. Now Sydney is dealing with heartburn and the frequent bathroom trips. And her hormones are just so out of whack. How do you two deal with all that?"

Now Harm and Bud didn't hold back as they exchanged amused looks. Harm as the ranking officer said, "You don't. Just get out of the way and learn to say "yes dear" a lot. Whatever Sydney asks for, just do it. Believe me it will save you from sleeping on the couch."

Bud added, "And I bet Mrs. Chegwidden is getting a bit more, uhm, shall we say amorous, right sir?"
"Uh yeah she is. Is that normal?" AJ asked.

"Oh yes sir it is. You being in here most of the time, miss the smiles Commander Rabb and I are wearing some mornings. That's usually when our pregnant wives take advantage of us. And we don't ever dare say no," Bud said proudly.

"I'll bet," AJ said with a smirk. As they finished their coffee AJ said, "Well that bit of male bonding was informative. I'll see you two at staff call, carry on."

Harm and Bud stood to attention saying, "Aye, aye sir." AJ was just able to glimpse the knowing smirks on the two just before they left.

1030 Local Time

Harm's office

After the staff received their assignments at the staff meeting, Harm sat down in his office with Carolyn Imes. They were going over her case trying to come up with a defense for her practicing law without a license.

Harm started with, "How was your trip back home for the holidays?"

"It was good. Though my mom and dad were a little distressed that I'm having junior here out of wedlock," Carolyn said.

Harm smiled when he saw that Carolyn was unconsciously rubbing her belly in a loving way. He only caught it because he saw his wife Diane and sister in law Sarah do the same thing whenever they mentioned their babies.

"Okay the prosecution, Commander Turner, will go not only for conduct unbecoming for practicing without a license, but also for dereliction of duty for not re-taking a bar exam at the earliest opportunity," Harm told his client.

Carolyn said, "Yeah I know. We can argue the fact that when I joined the Navy in '88 right out of law school, the UCMJ just said graduate of law school OR member of a state bar. I didn't think it would matter. That was three years before the JAG regulations clarified that belonging to the bar was mandatory. I mean I only missed passing my bar exam by two points. Also the fact of the Navy placing me a different duty stations throughout the years, made it difficult to schedule one, much less study for it."

Harm countered her argument with, "That defense will only get you so far. You've been in DC for the better part of the past two years. Turner will point out that you had enough time to schedule an exam. Knowing Sturgis as I do, he will try to throw the book at you. He'll pound away at conduct unbecoming to try to get a federal conviction with beau coup brig time. He'll also point out that you changed your name to a recently deceased member of the Michigan bar, requested a duplicate certificate, and claimed you passed the bar on your JAG application. That gives him a chance to go for perjury charge."

"How do we counter that?" Carolyn asked.

"We fall on our sword. Plead guilty and ask for some sort a fine and a transfer to a non legal post. I wouldn't be surprised if a suspension from duty is given."

Carolyn was about to protest.
Harm held up his hand to stop her as he added, "We could have it put in your record as a leave of absence. That will give you time to schedule classes and the bar exam. When you think about it, except for not having a license to practice law, you really haven't done anything wrong. In reviewing your cases between the holidays we, as in Bud, Sarah, Alan Mattoni and I found that all your clients you defended received good service. No one is going to go do anything about your clients who were exonerated. Those that weren't exonerated had too much evidence against them to get off. I ought to know I was the prosecutor in 27 of those cases."

Carolyn smiled at that as Harm continued.

"The ones you prosecuted received fair judgments. You disclosed all the evidence to their defending attorneys and if they were convicted, so what, their defense attorneys should have done their work more diligently. With that evaluation in hand Admiral Chegwidden didn't have to order your defended cases to be reversed or sent back for re-trial. Also let's not forget that you've had 14 years of outstanding fitness reports."

Carolyn sighed saying, "You know Harm you've always had a way of looking on the bright side of every case."

Harm flashed his patented flyboy grin as he said, "Why thank you ma'am. Diane tells me the same thing. When she had her problems while she was carrying the twins, I told her to take advantage of the doctor's orders to stay off her feet as an excuse to being treated royally. She was totally amused that I wouldn't let her do anything. Besides between my mom and John's mom I had a lot of help taking care of her."

Carolyn sighed in regret as she thought of who the father of her baby was. She said, "I envy your wife, she had you. The father of my baby still doesn't know I'm pregnant."

"Don't you think you better tell him?" Harm asked under arched eyebrows.

"I would except he's married to someone else. Telling him will open a whole other can of worms," Carolyn explained.

"How's that, I mean beside the married part," Harm said.

"He's in the Navy," Carolyn explained.

"Oh I see. We're talking adultery and everything that goes with that," Harm finished. He asked, "Do you ever plan to tell him?"

"Yeah I will eventually. I just have to get a few things straightened out first," Carolyn said.

"Well that's your prerogative. Just so you know you can come to me or Diane any time with help dealing with everything," Harm told her sincerely.

"I really appreciate that Harm. I'll keep that in mind," Carolyn replied just as sincerely.

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

1145 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Harm walked back into his office with a look of complete frustration on his face. He lost Carolyn's case. He and Carolyn half expected to lose. It was the way they lost that was so frustrating. First
Turner refused to take their plea bargain. He was intractable insisting that there should be a trial. Even Admiral Morris, the presiding judge, was stunned that there was a trial.

Turner called Alan Mattoni to testify to Imes' character. Turner was hateful in the trial and even tried to make Alan look foolish. He even claimed her 'so help me God' oath meant that she had lied to her God. To his credit Alan had resisted taking the bait. He was saved by Harms objection of Turner badgering the witness. Turner tried another tactic to get the answer he wanted. He asked Mattoni if he considered breaking the oath to be conduct unbecoming. Reluctantly Alan had to reply yes.

When the verdict came down Carolyn was found guilty of conduct unbecoming but only given a dishonorable discharge, but no brig time, much to Turner's disappointment.

The only good thing that came out of the trial was Admiral Morris' sincere offer of help from the bench when he pronounced sentence saying, "Commander Carolyn Imes, Judge Advocate General Corps, United States Navy, this court martial finds you, on all charges and specifications, guilty. This court sentences you to dismissal from the naval service. In arriving at this sentence, I took two principal factors into consideration. The offences you committed are serious. You caused a burden on an already overburdened JAG Corps. Two you have fourteen years of outstanding service. So I consider that an extenuation in mitigation. Upon your return to civilian life I suggest you take the Michigan Bar. I have no doubt you will pass it with flying colors. The fact of this court martial conviction will make your admission to the bar difficult, but not impossible. You'll need good references and I believe that among your friends and colleagues at JAG, you will find those references. This court's adjourned."

As Harm sat contemplating the verdict, Carolyn came in and closed the door. Seeing the look of defeat on Harm's face she said, "At least I'm not going to the brig."

"Yeah there's that," Harm replied grumpily.

"I think you're mad because you lost to Sturgis," Carolyn said with a smile.

Harm snorted in disgust before he replied, "It's not that I lost to him, I can take that. It's that when he prosecutes he always has to get so damned sanctimonious and hypocritical, leaving no room for compromise. But when he's defending, he can't compromise enough. There was no reason to bring God into the proceedings."

Before Carolyn could reply there was a knock on Harm's door. Harm looked up and smiled as he saw his sister in law. He waved for Sarah to come in.

Sarah went right to Carolyn saying, "I ran into Admiral Morris and he told me of your verdict. I'm so sorry Carolyn."

Carolyn let Sarah engulf her in a comforting hug.

After Sarah released Carolyn, she said, "Come over to my house for dinner tonight. Harm and his family are going to be there so that we can brainstorm on a few things to get you started in civilian life."

"Okay Mac what time would you like me there?" Carolyn asked.

"1800 is good, and since you're no longer in the military, you can drop the military time stuff," Sarah said with a smile.

"Okay Mac I'll see you at 6:00 o'clock," Carolyn said.
Harm and Carolyn walked out of JAG Headquarters together. She was carrying the box with the last of her personal belongings from her office. By sheer coincidence, they had parked next to each other.

As Carolyn placed her box in the trunk of her Civic, Harm got into his Corvette, turned the key in the ignition and cursed, "Aw shit. This thing won't start." He checked all his switches and realized that he left his dome light on, which in his older model car, drained the battery very quickly.

Carolyn was just about to get into her car when she heard Harm swear. She said to him, "Come on I'll give you a ride. We're going to the same place."

So Harm got into her car and they went on their way. They stopped at the sentry and told him about Harm's car.

As they drove away Harm said, "Thanks Carolyn. Sarah is long gone with her children and Diane is already at the Marshalls."

"No sweat Harm. Can we stop and get something for them? I hate to go to someone's house empty handed."

"Sure if you like. She and John like the pastries from Donatella's," Harm replied.

Carolyn sat at the kitchen table with Diane and Sarah. She was half listening to their conversation as she heard the sounds of the Rabb and Marshall children making noise around the house. Les and Samantha were upstairs with Caroline in her room. Chloe was in the living room giving Natalie her bottle. Patrick and Trey were downstairs with John and Harm watching Disney's 'Toy Story' while the fathers played pool. She envied the Mackenzie sisters their familial bliss.

'They both had it all, good career, great husbands and wonderful children,' she thought to herself.

While Carolyn was thinking of this, Diane got up to look in on Chloe and Natalie. She stopped at the arch between the dining and living rooms. She had to stifle a soft, happy sob at what she saw.

Natalie had finished her bottle. Chloe was standing with her back to Diane swaying gently and singing to Natalie almost asleep in her arms. She was gently patting the baby's back in order to get her to burp. Natalie finally let go a good burp.

"Oh there you go pumpkin," Chloe softly told her cousin as she continued rocking Natalie to sleep.

Chloe didn't notice Diane watching her. Diane turned and walked softly back into the kitchen. She went up behind Sarah as she stood at the stove. She put her arms around her sister, gave her a soft kiss on her cheek and a loving squeeze.

Sarah turned from her cooking and asked, "What's that for?" She was a little distressed at seeing unshed tears gathering at the corners of her sister's eyes.

"Oh just for having the best daughter. Chloe is going to make a great mother. She takes care of Natalie so well," Diane said as she let her happy tears trail down her cheeks. "Damn these post partum hormones," Diane said as she hastily went to wipe them.
"Oh Di'," Sarah said as she gathered Diane into a tight hug and held on for a short time. After a little
sniffling, they let go and shared a good laugh.

As she let go Sarah said, "Yeah, she is very good with Caroline. Caroline looks up to her so much.
Every now and then she says to me, "I want to be just like Chloe."

At that Chloe walked in holding Natalie and whispered, "Aunt Di. I think she's asleep."

Diane went up to Chloe and put her arm around her niece's shoulder and said, "Come on lets' put her
to bed in your mom and Dad's room. We'll keep track with the baby monitor."

With that Diane and Chloe walked upstairs.

Carolyn said to Sarah, "You know between you, Diane, Harm and John, you've really set up a nice
family here. I hope I can give this baby that."

"Yeah it also helps that Harm and John really get along. They're like two brothers, except they don't
fight," Sarah said with a chuckle. She continued, "And don't let that get you down. You'll find out
what a family is like when that baby comes along. All of a sudden, you'll see that those that love you
will be more than willing to help you out. And what about the father, isn't he going to be thrilled that
you're pregnant?"

"Well I don't know. He's married," Carolyn said.

"Oh I didn't know that. What are you going to do?" Sarah asked.

"I don't know. I called him at his office after my verdict and asked him to meet me tomorrow so that I
can tell him. After that I'll just get going to Michigan. I already scheduled to take the bar exam there
in three weeks," Carolyn replied.

"Well I hope you pass it this time. Just the same don't leave here tonight without your letters from
Harm, John and myself," Sarah said.

Before Carolyn could reply Diane came down the stairs with Chloe. She heard what Sarah said
about the letters and she added, "What about me? I have one written already. Harm called and told
me this afternoon. I wrote one before I left my office. It was the least I could do."

"Oh you guys," Carolyn said with a sniffle as she gathered Diane in another hug.

Eventually dinner was served. After Carolyn helped with the clean-up, Harm, Diane, Sarah and John
gave her the reference letters that they wrote. Carolyn put them in her pocketbook as she got ready to
go. As the Rabbs and Marshalls said goodbye at the door, Harm told her, "Now don't be a stranger.
Let us know when you pass the bar."

"I will, thanks for everything," Carolyn said as she shared hugs with everyone, including Chloe and
the other children. Harm and John watched from the doorway as she got into her car and drove
away.

2130 Local Time

Potomac River Great Falls

Observation Bridge

Carolyn fibbed when she told Sarah that she was meeting the father of her baby the next day. She
was actually meeting him right after she left the Marshalls. She had to wait on the bridge overlooking the falls shivering in the cold for 30 minutes before he showed up.

She was thinking, 'Why did I agree to this place. There is no one around. I should just get in my car and go home, to hell with him.'

Just as she thought that she saw a car pull into the parking area and stop. She saw a man get out and walk toward the bridge. She knew he was a naval officer as she saw the white hat.

When he got to her he asked, "What do you want Carolyn? You're lucky that my wife is away with our kids."

"No Teddy, you're lucky that your wife's away," Carolyn corrected him.

Getting impatient because of the cold Commander Theodore Lindsey said, "What's so important Carolyn?"

"Well you probably know of my verdict right?" Carolyn asked sarcastically.

"Yeah the SECNAV was notified. I had to take a lot of heat. He wanted to know when I knew about you not having a law license and why didn't I tell him or Chegwidden," Lindsey whined derisively.

"Gee Teddy you sound distressed," Carolyn said smugly ignoring his attempt to draw her into conversation.

"You'd be also if it was your job on the line," Teddy said. But seeing the look on her face he realized that he fired a blank.

"Well idiot I just lost my job today. Remember, I was convicted. The only reason I'm not looking at seven years of hard labor is because Admiral Morris took my great fitness reports into consideration and allowed me to straighten out my life."

"So what do you want from me then?" Lindsey asked.

"I have some news for you," Carolyn said drawing out the suspense.

"What news?" Lindsey asked threateningly.

"I'm two months pregnant and the baby is yours," Carolyn announced.

Lindsey was taken totally by surprise at that. He gathered himself to ask, "Wh-what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to keep it. Don't worry Teddy, I'll be able to take care of the baby on my own. I have a lot of friends," Carolyn said sweetly as she turned her back on him to go.

Lindsey stepped forward to grab her. He dropped his hand on her shoulder and tried to turn her around.

As she started to turn in surprise, she slipped on the ice coating the cement where she was standing. As she started to fall she flailed her arms in a vain attempt to keep her balance. She struck her head against the railing on the way down, collapsed into a heap and lay still.
Petty Officer Jennifer Coates waited on the passenger side of her old VW Golf for her boyfriend Marine Staff Sergeant Sergei Zhukov-Rabb. They were just coming from dinner. Just that morning Sergei returned from his deployment as a helicopter pilot in Afghanistan. He immediately called Jennifer and arranged a romantic dinner. Sergei wanted to take Jennifer to romantic spot to ask her an important question.

As they walked arm in arm up the switchback ramp to the bridge Jennifer was shivering as she asked, "Sergei what are we doing here? It's twenty degrees."

Sergei smugly replied, "In Russia this is considered Spring like weather."

Jennifer smacked his arm as she commented, "Well at least this makes up for you missing Christmas."

As they reached the top of the ramp they saw a man bending over a woman's body. As they tried to walk up to see what was happening, they saw him lift her up and to their horror flip her over the rail to drop into the raging water below.

"HEY!" Sergei yelled.

Lindsey was so stunned that Carolyn fell he didn't know what to do to attempt to stop it. He bent over her still form and noticed blood seeping out from beneath her head.

He felt her neck for a pulse, but he was unable to feel anything because his hands were too cold. He was trying to decide what he should do. A really morbid thought popped into his head, 'If I let her die, all my troubles are over. But how do I know she will die?' He looked through the fence risers and made his decision. He picked up her hat and threw it over the rail. Then he started to pick Carolyn up. He positioned her so that she was facing the rail. He managed to get her arms and then her upper torso over the rail to dangle on the other side. Then he picked up her feet and flipped her body into over the top. He watched as her body hit the water.

As he contemplated his actions, he didn't notice another car pull into the parking lot on the opposite side of the river from where he was parked.

He had just let Carolyn drop into the water when he heard Sergei's shout. Startled, he turned to look in the direction of the cry. His jaw dropped as he saw Jennifer and Sergei running toward him. He took off and ran in the opposite direction.

Sergei was going to go after him but Jennifer stopped, "No, we have to save whoever he dropped
over the rail.

They went and looked over the rail, not expecting to see Carolyn's body hard up against a large rock just a bit downriver from the observation bridge. It was only a matter of time before the rushing water forced her inert form to shift and float over the falls. Sergei started to remove his Marine overcoat and uniform jacket. Jennifer knowing what he was going to do said, "What are you crazy? That water's got to be colder than the air."

"We can't just let her drown. Don't worry I trained in rescue swimming on Lake Uchenskoya as a teenager. You'd be surprised how many people fell through the ice," Sergei said with great confidence.

Knowing she wasn't going to stop him, Jennifer pulled him close and laid a quick kiss on him, saying, "For Luck."

He smiled, took off his shoes and took his wallet out and handed them to Jennifer.

He said, "Call the police and get help." Then he swung himself over the rail landing feet first into the water.

As Jennifer looked over the rail she reached into her pocket for her cell phone and dialed '911'. As she waited to be connected he sighed in relief as she saw him bob to the surface and make his way to Carolyn.

The call connected and she said, "We need an ambulance at the Great Falls Observation Bridge. Two people went into the water."

She gave the particulars that the emergency operator asked for and stayed on the line waiting for help to arrive.

In the meantime Sergei was having his own problems. The icy water took his breath away. The initial shock from the cold hit his skin like a thousand needles. He jumped over the rail where he thought he would have lined up with Carolyn as he went in. But the current worked against him. As he hit the water and went under, it pushed him a bit down river before he could put his feet down and stop its pull on him.

He was fortunate that the water was only waist deep at this point and all he had to do was wade. After struggling mightily he finally reached Carolyn. He pulled her to his body, keeping her head out of the water. He saw that she was breathing, but still unconscious. He shifted himself so that his back was against the rock with his legs straight out in front of him. He wrapped his arms around her chest and waist and dug his fingers into her overcoat to get a better hold on her and waited. He looked up at the bridge and saw Jennifer waving at him. He managed to wave back before he retightened his grip on Carolyn.

After about ten minutes he saw the flashing lights of police cars, fire trucks and ambulances appear on both sides of the river. A helicopter soon arrived. It hovered over the spot high enough so that the prop wash didn't affect the rescue and shone its light on where Sergei desperately held onto Carolyn.

Men scrambled across the bridge with rope and harnesses. Jennifer pointed to where Sergei and Carolyn were and stood out of the way. A police officer took her with him to get her statement.

The first responders on the bridge donned wet suits, hooked harnesses around their waists, threaded ropes through carabiners and went over the rail into the water. Other firefighters in wet suits went into the water from each bank, dragging ropes and rescue belts with them. Soon Sergei and Carolyn
were surrounded by rescuers.

First they buckled a rescue belt around Carolyn's waist. Two rescuers held her up out of the water as best they could as they were pulled to shore. There they put her into a basket stretcher and into an ambulance. Jennifer was standing by the ambulance and gasped as she recognized who it was and said, "Oh my God, that's Commander Imes!"

"You know this lady?" the male EMT asked her.

"Yeah she works at the Navy's JAG headquarters in the Navy Yard," Jennifer explained. She then asked, "Where are you taking her?".

"Sibley Memorial Hospital is the closest one," he replied.

"Will they take my boyfriend there as well?" Jennifer asked again.

"Yeah I think so. Look lady we gotta go!" he said closing the ambulance doors.

Jennifer ran back to the bank to wait for the rescuers to pull Sergei out.

In the water Sergei had a rescue belt put on him as he was helped to shore. Jennifer met him and engulfed him in a fierce hug. Sergei was shivering so hard that he was unable to hug her back.

"I'll follow in my car," Jennifer said before she laid another kiss on Sergei. The EMTs closed the doors and sped off. Jennifer walked quickly back to her car.

Before she drove away she speed dialed a number. When the connection was made she said excitedly, "Hello Admiral Chegwidden. I need your help. I'm going to the Sibley Memorial Hospital ER. Yes it's Sergei and someone else sir."

"Yes sir I know who it is sir, but I don't want to say who over the phone."

"Yes sir I'm fine."

"Yes sir, I'll see you there sir, thank you sir."

She closed the phone ending the call.

As she drove to the hospital she raised a little prayer up, "Dear Lord I know I haven't been to church lately, but please take care of the commander and Sergei. I love him so much."

She didn't give voice to anything else, but held her hopes at bay until she saw how Sergei was doing. When she picked up his coats from the bridge to take back to the car, a small jewelry box fell out of his overcoat pocket. In the excitement of the rescue she didn't think to open it. Now as she thought about it, she didn't want to open it and spoil the surprise she suspected that she was going to get.

2230 Local Time

Sibley Memorial Hospital ER

McLean, VA

AJ and Sydney walked quickly down the corridor. They slowed when they saw Jennifer sitting in the waiting area outside the emergency room.

Jennifer looked up, saw them coming and ran to them. Sydney engulfed her into a tight hug as
Jennifer cried out her pent up emotions. AJ stood by indulgently and let the petty officer have her cry. He took in a breath and was going to insist that she calm down until he caught the look in his wife's eye. He wisely let her take over.

After a short while Sydney said in a soothing voice, "Okay Jennifer calm down and tell us what happened."

Just then Harm came walking up to them. AJ asked him, "What are you doing here commander?"

"Uh Petty Officer Coates called me sir. She said that Sergei was in the ER. She didn't give me details. She said you were going to be here as well and she would just as soon tell the story once," Harm explained.

Just then a doctor came through the emergency room double doors and asked, "Is one of you ladies named Jennifer?"

Jennifer disengaged herself from Sydney to answer, "That's me Doctor?"

"Walsh. Well your boyfriend is asking for you so that means that he's going to be alright. They're getting him some dry clothes. His uniform is still soaked. He's very lucky he wasn't in the water long enough to get hypothermia," Dr. Walsh said.

"Oh thank God! Can I see him?" Jennifer asked relieved.

"He's in the third room down the hall," Dr. Walsh said.

"Thank you doctor," Jennifer said. Before she left the officers she looked at them for permission.

AJ smiled and said, "Go on in. We'll follow you in a few minutes."

As Jennifer went in Dr. Walsh asked, "Are any of you related to the other lady that was brought in?"

"What other lady?" AJ asked.

Walsh pulled out his notebook and said, "A Commander Carolyn Imes. Jennifer identified her to the EMT that brought her in. She didn't have any identification on her so we didn't know who to call," Walsh explained.

"I'm her attorney and this is Admiral Chegwidden, Cdr. Imes' commanding officer and his wife Dr. Sydney Chegwidden," Harm said introducing himself, AJ and Sydney. He added, "She has no family that lives in this area," Harm said.

"Okay I guess I can tell you. Do you want to do this in private?" Walsh asked.

"Well at least out of the hallway," Harm said.

Walsh nodded and led them into an empty treatment room. "Commander Imes is a very sick woman. She is in a coma at the moment as she has a subdural hematoma from an injury in the back of her head."

Harm interjected saying, "She is also two months pregnant doctor."

"Yes we found that out. When her blood showed the hormone indicating that, we did an ultrasound. The baby seems to be alright. What probably saved her from bleeding to death was being immersed in freezing water," Walsh explained.
AJ, Harm and Sydney breathed a sigh of relief when they heard that the baby was fine so far.

"Are you going to operate to relieve the pressure doctor," Sydney asked in her professional tone.

"Yes we're prepping her right now. We're taking all the precautions that we can to protect the baby, but if it comes down to it, we'll save the mother before we can save the baby," Walsh explained.

"Thank you doctor, please do what you can for both of them," AJ said letting him go do his job.

As Dr. Walsh walked away AJ turned to Harm and said, "I think we've given the two love birds enough time. Let's go in and find out just what the hell happened.

"Aye, aye sir," Harm said as he walked past AJ into Sergei's room.

When they walked in they found Sergei kissing a very happy Jennifer. They broke apart in embarrassment. Jennifer held up her left hand to reveal a nice sized round diamond ring in an elegant gold setting.

"Sergei asked me to marry him," Jennifer proudly exclaimed.

"I assume you said yes to my little brother," Harm said as he was the first to envelope her in a tight hug.

"Oh yeah I did. We're going to be in-laws Harm," Jennifer happily exclaimed again.

After AJ and Sydney both got their hugs in AJ said, "Now that the romance is out of the way. Will someone please tell me what the hell is going on?"

Sergei began, "Well sir, Jennifer and I were going to the bridge at the Great Falls. I was going to ask her to marry me. When we got there we saw two people, a man and a woman. The man was first standing over the woman who was lying on the walkway. Then he picked her up and dropped her over the rail into the water. I yelled at him. He turned to look at me and then he took off."

Sydney, AJ and Harm both gasped in disbelief. AJ asked, "Did you get a look at him?"

Jennifer answered, "Not at his face sir. He was standing too far away to make out any detail and the walkway wasn't well lit. But he was a naval officer."

"He was an officer?" AJ asked incredulous.

"Yes sir, he was a commander I think. He had the dark overcoat and white hat. When he turned to look at us when Sergei shouted, I thought I saw the 'scrambled eggs' on the brim," Jennifer explained, unwilling to think an officer could be so depraved.

AJ rubbed his hand down his face as he thought of the implications.

Just then there was a knock on the door. Harm opened it and saw NCIS Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs holding up his identification wallet, behind him stood NCIS Special Agent Kate Larkin doing the same thing. They all shared surprised looks as Harm let them into the room.

"How did you get here so fast, I just got off the phone with your wife," Gibbs said to Harm.

"Petty Officer Coates called us. How did you know to come here? I was only just now thinking that we had to call you," AJ asked.

"The police called us when he saw that Navy & Marine personnel were involved in a rescue at the
Great Falls. The nurse in charge directed us to this room," Kate explained.

"So does anyone care to tell us what is going on and how a navy commander ended up in the Potomac River with a severe head injury?" Gibbs asked all in the room.

Jennifer and Sergei looked at Harm and AJ who both nodded for her to begin.

Jennifer took a breath and said, "Here we go again," as she told the same story as before.

As Jennifer and Sergei recounted the events for Gibbs and Larkin, there was another knock on the door. AJ opened it to find a nurse looking rather anxious as she explained to AJ, "There is a TV-News crew outside the ER entrance. They heard of a rescue at the falls and are looking for a statement."

AJ stepped out and let the door close behind before he said, "Thank you, please tell the hospital administration that someone other than them will come out to make a statement."

"Yes thank you admiral," The nurse replied and walked off.

AJ came back in the room and explained, "The media has gotten wind of the rescue. Seeing as we know someone dropped Imes in the river to get rid of her, I think we should withhold her name and the fact she is in the Navy, pending notification of her family. We can release Sergei and Jennifer's names as heroes, but that they didn't know the victim." Turning to Jennifer and Sergei AJ said, "Your statement will be that while you were at the falls for a romantic moment, you saw somebody in the water and you jumped in and called for help to save her. You think you can do that?"

"Aye, aye sir!" Jennifer and Sergei said in unison.

Okay as soon as you're ready to go, we'll go out and give that statement," AJ said.

Just then a nurse came in with Sergei's discharge papers. Sergei signed them and then he, Jen and AJ walked out to face the press.

When they left through the ER exit, they saw that one TV crew expanded to a lot of TV crews. AJ put on a smile and stepped to the bevy of microphones and started, "Good evening ladies and gentlemen I am Admiral AJ Chegwidden, the Navy's Judge Advocate General. These two individuals are Petty Officer Jennifer Coates and Marine Staff Sergeant Sergei Zhukov. Miss Coates works for me at JAG and Staff Sgt Zhukov's unit has just returned from a deployment in Afghanistan yesterday morning. Sgt Zhukov and PO Coates were out on the observation bridge at the Potomac Great Falls this evening for a romantic moment. There they saw a female thrashing in the water. Sgt. Zhukov jumped in to save her while PO Coates called '911' for help.

"Do you know who the woman was, how she ended up in the water and what her condition is?" one reporter asked.

"No they didn't know who she was or why she was in the water and her doctors are the only ones who can comment on her condition," AJ answered.

One reporter turned to Jen and Sergei and asked, "What was the romantic moment?"

Jen answered, "Sergei was going to ask me to marry him."

"Did he ask and did you say yes?" Another reporter asked.

"Yes to both questions," Jen said holding up her left hand to show off the diamond engagement ring.
At that the reporters forgot about the victim and applauded. AJ took that opportunity to say, "Now Miss Coates needs to get Staff Sgt Zhukov home to warm up so if you'll excuse us."

AJ got them through the crowd and ushered the couple into his Escalade, where Sydney was already waiting. When they got in he told them. "We'll come here later to get your car Jennifer. Right now you got them off the scent of our victim so it's best we beat a hasty retreat."

Aye sir," Jen and Sergei said together.

In the meantime Harm stayed at the hospital with Gibbs and Larkin awaiting word on Carolyn. She came through the surgery in guarded condition and with her pregnancy still intact. She was in a coma on a breathing tube as she didn't wake up after the time the anesthesia should had worn off.

After AJ got home he made a few calls. After he was done he called Harm to tell him that he called the NCIS Director Admiral Tom Magnum and Diane and they hatched a plan. After Harm told Gibbs and Larkin the plan, they went to speak with Dr. Walsh and the nurses on duty. They gathered in another empty treatment room to discuss the plan.

Harm began, "Okay here's what we need to do to catch the commander's assailant. For it to work all the medical personnel in this hospital need to go along with what our bosses have planned. For all intents and purposes Commander Carolyn Imes has left Washington for Michigan, as she told us she would do. The woman you have here will have her name withheld pending notification of her family. We need to see if her assailant pops up to try and cover up his crime or finish the job. So can we count on your help?"

Receiving nods from all the hospital workers present, Dr. Walsh said, "Yes you can Commander Rabb, Agent Gibbs. Whatever we need to do to cooperate we'll do as long as it doesn't interfere with Commander Imes care. In the meantime what is being done to safeguard her life?"

"We will be posting a marine guard, in plainclothes outside her room. But that won't keep the news crews away. When will Imes be stable enough to move?" Gibbs asked.

"I'd say by the morning. But if she doesn't come out of her coma, what do you plan to do and where will she be taken?" Walsh asked concern for his patient evident in his tone.

"As soon as she is stable she will be moved to a medically equipped safe house that NCIS has set up for this type of occasion. There she will receive the best care we can give her and her baby," Gibbs explained.

At that the hospital people totally agreed to go along with the plan.

Harm, Larkin and Gibbs waited until a member of the JAG Headquarters Marine Detail arrived to guard Carolyn's room. Gunnery Sergeant Wade Carlyle received his instructions from them and then he set up the guard rotation. At that the three went home.

While he was at the hospital Gibbs called Special Agents Tony Dinozzo and Chris Pocchi. He instructed them to go to the Great Falls parking lot and retrieve Carolyn's car and bring it to the NCIS Garage for examination. Later that day they found Harm's finger prints all over the passenger side door and dashboard. That being the case another part of the plan took shape.

Thursday, January 9, 2003

0820 Local Time

JAG Headquarters
AJ was at his desk bright and early. He had Harm in and they discussed Imes and her condition. "Any change," AJ Asked Harm.

"Only that she is stabilized but still in a coma. A tube was inserted to assist her breathing. They're also afraid she might have pneumonia from being in the freezing water, so they're loading her up with antibiotics. Diane and I were at the hospital at 0630. I was only home enough to shower and change. When we got back to the hospital, she was being prepared for transfer. Gibbs and Larkin and one of the nurses from last night accompanied her to the safe house," Harm replied.

"Where is it?" AJ asked.

"Ah sir Diane and Admiral Magnum felt that you didn't need to know that and either did I. You know the less people know a secret, the less likely it is to get out. We shouldn't be speaking about Imes here in case someone overhears and goes deeper under cover," Harm explained reasonably.

"Do you think someone here tossed her into the falls?" AJ asked shocked.

"I don't know sir, but we're not in a position to start our own investigation to find out," Harm replied.

"So we let NCIS do their thing and we stay on the sidelines!" AJ thundered. He continued his rant, "I'll be damned if I let a potential killer stay in my command."

"Sir calm down please. Remember what I said about someone overhearing," Harm said in an effort to calm his boss.

AJ sighed in resignation saying, "You're right. What do you suggest we do?"

"Well Diane suggested that we let another office investigate quietly in conjunction with Gibbs' team at NCIS," Harm explained.

"Which office?" AJ asked.

"Naval Intelligence," Harm stated.

"Who do you suggest as if I didn't know?" AJ asked with a smirk.


AJ smiled at that. He knew John would run over anyone on his way to the truth. "Does he already know?"

"Not yet sir," Harm answered.

"How much do we tell him?" AJ asked.

"The whole story sir," Harm explained.

"Alright I'll smooth the way with LaPorte and Sheffield. Speaking of Sheffield, he called me this morning when I came in. He said that he was glad that we had such heroic people working for us. He really liked the positive spin on the whole affair," AJ said.

Harm had to grimace as he said, "O Boy he will not like it when he finds out that a Navy commander was the victim and that another commander dropped her in the water."
"You're right commander. So we better come up with a way to catch this guy," AJ said.

"Sir my guess is he'll be more apt to make a mistake. Remember he was caught red handed committing the act and the rescue was the lead story on all the 11:00 News shows. He had to have been watching the news. Now he's going to go about trying to cover his tracks," Harm properly surmised.

"Yeah you have a point. He may just fall into our lap. We just have to show some patience. Thanks commander, now I have something more positive to tell the SECNAV. Carry on," AJ said pleasantly.

"Aye, aye sir and you're welcome," Harm replied as he got up to walk out of the office.

After the meeting Harm went about working his case load. He was properly enthusiastic when Jennifer announced her and Sergei's engagement to the staff. He took them out to lunch with Sarah when Sergei came by the office.

When he came back he saw that AJ returning from his meeting with LaPorte and the SECNAV. Later that afternoon John came and knocked on his office door.

"Hey ace got a minute?" John asked.

"Yeah John come in and close the door," Harm replied.

John laid his coat and hat on the extra chair and sat down. He said in low tones, "Sheffield told me about the rescue of Imes last night. Congratulations to Jen and Sergei," John said.

"Thanks, any word on how Carolyn is doing?" Harm asked.

"Last I heard she and the medical team reached the safe house without any incident and they are just now getting her settled. Still no change in her coma," John answered.

"That's one thing I hope I never have to go through. Lying in a twilight world, not aware of what is happening, being totally dependent on others for your survival," Harm said forgetting who he was speaking with.

"Oh yeah I wouldn't know," John said sarcastically.

"Oops sorry John I forgot," Harm said contritely.

"It's okay. Don't worry about it," John said.

Harm thought of something else as he said, "Carolyn told me that she was pregnant by a married man."

"Yeah she told Sarah that too," John confirmed.

"Well what she didn't tell her or the admiral but told me was that the father is Navy," Harm said.

"Whoa there's your motive. Before the attempted murder, the guy was facing some serious charges, conduct unbecoming, fraternization, adultery," John said.

"Yeah he must have thought that with Carolyn dead, his troubles were over," Harm said.

"This is some seriously depraved or corrupt individual to throw a woman into the river to save his skin," John said.
"So what's do you have in mind in trying to catch this guy?" Harm asked.

"Diane is going to leak word that Carolyn was the victim. She sent Kate Larkin and Vivienne Blackadder up to Michigan to notify her family and get them on board with the sting. Then we'll sit back and see what the perpetrator does next. In the meantime NCIS is looking at Imes cell phone records to see who she called. I think we'll find out a lot from that," John said.

"Sounds like a plan," Harm said admiringly.
AJ gave John the use of Carolyn's office for the duration of his investigation. He was sitting with Gibbs going over her cell phone records. Gibbs had them brought over after he had a chance to look them over. He noticed there was a cell phone number that Carolyn had received more than a few times over the last few months. It was also the last number she had called before her fall into the water. It was only forty five minutes before Coates had made her fateful '911' call to start the rescue.

"There's no name listed in the cell service for the phone," Gibbs said.

"Have you tried calling it?" John asked.

"Not yet, I wanted to do some more digging to see whose it is. I figured that it may be the perp's phone. If we call the 'Caller ID' feature would show my number or NCIS' number and then the perp would just dispose of the phone before he answers it," Gibbs theorized.

"Good thinking," John said.

As John looked at the dates when Carolyn received the calls he came to a startling conclusion. He told Gibbs his theory. "You know the date when Carolyn was first called by this number corresponds with the date when Lindsey first started his audit of JAG. I remember because it's just about a week before he confronted my wife in the JAG parking lot. He came out with some personal information about us that only our friends and family knew about."

"Lindsey wasn't in your inner circle," Gibbs said with a grin.

"He wasn't even in the outer circle," John replied with his own grin. He felt the need to explain, "When I was at JAG he and I never got along. We didn't have any disputes, but he never liked that I was a friend of President Bartlett. He was always asking me why I didn't use that friendship to advance. He was always saying if I had a president in my pocket, oh what I would do. Well he said it one too many times and I let him have it in the middle of the bullpen."

"What did you do?" Gibbs asked.

"I told him that I didn't need anyone's friendship to advance. I let my work speak for me. I also told him that if he didn't stop harassing me about it, I would file charges with Admiral Brovo," John explained.

"What personal information did Lindsey know about?" Gibbs asked.

"Chloe's adoption, I know you and everyone else at NCIS knew because I told all who I ran into when I was working there," John said.
Gibbs smiled as he remembered John sharing his joy at Chloe becoming part of his family. He voiced a question that he was anxious to ask, "Can you tell me how Harm's fingerprints came to be all over the passenger side of Imes's Civic?"

"Yeah I can. The night of Carolyn's injury, she was at my house for dinner. Harm came with her because the battery in his Corvette died. So instead of waiting for a tow he hitched a ride with her. After dinner Carolyn left the house alone."

"Well that answers that question," Gibbs said. He then asked, "So how do we find out who owns the number that Carolyn called?"

"Let me call from my cell phone. Not a lot of people have my number and the caller ID just says cell phone, not my name," John suggested.

He looked at the phone on the list as he dialed. When the call connected he and Gibbs were surprised to hear a cell phone go off in the bullpen just outside the office. When he and Gibbs turned to look, they were astounded to see Lindsey pull out his phone and answer. John heard his "hello" both over the phone and outside the office. John hung up as quickly as he could. Lindsey looked at his phone and said, "That was rude."

Gibbs got up and watched from the door as Lindsey walked to Harm's office and knock on the lintel of the open door. Without waiting he entered the office and put his cover down on the credenza next to Harm's.

"Curiouser and curiouser," John said.

Gibbs looked back in and raised his eyebrows in agreement.

At Harm's office Lindsey asked, "Am I interrupting?" Harm and Jennifer were discussing a case Harm was defending.

"Ah no, will you excuse us petty officer. You can leave the file here."

Jennifer acknowledged the order saying, "Aye, aye sir."

Knowing why Lindsey was there Harm asked, "Saving the best for last Commander?"

"Oh I won't rehash incidents like turning your hallowed halls of justice here into shooting practice or mention the fact you personally burned through a quarter billion dollars of equipment in your career, nine tenths of that after you left flight status to become a lawyer."

Bewildered as to why Lindsey was bringing up those incidents, Harm could only say "Well thank you."

Lindsey went on with, "No I came here to thank you for delivering the icing on the cake commander. You have more than enough to recommend your Lt. Yen for court martial."

Now Harm was annoyed as he asked, "What does any of this have to do with you?"

"You're squandering the navy's time by keeping this investigation open. As per usual what you want is what you get. And the admiral thinks I'm not Captain Material," he snidely finished.

Harm sighed as he rightly figured where Lindsey was coming from, "So that's what this is about huh commander, the Good Child Syndrome. You keep your nose clean, I don't, but I catch all the breaks."
Lindsey smuggle replied, "Oh commander don't worry. Your days of catching all the breaks are over. My report on this place goes to the SECNAV at 0900 tomorrow. I'm recommending that you and your friends here at JAG all be reassigned."

"Reassigned?" Harm asked.

"You've all become far too cliquish. The interpersonal incest that goes on around here makes it impossible for the chain of command to function. It's long overdue Rabb. You and I both know it."

With that Lindsey turned, picked up one of the two covers on Harm's credenza and left.

Harm sat totally frustrated contemplating what Lindsey was thinking. He didn't see that Gibbs was watching Lindsey and Harm as they spoke. Gibbs raised an eyebrow as he saw which cover Lindsey pick up. He waited until Lindsey walked out of the bullpen until he walked over to Harm's office, motioning for John to follow him.

When they reached Harm's office Gibbs walked in without knocking. He picked up the cover from the credenza and looked inside. Hand printed on the card inside the clear plastic pocket he saw the name he expected to see. He handed it to John and told him, "Read the name out loud."

"Rabb, so what!" John said.

Gibbs looked at him with raised eyebrows. He said, "Show it to Harm." Turning to Harm Gibbs asked, "Did you write your name on the slip in the label pocket?"

Immediately Harm answered, "No I didn't. Diane printed labels from a label maker on the cards for inside the pockets of both sets of our hats. We know the printed letters from the label maker won't fade from perspiration like the ink on a card would."

Uh huh?" Gibbs said almost triumphantly.

"What do you have in mind Jethro?" John asked.

"Just a gut feeling, I'll call you later," Gibbs said as he turned to leave.

After he left Harm said, "John let me see that."

After John handed the hat over, Harm examined it and said, "This isn't my hat. The name is hand printed. Lindsey took mine, but why?"

Taking the hat back by touching the back of the white top John said, "I think I know why. Let me have Abby run a DNA test on the sweat on the headband. I'll call you after I hear from Jethro."

Gibbs made it out to the parking lot just as he saw Lindsey get into his car. Gibbs got into his car and expertly set out to tail Lindsey where ever he was going. He wasn't surprised that the destination was the Great Falls Observation Bridge. Gibbs saw Lindsey get out of his car and walk onto the bridge. Lindsey ensured no one else was on the bridge as he took off the hat he was wearing and drop into the water. Then he walked quickly back into the car. He didn't see Gibbs as he made his way to his car and drove away.

Gibbs waited impatiently for Lindsey to leave. When he did he took off down the bank. The hat floated down the falls quickly and settled into the stream close to the bank Gibbs was on. He waded into the river and retrieved the hat. When he got back to his car he put it in an evidence bag.

He drove to his office to put on a change of dry clothes. Then he returned to JAG Headquarters.
1630 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

When he returned to JAG, Gibbs went right to John's office. He said to him, "I need to speak with Coates and Zhukov. Can you have them meet me in the conference room in say 15 minutes?"

John complied saying, "Coates can see you right away. Sergei is still on leave. Let me call him and have him come here. He only lives ten minutes away, just north of Union Station."

When John and Jen went into the conference room Gibbs had four chairs lined up in a row. Gibbs asked Jen, "Miss Coates I need you to demonstrate how you saw Imes's assailant pick her up and flip her over the rail into the water. Are these chairs about the same height of the rail?"

Jen went over to stand at the back of the chairs. The top of the chair backs came up to the level of her breasts. She told him, "I'd say so Agent Gibbs."

"Good lie down," Gibbs ordered her.

Jen was skeptical but she complied.

Gibbs continued, "Now Miss Coates I want you to not go completely limp but help me lift you up. As I try to pick you up, tell me where you saw his hands on the commander."

As Jen lay on the floor he said, "I saw him wrap his arms around her waist and lift her up."

Gibbs did as Jen directed. Jen gave him some assistance as he lifted her up.

With his arms now around Jen as she stood Gibbs asked, "Now he's got her up what next?"

"Okay leaning against her he took her arms and put them over the rail."

Gibbs did as Jen said.

"From there he grabbed her waist again and lifted her up so that she was hanging half over the rail."

Gibbs made a show of doing so as Jen draped herself over the back of the chairs with her arms dangling down.

"Then he held one hand against her back to hold her against the rail and with the other hand, he reached down to her thighs and flipped her over," Jen finished.

"Okay that fine. Now stand straight."

Jen did as Gibbs asked.

He said, "I want you to go limp as I try to hold you up. Just let yourself go and I'll support you," Gibbs requested.

Jen complied as she did what Gibbs requested. Gibbs held Jen up by keeping his arms under her armpits with his hands up around her shoulder points.

As they stood in that almost comical position, Sergei came in. He was immediately indignant of the position his fiancé and Gibbs were in. He was about to say something when Gibbs asked him, "Is this how you saw the man on the bridge hold Commander Imes before he flipped her into the
water?"

"Yes it is,' Sergei said now understanding what was going on.

Gibbs said to John, "Look where the back of her head is."

"Yeah so?" John asked nodding but still not quite grasping Gibbs point.

"Commander Imes had an injury to the back of her head. It bled profusely. We know that by the amount of blood we found on the bridge. We matched it to Imes. If Lindsey was holding her this way, her blood had to have been transferred onto his coat," Gibbs replied.

"Ah I see now. So what comes next?" John asked.

"What comes next is you let me stand please," Jen said in amusement. She had enjoyed being a test dummy up to a point. Still she was glad to assist in the investigation.

Gibbs helped her up saying, "Thank you petty officer."

"You're welcome Agent Gibbs," Jen said making a show of straightening her uniform.

"Now we get a warrant to search Lindsey's home, car and office hoping he hasn't had time to get rid of the coat. Do you know a judge that can give us one this late in the day?" Gibbs asked.

John's grin was ear to ear as he said, "Oh I think I know one that can give us what we want. The only thing is I can't be the one to ask."

"Why not?" Gibbs asked in annoyance.

"She's my wife," John replied.

1745 Local Time

Judge Chambers of

Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall

John, Gibbs, Jen and Sergei went right over to AJ's office. There AJ assigned Major Michael McBurney to do the legal leg work. After John and Gibbs briefed McBurney, he went to plead their case in front of Sarah. Sarah's yeoman, CPO Emma Gardner was the recorder for the session.

"Your honor, NCIS has determined that the last number Commander Imes dialed on her cellphone was to a cellphone belonging to Commander Lindsey. That was determined when Agent Gibbs and Captain Marshall called the number and Lindsey answered it while he was in the JAG bullpen outside the captain's office. Based on that we believe that he was the person Commander Imes was meeting that night and that he was the one to throw Commander Imes over the rail of the Great Falls Observation Bridge."

"So your probable cause for the search was Lindsey answering his cellphone. That's pretty thin Major. It could be argued that Imes and Lindsey were corresponding for Navy business," Sarah said.

"There is more your honor," McBurney said.

"Enlighten me please major," Sarah said impatiently.

"Based on the testimony of Petty Officer Coates and Staff Sergeant Zhukov who saw Commander
Imes being lifted up and flipped over into the water, we believe that in doing so, blood from Commander Imes head wound was transferred onto her assailant's overcoat. Also your honor, Agent Gibbs observed Commander Lindsey take Commander Rabb's Officer's cover and drop it on the bank of the Potomac near the Great Falls Observation Bridge."

"How did Agent Gibbs know Lindsey had Commander Rabb's cover?" Sarah asked.

"Gibbs observed Lindsey make the switch in Rabb's office. Then he followed him out of JAG headquarters to the observation bridge, where Lindsey dropped it into the water. Agent Gibbs was able to retrieve the hat for evidence. Based on Coates' and Zhukov's testimony of their account on what happened on the bridge and Lindsey's surreptitious actions with Rabb's hat, we feel there is cause to have an warrant issued for the search of Lindsey's home, office and car for that coat so that we can examine it for the trace evidence."

Sarah nodded her head in agreement as she signed the warrant document that McBurney had prepared saying all those things and stipulated for the record, "Based on what you have shown me, you do have probable cause for me to issue a warrant to search for the overcoat wherever Lindsey maybe present, be it in his home, his office or his car."
Chapter 93

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 93

Wednesday, January 15, 2003

1315 Local Time

NCIS Safe House

McLean, VA

The safe house that Commander Carolyn Imes was taken to recover was coincidently only 10 blocks away from the Chegwiddens' home.

Inside Carolyn was receiving the best care as she lay in her coma

For her part Carolyn was in her own world. She remembered having a really powerful headache. She knew it was from falling and hitting her head. She remembered the pain, the semi-conscious state of being lifted, falling and then a bone chilling and debilitating cold followed by a deeper blackness where nothing happened for long periods of time. The blackness was occasionally broken up by lights in her eyes that lasted only an instant each time she saw them. Soon the darkness dissipated as she heard soft voices and saw bright colors. The colors parted and she saw a light shining over her face. As she came more fully awake she realized it was a light in the ceiling she was looking at.

She felt a pain in her throat, feeling the tube embedded there. She went to move her hands to get at the tube, but they were restrained. Her legs weren't restrained though. So she started to thrash and kick frantically as she lay becoming more awake by the second.

She heard a long continuous beep as if a heart monitor flat lined. Almost immediately she caught a glimpse of people rushing into her room. She felt hands on her body trying to calm her. She settled down just a bit, but still pushed at the hands and the restraints that were holding her.

Soon enough she saw a face looking down on her own. The face was very familiar, but the eyes were wrong.

'Mac has the deepest brown eyes I've ever seen. These eyes were light hazel, sprinkled with flecks of green,' she thought to herself.

Carolyn gave a quizzical look that was immediately recognized by the person looking down at her who smiled and said, "It's Diane. Don't worry you're safe now and so is your baby."

Carolyn relaxed immediately, knowing now that she was among friends. Also hearing that her baby was safe helped to calm her down even more as she cried in relief.

Diane used her thumb to wipe away her friend's tears as she stroked Carolyn's face.

Diane's face was replaced by a woman with the reddest hair she had ever seen. "I wish mine could be that red," Carolyn said or thought she did.

The red head smiled down and said, "Don't try to talk yet. We can't understand you anyway because
of the breathing tube in your throat. Now that you're awake, we'll take it out soon enough."

Carolyn nodded at the reassurance, then closed her eyes and went back to sleep.

Outside Carolyn's room Diane stood talking to Harm, John and AJ. She told them, "Well she went back to sleep. After she's had some REM sleep, they'll remove the breathing tube."

"Not quite that soon Assistant Director Rabb," a male Scottish voice said from behind them.

Turning and offering his hand AJ said, "Dr. Mallard how are you and why can't the tube be removed yet?"

"Oh call me Ducky, everyone does. To answer your question admiral, Commander Imes' lungs still show sign of the pneumonia she contracted from being immersed in the freezing water. It will be at least twenty four hours before we can remove the breathing tube."

"Well we can wait one more day. Lindsey isn't going anywhere and we have enough evidence to keep him there. Carolyn's testimony would be just icing on the cake," John said.

The Rabbs and AJ nodded in agreement.

Lindsey wasn't going anywhere because he was presently incarcerated in the Washington Navy Yard Brig since the previous Friday afternoon.

Flashback to:

Friday, January 10, 2003

0900 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

The search warrant that Sarah issued was executed by NCIS at 0600 that morning. After obtaining it, Gibbs gathered his teams and sent them out to Lindsey's house and office at the Pentagon. Kate Larkin's team at the Pentagon office came up empty, but the team at Lindsey's house, where Gibbs was with Tony Dinozzo, struck gold.

When Dinozzo searched Lindsey's car, he found an overcoat balled up in a black plastic garbage bag in the trunk. Dinozzo immediately brought it to Abby's lab. There she found traces of blood on the front and the arms of the coat as well as many hair fibers that matched Carolyn's. Further testing of the coat revealed enough of Lindsey's DNA from skin particles and his own hair fibers to ensure that the coat was actually his.

The timing of the raid was just right.

On the night of Carolyn's assault, Lindsey saw the blood on his coat when he got back to his car. He drove away and stopped at a gas station and taken the coat off and stuffed it in a bag and put it in his trunk. He was enough of a lawyer to know that he needed to get rid of the coat as far away from his home or office as he could, but he hadn't the time to go that far. The next morning he immediately bought another overcoat, intending to get rid of his old coat that Saturday on his way to pick up his family from their skiing vacation in West Virginia. The execution of the search warrant foiled those plans.
Immediately upon finding the coat, Gibbs arrested Lindsey and brought him to NCIS for questioning.

After he let Lindsey sit in an interview room for about ninety minutes, Gibbs walked in to begin the interview.

"So tell me how did you know all the personal even intimate details of the people at JAG? How much of that did you write in this audit?" Gibbs asked him holding up the thick document, as he cast his line.

The execution of the search warrant also prevented Lindsey from presenting the audit to the SECNAV.

"Enough to make it interesting, those people have had it too good for too long. That audit was supposed to be my ticket for promotion," Lindsey said.

That was Lindsey's first mistake as he chased the bait. Now Gibbs had him talking.

"According to Rabb and the Marshalls, you didn't like being passed over for promotion," Gibbs said as he let out some line, playing on Lindsey's dissatisfaction.

"Who doesn't like being passed over?" Lindsey answered drawing the shiny lure in.

"So you thought this audit would put you over the top with the SECNAV," Gibbs asked feeling the line jerk.

"Nelson couldn't get me promoted, but with Sheffield, I knew I had a better chance," Lindsey admitted swallowing the bait.

"You still haven't answered the first part of my question," Gibbs said pulling the line back.

Lindsey gulped as he said, "I still had a lot of friends there that owed me a few favors."

"Not according to what I heard. The scuttlebutt going around JAG Headquarters was that you were a bully, a blackmailer and a general screw-up," Gibbs said, pushing Lindsey's buttons, embedding his hook deeper.

That enraged Lindsey as he got up shouting, "She's a liar and a fraud. She had no business being in that office."

"Who had no business being in that office, the mother of your child perhaps? The one that didn't have her license to practice law, but was still a better attorney than you ever hoped to be? The one who had the courage to tell her CO about that and faced the music honorably," Gibbs said, reeling the line in.

"She didn't tell you that the baby is mine?" Lindsey said derisively, not knowing that he just admitted to being intimate with Carolyn and that the baby was his.

"No, but when Imes wakes up, she will," Gibbs said, dropping his prize in the net.

He shut the file he had with him, got up and walked out of the room.

End of flashback

1430 Local Time
Diane notified Gibbs that Carolyn came out of her coma. Heeding Ducky's precaution he went to the
safe house the next afternoon. After Diane and John briefed him he went into Carolyn's room and
waited patiently for her to wake up. Her condition had improved dramatically over the night. Seeing
that his patient was doing better than expected, Ducky decided to remove the breathing tube that
morning.

After getting the tube removed and the inevitable suctioning and other therapies, Carolyn had a lunch
of warm oatmeal and pudding. Solid foods would inflame her already irritated throat for a few days.
Thus when Gibbs arrived for his interview she was strong enough to speak with him.

When Carolyn woke up she saw Gibbs sitting in the chair next to her bed. She knew him as the
investigator for some of the cases she was a part of. He had his head down reading some folder. He
looked up at her, "Hi."

"Hi yourself, how are you feeling?" Gibbs said with a reassuring smile.

"Very weak and my throat still hurts," Carolyn croaked.

"Feel like answering a few questions?" Gibbs gently asked.

"Sure but I don't remember anything after hitting my head and waking up here," Carolyn answered.

"Okay I'll keep it brief then. After you left the Marshalls, where did you go?" Gibbs asked.

"To the Great Falls observation bridge," Carolyn answered.

"Did you call anyone to have him meet you there?"

"Yes I did."

"Who was it?"

"Commander Ted Lindsey?"

"Why did you need to meet him?"

To tell him he was the father of my baby and that I intended to keep it."

"What did he do?"

"He was less than thrilled when I told him. I didn't want to listen to him raving so I turned my back
to leave. When I did he grabbed my shoulder. I was startled and tried to turn to make him let go, but I
slipped on the ice, fell and hit my head. I must have lost consciousness as I vaguely remember being
lifted, then falling and then this real painful cold. I guess I blacked out after that."

"Do you know what happened to you?"

"Dr. Mallard told me that Sergei Zhukov saved me from drowning after I was in the river. How did I
get there?" Carolyn asked in distress.

"Lindsey dropped you in,' Gibbs told her as calmly as he could.
Totally unnerved at that Carolyn screamed, "He did! Why would he do that? I told him that I didn't need anything from him for the baby. Why would he try to kill me?"

At her screams Ducky and a nurse came in. The nurse went to calm Carolyn down. She could see that Carolyn was in pain from shouting. She had her sip some water.

Ducky asked Gibbs, "Jethro do you have what you need?"

"Yeah Duck I do," Gibbs said. Before he turned to leave he asked, "Commander, are you willing to testify in court what you just said to me?"

Anger had replaced Carolyn's loss of composure and the water had eased the pain in her throat. She looked Gibbs in the eye and said in steely determination, "You bet your ass I will Gibbs."

Gibbs walked out the door with a smile on his face.

Monday, February 10, 2003

0930 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Lindsey's trial commenced three weeks after Gibbs interviewed Carolyn. That was so she could recover more fully. After all she was the chief witness for the prosecution.

Harm and John were the prosecutors.

Lindsey hired a civilian for his defense. He felt that any JAG attorney that was appointed to defend him would not give the zealous defense that he required.

AJ was very put out by that and said so, but he had no choice but to go along. Still he was glad that he had a good team for the prosecution.

For the obvious reasons of the rules of professional conduct Sarah could not participate as the judge, though she sorely wanted to.

On the first day of the trial, she stopped by the JAG Bullpen and told her husband and brother in law, "Good luck and rip him a new one for me please."

"No problem sis," Harm said smiling as she gave him a good luck kiss on his cheek. She used her thumb to rub off the lipstick she left behind.

"Yes dear," was all John said.

Sarah smiled indulgently then she gave him a more intimate good luck kiss on the lips. She added, "Since this is the only trial on the docket, I will be watching from the gallery." At that Sarah walked out. John loved the way she smiled as she walked, unconsciously resting her hand on her baby bump.

Harm and John walked into the courtroom together, before the defense council did. They both went about setting out their legal documents and getting their notepads ready for use and weren't paying attention as they heard the doors opening and closing letting the audience in. They were totally shocked to hear, "G'day mates," in a very deep Australian accent.
Harm was the first to recover. He stood to shake his hand and said, "Mic! What are you doing here?"

"I'm the defense council. Commander Lindsey hired my firm. Being that I'm familiar with the UCMJ, they assigned it to me." Michael J. Brumby answered.

"The last I heard, you were the Legal Attaché to the Aussie embassy for a couple of years, then you were reassigned out of the US. When did you leave the Navy Mic?" John asked as he got up and shook Mic's hand as well.

"Last year. I didn't re-up when my commission term ended. Being that I was a dual citizen, I came back here just after the New Year to hang my shingle. I joined Ryan, Price and Sealy. I already knew to Larry Kaliski, the senior partner there, from when I was assigned to JAG. Mostly I've been doing accident cases. This is the first criminal case I've had. Coincidentally it's at JAG," Mic explained.

"How's Rene. Last we saw, you two were very cozy," Harm asked.

"Well she's the reason I didn't reenlist and came back here. We got married a year ago. She's expecting our first next month," Mic explained happily.

"Well congratulations Mic," John said and offered his hand again. Harm offered his own good wishes.

The happy tone changed when Mic said, "Well now that we got that out of the way, can I make a plea for my client?"

Before Harm could reply, John said, "You're out of your Aussie mind Mic. I have enough evidence to sentence Theodore for life at hard labor in Leavenworth."

"We'll see," Mic said skeptically.

John heard the words, but he also heard an under tone of doubt in Mic's voice. Besides John knew he and Harm worked very hard over the last two weeks ensuring their evidence was rock solid.

Soon the trial began with Rear Admiral Anne Scotchel presiding. As soon as she called the court to order and before she called for opening arguments Mic fired the first salvo.

"Your honor I move to have Commander Rabb recused from the case, he is a suspect in this case and thus is ineligible to prosecute."

Harm and John showed little emotion, but inside Harm was seething.

"What is your basis for this accusation Mr. Brumby?" Scotchel asked.

"Your honor Commander Rabb's fingerprints were found in Carolyn Imes' car, the victim of this case. I submit that she and Commander Rabb were having their own affair and that Commander Rabb was the assailant who dropped Imes in the Potomac."

Harm was about to jump up in his own defense, but John beat him to it. He stood up saying, "Your honor this is Mr. Brumby's ridiculous and pretty much comical attempt to cast reasonable doubt on the charges against Commander Lindsey. Commander Rabb was in my company with his wife and my wife at the time of Commander Imes being reported in the water. Furthermore Commander Rabb hitched a ride in Commander Imes' car when they left JAG Headquarters because the battery of his car died. They both arrived at my residence shortly thereafter. NCIS has already verified this account. If Mr. Brumby had exercised some patience those facts I just stated would have been
introduced later in the trial."

"Very well captain, your motion is denied Mr. Brumby. Let us proceed to open statements," Scotchel ruled.

Harm did the prosecution's opening arguments asking that the members find Lindsey guilty of conduct unbecoming, adultery, fraternization and attempted murder.

After Brumby gave his opening statement the trial went onto the presentation of the prosecution's case.

First Harm presented Lindsey's coat as their Exhibit 1 with Abby Sciutto offering her testimony to its authenticity. The other forensic reports were brought to the court's attention as evidence. Then it came time for Jennifer to be sworn in to give her account of that night.

"Petty officer Coates tell us what you saw on Wednesday night, January 8, 2003," Harm asked.

Jen answered, "That night my fiancé Sgt. Zhukov and I went to the Potomac River Great Falls Observation Bridge. He wanted to propose in a romantic setting. When we reached the top of the bridge we saw a man flip a woman, I now know is Navy Commander Imes, over the rail and into the river, sir."

"Were you able to get a look at the man's face?"

"No sir I was not."

"Why not?"

"He was too far away and it was dark sir."

"Were you at least able to see anything else that would distinguish him in some way?"

"Yes sir he had a Navy cap with the commander's scrambled eggs on the brim."

"How were you able to see that?"

"When we saw him flip Commander Imes over the rail Sgt. Zhukov yelled out to him and he turned his head."

"Even then you were unable to see his face?"

"Objection your honor, asked and answered." Mic interrupted.

"Sustained, move on Commander" Scotchel declared.

"Yes your honor. Petty officer what did he do next?" Harm asked.

"He turned and ran to the opposite end of the bridge, sir;"

"Then what did you do?"

"Sgt. Zhukov and I ran to where we saw Commander Imes go into the water. We saw her below us. Sgt. Zhukov told me to call '911' while he went into the water to save Commander Imes."

"Thank you Petty Officer Coates, no more questions," Harm said.
Mic got up to asked his questions, "So Petty Officer, you didn't see Commander Imes assailant?"

Before Jen could answer, John said, "Objection your honor, asked and answered."

"Sustained Captain," Scotchel told John. Turing to Brumby she asked, "Any more questions counselor?"

"No your honor," Brumby said.

The trial proceeded smoothly after that with Sergei testifying to the same account as Jen. After Sergei was done, John announced, "Your honor the prosecution calls Commander Carolyn Imes to the stand."

There was a hush as the marine guard opened the door to let Carolyn in. She was in a wheelchair that Diane Rabb pushed her in. She had her uniform on. She was wearing a wig to cover her baldness as her hair was shaved off to facilitate the surgery to treat her head injury. Despite this after Diane pushed her past the counsel tables, Carolyn insisted on getting out of the chair and walking the 4 steps to sit in the witness stand.

After Diane left the wheelchair beside the witness stand, she took a seat in the gallery next to her sister Sarah as Carolyn was sworn in and John started the questioning.

"Commander Imes-," John began before he was interrupted by Brumby jumping up.

"Objection your honor, Ms Imes is no longer in the Navy. In fact she has been convicted of practicing law without a license by the Navy in this very court," Brumby stated.

John countered with, "You honor, Commander Imes is still in the Navy. Due to her injury, BUPERS held up her discharge papers until after she recovered. Besides whether 'Ms' Imes is in the Navy or not is irrelevant to the facts of this case."

"Objection overruled, you may continue Captain," Scotchel intoned.

"Thank you your honor. Commander Imes what did you do on the evening of January 8, 2003?" John asked.

"After I left your house, alone, I called the defendant, Commander Lindsey and asked him to meet me on the Great Falls Bridge," Carolyn answered.

"Why did you ask him to meet you?"

"I needed to tell him something."

"What did you need to tell him?"

"That I was pregnant with his child."

"Did you meet him and were you able to tell him your news?"

"Yes we met on the bridge and I told him the news."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said that the baby was his and that I didn't need his help raising it and that he should leave me alone."
"What did you mean by 'leave you alone'?

"I was working with him funneling information about the JAG Headquarters personnel for the purposes of the audit he was doing for the Secretary of the Navy."

"What kind of information were you giving him?"

"Personal and private information I was privy to."

"Why were you giving him that information?"

"He found out that I didn't have a law license and he threatened to disclose that, if I didn't help him."

"So he was blackmailing you?"

"Objection your honor, goes to state of mind" Brumby shouted.

John countered with, "Your honor blackmailing or extortion is defined by one person making a threat to do something if the other person doesn't do thing the first person wants done. As an attorney, licensed or otherwise, Commander Imes knew the definition of extortion."

"Overruled, please continue Captain," Scotchel said.

John continued with, "Thank you your honor. Commander what else did Commander Lindsey force you to do?"

"He forced me to sleep with him."

"Why did you go along with that?"

"Again he threatened to disclose that I didn't have a law license."

"When you found out you were pregnant, what did you do?"

"I was required to tell my commanding officer, Admiral Chegwidden that I was going to have a baby."

"Was that when you also told him that you didn't have a law license?"

"Yes it was."

"Why then?"

"I decided to tell him because I knew that if I didn't come forward, the penalty I faced would be more difficult to bear if I wanted to keep my baby."

"Why did you wait to tell Commander Lindsey about your baby or even then tell him at all?"

"I wanted to get my trial done and out of the way. I knew that if I was in prison, the point whether he knew I was pregnant was moot. Seeing that I wasn't going to prison, I felt the need to tell him so that he knew he had a child out there. As I said before I wasn't asking for any money from him."

"So after you told the commander that the baby was his, what did you do next?"

"I told Lindsey goodbye and turned to leave. I felt him grab my shoulder. As I turned, that's when I slipped on the ice, fell and hit my head."
"What do you remember after that?"

"I remember my head hurt and I was dazed. Then I felt myself being lifted up and propped against the rail and then the world spinning around as I was falling. After I hit the cold water I don't remember anything else until I woke up in the safe house," Carolyn said visibly shaking from the effort.

"No more questions your honor," John said.

"Counselor?" Scotchel said to Brumby.

Brumby got up and approached the bench asking, "So you didn't see if Commander Lindsey was the one who lifted you up?"

"Who else could it have been? He was the only one there. That much I remember." Carolyn argued back.

"Perhaps he was trying to assist you," Brumby said.

"Objection your honor, counsel is badgering the witness and is there going to be another question?" Harm said.

"Sustained, counselor ask a question," Scotchel ordered Brumby.

"Yes your honor," Brumby said. Then he asked, "Do you think the commander was helping you and you accidentally fell over the rail into the water."

"I don't think so. I do remember that the rail was about chest high. I wouldn't have gone over the rail in the state I was in unless I had help," Carolyn told Brumby.

Brumby sighed as he said, "No more questions your honor.

"You may step down Commander," Scotchel said as she gave a pointed look at Diane who came up to assist Carolyn if she needed to.

Carolyn insisted in pushing the wheelchair for support as she walked behind it. She held her head up as she proceeded down the aisle and out the door which the Marine guard held open for her. It was a corporal that she was familiar with. As she passed him he whispered "Semper Fi ma'am!" Carolyn straightened up at that little bit more as she walked into the hallway.

John called Gibbs next. He testified to seeing Lindsey switching Harm's hat and tossing it in the Potomac from the bridge and his recovering it.

"Agent Gibbs did you lose sight of the hat between the time the defendant dropped it in the water and your recovering it?" John asked.

"No I did not," Gibbs replied.

"Whose name was in the hat that you retrieved from the water?" John asked.

"Commander Rabb's," Gibbs answered.

"No more questions your honor," John said.

"Counselor?" Scotchel asked Brumby.
"No questions your honor," Brumby glumly responded. 

Harm stood up to say, "In that case your honor, the prosecution rests."

When Brumby presented his case, it was bereft of any merit as there was no evidence to support any defense Lindsey came up with. He rested the case very quickly. 

Admiral Scotchel recited the jury instructions and the court was adjourned to await deliberations. 

After they left the courtroom Harm, Sarah and John found Carolyn in AJ’s office resting comfortably on the sofa with Diane sitting in one of the guest chairs. 

AJ had some news for them. After he complimented them on a case well done, he said to Harm and John, "I'm glad you're all finally here so I can tell you and Commander Imes together."

"What's that sir?" Carolyn said sitting up a bit straighter. 

AJ smiled as he said, "During your recovery, I was in touch with the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces on your behalf. Because of your admirable record here at JAG, I was able to get your discharge vacated."

"Vacated sir?" Carolyn asked astonished. 

"Yes vacated, but your conviction still stands. That will also be vacated with the proviso that you take the next year off to study for and pass a state bar. If by that time you do not, the conviction and the discharge will be enforced."

Carolyn sat back and sighed happily in surprise. She started shedding quiet tears as she said, "Before Lindsey threw me in the water I was scheduled to take the bar exam this week, if you can believe it."

Everyone smiled at that as Carolyn continued, "Thank you very much Admiral Chegwidden. That is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me."

"You're welcome Commander," AJ said softly. He was very reluctant to talk as he would give himself away for being a softy. John and Harm smirked discreetly as they knew better. 

Sarah and Diane went to sit on the sofa as they each gave Carolyn a congratulatory embrace. 

Before anyone could say anything else Tiner buzzed in saying, "Admiral, the members are returning with a verdict."

"Wow that was quick," Diane said. 

Sarah, Harm and John got up and walked quickly from the room. Diane helped Carolyn get into the wheelchair for the trip to the courtroom. 

In the courtroom, Admiral Scotchel asked, "Have the members reached a verdict?"

The foreman, a female Navy Commander stood up and said, "We have your honor." 

She handed the verdict slip to the guard who gave it to Scotchel, who read it. She handed it back to the guard who gave it to the foreman. 

Scotchel intoned, "You may publish your findings."

The commander read from the slip saying, "Commander Theodore Lindsey, US Navy. This court
finds you on the charge of conduct unbecoming, guilty, on the charge of fraternization, guilty and on the charge of adultery, guilty and on the charge of attempted murder, guilty."

There was a hush in the courtroom as Scotchel intoned, "Commander Lindsey you have been found guilty of all charges brought before this court. This court will adjourn until 0900 tomorrow where I will hear arguments on sentence mitigation. That is all."

Scotchel banged her gavel, stood and walked out. John and Harm shook hands congratulating each other. They were a bit curious to see a woman walk up to Lindsey. As the guards were handcuffing him to lead him away, she stuffed the legal document she was carrying into the top of his uniform coat. It was Lindsey's wife, Susan. She practically spat out, "Those are divorce papers. I'm leaving you on the grounds of adultery." At that she turned and walked away.

The guard took the papers from Lindsey's coat and put them in his hand as he led him out of the courtroom.

John and Harm left the courtroom with Sarah, Diane and Carolyn, satisfied with a job well done.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 94

Tuesday, February 11, 2003

1000 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

At his sentencing, Admiral Scotchel threw the book at Lindsey. She gave him 25 years confinement at hard labor, the maximum for attempted murder, disbarment, reduction in rate to E-1, and a Bad Conduct Discharge. She then sentenced him to serve 5 years each for the other three charges, conduct unbecoming, fraternization and adultery.

After Scotchel announced the sentence she said, "Commander Theodore Lindsey. I once considered you a friend. But in light of your actions you have burned whatever bridge to friendship you ever had with me or anyone else in this service. The fact that you would even contemplate killing a person to cover up your forced fraternization, which constitutes a sort of rape in my mind, is despicable. You have dishonored yourself, your position and rank as well as the JAG Corps and the United States Navy and for what; the fact that you wanted to get even for not being considered for advancement? That sir is no excuse for your actions. I hope you use the time I sentenced you to for reflection on what you have wrought. This case is closed."

It seemed to those watching that Scotchel banged her gavel a bit harder than she usually did, that's how angry she was at the defendant and his blatant betrayal of the principles she held dear.

Mic was sympathetic to his client, but he knew that with the evidence against him, his case was unwinnable.

When the marine guard led Lindsey off, Mic turned to Harm and John and extended his hand, "No hard feelings?"

Harm was the first to take his hand saying, "Just don't make me a suspect again."

"Ah that was just gamesmanship. I knew you didn't do it and I didn't have a winning case. When I read the file I knew your fingerprints and the fact that your two witnesses didn't get a good look at his face may have let him slip by. But Carolyn was the one who sealed the case for you. I guess the members saw that as well," Mic acknowledged.

"Yeah we were lucky that Carolyn woke up when she did. Otherwise he may have just slipped by," John agreed.

"Well maybe Kaliski will assign me to another JAG case and we'll see who wins then," Mic said.

The three shared a good laugh as they started to walk out of the courtroom. They met Sarah on her way to her own courtroom. She stopped and gave Mic a welcoming hug saying, "I would have given you this yesterday, but you were the opposition then."
"Ah no worries, it's still good to get one now," Mic acknowledged hugging her back.

He stood back holding Sarah's hands and said, "You look just as beautiful with child as Rene does. What's this now your second baby?"

"No it's my third, remember I was pregnant with Patrick when we were in Australia," Sarah reminded him.

"Oh that's right," Mic acknowledged. He added, "Listen I'll run it by my wife first but would you all like to come over to the house. I'm sure Rene would be glad to see ya," Mic said.

John and Sarah exchanged glances and nodded and Harm said, "Let me run it by Diane. Let us know what Rene says and we'll make a date. But be mindful Mic, between the Marshall and Rabb children we almost have a baseball team."

"I would say that with Rene's and Sarah's buns in the oven, you'd have more than a full team," Mic said amongst the chuckles. "Still it would be nice to see what our house sounds being full of kids."

They all laughed at as they arrived at the elevators and Mic said his goodbyes and the JAG team went about their business.

Monday, March 17, 2003
St. Patrick's Day
0945 Hours
JAG Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, SE

In the aftermath of Lindsey's trial things at JAG Headquarters settled into the same pleasant routine. No more was the cloud of an audit hanging over the building. Still a visit from Secretary Sheffield caused the usual stir.

Sheffield breezed right by Tiner on his way to AJ's office. Fortunately the Marine guards phoned up to say the Sheffield was in the building.

"AJ how is everything?" Sheffield asked offering his hand.

"Everything is fine Mr. Secretary. I have something that you've been waiting for. I have been holding this for a month. I even had my staff prepare rebuttals," AJ said as he presented the audit that Gibbs confiscated from Lindsey.

Sheffield pulled his hands back as if it was radioactive as he commented, "Considering the source, I believe that audit would be quite inaccurate."

"I would tend to agree Mr. Secretary," AJ said as he dropped the thick binder in the round file.

Sheffield continued, "Still AJ in my time in office I see that you run a tight ship. Your budgets have been well in line with the cost of doing business. Your attorneys tow the ethical line in doing their jobs. Just keep doing what you're doing and we'll handle things as they come along."

AJ smiled as he said, "Thank you Mr. Secretary, that's very good to hear. Still I would be remiss if I didn't give credit where credit is due. When I had Lt. Colonel Marshall as my Chief of Staff, she ran a very tight ship. The other officers were afraid to step out of line on her."
Sheffield chuckled at that as he asked. "And now that she is in the judiciary?"

"Now, Commander Turner and Commander Rabb are doing quite well. They both share in keeping the office running. No one goes into court until all their evidence is in order, which saves us the cost of an overly long trial. They have the attorneys investigating each case as thoroughly as they can. In fact Commander Rabb has taken it upon himself to schedule regular inservicing with the senior attorneys as well as those new to the JAG Corps on the proper processes needed for investigations and going into court as well as the newest legal rulings that come down the road."

"Really I had no idea Rabb would be the one to teach. Wasn't he the one who fired into the ceiling?" Sheffield asked intrigued.

AJ sighed as he answered, "Yes he was, but he made his point and paid for the repairs of the damages. I believe that being married and being a father has helped to make him mature more quickly than he would have otherwise."

"That's good to hear. Speaking of children how is Sydney?" Sheffield asked.

"Oh she's doing well. She complains about the usual things being pregnant puts her through, but she is enjoying it at the same time," AJ said proudly.

"And you?" Sheffield asked amusingly.

"I have taken the advice from the other fathers on my staff to remember two little words," AJ replied.

"And they are?" Sheffield asked smiling.

"Yes dear," AJ replied with his tongue firmly in his cheek.

Both men shared a good laugh before Sheffield bid AJ "Have a good day admiral", and walked out.

Same time

St. Patrick's Parade
Reviewing Stand
5th Avenue 86th Street
New York, NY

John and Sarah were in New York to watch the St. Patrick's Day parade. At least Sarah, John, Caroline and Patrick were. Chloe's school, Gonzaga College High School, was marching in the parade. The band was chosen to escort the US Marines contingent that was marching. That meant that they would be marching at the beginning of the parade.

Chloe was the commander of the Color Guard. She would be the person holding the American Flag at the head of the schools contingent.

John knew the NYPD Captain that was managing the part of the parade where the reviewing stand was. So he arranged to have tickets for the family. Being in her ninth month of the pregnancy Sarah was grateful that she was not going to stand all that time to watch a parade.

Sarah was doubly grateful that they arrived the day before as they traveled on the Amtrak Metroliner that reached New York's Penn Station in the late morning. Chloe was already in New York as she arrived by bus with the school's band the previous day.
John arranged that while he took the kids sightseeing around midtown Manhattan, Sarah was going to be treated to a pampering afternoon in the Oasis Day Spa around the corner from the Hyatt.

(Flashback to the previous day

March 16, 2003)

Back in February, when New York’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade organizers, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, notified Chloe's school that their band was marching, John made the reservations for the hotel and Sarah's spa day.

They boarded the train that left from Union Station Sunday morning. The kids just drank up the excitement of a train ride. They were also looking forward to seeing their grandparents who would meet them at the hotel then the whole family would go for dinner at the Four Seasons Restaurant.

While her three children were gazing out the window Sarah snuggled closer to John and brought her lips closer to his ear as she said, "Did I remember to thank you for the spa day?"

"Yeah I think you did last night," John whispered back as he laid a kiss on the crown of her head.

"Admiral Morris was really nice not assigning me any long trials for the rest of my pregnancy and I'm glad his wife recommended the spa. She told me that the spa has a program for expectant mothers who are just about 8 months along. I'm really looking forward getting pampered," Sarah said happily as she rested her head on John's shoulder.

Soon the train entered the tunnel under the Hudson River for the last leg into Manhattan. When they exited Penn Station on 7th Avenue, they caught a cab to the Hyatt, where they registered into a double-double room (Two double beds). Chloe was also staying in the Hyatt in a room with three other girls from the drill team that the school booked.

Sarah and John unpacked the few clothes they had, called Chloe to meet them and left the room. They parted ways in the lobby. Sarah went to the spa while John waited for Chloe and some of her friends with their parents to join him, Caroline and Patrick.

1300 Local Time

Oasis Day Spa
Lexington Ave., NY

When Sarah arrived at the spa she was checked in, signing the terms of agreement against injury and authorizing medical treatment if needed during the course of her session. She was then given over to her personal therapy coordinator. The woman was about Sarah's height, with a nice, fit figure. She had dark hair that was tied back in a comfortable ponytail,

"Good afternoon Mrs. Marshall. I am your personal therapy coordinator Antonia. I will ensure that your time with us is as pleasant as we can make it. I see that you are several months pregnant," Antonia said.

"Yes I just entered my ninth month," Sarah confirmed.

"Very good, I have two children myself so I know the feeling. The last month can be somewhat uncomfortable. We consulted with many obstetricians and therapists who are mothers themselves to develop a program to alleviate some of that discomfort. When you leave here we will also give you literature that you can give to your husband so that he can continue the therapy. How does that
sound?" Antonia asked happily.

"Oh that sounds very good," Sarah answered in happy anticipation.

"Okay let's get you ready then, take this gown and change completely out of your clothing including your underwear. We're going to hand launder your lingerie for you. There is nothing like putting on a fresh set after the pampering you're going to receive."

"Sounds good," Sarah said as she went into the changing room to change. After she came out Antonia led her to a massage area. Sarah sat down on a massage chair that was adjustable to fit her baby belly. Soon another woman came in an introduced herself, "I'm Wendy your masseuse." Rubbing her hands in warm oil, Wendy began her ministrations on Sarah. Sarah groaned with pleasure as all her discomforts drifted away.

The pampering continued as Sarah was led to a table. Wendy and Antonia adjusted it so that Sarah could sit and then lie down on her back. She was given a full facial that included a cheek massage as well as a cleansing mask and the usual cucumbers over her eyes. As Sarah lay on her back on the table, Wendy came in a massaged her legs from her thighs down to her toes.

Sarah groaned in pleasure, "My feet haven't felt this good in seven months."

"I'm glad you're enjoying this Mrs. Marshall," Wendy said smiling as she continued her work on Sarah's feet.

As Wendy finished with the feet she instructed Sarah to, "Lay on your on your side now Mrs. Marshall. We'll give your back another go round before we release you."

Sarah sighed with pleasure as Wendy worked the knots out of her back.

Soon it was time for Sarah to get dressed and leave. She had a gift bag with the oils and potions that were used in her therapy as well as the instruction for their correct use.

Sarah arrived at the hotel room first. She changed out of her street clothes into a set of John's sweats. Hers were too small for her pregnant frame. She lay down on the pulled down bed and pulling the covers up, lay down for a nap.

1245 Local Time

Grand Hyatt Hotel

Midtown Manhattan

Park Ave, Grand Central, NY

While Sarah was at the spa, John and the kids were enjoying their tour of midtown.

Being that he was the native New Yorker, the parents from DC appointed John as their unofficial tour guide.

Just before they left the Hyatt they gathered around him as he said, "I know this part of town very well. As a matter of fact, I worked in this hotel while I was in college. So everyone stay close to your parents and follow me. If you have any questions, we'll stop so that you can ask and have them answered before we move on, okay?"

He received the various affirmative responses.
"Good let's go then" John said before they all went down into and through Grand Central Station, over which the Hyatt was built, out the other side to Madison Avenue and started to walk uptown.

As they walked up 5th Avenue, they stopped into St. Patrick’s Cathedral. They all lit candles and said a few prayers. Then they crossed 5th Avenue and saw the ice rink at Rockefeller Center. They went into the GE Building and bought tickets for the observation deck on the roof called the "Top of The Rock". They lingered there for a while snapping photos of themselves and the breathtaking view.

After leaving there, the group walked over to 7th Avenue and then down to Times Square. They took more photos of the huge signs.

At the Times Square Armed Forces Recruiting Station John walked in and introduced himself to the highest ranking service member he saw, an Army Staff Sergeant named Glenn Cortland.

Shaking his hand and showing his Navy ID Card he said, "Good afternoon, I'm Captain John Marshall, US Navy."

"Good afternoon sir, what may I do for the Captain today?" Cortland asked.

"My group and I are from DC. Our children are marching in the parade tomorrow. A few of the parents in our group are service members. We were wondering if you and the other recruiters would like to be in a photo with us."

Cortland was very receptive as he said, "Sure captain let me get the other recruiters and we'll be right out."

They had a policeman take a few really nice pictures of the whole group along with all the services' recruiters in front of the recruiting building. It was the highlight of the tour.

At West 42nd Street and Broadway, Patrick was the first to protest as he said, "Daddy I tired. Can we go back to the hotel?"

"Sure pal we're on our way back there now," John said.

The other parents totally agreed as he saw how tired all the other the kids were getting. He was getting tired of walking himself.

It was only a short four block walk down 42nd Street to the Hyatt. The students and their parents all said thanks to John for a splendid tour and went to their respective rooms.

When the Marshalls entered their room, they saw Sarah sound asleep in the middle of the bed.

After John removed his coat and hat, Patrick quietly went over to the bed, stood on his tip toes and gave his mother a gentle kiss on her cheek.

Sarah stirred and opened her eyes to find her son's angelic face, cradled cutely on his top of his flat hands, looking happily back at her.

"Hi baby," Sarah said sleepily.

"Hi mommy, can I lie down with you?" Patrick asked.

"Sure baby, get on up here," Sarah said moving to make room for him.

Caroline joined her brother on the bed as she gave her mother her kiss.
Chloe gave her mom her welcome kiss saying, "I'm going back to my room and change for dinner. I'll see you guys later."

"Okay sweetie," Sarah said.

John walked out with Chloe to escort her to her room.

After they left Sarah shifted over some to also accommodate Caroline. She gathered them into her embrace and let them snuggle in and lie down. Sarah sighed with the joy of having her children around her. Being that the kids were tired from walking around, they soon fell into a restful sleep.

John came back from escorting Chloe to her room. He leaned over and finally gave Sarah his kiss saying, "You guys relax. Mom and dad aren't due to meet us for dinner for another two hours."

"Okay honey. Did you guys have a good time touring?" Sarah asked as she alternately stroked first Patrick's silky hair then Caroline's.

"Oh yeah we had a great time," John answered as he recounted the tour. He took the kids shoes off and spread an extra blanket over the three of them.

Sarah replied, "That's good." Wake me at 1830."

"No problem," John said as he lay down on the other bed to take his own nap. He'd save the funny story that involved Patrick and St. Patrick's for when they all had dinner with his parents later.

2000 Local Time

Grand Hyatt Hotel

Park Ave, Grand Central, NY

Jim and Maureen Marshall walked through the Lobby of the hotel up to a wall phone. Jim dialed the hotel operator and was connected to Sarah and John's room. Maureen heard only her husband's side of the conversation.

"Hello Sarah? Yes we're down in the lobby. Okay we'll wait for you here. See you soon."

Jim and Maureen went over to the lobby bar and ordered a couple of drinks. They barely finished them and gotten comfortable when they saw one elevator open and two dark haired images exited. Caroline and Patrick paused to look around and then finding what they were looking for took off across the lobby to their Grandparents.

Jim and Maureen stood to gather them in their arms. Sarah, Chloe and John followed close behind and received their own greetings.

"How are you all enjoying Manhattan?" Maureen asked.

"Oh it's great and so loud. DC isn't like this," Caroline said in wide eyed wonder.

"I really liked the view from Top of the Rock. Daddy had to lift me onto his shoulders because I was too short to see," Patrick said.

"You should tell mom, Nana and Grandpa what Patrick said at the St. Patrick's Cathedral," Chloe said her eyes twinking.

John had to laugh as he remembered and said, "As we walked through the entrance of the cathedral,
Patrick looked around and said, "This is Jesus' house". The guide at the desk was so charmed by it."

Everyone chuckled as Sarah said "Ah that's so cute."

Before John could say anything else Patrick piped up and said, "And they named it after me."

The sounds laughter echoed after them as they walked out to dinner.

End of Flashback

12:45 Local Time

St. Patrick's Parade

Reviewing Stand

5th Avenue at 86th Street

New York, NY

The weather was clear but a bit cold. The Marshalls, minus Chloe were sitting with a blanket over their knees sipping hot chocolate as they sat in the reviewing stand.

They watched the parade unfold as first the US Army's Fighting 69th New York Regiment paraded by, followed by the Navy and Air Force. They stood up and looked down the avenue in anticipation as they saw the Gonzaga College High School banner from 2 blocks away.

The other Marshalls shouted and cheered her name as Chloe passed by proudly holding the US Flag. She tried but failed to keep a stern face, as the insistent cheers from her family forced her to crack a smile and wink at them as she passed by.

After the Marines passed by there was a break before the first contingent of New York City's uniformed services were set to parade by. The Marshalls took advantage of the break as they gathered their things and left the reviewing stand. They crossed 5th Avenue and leisurely walked the four blocks east to the end of the parade's march and dispersal point on 3rd Avenue at East 86th Street. They got there along with some of the other parents just as the band was dispersing and boarding their bus. They saw Chloe just before she boarded the bus. She waved at them and blew them a kiss as John called, "We'll take a cab and meet you at the hotel."

They walked back to Lexington Avenue and were able to get a cab going downtown and settled in for the short ride; though the going was slow due to the heavy traffic. They went about ten blocks when Sarah let out a gasp.

After Sarah collected her breath she said, "John I think we should skip the hotel and go to the nearest hospital, NOW!"
Chapter 95

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 95

Monday, March 17, 2003

1515 Local Time

Lenox Hill Hospital

100 E 77th Street

New York, NY

Coincidentally just a Sarah said "go to the nearest hospital" they were just passing East 78th Street. Without asking the cab driver went right to the Emergency Entrance for Lenox Hill Hospital on East 76th Street. As they pulled up John saw that the fair on the meter was a little over $15.00. He fished out a $20.00 and handed it to the cabbie saying, "Keep the change!"

John got his family out of the car as quickly as possible and walked into the hospital's ER. He had Sarah and the kids sit down at the bench near the registration desk. He stood and at the counter and said loudly but calmly, "My nine month pregnant wife needs help with her pain."

Immediately a female nurse came around from behind the counter with a wheelchair and brought it over to where Sarah was sitting. She helped John get Sarah up and into the chair.

The nurse said, "My name's Jeanie, what's your name sweetheart?"

"Sarah and this is my husband John and our children Caroline and Patrick." Sarah said grimacing through the pain.

"Okay Sarah I'll take you up to the OB section on the 3rd floor while John get's you registered.

While John was registering his wife, Jeanie wheeled Sarah into the elevator. Jeanie asked, "1 to 10 what's the pain?"

"An 11!" Sarah gasped out.

"Okay here we are," Jeanie said at the entrance to the obstetrics ward.

Jeanie and the other nurses there did a good job of getting Sarah changed into a hospital gown, into a bed and the fetal monitor wrapped around her baby bump. After Sarah was settled in the bed the attending OB doctor, a young lady with short dark hair came in and introduced herself with, "Hi I'm Dr. Jessica Wares. Let's take a look at you."

Sarah positioned herself for the examination. After Dr. Wares finished she said, "So far you're not dilated and everything is still intact. The baby's heart beat is good so he or she is not in distress. What were you doing today?"

"My family and I were at the parade. We were sitting in the reviewing stand while we watched our older daughter march with her school. We only walked as far as necessary from a bus or cab," Sarah explained.
"When are you due?" Wares asked.

"April 15," Sarah answered.

"Does the pain feel like labor?" Wares asked.

"No, it's still lingering. It feels like a muscle strain. It seems to be around my C-Section scar, but I haven't been lifting anything," Sarah answered.

"Hmm it might be that. We'll do an ultrasound to find out more. Let me go get the machine," Wares said as she left the room.

Just as Wares left, John came in. John asked, "How are you feeling?"

"The pain is still there, but it's getting better," Sarah answered much calmer than before.

"Okay that's good. I called Bethesda and spoke to Eve Baldwin. She is calling the attending here," John said.

"That's good. What about Chloe?" Sarah asked.

"I called the hotel and spoke with the band leader, Bob Szlasko. He was just getting the kids back into their rooms. He and his wife are coming up here with Chloe," John replied.

"That's good. Where are Caroline and Patrick?" Sarah asked again.

"They're sitting on a bench right outside. They're really very scared and want to see you," John said.

"Okay let them in," Sarah commanded as she arranged the bed covers to cover as much of herself as possible.

When John brought their children in they went immediately to the bed. Patrick asked, "Are you okay mommy?"

"Yeah baby my pain is getting smaller by the minute," Sarah answered stroking his face.

"You really scared us mommy," Caroline added.

"Well I was really scared myself, but I'm getting better," Sarah replied.

Just then Dr. Wares came in with another nurse who was pulling the ultrasound machine in. Wares asked, "Sarah how's the pain?"

"Getting better it's down to about a five now," Sarah replied.

"Do you want the kids to leave doctor?" John asked.

Wares answered, "The kids can stay, but they have to sit in the chairs."

John did as Dr. Wares ordered and took hold of Sarah's hand.

Dr. Wares squirted the gel on Sarah's abdomen and started using the wand. She made some comments as she moved it around, "Okay the heartbeat is good, no deformities in the placenta. Do you want the children to see this?"

John and Sarah looked at the two. They had expressions on their faces akin to fear and wonder.
Sarah said, "Sure that won't be a problem."

The nurse turned the screen so that Caroline and Patrick could see it. They lost their fear as they saw the images of their sibling on the screen. "Wow is it a boy or a girl?" Patrick asked.

"We can find out," Wares answered.

Sarah and John looked at each other and then nodded. Sarah said, "Go ahead doctor, let us know."

After moving the wand around some, she stopped it when she got to the view she wanted and announced, "Well it's another boy."

Patrick pumped his fist in the air and like Marv Albert let out a very loud and enthusiastic, "Yessss now we're even!"

Caroline said, "Another dumb boy."

All the adults in the room chuckled at the kids totally opposite reactions.

Just then the door opened as a very worried Chloe rushed in. She was still in her band uniform. She went immediately to Sarah, embraced her and asked, "Are you okay mom?"

"Yeah baby I'm fine. I think it's a muscle strain" Sarah explained.

"We still have to determine that. Dad it's getting a little crowded. Can you take the kids to get some food? The cafeteria is on the 1st floor," Wares strongly suggested.

"No problem doc. Kids give your mom a kiss. We'll be right back," John said.

The kids gave their mom a kiss and filed out with John.

When the rest of the family left Dr. Wares said, "Okay let's take a look at the C-Scar."

Wares moved the wand around and commented, "Your doctor did a nice job. But I see a lot of scar tissue in there. It looks like when your baby rotated in preparation to birth, his head landed on just the right spot to cause your pain. Also all the walking you did probably exacerbated the strain. I'd like to keep you overnight to see if he shifts away from that spot and the pain goes away. You're probably going to have to spend the rest of your term in bed. I already spoke to Dr. Baldwin from Bethesda. I told her that I suspected that pressure on your C-Scar was causing your pain. She had the same opinion as me, pending my examination."

"Okay, after tonight, what about going home?" Sarah asked.

"How did you get here?" Dr. Wares asked.

"By Amtrak Metroliner," Sarah replied.

"Good that's a relaxing way to go. Tomorrow you can go home as long as you go right to bed. You only leave the bed to use the toilet and bathe. No lifting anything, that includes moving a chair to sit. Do you have a walk in shower?" Wares asked.

"Yes we do," Sarah said relieved. Still she didn't relish the "stay in bed" orders. She was going to go
out of her mind with boredom for the next four weeks.

'But then again maybe it won't be so bad,' Sarah thought to herself.

A little while later Sarah's family returned. Sarah gave them the news about staying the night.

"In that case I'll call my dad and have him come pick us up. We already checked out of the hotel before we came to the parade. When dad comes in to get us, we'll get our luggage from the Hyatt's bellhop storage and spend the night in Rockaway," John said.

"You're going to ask him to come all the way out from there on St. Patrick's evening. It's amateur night out there. Everyone who doesn't drink all year, drinks tonight," Sarah stated.

"Well then when I call him I'll tell him we'll take the Long Island Railroad out and he can meet us at the station in Far Rockaway. Okay what about you Chloe, you can afford to miss school tomorrow and come home with us."

"Dad as long as I know mom is okay, I can leave tonight with the band. Uncle Harm or Uncle Matt can pick me up in DC," Chloe proposed.

"Okay that's a good idea. I'll drop you off at the hotel to meet the band. I'll call Uncle Matt and have him pick you up. Matt can spend the night in our house. The Navy Yard isn't far from the school and he can drop you off there when he goes to work. You call me or your mother as soon as Uncle Matt meets you tonight," John instructed.

"Okay dad," Chloe said

"That's a good plan," Sarah surmised.

Soon John and the kids kissed Sarah goodnight and left. John made the calls to his dad and Matt, telling them of his plans. Then he and the two little ones went to Penn Station and got on the 7:10 PM Train to Far Rockaway.

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

0830 Local Time

Lenox Hill Hospital

New York, NY

The previous evening when John and his children arrived in Far Rockaway John had to come up with a new plan. While THE Mr. & Mrs. Marshall watched Caroline and Patrick in Far Rockaway. John took the train back into Manhattan. He was going to see Sarah and his new son in the hospital.

After John and the kids arrived at his parents' house and Chloe called to tell them she had Uncle Matt and was squared away at home, the hospital called.

Dr. Wares was monitoring Sarah most of her shift. She noted that the pain was fluctuating. The pattern that showed on the fetal monitor was contractions. That was confirmed when Sarah's water broke. The contractions soon became very strong and rapid. The nurses were barely able to get Sarah into the delivery room before she gave birth to a 4 pound, 12 ounce 18 inches long baby boy. The official time of birth was 1905 hours on March 17, 2003. This had all happened while John and the kids were on the train out from Manhattan.
When she was in recovery Sarah called Jim and Maureen after she was brought into a room. She instructed Jim to have John get a good night's sleep and come back early the next morning. John did call Sarah back. She was waiting up for his call, but he heard that she was tired and cut the call short with the usually exchanged, "I Love you".

John called both their supervising admirals, LaPorte & Morris. They totally understood why they would be absent for the foreseeable future. When their wives heard the good news they got on the phone to give their congratulations.

When they asked the baby's name, John said to each of them, "It was so sudden Sarah and I hadn't yet decided on a name and we want to decide when we're together. We'll call you tomorrow when we do."

Now on the train ride in John was wondering what his new son's name would be. He had an idea and was anxious to tell Sarah.

When he arrived at the hospital, he went right to Sarah's room. There the nurse put the Daddy ID band on his wrist. That would allow the pediatric nurses to verify that he was the father. His band would match with the band on his son's ankle.

"So have you seen him yet?" Sarah asked after receiving his kiss.

"No I came straight here to see you. How does he look?" John asked back.

"John he is so beautiful, but so tiny, much smaller than Natalie," Sarah said in wonder. She sobered slightly as she said, "He's in NICU in an incubator. They say that's only a precaution and that he's breathing well. He even cried because he was hungry. They let me breast feed him and he latched on really well," Sarah said excitedly.

"That's great. Have you thought of a name?" John asked the elephant in the room question.

"I have, we promised Harm we'd name him David, after his middle name, if it was a boy and I want to honor that," Sarah said.

"For his middle name I had Anthony in mind after my godfather," John said.

"You know that reminds me of a song I heard with those names. You always play it on St. Patrick's day," Sarah said.

"Oh yeah the "Orange and The Green", John said. Then he sang the verse, "I was christened David Anthony, but still in spite of that. To me father I was William, while me mother called me Pat."

"That's the one," Sarah said delightedly.

"So it's settled he'll be David Anthony," John exclaimed.

"That sounds great," Sarah said with a big smile.

John leaned over and gave her a long kiss to seal the deal.

When they broke apart John asked, "Do you want to come with me to see him?"

"I'll join you in a little while. I need to stay here so Dr. Wares can examine me and the nurses in the nursery want me to express some milk so they can bottle feed him if they need to," Sarah explained.

"Okay I'll be right back. I love you," John said sealing his declaration with another kiss.
"I love you to," Sarah said as they broke their kiss.

John walked down to the NICU. After going through the usual ID checks, he washed his hands and put a gown on.

The charge nurse, a young dark haired girl named Noreen was helping him tie the gown behind his neck. She asked, "Have you and Mrs. Marshall decided on a name yet?"

"Yes we'll be calling him David Anthony," John said proudly

Noreen said, "That's much better than Baby Boy Marshall."

She wrote the name on a blank incubator ID card and then showed him to David Anthony's incubator. Noreen verified the numbers on the ID bands matched and then she switched the name cards out.

When John first saw his new son, his heart just melted. He was swaddled in a light blue blanket, with a light blue warming cap. His hands had little mittens on them. John saw that he was waving them in the air as he lay there.

Noreen saw the tears of joy well up in John's eyes and told him, "David's doing very well. For such a little guy, he lets us know very loudly when he is not satisfied with something. So far he's gained a few ounces so that's a very good sign. You can reach through the access holes and touch him or if you want we can take him out so you can hold him."

"That would be safe enough," John asked apprehensively.

"Of course it would, Mrs. Marshall has held and fed him already. David's only in the incubator because of his small size and how early he was born. The fact that he's gaining weight is a very good sign," Noreen reassured him.

Noreen then instructed John, "Just sit there in the rocking chair and let me get David out for you."

Noreen lifted the top of the incubator, lifted David out and placed him in his father's arms. David made a few little noises at being disturbed, but settled quietly in John's arms.

As John stroked his son's cheek with the back of his finger, David just cooed contentedly. John rocked David as he softly sang to him:

"Over in Killarney
Many years ago,
My Mother sang a song to me
In tones so sweet and low.
Just a simple little ditty,
In her good old Irish way,
And I'd give the world if she could sing
That song to me this day.

Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush now, don't you cry!
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that's an Irish lullaby."

Oft in dreams I wander
To that cot again,
I feel her arms a-huggin' me
As when she held me then.
And I hear her voice a-hummin'
To me as in days of yore,
When she used to rock me fast asleep
Outside the cabin door.

Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush now, don't you cry!
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that's an Irish lullaby."

It was during his singing that Sarah came into the nursery to deliver the milk she expressed. As she stood in the hospital robe and nightgown, she put her fingers to her pursed lips to silently tell the nurses not to disturb John's performance. She loved sound of her husband's voice as he sang. She loved the way David was looking up at him with big eyes as he was soothed by John's rich and gentle tones. When he finished singing, Sarah went over to John, bent a bit and kissed the top of his head.

Noreen brought another chair over for Sarah to sit. She withdrew a bit to give the parents privacy with their new baby. It wasn't before long that John changed David's diaper and Sarah fed him, put him in the incubator and they were leaving so Sarah could have her lunch. The happy parents walked arm in arm to Sarah's room. Sarah lovingly rested her head on John's shoulder. When they got there Sarah's lunch tray was waiting for her.

As she sat on the bed to eat she said, "Why don't you go down to the cafeteria and get a bite to eat. I still have to express some more milk after I finish eating. And while you're out I'll call Diane and the admirals including AJ."

"Yeah I'll do that. Oh by the way Dad and Mom are bringing Patrick and Caroline by this afternoon. While they're here we'll finalize our plans as to how we're going to get home. I don't much like taking a newborn on the train or a plain. Dad was thinking about driving us down on Friday and staying the weekend," John said.

"That's sounds like a good idea. When Jim and Maureen come to visit we'll tell them that's what we'll do. The extra two days will give me time to decompress before we take the trip. That also fits in how I'm doing. When Dr. Wares examined me, she said everything is good and we'll only have one more day sleeping apart. She said as long as David is improving, we can be discharged tomorrow," Sarah announced.

"That's great. I'll see you after lunch," John said as he laid a quick kiss on Sarah in between bites and left the room.

As he exited the elevator on the 1st floor he heard someone nearby say, "John!" It was a voice he hadn't heard in over twelve years.

He turned and said, "Annie?"

1315 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard
Harm was sitting in his office on the phone talking with Diane, "So they named him after me, that's
great honey."

"John is so happy that David was born on St. Patrick's Day. It'll be one more excuse for them to
celebrate," Diane said with a chuckle.

Harm was chuckling along with Diane when Tiner came to the door. Harm put up his finger to ask
him to wait while he said goodbye to his wife. When Harm hung up Tiner said, "Commander Rabb,
Admiral Chegwidden would like to see you sir."

"On my way Tiner," Harm said as he got up.

Upon reaching AJ's office, Tiner buzzed him in right away.

Before he could stand at attention in front of AJ's desk, AJ said, "At ease Harm and have a seat."

Harm sat and waited while AJ went around and sat in the other guest chair. AJ began with, "First of
all I received the report from the NTSB of the accident investigation into my unplanned ejection last
February 21. They determined that it was totally my fault that I ejected. So you're off the hook for
that. Then the JAGMAN investigation into you commandeering a Humvee to come look for me
came back in your favor as well. The CO at the airfield you landed at was a total jerk. He had no
business keeping you from the rescue efforts. You were the closest to getting to me as I kept moving
until you found me in that tavern."

"That's great to hear sir. Ah, how is your back," Harm asked.

He saw AJ wince as he remembered, "It's fine now. The week in traction seems to have done the
trick. The doctors are amazed that the vertebrae around the herniated disc fused on their own and I
didn't need surgery."

"Well that's good. I know what that surgery is like," Harm said wincing at his own, painful memory.

Smiling Harm asked, "How is Sydney dealing with having 'Damnit' in the house?"

"Oh Sydney's fine. She's a dog person. She took Damnit to the vet to check for her shots, clean out
the mange from her coat and generally groom her. You know Damnit is still a puppy?" AJ Asked
Harm.

"I didn't notice when I saw her," Harm answered.

"The vet says that she still hasn't grown into her ears and paws," AJ said.

"It figures that Damnit is a puppy. She is so eager to please. When you came in after your hospital
stay, she went right over to him when Sturgis repeated her name. The look on his face when Damnit
knocked over the files on your desk that he spent so much time organizing and signing was priceless.
That was the closest I saw him to coming unglued and really cursing," Harm chuckled.

AJ chuckled along as he added, "Well Sydney likes having a companion in the house when she's
alone during the day. Also the fact that she was instrumental in leading me to the tavern and thus
saving my life went a long way in Sydney getting attached to her," AJ explained.

That's good to hear sir. Is there anything else?" Harm asked in reply.

"Yes there is. I just got off the phone with Sarah. She says David and she are doing fine and should
be discharged tomorrow. Jim Marshall is going to drive them down to DC on Friday."
"That's also what Diane told me earlier sir," Harm replied.

"Also because Sarah is starting her maternity leave three weeks early, Admiral Morris needs to implement the plan you, he and I discussed to replace her TAD sooner as well," AJ said.

"When will Admiral Morris need me to report to the judiciary sir?" Harm asked.

"You'll report for duty on the bench tomorrow first thing. This afternoon hand over all your cases as you need to between Turner, McBurney, Coleman and Roberts. I told Turner to have Lt. Nestor work with Bud. Before Turner does that though he is defending with her as second chair in a case that's going to court. I need to see her in action in the court room," AJ said.

"That should be interesting to watch," Harm said ruefully.

"I'm glad you said that. You'll have a ringside seat. It's going to be the first case you will preside over," AJ said with a Cheshire cat grin.

Harm just grinned knowing that AJ had a gotcha moment on him.

AJ dismissed him to finish out his day.

1315 Local Time
Lenox Hill Hospital
New York, NY

When John turned at Annie calling his name he saw another version of the woman he used to be in love with. She was tall at 5'-7" with the same nice figure that he remembered. Her hair was different though. It was short and light brown with highlights. He remembered it as dark, almost black and very long as she wore it to halfway down her back.

John went up to her and put his hand out in greeting. Annie took it and then surprising him leaned in and gave him a kiss on his cheek.

"How have you been," Annie asked.

"I've been good," John answered.

They both laughed self-consciously at their small talk. It was Annie who suggested, "I was just going in to have a bite, would you like to join me?"

"Sure I was just going into eat as well," John replied.

They both went through the tray line and got their meals. They managed to find an empty table for two and sat across from each other.

After taking their first bites Annie asked, "So last I heard you were living in Washington. Are you up here visiting your folks?"

"Yes and no. Mom and Dad met Sarah, the kids and me here in New York on Sunday for dinner. We were here to see our oldest daughter march in the parade."

"Is Sarah your wife?" Annie asked.

"Yes we've been married since October 1998. We have four children ranging from 16 years to one
"You have a 16 year old?" Annie asked incredulously. She was totally surprised at how much living her old boyfriend had done since they broke up and immediately suspicious that he probably kept the fact that he may have fathered a child with another woman before or while they were dating.

"Well Sarah and I adopted Chloe in 2000 when she was 13. We had Caroline in August 1999 and Patrick in November 2000 and finally David yesterday," John proudly recited.

"Wow you've been busy. Are you still in the Navy?" Annie asked.

"And probably will be for life," John said with a twinkle.

Annie laughed at the Billy Joel reference and said, "So I guess Sarah has no problem with you being in the Navy."

"Only that she's in the Marine Corps. She's always telling me that we squids couldn't do anything without the Marines' help," John said with a smile.

"Sarah's a marine?" Annie said. She had a vision of a woman that looked like Sgt. Snorkel's girlfriend, short, overly muscular with a tattoo that said "Semper Fi".

John saw the look, smiled knowingly and said, "I know what you're thinking and yes she does have a tattoo."

Annie was startled by John's admission as John added, "When Sarah and I first met in January 1997 it was love at first sight. Although it took us about 7 months to admit that we loved each other. We were working in the same chain of command during that time. I asked for a transfer so that I could ask her to marry me."

"Same chain of command, I thought Marines and Sailors were already in different chains of command," Annie said.

"The Navy and Marines are under the command of the Secretary of the Navy. We worked together as attorneys in the Navy’s JAG Corps. When we got married I was the Deputy Director of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service or NCIS. Now she's a judge and I'm the Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence."

"You're an attorney?" Annie asked totally surprised.

"Well yeah, I went back to Fordham Law School after I got my back fixed after my accident. I ran into your Uncle Joe, the Jesuit, several times while I was there. He and I had some conversations about you and what my plans were. I'm surprised he didn't tell you that," John said.

"He never told me. He wasn't fond of you anyway. He always thought you were cocky," Annie said ruefully.

"Well he never really got to know me. He never agreed about my joining the Navy. Do you know he called my mother try to get her to change my mind?" John asked.

"I never knew that. He never told me. He doesn't even like my husband. He always thought that since my father, his brother, died when I was a child, he had a say in my life. When I asked him to marry Miguel and me he refused," Annie said.

John smiled and said, "I never liked him either. So enough about me, I was happy to hear you say
"my husband". Are the words "our children" forthcoming?

"Yes they are. Miguel and I have three children, two girls, Melanie 10, and Raquel, 8 and Miguel Jr., 6," Annie said proudly smiling.

She pulled out wallet photos of her family to show. John reciprocated when he pulled out the latest laminated photo of his family.

When Annie got a look at Sarah she said admiringly, "Your Sarah is beautiful and your kids are gorgeous, even Chloe."

"Thank you and right back at you. Miguel is a handsome devil and your kids are just as gorgeous," John said.

John then asked, "So you know what Sarah and I do for a living what do you and Miguel do?" John asked.

"Well I used my degree in Health Care Management and worked my way up in the industry from one position to another. Now I'm the Administrator of this hospital," Annie proudly replied.

John smiled and nodded his head in admiration.

"And Miguel is a thoracic surgeon at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. He grew up in Spanish Harlem and his mother is always going around saying "my son, the doctor"," Annie finished.

John chuckled at that saying, "Sounds like my mom." Then he added, "And your Uncle Joe had a problem with him because?" John asked dumbfounded.

"He got me pregnant before we got married. We were already engaged at the time. My mom didn't have a problem, she was just happy to see me happy. That didn't stop Uncle Joe from being an ass about it though," Annie finished.

"Well he was always a little too puritanical for me," John said.

"So how did you end up going from a SEAL to an attorney?" Annie asked.

"Well I always wanted to be a Navy lawyer, but I knew that I had to wait until my request was approved. While I waited I became a SEAL. I knew that if I could hack being a SEAL, than I can handle anything. The accident just pushed it along a bit faster than I planned. I wanted to have a life in a nice profession in the Navy," John replied.

Then he asked, "I have to ask though, why did you write such a nasty letter when I wrote to tell you I was in Bethesda?"

Annie sighed before she replied, "Well first of all I didn't write it. My mother did. When your mother called to tell me that you were in an accident and how badly you were hurt, I just broke down. I knew then that I wasn't strong enough to be a Navy wife. So when my mother saw how unhappy I was, she wrote the letter and signed my name. She told me that she wrote it after I received your return letter breaking our relationship off."

John thought a moment as he remembered reading the letter before he said, "After I read the first paragraph, I just crumbled the letter and threw it out. I was so mad at you after that. I took meeting Sarah to get over that," John explained.

"Well even though I didn't want to marry you if you stayed in the Navy, I never wanted for you to be
unhappy. I was waiting for you to come back to New York so that we could at least break it off nicely. But around the time you came home was just about that time when I met Miguel. He was a resident at Montefiore Hospital. We met at a restaurant in Long Beach. We were both there with mutual friends. We hit it off and the rest is history. By the way his last name is De La Garza."

"So you're Mrs. De La Garza, that's great Annie. Listen why don't you stop in and meet Sarah. She's in room 316. She and our son are scheduled to be discharged tomorrow," John said.

"I'd love to meet her just to see the woman that tamed you. I'll stop by before I go home tonight," Annie said.

"I'll look forward to it," John said as he rose from the table. He gave Annie a quick kiss on her cheek and went back up to Sarah's room.

1730 Local Time
Lenox Hill Hospital
New York, NY

John was snuggling with Sarah in her bed. They were speaking of their son. "I just came from the nursery. The pediatrician examined our new baby. He says that David is gaining weight and no longer needs to be in the incubator. That means that he can be discharged with you."

That's great honey," Sarah said.

John then said, "While I was downstairs at lunch, I ran into my old girlfriend."

Sarah's eyes widened as she asked, "Oh wow what a coincidence. What was she doing here?"

"Annie is the hospital's administrator," John explained.

"No kidding!" Sarah said.

"Yeah I invited her to come meet you before she goes home," John said.

"That should be interesting! So what did you two talk about?" Sarah asked.

"Oh what we've been doing since we split and we reconciled our break up. It turns out that her uncle and mother were ganging up on my mother, trying to get me to give up the Navy and get us married or if I didn't leave the Navy, splitting us up. She did tell me that after she heard how badly hurt I was from the crash, she figured she wasn't strong enough to be a Navy wife," John explained.

"Well I am glad that you were able to put some closure on that part of your life," Sarah said.

She then asked, "What time are your parents bringing the kids?"

"How about right now?" Jim Marshall called from the door.

He was just able to get out of the way to let Caroline and Patrick into see their mother with cries of "Mommy, Mommy!"

Patrick asked, "Where's the baby? I want to see my little brother."

Caroline joined in saying "Me too!"
Sarah held her arms open and said, "Well come up here and give me a kiss and then your dad will take you down to see David."

The two children indulged their mother and then they grabbed John's hands and pulled him out of the room with Caroline saying, "Come on Dad we want to see David."

When John left with the children, Maureen and Jim bestowed their kisses on Sarah.

Before they could begin any conversation there was a knock on the open door.

Maureen Marshall turned to acknowledge the knock and was almost floored with surprise. She almost gasped, "Annie?"
Chapter 96

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 96

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

1800 Local Time

Lenox Hill Hospital

New York, NY

When Annie saw Maureen and Jim she immediately swallowed her surprise and said, "Hello Mr. & Mrs. Marshall. It's good to see you again."

Maureen recovered enough to return the greeting, "It's, ah, nice to see you to." Maureen then asked. "Don't think me rude Annie, but what are you doing here?"

"I'm this hospital's administrator," Annie replied.

Maureen's face went from surprise to admiration. She said, "I knew that you were working in the industry, but I didn't know you had risen that far. Ah, you just missed John I'm sure he'd like to see you."

"Oh I saw him at lunch and just now with his and Sarah's beautiful children on their way to the nursery to see David,' Annie replied.

Sarah was sitting being very amused by the exchange and turned to Annie when she said, "And Mrs. Marshall it's very nice to finally meet you. John has told me so much about you."

"All good I hope and it's Sarah," Sarah replied taking Annie's offered hand and shaking it vigorously.

Sensing their need for privacy, Jim Marshall said, "Maureen and I will leave you two ladies alone. We'll go to the nursery to finally see David."

"Okay, we'll talk when you get back," Sarah replied.

When the Marshalls left, Annie said sincerely, "I have to tell you Sarah when John spoke of you and then seeing the two of you together there is this glow that comes upon him. I never saw that when he was with me."

Sarah blushed and smiled at that saying, "Thank you for saying that."

"I guess it has to do with him finally finding the right woman for him. I know now that I wasn't the right one. Oh I knew he loved me, but we were having problems before he deployed during the First Gulf War," Annie said.

"Yes he said that you were always trying to convince him to leave the Navy after his obligation was up," Sarah said politely.

"I wouldn't call it convincing, but we had a lot of fights about it," Annie replied. She continued, "To
be fair I was somewhat selfish. Deep down I knew I wasn't right for him. I wanted a "9 to 5" type of
guy or at least someone who wanted to stay home, not a guy that had to leave for the other side of
the world at the drop of a hat."

"Well in the military it helps that one's spouse is very understanding or is also in the service. To tell
you the truth, when we met John was finished with being deployed overseas. Any other posting he
would have received would have kept him in the states and he would have had his pick of any that
he was eligible for," Sarah explained.

"Well he said that he had to leave his Navy post to marry you, what was it he called it?" Annie
asked.

"The JAG or the Judge Advocate General Corps and yes he had to leave that posting so we could
get married. The service does not allow married couples to serve in the same chain of command.
Remember I said that at his rank, he had a choice of billets, that's what we call postings, and he chose
to be the NCIS' Assistant Director," Sarah explained.

"So is that part of Naval Intelligence?" Annie asked confused.

"No, but there are times when his department works hand in hand with NCIS," Sarah explained. She
wasn't going to go into the fact that her sister Diane was now the Assistant Director there.

"To get back into deployments, I was the one who was deployed when we were married. I went
about two months after Patrick, our second, was born. I was gone six months to Indonesia as the
Force Judge Advocate of a Marine Expeditionary Force aboard an amphibious carrier called the
Guadalcanal. He came out to Australia to meet me three months into the cruise. Since then I've been
on short assignments or cases around the world while he stays home with the kids," Sarah proudly
explained.

"Force Judge Advocate, that sounds legal, but what does the title mean?" Annie asked.

"It's the legal head or you could say the district attorney for the fleet," Sarah explained in the simplest
terms.

Annie nodded her understanding then she asked, "So now you're a judge. What kind of cases does
the Navy try?"

"Oh they're just the same as any in civilian life. Just because they're service members, doesn't mean
that they're not committing crimes. My brother in law, who is also a Navy attorney, was on a case
where a Los Angelis gang purposely had one of their members join the Marines so that they could
peddle drugs to other marines at the camp near L.A."

"That's amazing. So what kind of case were you working on when you met John?" Annie asked.

Sarah smiled at the surprise she was about to spring as she said, "Well we had to retrieve the
Declaration of Independence."

"That was you and John!" Annie exclaimed in wonder.

"Yeah it was. I will say that John is the bravest man I know. The night we were where the
Declaration was being held, he just strapped on his equipment, walked into the desert, climbed a
mountain and saved my uncle and me from the men who stole it. President Bartlett gave the Legion
of Merit to both of us for that action. After that we were partnered for a lot of cases both in DC and
elsewhere in the US and the world," Sarah proudly exclaimed.
"And through all of that you two fell in love, got married and had three children and adopted another. How did you find the time?" Annie asked in wonder.

"You just do. Listen the military is just like any other profession, just with more rules governing conduct. The military does accommodate women with children. They just keep us close to home and not out on assignments when we're pregnant," Sarah explained.

"So what's it like when you come home from one of your assignments?" Annie asked.

Annie smiled when she saw Sarah blush before she answered, "Well let's just say that we go through a few periods of 'adjustment', if you know what I mean."

Annie smiled as she got the reference.

Sarah continued, "One time Maureen was staying over on the night I returned from one of my overseas assignments and she heard us. I will say that John's stamina for multiple 'adjustments' is very satisfying. Sometimes I wish I went away more often so that he could 'adjust' me when I get home."

"Yes he does have a talent for adjustment", Annie said, smiling and holding up her fingers in quotes at "adjustment".

Both women giggled at the shared memories.

Sarah sobered up as she went on, "There was a time I didn't think we'd get married."

"What happened?" Annie asked.

Sarah sighed as she explained, "John was shot by a guy that was stalking me. It took him four months to recover." She went on to tell the whole story. She wasn't going to go into the classified missions in Russia when they were looking for Harm's father and almost getting blown up saving Putin.

"What happened to the guy?" Annie asked.

"Well after I shot him, he got away. He was later arrested seeking treatment for his wounds. He's in a federal prison serving a life sentence," Sarah explained.

"Well don't let me get on your bad side," Annie said knowingly.

Sarah smiled as she asked, "So John tells me you're the administrator here and your husband is a surgeon."

"Yes Miguel works uptown at Columbia Presbyterian," Annie said and went on telling Sarah the same story she told John.

"Well I gotta tell you, it was nice meeting you. I'm glad John has you to love him. You two are just right for each other," Annie said shaking Sarah's hand.

"And I'm glad John reconciled your mutual romantic misunderstanding. Stay in touch. We'll exchange Christmas cards and stuff," Sarah said.

"I will. Goodbye Sarah. It was good speaking with you," Annie said.

"Thanks, the feeling is mutual. Goodbye Annie," Sarah said just before Annie walked out of the room.
Lt. Loren Singer Austen was five months pregnant and thoroughly enjoying herself. Yeah she had the morning sickness for the first two months, but she was over that. She was working at headquarters just like her mentor and friend Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall, alongside her other friend Lt. Harriet Simms and the other pregnant women at headquarters had done. So life for her was very good. She was especially happy that Sarah gave birth to a healthy baby boy, even though David was three weeks premature.

She was working a case with Harm, his last before he went TAD to the Judiciary. The case involved fraudulent enlistment. Petty Officer 3rd class Steven Wilson single handedly stopped a suicide attack on the Marine Corps Camp Stronghold Freedom in Afghanistan, saving his platoon. Stewart Dunston of ZNN, on national television was at the camp with his crew and caught the whole incident on camera. Wilson refused to talk to Dunston. After the incident was aired on ZNN, Jennifer Bruder saw him on television. She recognized Wilson as her husband's partner, thought to be killed in the collapse of the World Trade Center.

Loren looked up at the knock on the lintel of her open door and saw her partner on the case standing there. Normally Loren would have risen from her chair as protocol usually dictated she should when a higher ranking officer entered, but AJ had passed out a written order that all pregnant women were excused from observing that formality.

She smiled at him and said, "Come on in commander, that's why the door is open."

"You know I like this playful side of you Loren," Harm said taking a seat.

"Well it's gotten so much easier to relax now that most of the staff who knew me as the "Ice Queen" has been rotated out and the rest are no longer surprised at the levity," Loren explained.

"Also being married and pregnant makes it harder for people to be hostile," Harm said.

"Well this will only last another four months then I'll just whip out the baby photos to keep the skeptics at bay," Loren said cheekily.

Harm chuckled before he asked, "Still trying to get a handle on our mystery petty officer?"

"Yeah I'm finding it tough to understand why he changed his name to enlist. There's got to be something deeper than just survivor's guilt. I mean look at the quandary we're in. The guy deserves to get a medal for his action in Afghanistan, but he deserves to go to jail for fraudulent enlistment," Loren answered.

"Well I'm going to take the shuttle up to New York to interview Mrs. Bruder, his late partner's wife. I'm hoping that she can shed some more light on the subject so I can have it closed before I go to the judiciary. I would have handed this case off to Sturgis but the admiral said the SECNAV wanted me to handle it because of the delicate public relations issue," Harm commiserated.

"Yeah there's that," Loren observed.

"I'd take you along because I could use your help in dealing with the widow, but I know how sick
"Thanks for that. I am sorry I barfed in your Stearman when you took Bobby and me flying last month. I had no idea I would do that. I mean Diane said that you were a gentle flyer and we were flying in good weather and all," Loren said before she was interrupted by Harm holding his hand up.

"Loren it's okay. You weren't the first person to yak in a cockpit and you won't be the last. I'm just sorry I didn't get you down in time. But that's why God invented hoses and removable bubbles. It's just like Meg and Bobby always say about horse riding:

Loren joined him as they said, "There ain't a man that can't be throwed and there ain't a horse that can't be rode."

They both shared a good laugh before Harm said, "Maybe if I have the time I'll stop at the Marshalls to see David. They live very close to where Mrs. Bruder lives in Hewlett, Long Island."

"Great then you can give this to Sarah and John for me. I bought it at on my way home yesterday," Loren said pulling a gift bag out from under her desk. It contained a cute stuffed teddy bear dressed in a sailor suit with the appropriate Hallmark card.

"Please tell Sarah I'm sorry but the store was out of the Marine Bears," Loren added.

Harm grinned and said, "I'll look real good carrying this while in uniform."

Loren giggled then roared with laughter when the sight the tall commander would make popped into her head.

"Hey everyone loves a cuddly sailor," Loren said between laughs.

Harm got up in mock offense saying, "I'm leaving now with what's left of my dignity."

"Yes, you go on Commander Care Bear," Loren said before she convulsed with more laughter.

Harm was smiling and shaking his head as he left the office for his own.

After Harm left Loren calmed down enough to say to herself, "Damn now I have to use the ladies' room. I have to remember in my condition, laughing like that makes me leak a bit." Before she left she made sure that she had her extra Poise pad in her purse.

On her way back from the ladies' room she met up with AJ. Loren said, "Good morning sir. How is Mrs. Chegwidden?"

"She's fine thanks for asking. You can call her Sydney, after all you out rank her," AJ said cheekily.

"Thank you sir, will Bobby and I see you and Sydney at the birthing class this evening?" Loren asked.

The Austens and Chegwiddens attended the same class at Bethesda every week. Sydney was also five months pregnant.

AJ replied, "Sydney and I will be there. As a matter of fact, she will be waiting for us there." He stopped and said "I'll tell you what lieutenant why don't you and Robert join Sydney and me for dinner at Giovanni's afterward, my treat?"

"You know sir, Bobby and will take you up on that. By sheer coincidence we were going to go there tonight anyway. I have been craving their veal marsala for like forever," Loren replied
enthusiastically.

"Great I'll make the reservations for after the class," AJ said with the same enthusiasm.

When Loren returned to her office she found Jennifer Coates waiting for her. "Can I help you Jennifer?" Loren asked her.

"Ah yes ma'am, it's kind of personal do you have a couple of minutes?" Jennifer asked nervously.

"Sure come on in," Loren said as she preceded Jennifer into the office. She stood at the door and motioned for Jennifer to take a seat. Then she closed the door and sat in her own chair. She folded her hands on her baby belly and waited patiently for the obviously nervous petty officer to begin.

Loren took a deep breath as if to say 'get on with it' when Jennifer blurted out, "It would make me very happy if you would stand up for me as my matron of honor when Sergei and I get married. Please tell me you'll do it, ma'am."

Loren blinked a couple of times in surprise and replied with a question, "No offense but why me? Don't you have a few other girlfriends you could ask? I see how you and the other non-coms in the office go out to lunch together every day."

"Yes ma'am I know, but I'm still somewhat new to headquarters, even after three months. You and I served together on the Seahawk for six months ma'am and I will always appreciate the counseling and advice you gave me during that time. Even here at headquarters, your door is always open for whenever I need advice with something. Even when we talk you never make me feel that your rank is a STOP sign. What I mean to say ma'am is that you are the first female friend that I have ever had that respects me for me and being that we served such a long time together, you're the closest thing to family that I have ma'am." Jennifer finished.

Loren's eyes welled up at the sincerity of Jen's plea. She cleared her throat as a way to gather her composure as she said, "Well since you put it that way fine, I'll do it"

"Oh thank you ma'am," Jen said in bubbly appreciation.

"When do you plan to get married?" Loren asked.

"September 27 ma'am," Jen answered.

"Okay that's plenty of time for after I have junior here and I can get down to a good dress size. There is one thing you need to do if we're going to be working together on this," Loren said in a commanding voice.

"What's that ma'am?" Jen asked.

"When we're speaking personally STOP calling me ma'am Jennifer. You're the bride and that makes you the boss," Loren stated very firmly.

"Yes ma'am ah Loren," Jennifer replied with a bright smile.

"Okay, how about we begin planning now. Have you given thought to who you'd like to walk you down the aisle? I know how you feel about your father," Loren asked.

"I haven't given that much thought at all Loren. You know he never wanted a daughter and he practically wouldn't let me into the house that time you were prosecuting me," Jen said sadly.
"Yeah I remember you telling me," Loren agreed morosely. She brightened as an idea came to her, "Why don't you ask Bud. He once told me that you're the sister he never had."

Jen brightened up at the idea as well then sobered a little as she replied, "Do you think he'd do it?"

"Why don't you ask him, he's right outside," Loren said as she saw the subject of their discussion striding by her office.

"No I can't do it now," Jen started to protest.

She was interrupted and then thoroughly embarrassed when Loren whistled and shouted loud enough to be heard through the glass, "Hey Bud!"

When Bud turned his head Loren motioned for him to enter. Bud opened the door smiling and said, "You whistled."

"Come in, close the door and have a seat. Jennifer has something she wants to ask you." Turning to her Loren smiled devilishly at seeing the young woman's very embarrassed red face. She said, "Jennifer just like you when you asked me to be matron-of-honor, just ask it."

Jennifer opened and closed her mouth without saying a word before she gathered her courage and asked, "Ah Lieutenant Roberts it would be my honor if you would consent to escort me down the aisle when Sergei and I get married next September 27."

Bud blinked in surprise and then sat up a little straighter and smiling brightly replied, "Wow I'd like to do that. Thank you for asking me Jennifer." Then he cocked his head to one side as the thought of something else, "I'll make sure the regular tune up for my leg is done in plenty of time for the event."

Loren just rolled her eyes and Jennifer exclaimed horrified, "Lieutenant!"

Bud smiled and lifted his eyebrows like Groucho Marx and said, "Gotcha."

Then the trio chuckled heartily. Loren stood up and waving her hands in a shooing motion said, "Alright now that we got that out of the way, the two of you get out or I'll be schvitzing again."
Chapter 97

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 97

Saturday, March 22, 2003

1430 Hours

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW DC

John pulled his dad's Suburban into the driveway. It was a long trip from Far Rockaway to DC.

David let his presence be known at 0530 that morning. It was as if he knew that he was finally going home. Because coincidentally, that was near the hour that John and his dad Jim decided to get up to prepare for the drive to DC. After getting everyone else up, dressed and fed, they all piled into the Suburban and left the elder Marshall residence at 0900. John rode shotgun while Sarah was in the middle seat next to David and Patrick while Maureen and Caroline shared the third seat. Jim Marshall already had the necessary booster seats and an infant carrier available as he had chauffeured his other grandchildren from his other sons, Mark and Matthew over the years.

After dealing with detours around weekend road work in Brooklyn, they crossed Staten Island into New Jersey later than they planned, but cruised from there to the outskirts of DC in good time, making only two rest stops along the way. Before they reached home they had to contend with more weekend road repairs all along the route inside the DC Beltway to Florida Avenue.

Despite the long drive Patrick and Caroline were not whiney or irritable all during the whole trip. The Suburban was equipped with a DVD movie system that the two children used earplugs to listen and watch two Disney movies that Jim Marshall kept stocked in the car.

It was David who necessitated the need for the rest stops. Sarah was able to breast feed him while they rode along. It was after the feedings when he left his usual deposits in his diapers and they had to stop to change those diapers or drive along with an irritable as well as a stinky baby. After each feeding and changing David slept contently in the infant carrier.

During the whole trip Sarah was amused every time John and Jim Marshall switched the driving duties. From where she sat, she had a perfect view as she saw how much the same John and his dad were, especially as to how they drove. They drove fast, in a hurry to get where they were going and they both sat and held their hands on the wheel the exact same way as they drove.

Now as the adults all got out, they stretched luxuriously, appreciating the end of the long journey. Sarah and John had to wake the kids to get them out of the car. As they bent to doing this, the front door burst open and Chloe came running out, followed more sedately by Uncle Matt. Sarah was the first to get her into a welcoming hug.

"Oh baby it's so good to see you again," Sarah said hugging her oldest child.

Chloe squeezed her mom tightly saying affectionately, "You just couldn't wait to get home to have David could you?"
"No he's like your father, impatient to get on with life," Sarah said happily.

"Let me see him," Chloe said as she released her mom and went into the car. She squealed with delight as she got her first look at her new baby brother.

"Oh he's so cute and tiny," Chloe gushed. She unbuckled the restraints and lifted him out and carefully got out of the car.

Chloe carried David right by her mother, ignoring her extended hands and walking into the house started talking to him.

"Welcome home Davey. I hope you like it here. Everyone here couldn't wait to see you. I guess you couldn't wait to see everyone yourself." Davey just gurgled in sleepy contentment as they entered the house.

Sarah shook her head and chuckling let Uncle Matt envelope her in his embrace. She said, "I think that my motherly duties have just been usurped."

"Nah I don't think so. Chloe will be more like mother's big helper," Matt told her.

"Yeah I think you're right," Sarah agreed. Hooking her arm into her uncle's, Sarah and Matt walked into the house.

While Sarah and Uncle Matt walked into the house, Maureen, Jim and John went about unloading the Suburban. Maureen collected the usual detritus that accumulated from the long trip with children while the men unloaded the luggage.

The first person Sarah met was Deanne. Sarah shucked her coat and gathered her mother in her arms for a tight and loving hug. Deanne said, "Chloe was totally absorbed in little Davey and only let me have a glimpse of him before she took him right upstairs saying he needed to be changed. She's going to be a good mother someday."

"You're right, but let's put that off for a while," Sarah said.

Into this came the other two Marshall children followed by Maureen. Jim and John took up the rear with the bags from the car.

"Grandma, Grandma, we got a new baby brother," Patrick and Caroline shouted as Deanne gathered them in her arms. She let her grandchildren go for a bit too properly great Maureen, Jim and John.

"Yes I know and he was rather impatient to run around with you," Deanne said.

"Yeah but he's too tiny to run yet. We have to wait till he grows a bigger until I can beat him in a race," Patrick said.

The adults all chuckled and the very early signs of sibling rivalry.

When they entered the living room the elder Marshalls warmly greeted Deanne and Matt. It was a far cry from when the Marshalls first met Matt at Patrick's second birthday party.

Flashback

When Matt finished getting hugged by Deanne and his nieces he turned as John introduced him to his parents saying, "Mom, Dad this is Diane and Sarah's Uncle and Deanne's brother Colonel Matthew O'Hara."
"Mr. & Mrs. Marshall," Matt said a bit self-consciously, putting his hand forward.

Jim Marshall took his hand saying, "Call me Jim."

Maureen surprised everyone when she pulled Matt into a fierce hug and gave him a kiss on his cheek. Her Irish was clearly up when she said, "There'll be no Mister or Missus coming from you Matthew O'Hara. We're family now and have been for a long time. We are so grateful that you were there for our Sarah during that time in her life when she needed your help the most."

Even Sarah shed a couple of grateful tears at Maureen staking her claim to Sarah, practically declaring her to be the other daughter she didn't have.

End of flashback

The greetings now weren't as stilted or formal as Matt warmly shook Jim's hand and accepted Maureen's equally warm hug and kiss.

As soon as the greetings were done John put his foot down addressing Sarah with, "Honey, remember what the doctor said. Rest after so long a trip. Do you want me to turn the bed down or set you up down here?"

"Set David and I up down here. You know Diane & Harm and Ann Marie & Peter will be over with their respective broods as well as the Chegwiddens and the Roberts. I'd rather they just come in here and not trek upstairs," Sarah replied.

Deanne added, "That's good dear. Matt went to the deli and got some lunch meat while Chloe and I prepared a buffet for everyone to make their own sandwiches. We have turkey, roast beef, ham, Swiss, Munster and Provolone cheese, bologna and liverwurst. What would you like?"

"Make me a roast beef, turkey, bologna and Swiss with mayo and tomatoes on rye bread please momma," Sarah requested.

Soon Chloe brought David down from his changing and laid him in the bassinet that John brought down from their bedroom.

Eventually the word was out that the Marshalls were finally home and the above mentioned families came a calling. John was acting as the gatekeeper while Sarah just basked in the glow of admiration that her status as a new mother allowed her. All the cousins oohed and ahhed at the new baby then gathered in the playroom in the basement. Sarah spent most of the time holding David so that his cousins wouldn't be tempted to handle him.

Sandwiches were enjoyed by everyone as their visits were only for a brief time. The men gravitated into the kitchen when David insisted on being fed and Sarah put him to her breast. While David fed Sarah placed a blanket over her shoulder. She chatted with the women while Maureen and Deanne took turns helping their daughter out.

"So how has David been doing for coming so soon," Harriet asked.

"He's gaining weight. When we left the hospital David had gained a whole pound. The doctors said feed him on demand so that he can continue to thrive," Sarah replied.

As Sarah finished speaking the doorbell rang. When Maureen answered it she saw Meg Pike and Loren Austen waiting at the door with their respective husbands Bob and Bobby bringing up the rear.
When the men saw Sarah breast feeding they bent over the back of the sofa, gave her a quick kiss and went to make their sandwiches and join the other men in the kitchen. Their wives joined the other wives/mothers in the living room.

"Hey guys how's it going?" John said in greeting when Bob and Bobby walked in.

"Shouldn't we be asking you that? You go for a little field trip and you come back with a baby," Bob Pike asked back shaking his hand.


"He reminds me of AJ's birth except you were able to get to the hospital sir," Bud said.

"You know Bud I am going to hang a shingle in my yard. You know what it's going to say?" John asked.

"No sir what," Bud asked totally befuddled at what John was referring to.

"The only person who can exercise RHIP on these premises is the woman of the house. All others leave the military and its courtesies outside the door," John declared.

AJ and the rest of the men chuckled as Bud got the meaning of the friendly rebuke.

Peter broke the tension as he asked, "What did Matt and Mark have to say when they saw David?"

"Well when they along with Christine & Leslie and their kids came to Mom & Dad's house, Matt said David just wanted to save him and Mark a trip to DC to see him," John said with a smile.

"What did you say to that?" Harm asked.

"I said it must have been the bagpipes during the parade. I can hear him in the womb saying, 'What the hell is that noise?'" John joked.

The men laughed along with John.

In the living room Loren told the others, "Jennifer Coates asked me to be her matron of honor. I was so touched by that. She also told me that she's going to ask you to be in the wedding party Sarah."

"When is she having the wedding," Sarah asked.

"Next September 27," Loren said.

Harriet spoke up to say, "Jennifer also asked Bud to walk her down the aisle. Bud was really thrilled and said yes on the spot."

"Yeah he made a joke about tuning his leg up for the event," Loren said.

The other ladies just groaned and laughed as Meg added, "Bud has always had that sense of humor. When we were working together before he met you Harriet, he was always coming up with those off color jokes. Sometime you have to reach up and catch them before they went over your head."

Harriet nodded her head in agreement and just beamed with obvious pride.

David finished feeding and Sarah sighed with the relief from the pressure on her breasts.

"He seems to know that when my breasts get achy it's time to feed," Sarah commented handing
David over to Chloe and readjusting her feeding bra and top. Chloe moved to her mother's side just at the time David unlatched from Sarah's nipple. The other ladies marveled at how attentive Chloe was being. Sarah saw that as she just beamed with pride.

"Here Chloe let me burp him and you can take him upstairs to change after that. Then you can tell the men that they can come back inside," Sarah said as Chloe lowered her baby brother into his mother's arms.

The men gravitated back into the living room after Chloe came down through the kitchen with David in her arms. She announced, "He's been changed and fed and now you can rejoin us women in the living room."

The men did just that. Eventually it came time to leave as the unaccompanied couples helped with the clean-up and the visiting parents gathered their children as they all said their goodbyes.

Uncle Matt and Deanne were the last to leave as Matt said to Sarah, "I'm taking your mom home before I go home. It's going to be nice to sleep in my own bed after this week taking care of Chloe."

"And we really want to thank you for that," Sarah said as she kissed her uncle and mother goodbye at the door.

"Hey that's what family is for," Matt acknowledged. Sarah stood and watched them pull away before she turned and locked the door for the night.

John shooed his family up to bed as he went about checking the house before he kissed the kids goodnight, changed into his sleeping clothes and joined Sarah already in bed.

"I know exactly what Matt means about finally sleeping in your own bed," John commented as he snuggled up to spoon with Sarah.

"Yeah it is nice," Sarah agreed as she fell deeper into sleep. John wasn't far behind.
Sarah was wheeling the combo stroller/infant carrier with David sleeping contently therein out of the elevator onto the third floor. She was on the way to the JAG Bullpen. Even though her six week maternity leave wasn't up yet and thus she was not reporting for duty, she had her uniform on. She believed and rightly so that when an officer is at her place of duty during the regular work week, one should be in uniform. She only came to the office in civvies on the weekends when she needed some quietude to get some work done.

Sarah still hadn't lost all the baby weight from David's pregnancy. The jacket and blouse were a bit snug, especially around her breasts, but the skirt was good because she was wearing one of the stretchable, maternity skirts. Still she looked fabulous.

As she approached the double doors, a female petty officer she knew who was also coming in held them open for her. "Here let me ma'am."

"Thank you Mrs. Ryerson," Sarah said with a smile. Sarah made it a point to get to know as many of the staff as she could, that also included their personal status. To her mind she showed them the same professional courtesy she expected to have them return to her. It also gave the staff a feeling that they were being thought kindly of.

"My pleasure ma'am," Petty Officer Janine Ryerson replied with a bright smile. She paused at the door and bending to look into the carrier she asked Sarah in her Alabama drawl, "How is this little shaver ma'am?"

"Oh he's doing great. We just came from the pediatrician. David's gained four pounds in the past three weeks. The doctor weighed him in at nine pounds, 10 ounces," Sarah proudly replied.

"Oh that's great ma'am. I can't wait until my husband comes home from deployment so we can make one these ourselves. I must say ma'am you seem to manage well with having children, what with three older ones at home. How do you do it?" Ryerson asked, being genuinely sincere in her curiosity.

"You just do Jan. It's like anything else in life, be it the Navy or civilian life. You set your mind to do the right things you need to do accomplish your goal. It also helps that my husband has been hands on with raising all our children and we have a lot of family living nearby," Sarah said enjoying the teaching moment.

"Thank you ma'am, I'll keep that in mind," Ryerson said smiling as she walked away.

Sarah made her way to through the bullpen, stopping occasionally to let those she passed peek into
the carrier at her beautiful baby boy. AJ had stepped out of his office when Tiner alerted him to Sarah's presence in the bullpen and standing in the doorway saw the pride exhibited on Sarah's face.

AJ watched as the crowd around Sarah got a bit too large. Sensing she needed a rescue he spoke up saying good naturedly, "Alright people back to work. It's not like the colonel hasn't brought her babies through before."

The staff scurried back to their stations, but not without smiling. They knew that underneath his official crust their CO was an old softy anticipating bringing his own little shaver through the same way when Sydney had their baby.

When Sarah reached him he asked her, "To what do we owe the pleasure of yours and David's company colonel?"

"Well admiral I came to ask Tiner to give out these open house invitations for David's Christening. We're having it on Mother's Day, May 11," Sarah replied taking a stack of envelopes out from under the carrier. She added, "I've already left a stack up in the judiciary."

"Sure no problem I'll have Tiner distribute them after lunch. What else is new?" AJ asked allowing Sarah to precede him into his office at and settle down in a seat.

"Well David's a dream. He's gaining weight just how his doctor likes. He sleeps practically through the night. I'm only waking up once at about 0500 most mornings. Of course it helps that we try to stay up a bit later with him the night before," Sarah replied.

"Well that's great," AJ replied.

"There is one more thing I came specifically here to ask you to do for me AJ," Sarah said.

Hearing Sarah use his name alerted AJ that her request was personal. He replied, "And what's that."

"I'd like you to ask Sydney to call me. John and I would be honored if she would consent to be David's godmother," Sarah replied.

"Well I'm sure she'll be happy for the honor. Why didn't you ask her when you were at Bethesda?" AJ asked.

"Well I was going to after David's appointment, but I just missed her because she was involved with a medical emergency. I don't know when she'll be available," Sarah replied.

"Well, as soon as she gets home or calls me here, which ever comes first, I ask her to call you," AJ said very proudly.

"Thanks AJ and please do me a small favor. Let me ask her. I want to hear how happy she's going to be," Sarah replied smiling.

"No problem Sarah," AJ replied smiling indulgently.

Just then David let his presence be known by giving a short bleat which escalated into a series of short whimpers.

"Oh I'd better go. He's going to want to be fed and changed. I'll go up to my chambers for that. Emma will give me the privacy," Sarah said getting up to wheel the stroller out.

"That's fine Sarah. Sydney will call you at her first opportunity," AJ said after Sarah's retreating
form. Sarah just waved her acknowledgement.

She went quickly through the bullpen and when she reached the elevators she stopped to take David out. As she held him to her chest, she pressed the up button. She wheeled the stroller in one-handed. When she debarked on the fourth floor, David calmed down some, but was still being quietly fussy.

Emma Gardiner saw Sarah coming and seeing the state of semi-distress she was in, opened the office door for her and followed her in.

Emma held David while Sarah got herself ready to breast feed. She took off her uniform jacket, unbuttoned her blouse and sat down. As she undid the cups of the feeding bra, Emma handed David down to her. When David latched on Sarah breathed a sigh of relief.

Emma said, "Colonel I'll guard the door until you're finished."

Sarah demurred at that saying, "Thank you Emma, but don't worry about the staff bothering me, go and have your lunch. I'm not here officially and they're out to lunch now anyway."

"Very well ma'am. I'll see you after lunch, if you're still here," Emma said as she walked out of the office, closing the door behind her.

"Thank you Emma."

As David fed, Sarah looked around her desk at the family photos she had arrayed there.

"I have to find a place for your pictures little man," Sarah said aloud kissing David's downy head

Pretty soon, David had his fill. Sarah put him in the carrier and then squared her uniform blouse away. Before she put her jacket back on, she caught a whiff of his regular post feeding deposit from where she was standing. So she bent to change David's diaper.

Just as she wrapped the stinky one for proper disposal, there was a knock on her door.

"Come in," she said without looking up.

She recognized his voice when Harm said, "I saw Chief Gardiner at lunch and she told me you were here."

"Hey Harm how's being a judge working out for you?" Sarah said offering her cheek for his kiss without stopping her changing task.

After he gave her the kiss he replied, "Well it's not quite what I expected. While I like being up there as the final authority, it gets frustrating at times."

"Oh really, how so?" Sarah asked as she finished changing her son.

"While you're up there, you think about how each side should be presenting its case, you know asking the right questions. It becomes frustrating when they're not asked," Harm replied.

"Yeah I know the feeling," Sarah replied.

Harm acknowledged her and continued, "Take the first case I presided over."

"Was that the friendly fire case where our pilot dropped a bomb on a company of British soldiers?" Sarah asked.
"Yeah that's the one. Loren and Bud were prosecuting while Sturgis and Eileen Nestor were defending. I tell you Loren and Bud were shredding them, had them on the ropes. The only thing Turner could use as a defense was Ridley's, who's the pilot on trial, combined use of stimulants and depressants making him paranoid and jittery even though they were commonly prescribed by the flight surgeon."

"Kind of thin," Sarah commented.

"You're telling me. Turner was so attached to that defense he didn't even want to cross examine a Lt. Kaufman from the AWACs plane whom Loren called. He almost deferred his cross until Nestor stood up to ask the questions he should have asked. If she hadn't done that, I think I would have asked those questions. You should have seen the look on Sturgis' face when she did that. Later I found out that he tried to rip her new one for overstepping her position of second chair. Instead he's the one that got ripped when the admiral overheard him and stepped into the office to tell Sturgis what was wrong with his defense strategy," Harm said.

"That must have been something. How did you hear about it?" Sarah asked.

"Jennifer Coates is clerking for me and she told me she overheard AJ's shouting while she was in the bullpen," Harm explained.

"Why Jennifer?" Sarah asked curious.

"I wanted to give her the experience," Harm answered.

"That's nice," Sarah acknowledged.

"Anyway it was going smoothly until the SECNAV came in on the second day and sat behind the prosecution," Harm continued.

"Oh boy you must have loved that. Scuttlebutt says that he's trying to kiss British Butt," Sarah said.

"Oh you got that right. I called counsel to the bench and advised Loren and Bud that his sitting there was not a good idea. Apparently it took as after that first time he didn't show up at the trial again, but he did see me after that," Harm explained.

"Oh really, where was that?" Sarah asked.

"While I was on my run on the weekend during the trial, Sheffield stopped his car and asked me to join him. He was saying stuff about how we have to keep what allies we have and siding with the Brits on this case was a good idea," Harm said.

Sarah was appalled as she asked, "What did you say and do?"

"I told him that his actions were treading very close to unlawful command influence and I would have to report him to Chegwidden," Harm answered.

"Did you report him to the admiral?" Sarah asked.

"I certainly did. The admiral countered that Sheffield wanted me removed from the case," Harm answered.

"Obviously AJ refused," Sarah said with a smile.

"You're right. Anyway after that the defense finally got its act together and won the case," Harm
"How did they do that," Sarah asked.

"Eileen finally asked the question I was waiting for," Harm explained.

"What was that?" Sarah asked.

"She asked about the electro-magnetic resonance report from the AWACS. It showed that the Brits' generator that they were trying to fix was sparking. That's what Ridley thought was the small arms fire he saw before he opened up on them," Harm answered.

"So that was the end of the case," Sarah said as she finished dressing David.

"Not quite. Even though Ridley was found not guilty, his activities were still inappropriate. I ordered a Field Evaluation Board to consider his future as an aviator in combat," Harm said.

"Wow I would have thought you would have just left it at the verdict," Sarah said in wonder.

"Yeah well even though he was acquitted of homicide, it wasn't so cut and dry. He disobeyed orders twice, once to stay at altitude where the small arms fire couldn't reach him and secondly to wait to verify who was on the ground. He made the wrong decision twice in the span of ten seconds. His actions showed a recklessness that was totally inappropriate and it got our allies killed," Harm explained.

"Wow that was some decision Harm. You may have a future as a judge after all," Sarah complimented.

"Why thank you your honor," Harm acknowledged with a smile.

"Come on your honor. I need to get home and you need to get back to the bench," Sarah said as she moved to leave.

Harm opened the door for her as he said, "After you sis."

They said goodbye at the Ladies Room which Sarah needed to use and to properly dispose of David's stinky diaper. It wouldn't have been nice to leave it in her office waste basket.

Monday April 28, 2003

0830 Local Time

JAG Headquarters Courtyard

Sarah's first day back to work began inauspiciously enough. After she ensured that David was happy at the daycare center with his cousin Natalie, she and John along with Chloe, Caroline and Patrick joined Diane and her three older children, Les, Trey and Samantha walked over to the JAG Headquarters together.

They were all attending an awards ceremony before the whole company of JAG Headquarters Staff. Harm was to receive the Silver Star for saving the fleet from a nuclear missile by letting it chase him in his F14 until it ran out of fuel.

When they arrived at the courtyard in front of JAG Headquarters, they saw that the JAG staff including the Judiciary was getting itself assembled. They saw Sydney Chegwidden, now a Lieutenant JG, standing with Ann Marie and Pete and their two children Andrew and Diane.
While Sarah and Diane went to join the assembled company, John stood with Sydney and his sister's family. They managed to get all the children seated with them in the first row that was saved for family.

As AJ read the citation stating the action Harm took, all the children were sitting quietly with their mouths opened in respectful awe.

When AJ finished reading and Tiner handed him the medal case he called, "Captain Rabb front and center!"

Diane came and stood at attention in front of the Admiral and snapped off a crisp salute which to AJ which he returned. She looked splendid in her full uniform.

"Mrs. Rabb would you like to do the honors?" AJ asked rhetorically holding out the medal case for her.

"Of course I would sir," Diane answered taking the offered case and extracting the medal. She gave the case back to AJ, did a crisp about face, stepped up to Harm and proudly pinned it on her husband's coat lapel. She held the ritual kiss a bit longer than usual causing chuckles to ring out from the company. Disengaging at AJ's cough Diane stepped back and snapped a smart salute.

"Congratulations Commander Rabb. Your actions reflect what is best in our Navy," Diane said trying but not succeeding in hiding her smile.

There were indulgent smiles all around as all the Rabb, Marshall and Matthews children stood up and snapped to and to give their own salutes to their father/uncle.

Snapping into his own salute Harm answered, "Thank you Captain Rabb. Will that be all?"

"No, that will not be all Commander Rabb. We will have a full debriefing on your actions tonight," Diane said loud enough for everyone to hear.

There were a lot of full belly laughs and some catcalls coming from the company.

AJ smirked indulgently as he let it go for about ten seconds then put a stop to it by loudly growling, "As you were people. You'd think that you never saw a married couple flirt in public before."

There were the requisite chuckles at their commanding officer's joke before AJ barked, "TEN-HUT." As the company snapped to AJ barked, "COMPANY DISMISSED."

"AYE-AYE SIR!" the company bellowed then launched into loud applause.

Diane, the Marshalls and Matthews parents were overtaken as all the children ran up and crowded around Harm. Starting with his own children he happily gave the boys high fives and all the girls kisses.

AJ came up with Sydney to offer their congratulations. All the kids, including the Matthews pair, copying their cousins, snapped to attention and saluted along with their officer relatives.

AJ smiled as he looked around and said, "I see you got the kids trained properly, even your two Mr. & Mrs. Matthews.

"Well admiral it's no wonder, they hang around with each other all the time,' Ann Marie remarked with a bright smile.
AJ chuckled and offered his hand saying, "Congratulations Commander. You made us all proud."

"Thank you sir," Harm replied shaking his CO's hand.

Soon he was inundated with the headquarters' company as they stepped forward to offer the same.

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters Courtroom

Sarah just finished presiding over a brief trial where Loren and Bud were prosecuting and Sturgis was defending. It was a case of misappropriation of Marine funds and weapons software by fraud.

Earlier in the week Lt. Jeremy Duncan, a Navy computer expert, was working at Psycoustics, a defense contractor. He was assisting them as they were making an audio program system to be used in new Marine helmets. He blew the whistle alleging that the weapons system software was defective. He included the Secretary of Defense and the Governor of Virginia in his indictments of fraud.

Duncan's CO wanted to court-martial him for leaking the classified information. He was dissuaded from this by the Secretary of Defense, (SECDEF). Wanting to have it handled quietly, SECDEF handed the mess over to SECNAV Sheffield who passed it on to JAG.

AJ assigned Loren to investigate by going to Psycoustics to check the system out. After using the helmet under Duncan's tutelage, she became convinced that the system was defective.

When Loren returned to JAG she submitted her report advising the Duncan be given a letter of reprimand and be allowed to resign from the Navy. Duncan's alleged civilian attorney Harlan Bradford downloaded a JAG boilerplate resignation from the web to facilitate the resignation.

However, when the Navy pulled the plug on the helmet development, Psycoustics filed a grievance with the Department of Defense claiming Duncan sabotaged the software for the 3D audio program by tampering with their source code.

Loren got very upset and Chegwidden assigned Bud to assist her in investigating Mad Hamster the video game company that hired Duncan upon his resignation from the Navy. Upon visiting Mad Hamster Loren and Bud found that the sabotage was true. Duncan stole the software for Mad Hamster to use in their new combat video game. They also found out that Bradford wasn't an attorney, but was in fact the president of Mad Hamster.

Loren tried to get Psycoustics to sue Mad Hamster but they wouldn't. She was angry but gave up. Bud didn't and discovered that Duncan was still on terminal leave so hadn't been officially discharged yet. He was brought back to the Navy and court-martialed.

The trial concluded when Duncan was sentenced to one year at hard labor and a $50,000 fine and a dishonorable discharge. The $50,000 fine was the amount he received as signing bonus from Mad Hamster.

During the trial Sarah saw two things. One, Bud and Loren made a very good litigating team. They reminded her of when she was first working with John and then with Harm. The second thing she saw was that Sturgis was very lackluster with his defense of his client. He showed obvious contempt to Duncan at deceiving the Navy. Sarah had feeling that the case would come up for appeal because of that.

Sarah went to her chambers to secure for the day. Emma brought in the transcripts for the trial which
Sarah signed off on. After returning some phone calls, Sarah got her things and left the office.

She didn't know that by the end of the week a cascade of events would begin that would threaten the world that she and her extended family joyfully built in DC. Those events would cause a major upheaval that would leave not only her but also all the members of that family in great jeopardy.
Chapter 99

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 99

(AN: The "Southern Cone" being referred to in this chapter is that part of the map of South America where the countries of Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile form a triangle or cone. In fact the map of the whole continent looks like a full, overflowing ice cream cone. Nuff said.)

Wednesday, April 30, 2003

1847 Zulu

Saif Al Tikriti Palace

Nasiriya, Iraq

The Marines fighting in Nasiriya captured one of Saddam's palaces. While going through the documents that were confiscated, they found that a very large cache of Stinger Missiles that the dictator once possessed was smuggled out of Iraq. The only indication of where they were going was a copy of a shipping manifest for the truck that took them away. The manifest and the other documents were sent up the line to be analyzed by Naval Intelligence. It would be a full week before the final destination of the stingers would be determined.

Sunday, May 11, 2003

Mothers’ Day

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave, NW

David's christening and the open house party that followed went off without a hitch. As he was held by his godmother Aunt Sydney and looked over by his godfather Uncle Peter he did the usual cooing as Father Mario poured the water over the top of his little head.

The old wives tale has it that if David cried loudly when the water touched his head, he is crying out as the devil leaves him. If he doesn't make a sound, the devil was never there in the first place.

All the family and friends that came to the open house party had plenty to eat and drink. After the family women cleaned up after the party, John and Sarah said goodnight to them, tucked their kids into bed and fell into their own bed together to have their way with each other.

After their third go around Sarah said happily, "You know we get better and better at this."

"Oh we sure do. I'm so glad that the doctor told you that we could resume normal relations. I've been waiting a long time for you. I can't tell you how many cold showers I've had to endure," John commented.

"Forty five," Sarah said her eyes twinkling.

As John looked down at her she explained, "Who do you think has been warming you up after each one? Your cold skin woke me up after you climbed into bed after each shower. And besides I seem
to remember helping you along the way numerous times after the doctor said no intercourse," Sarah said smiling.

"Yeah those were nice and though you very good at that, nothing compares to the real thing," John said.

"Well I'm glad I was able to give it to you in those ways as well as the real thing we just experienced the last three times," Sarah said happily. She added sleepily, "Good night hot stuff."

"Good night ninja-girl," John replied just as sleepy as he gathered his wife to move with him to their usual sleeping position, their arms wrapped around each other with her head on his chest right over his heart. The strong beat of her husband's heart always managed to quickly allow her to sleep.

Monday May 12, 2003

1015 Local Time

Office of Naval Intelligence

Pentagon, Arlington, VA

CPO Carolyn Pierce came into John's office with a document folder sealed with 'Top Secret' tape and put it on John's desk.

"What did he say," John asked as he sliced into the tape and opened the folder.

"Admiral LaPorte said that you need to act as quickly as possible in any way you see fit," Carolyn explained before she walked out of the office, closing the door.

After Carolyn left John called Admiral LaPorte to tell him what he was having done. He finished with, "You'll smooth it out with Director Magnum sir? Yes sir thank you."

After he hung up with LaPorte John dialed a familiar number.

When the call was picked up at the other end he said, "Diane I have some more information on our joint operation that you need to be read in on. Yes you need to come here, and in uniform. Yes LaPorte is already on the phone with him now. Okay I'll see you within the hour."

Same time

Assistant Director's Office

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

After Diane hung up from her brother in law's call, she got up and went to her office closet. There she extracted the garment bag that she kept there. She brought it over to the office couch and opened it. After locking her office door to ensure her privacy, she changed out of her light gray business suit into her Navy Dress white uniform. After she switched her purse contents to the regulation matching white purse, she stepped out of her office carrying the garment bag and told her secretary Cynthia Manners, "Cynthia I'm going to the puzzle palace. I'll be there a while it seems, so I'll go home from there."

"Yes Mrs. Rabb," Cynthia acknowledged.
The puzzle palace was the semi-derogatory name that the service personnel affectionately gave the Pentagon.

Upon exiting the NCIS building, Diane got into her official dark blue Crown Victoria. She didn't have a long drive to Arlington and she pulled up to the queue of cars being inspected before they were allowed to enter the Pentagon’s massive parking lot. She found a space and joined the small group waiting for the shuttle bus to the largest office building in the world. She quickly made her way to John's office.

After she sat down John handed her the folder he read before he called her.

After Diane finished reading the report she asked. "So the Stingers are on a ship bound for, Uruguay. How far out from Montevideo are they?"

"About five days," John answered.

"Is our source confident in his cover?" Diane asked.

"He seems to think so. The ship's crew is leaving him pretty much to himself. Did you read what he found when was able to examine the Stingers?"

"Yes I did. That is very interesting," Diane said.

John was about to elaborate further, but his ringing phone interrupted him.

John snatched the receiver up answering with "Captain Marshall?" Diane heard only his side of the conversation.

"Hey sweetie what's up?"

Diane guessed Sarah was on the phone when she heard the greeting and saw his smile. She then saw John's smile disappear before he shouted, "He's what. Okay don't do anything. Diane and I will be right over. Yes she's sitting here in my office as we're discussing the same thing he is. Okay I love you to."

Diane was wondering what was up with her sister when John answered before she asked, "It seems that the CIA has also been tracking our Stingers. Clayton Webb is at JAG trying to recruit Sarah into an operation concerning them. Sarah and I have an agreement that if anyone outside of JAG or the Navy, like the CIA, tries to recruit her, she calls me right away."

"Oh boy we better get going, before our whole operation is blown," Diane said gathering her purse and cover and started to walk from the office. John locked the file in his desk before he got up, grabbed his hat and followed Diane out the door.

1130 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

John and Diane strode in unison through the double doors of the JAG Bullpen. Any staff that was in their path got right out of their way upon seeing the determined looks on their faces. Even Tiner got up and opened the door to AJ's office to allow them to enter without breaking stride.

"Thank you Tiner," Diane said as he moved to close the door.
John threw his cover onto the sofa and turned to survey the room. Sarah was sitting in a guest chair smiling sweetly up at him. Clayton Webb was also looking up at him with an expression that was much sourer than Sarah’s. AJ was sitting behind his desk smirking in anticipation of watching the coming fight.

Sensing the tension in the room and seeing that her husband was close to exploding with rage Sarah stood up, and moving to John took hold of his hand, kissed him on his cheek and said, "Okay people let’s take a breath."

John allowed his wife to wipe off the lipstick from his cheek and lead him to sit on the couch before he asked, "Webb what do you know of the Stingers?"

"Not much, I've been trying to find them for over a week. Edward Hardy the CIA's South America Southern Cone Section Station Chief in Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay, called and told me that a DEA agent in our embassy there told him that an al Qaeda terrorist named Sadiq Fahd, who is allegedly in Paraguay, wants to purchase one hundred stinger missiles."

"How did the DEA agent hear about that?" Diane asked.

"From a snitch who is working for a drug lord named Raul Garcia who is also based in Paraguay. The snitch said that Garcia heard that Sadiq stole a large amount of coke from a rival of Garcia's. Garcia approached Sadiq to buy the coke. He was there when Garcia and Sadiq met. Sadiq said the price for the coke was weapons to carry on jihad. So Garcia put out feelers for any weapons and he heard of the Stingers," Webb answered.

"From where did Garcia hear about the Stingers?" John asked.

"He was put in contact with an arms dealer working in the Iraqi black market. The snitch says Garcia bought them sight unseen," Webb answered.

"Who is the arms dealer?" Diane asked. She had a look of knowing who it may be.


"Uh huh," Diane said simply.

"Do you know of him Captain?" AJ asked.

"Yes sir I do. He was the terrorist who gave the explosives and money to Hasan Mohammed who then executed the attack on the Cole. Ahmad Ben Atwa was captured by NCIS ten days ago. That's how we knew where the Stingers were after the Marines reported them sold," Diane answered.

Webb looked surprised at this then sighed and said, "No wonder we've haven't heard a peep out of him."

"Yeah well the fact that we have him does not leave this room or I'll see you in Leavenworth," Diane said looking directly at him.

"What about them?" Webb asked indicating Sarah, AJ and John.

"John already knows as NI was instrumental in putting him on to us and Sarah is family and AJ is AJ. They do what they're told," Diane said with a Cheshire cat smile and batted eyes.

AJ snorted out a short laugh while Sarah and John grinned along with Diane at Webb’s expense.
Bring the meeting back under control, John asked Webb "What else does Hardy know."

"Not much else. While he knew only that they were sold, he didn't know where they were coming from or when," Webb said.

John smiled as he knew that he now had the upper hand as he said, "The Stingers are on a freighter in the Atlantic that is five days out from Montevideo. One of my men has been trailing them since we were told of them last month. He finally caught up with them last week at a pier in Haifa."

"Who's your man?" Webb asked.

John said, "Gunnery Sergeant Victor Galindez."

At that Webb looked on quizzically as he asked," I thought he was working for the CIA in Afghanistan?"

John continued, "No he was always working for me in NI. He was our liaison in the field between NI and you during the dirty nuke incident. After that was resolved his assignment was to track reports of arms smuggling out of Iraq. When I received the report of the Stingers' sale, I told him to track them down. He sent me his report before he got on the ship posing as a representative of Ben Atwa's. It sailed from Haifa eight days ago," John explained.

Then John had another thought and he asked, "So if Naval Intelligence has been tracking the Stingers and we would have found out about Sadiq and Garcia when they would have showed up to take delivery anyway, why are you here Webb? What is it that you really need from Sarah and JAG?" John asked.

Webb sighed deeply before he replied, "There's a mole in the Hardy's office or so he said. That's why he reached out to me in Tierra De Fuego."

"What were you doing at that end of the world?" Diane asked.

"I was exiled there for the past few months because I helped your husband and John out in the Angel Shark case," Webb answered her.

"Oh that," Diane said with a smirk.

Webb continued, "Anyway I need someone from outside the CIA to track the mole in Hardy's office. That person has been feeding the information and burning agents to Sadiq for the past month. Who's to say that Hardy is the mole himself? Besides we still haven't got a lock on Sadiq's precise location," Webb explained.

"So what you need is a stalking horse, someone to draw the mole out," Diane said.

"That's about it," Webb conformed.

"So why come here to ask Sarah?" John asked very perturbed.

"I needed someone from outside the agency that not only looks Middle Eastern, but speaks all the languages there like a native. I thought of Sarah immediately. I had Director Watts call the SECNAV and he gave me the go ahead to come here to recruit the colonel. She would have been ideal to sell that she was someone who would be associated with Ahmad Ben Atwa. That is before we knew where he was," Webb said.

John sat there seething, angry that Webb didn't come to him first and that he would have sent Sarah
into a situation that would have left her at risk of being exposed if Ben Atwa showed up or Garcia called him to verify Sarah's identity.

He took a breath and was about to say something when AJ's office phone went off. AJ picked it up saying, "Yes Tiner? Good put him through please."

AJ waited until the call was connected and he said, "Bob we were just speaking about you. Yes he, Colonel Marshall and Captain Rabb are here with Agent Webb. Sure stand by."

AJ pressed the speaker button on his phone saying, "Admiral LaPorte you're on speaker now."

"Captain Marshall you ran out of your office with Captain Rabb before I had a chance to tell you that the SECNAV has authorized the CIA to borrow your wife for their mission," LaPorte said.

"Yes sir we were just getting to that here," John said looking pointedly at Webb.

"John I know you don't like that Watts did an end around our office but now that the horse is already out of the barn I would advise that you make the best of this situation by thinking of how we all could accomplish our mission. I seem to remember that the four of you along with your husband Diane made quite a formidable team on the operation in Russia back in 98. I suggest you delve deeply into that well of experience. Do you get my drift?" LaPorte asked pleasantly but with a sharp point.

"Yes sir I do," John said with a sigh of capitulation.

"Good to hear Captain, let me know what you come up with," LaPorte said.

"Sir there is one more thing before you go," John asked.

"What's that John," LaPorte answered.

"Sir if we're going to do this I want complete control over the entire mission. That would entail that NI, NCIS and the CIA work together in a joint operation with its goals of stopping or destroying the Stingers before they get into Sadiq's hands, neutralizing or eliminating Sadiq and finding the CIA's mole," John said resolutely.

"You've got it. Use whatever personnel you want. That includes whatever back-up you think you'll need. I'll smooth the way with Watts if you need me to," LaPorte said.

"Aye-aye sir, understood and thank you sir," John said with a now satisfied smile.

"You're welcome Captain, carry on. AJ give my regards to Sydney. We'll talk later. Goodbye," LaPorte said.

"Thanks Bob, goodbye," AJ said as he disconnected the call. He turned to John and asked, "Happy now?"

"Not entirely but I'll live," John said with a tired smile.

"Good to hear. Is there anything else you need from this office," AJ asked. He half knew what John was going to ask for. He was ready to give it to him to ease his friend's mind.

"I want Harm in on this. As Admiral LaPorte said, we made a pretty good team in Russia. He will need to be the control person on site, but stay in the background while Webb and Sarah do their work," John said.
His tone left no question in anyone's mind that he wouldn't be satisfied with anything less than getting what he asked for.

He did add for the humor of it, "Besides, he would be pissed if we didn't include him.


Thank you sir," John said.

Addressing them all AJ said, "Colonel I'll talk to Admiral Morris about your TAD. John I'm sure that you'll have the requisite orders cut for everyone's TAD."

"Yes sir, Chief Pierce will cut those orders as soon as we sit down to plan this thing," John answered.

"John since we're already in the Navy Yard let's start in my office. I need to read Thomas in on these recent developments anyway," Diane suggested. Her tone also said that it was not a suggestion.

"Right we'll collect Harm on the way out. Admiral with your permission," John said asking AJ to dismiss them.

"Carry on and good luck," AJ said sincerely shaking their hands, even Webb's.

"Thank you sir," the four said.

As they all walked out AJ raised his voice enough so that Tiner could hear him through the open door, "Tiner get me Commander Turner and Lieutenant Austen.

"Aye sir," Tiner acknowledged from the door.

In the bullpen they passed Loren and Sturgis on their way into AJ's office. When they got to Harm's office and seeing he was there, John banged dramatically on the open lintel saying, "Let's go Hammer we got a job to do."

Without questioning him, Harm got up and got his cover. On his way out he did ask, "What's up?"

"We'll tell you when we get to Diane's office," John said as they all trooped out the double doors.

While Webb, Diane and Harm went across the courtyard to NCIS, John went with Sarah to her office on the fourth floor to get her things. While they were up there and had a few private seconds John took hold of her hips and pulled her to him and gave her a brief but still heartfelt kiss. As she rested her hands on his shoulders she asked, "I kinda know what that's for, but would you please enlighten me?"

"I had no intention of getting you involved with this thing. I also know that I won't be able to go with you. That's why I insisted that Harm be involved. I know he'll watch out for you and keep you safe," John said.

"I know and I appreciate it. It will be just like when we were in Afghanistan," Sarah said appreciatively.

"Yeah I suppose, just don't drive into any minefields," John said before kissing her long and slow.

They broke the kiss when they came up for air. Sarah was breathing hard with desire as she felt his desirable reaction against her belly. Breathlessly she said, "Come on let's go. We'll finish this tonight."
"Oh you bet we will," John said as he also got himself calmed down.

They walked out the door hand in hand.
When John and Sarah arrived at Diane's office Cynthia ushered them in the same way Tiner did at AJ's. When they entered they saw that NCIS Director Tom Magnum was also there sitting at the foot of the conference table Diane had in her spacious office.

"Sarah, John," Magnum said getting up, kissing Sarah's cheek and shaking John's hand.

"Tom," Sarah and John said in unison.

"Okay let's get to it," Magnum said to them retaking his seat.

After Diane, John and then Webb told them the whole story, John said, "And there is one more thing that Diane and I found out before we went over to JAG."

"What's that?" Webb and Magnum said together.

Magnum looked pointedly at Webb and said, "Mr. Webb you are a guest here. You will get to ask questions after I leave. Is that clear?"

Webb gulped as he said, "Yes sir."

"Good, now what were you going to tell us John?" Magnum asked.

"Sir when Gunny Galindez examined the Stingers, he saw that they were all missing a key circuit board that will enable them to acquire their targets. Without them they may as well be a bunch of dumb RPGs."

"So how can we use that," Magnum asked looking at the faces around the table.

"I have a suggestion," Webb said almost shyly.

"Go on Mr. Webb," Magnum urged him smiling.

"Well before I knew about the missing circuit boards, I was going to have the colonel and I pose as Ben Atwa's representatives. It's known that Ben Atwa likes to be paid in diamonds. Sarah, as his representative, would be his diamond expert and I would be the guy providing her security as her husband."

John looked sideways at him when he said 'husband', but refrained from saying anything. Sarah just
looked between both of them totally amused.

"We can say that Galindez notified us of the missing circuit boards or better yet that they were removed purposely and that Sarah and I were only going to provide them upon final payment. We can have some circuit boards made up, totally ineffective of course to show them," Webb concluded.

"That sounds plausible, but I don't know anything about diamonds, not even what this one cost or is appraised for," Sarah said holding up her left hand.

"Eight thousand, two hundred five dollars," John supplied.

Diane and Sarah both looked on shocked as Harm and Magnum smiled.

Diane asked smiling, "Really, how did you afford it?"

"I started saving up for it as soon as I met her in the Rose Garden," John said with affection.

He smiled as Sarah blushed crimson.

Magnum's cough brought them back to the matter at hand.

Webb interjected with, "We have at least two and a half days before he have to be in Montevideo to meet Gunny and the ship. We have our own diamond expert in the CIA named Van Dyne. He's a very good teacher. Mac can go there as soon as we're finished here and start learning all she needs to know."

"That sounds good. Now that we've established what your cover story is going to be, what are your cover identities' names going to be?"

"You should stick with your first names. That way you won't inadvertently slip up when you refer to each other," Diane suggested.

"Okay, we'll go by Clayton and Sarah James and since Harm has the coloring to pull off being Irish he can be Harmon O'Neil. We can set up a legend for him to be in the IRA. He can go along providing additional security for Sarah and me," Webb offered.

"Good, we'll work with our forgery counterpart at the CIA to install their legends. McGee is great at that," Diane said.

"Okay people let's get the show on the road," Magnum said as they all rose to leave.

As they all got up to leave Diane's office John told Sarah, "You and Harm go with Webb to Langley to get started with Van Dyne. Diane and I will get McGee started on the cover identities. We also need to work out a couple of other things for the mission."

"Anything I should know?" Sarah asked seductively.

"I'll tell you at home tonight," John said casting a glance at Webb's back.

"Okay but don't keep us too much in the dark," Sarah said as she gave him a quick kiss before she walked away with Harm and Webb.

After the door was closed John said, "Let's get a call into Coronado. I have just the guys we need to back up our spouses," John said.

"I know just who you mean," Diane said picking up the phone and dialing a familiar number.
Diane's call to Coronado was answered by the CO of the SEAL Team 5, "Lt. Commander Rivers."

"Good afternoon Lt. Commander Rivers this is Captain Diane Rabb, Assistant Director of NCIS," Diane began.

"Good afternoon ma'am. Are you by chance related to a Commander Harmon Rabb?" Rivers asked.

"He's my husband," Diane answered.

"Well then what can I do for you Captain?" Rivers asked.

"I have someone else you know with me. Let me put you on speaker," Diane said.

"Go ahead Lt. Commander," Diane said when the speaker was activated.

"Curt, John Marshall here. Congrats on your promotion. It was a long time coming," John began.

"Good afternoon and thank you Captain. How's Naval Intelligence?" Rivers asked.

"Just fine thanks and that's why I'm calling. I have a mission for your team. How fast can you all get on a plane to Andrews?" John asked.

"We're always ready to go at a moment's notice sir," Rivers answered.

"Including you how many in your team at the moment," John asked.

"Sixteen members, sir," Rivers answered.

Good e-mail me the list of names to Captain Rabb here at NCIS. (Diane recited her e-mail address.) Then get ready to be here in DC by the evening. Leave your gear at Coronado and come in casual business attire. Captain Rabb and I will meet you at Andrews and brief you on the mission. I don't want to do that over the phone, understood?" John said.

"Aye, aye sir, we'll notify you when we are wheels up. See you in DC," Rivers finished.

Very well carry on," John said as they ended the call.

"Okay we'll need to have 16 round trip tickets from Dulles to Ciudad Del Este ready for when they arrive. I only want them in DC long enough to debark at Andrews, get briefed and boarded at Dulles," John said.

"Good as soon as I get the list of names, (Diane was interrupted by the E-mail chime on her computer.), "which just came in, we'll get the airline tickets arranged. Geez Rivers doesn't waste any time," Diane said amused.

"Well at least the first part of this operation is going as we planned," John commented.

"Yeah let's hope it continues," Diane said.

"Amen to that," John agreed.
John came home from briefing Rivers' team and seeing them embark on their flight to Paraguay. He walked in to their bedroom to find Sarah lounging in her favorite red silk pajamas. She was reading the Guidebook to Diamonds, given to her by Agent Van Dyne. She was concentrating so hard, with her glasses on and the tip of her tongue at one side between her lips, that she didn't acknowledge his entering the room.

As he looked at his wife he thought, 'OMG she looks so beautiful like that." He went over and placed a gentle kiss on the top of her head.

"Homework for Professor Van Dyne honey?" John asked.

Sarah tipped her head up to properly to receive the usual greeting before she answered, "Yes he wants me to memorize as many things as I can."

"Such as?" John asked indulgently.

Sarah went into her lecture, "Well there are the Four C's- cut, color, clarity, and carat weight. Then there are the shapes, Round, Princess, Emerald, Asscher, Marquise, (holding up her left hand), Oval, Radiant, Pear, Heart & Cushion. To start with the cut is very important and what Van Dyne says I need to pay strict attention to."

"Why's that?" John asked.

Sarah read from the book, "The cut of a diamond determines its brilliance. Put simply, the better a diamond is cut, the more sparkle it will have. Of the Four Cs, no other characteristic has a greater influence on a diamond's appearance. A diamond's cut grade is an objective measure of a diamond's light performance, or, what we generally think of as sparkle. When a diamond is cut with the proper proportions, light is returned out of the top of the diamond, which gemologists refer to as the table. If it is cut too shallow, light leaks out of the bottom; too deep and it escapes out of the side. Here come look. The book illustrates what the difference is."

John went to sit and look over Sarah's shoulder. Sarah moved to get as comfortable as possible so that she could read and show the book.

"Here's the list that tells you the difference of the cuts," Sarah said pointing to the page.

Ideal cut: Represents roughly the top 3% of diamond quality based on cut. Reflects nearly all light that enters the diamond. An exquisite and rare cut.

Very good cut: Represents roughly the top 15% of diamond quality based on cut. Reflects nearly as much light as the ideal cut, but for a lower price.

Good cut: Represents roughly the top 25% of diamond quality based on cut. Reflects most light that enters. Much less expensive than a very good cut.

Fair cut: Represents roughly the top 35% of diamond quality based on cut. Still a quality diamond, but a fair cut will not be as brilliant as a good cut.

Poor cut: Diamonds that are generally so deep and narrow or shallow and wide that they lose most of
"And here's the picture that shows how the grade of cut affects the diamond's light performance," Sarah pointed out.

"Interesting," John observed looking at the illustration on how the different cuts refracted the light. He then noticed a medium sized jewelry box on her night table. He knew it wasn't one of theirs. He pointed to it and asked, "What's that for?"

Sarah looked and went to pick up the box to show him. She opened it up to reveal a much larger Marquise cut diamond ring than what John got her and a matching wedding band. "This is what I'm to wear when we go to Paraguay. Mine is engraved with your little note of affection while these are not. If by some chance I have to take them off or heaven forbid, they're removed from my finger, nothing will come back here," Sarah explained.

"That makes sense," John said as he got up to change for bed.

Sarah asked, "How did it go at Dulles?"

"Fine Diane and I briefed Rivers' team on what they have to do and then we sent them off to Ciudad Del Este," John said from the bathroom.

"I know Diane will tell Harm. Did you brief Webb?" Sarah asked.

"I'll do that tomorrow when I see him. For this mission, I don't want anything going out over the phone. That way we don't have any leaks," John answered from inside the bathroom.

"Good we have to build up some trust with him," Sarah rightly commented looking down at the book to study some more.

That plan was shelved when John sat on her side of the bed and bent over to start kissing her neck. She looked up and noticed that John was wearing his robe. From the way it fell open it gave her a view that showed that the robe was the only thing he was wearing.

Sarah placed a bookmark at the page she was reading and put aside. She took off her glasses and wrapped her arms around her husband drew him to her and kissed him long and slow. During the kiss they lay down fully on the bed until they were lying on their sides.

Sarah undid his sash and reached for John. She was very happy at what she felt. Speaking in a sultry voice she said, "You weren't kidding when you said that we'd finish what we started in my office."

Answering her in the same tone John said, "As a reward how about after we've had our way with each other, I'll help you study."

"How are you going to do that?" Sarah asked nibbling on his ear.

"How about I test you and for every right answer I get to kiss you somewhere erogenous," John said as he kept kissing around her face and neck.

"Oh that sounds niiice," Sarah gasped as John moved down her front and kissed a favorite spot. "I like how you map out your lesson plan," Sarah said succumbing to John's attentions.

The rest of the night was filled with the sounds of them expressing their love. They correctly assumed that Sarah had the better part of the next three days to study.
Thursday, May 15, 2003

1130 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

It was decided that after Sarah learned all she had to know of inspecting diamonds, all the mission planning was being done at NCIS. All the identities with appropriate background on the internet were set up by Tim McGee and his counterpart in the CIA. To establish a liaison with the CIA Catherine Gale was read in on the mission and she subsequently during the mission preparation spent her time at NCIS.

Webb was practically apoplectic when John told him of the presence of SEAL Team 5 in Paraguay. John said, "That's why I didn't tell you until they were on their way. For now their mission is to provide cover for you three as you go about your mission. That way if it goes pear shaped, they will be able to get you out."

"What is their cover? Will Rivers contact us?" Webb asked.

"They're cover is that of tourists and no he will not contact you. They will be monitoring your movements via these." John pulled out a set of homing devices. They looked like pens.

John continued, "Keep this in your jacket pocket. They will not go active or transmit until the receiver is turned on. That way if you're scanned by Garcia or if you meet him, by Sadiq, they won't detect any transmissions. Harm will be monitoring the receiver and he will call Rivers when he needs to."

"Sounds good," Webb said mollified. He then asked, "How will they be armed?"

"That's on a need to know basis. Suffice to say they will be ready to move in to either extract you and Sarah or eliminate the Stingers. Just be secure in the knowledge that they will be watching you all the time," John explained.

"Okay I can understand that," Webb said appeased.

Monday, May 19, 2003

2211 Zulu

Nuevo Hotel Simpatico

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

They flew out to Montevideo on Friday. They met Gunny as he got off the container ship. After going through and signing the requisite Custom papers, Sarah and Webb made a show of inspecting the Stingers thoroughly as if someone from Sadiq or Garcia was watching. Then they loaded the container with the cargo onto a semi-trailer frame and set off for Paraguay. While Gunny sat with the guy hired to drive the semi, Sarah and Webb rode in relative luxury behind in a Mercedes being driven by Harm. When they reached the border between Uruguay and Paraguay they went through customs very smoothly. The passports were stamped and the manifest indication engine parts was passed with only a cursory inspection of the one crate in the container that really contained actual motor blocks. They arrived in Ciudad Del Este in good time. They secured the cargo in a local warehouse and checked into the hotel.
To maintain their covers they all registered as per their cover. Sarah and Webb in one room while Harm and Gunny, riding under his cover name of Carlos Fuentes, shared the other.

"I hope you don't snore sir," Gunny said to Harm.

Webb interjected at that point saying, "For this mission drop the military courtesies. You and Harm are equals providing security for Sarah and I as well as Ben Atwa's Stingers until they are delivered. I am I being clear here?"

"Crystal clear Mr. James," Gunny acknowledged.

After Webb put out the word to Garcia, through the channels obtained from Ben Atwa by means of intense interrogation by Gibbs at NCIS, that the cargo was in Paraguay the quartet settled in for the night.

After Sarah came out of the bathroom dressed for bed in a modest peignoir, Webb said, "I'll take the couch."

"No you will not," Sarah insisted. She continued, "Our cover is that of a married couple. If we don't at least share the bed, we stand a chance of blowing it."

"But what will John say if he finds out?" Webb asked embarrassed.

"He won't have a problem with it as we already discussed that possibility. Don't worry Clay I won't be groping you or anything. I already get enough of that from John that I don't need to go looking for it anywhere else," Sarah explained patiently.

Webb sighed and went into the bathroom to change into his own bed clothes, pajama bottoms and a tee shirt. When he came out Sarah was holding the turned down covers up for him to get into bed. She was sitting on the same side of the bed she usually slept in when she was with John. After turning off the light Webb nervously settled himself on his back. Sarah surprised him by laying her head on his chest.

Webb took a breath to protest but Sarah beat him to it by saying, "Relax Clay before I met John I was an incurable insomniac. It wasn't until I started sleeping in his arms that I was able to fall comfortably asleep. Every time I was sleeping alone or away from him on deployments or assignments, I had trouble sleeping."

As she settled her head just where she wanted it she continued, "The beating of his heart just lulls me to sleep. So in order for me to get the sleep I need so that I can be fully alert, we'll sleep this way."

"Okay if you say so," Webb said settling in. He still didn't know what to do with his hands though.

Sarah solved that problem for him by taking one hand into hers and saying, "Just lay the other one on my shoulder. Yes that's fine. Goodnight Clay."

Webb was thinking on what Sarah said and he gave into the urge as he asked, "Mac before you fall asleep, I have to know something."

"What's that Clay?" Sarah said with her eyes closed.

"How do you and John do it?" he asked.

"You begin with total trust Clay. When we both agreed to start seeing each other we both expressed that all we wanted from each other was to make the other happy. To that end we both agreed to not
keep secrets. That's why you and I are sharing a bed," Sarah explained wearily. She picked up her head, looked at him right in the eye and said, "And that's all we share, understood?"

"Understood your husband can kill me in ways that I didn't know about before I read his file," Webb answered.

"Damn right. Oh and by the way, I also read his file. He taught me some of those ways himself," Sarah said smiling sweetly and laying her head back on Webb's chest.

Webb gulped as he settled down to sleep. He made it a point to keep his thoughts away from anything remotely erotic.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 101

Tuesday, May 20, 2003

1217 Zulu

Nuevo Hotel Simpatico

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

The quartet was having breakfast in the hotel's outdoor restaurant. Webb had insisted that they do so saying, "There's more noise out here and it makes it difficult for anyone to overhear us."

"Makes sense," Harm commented. Smiling mischievously he then asked, "So how did the two of you sleep?"

Webb caught the look Sarah gave him that said, 'indulge yourself', which he did as he answered, "Sarah slept in my arms in the way she has been doing since she's been married."

At Webb's answer Harm nearly did a spit take, but managed to choke down the coffee he was sipping instead of spraying it over the table. Wisely he kept his cool and refrained from saying anything rightly figuring that doing so would blow their cover.

Sarah, Webb and even Gunny looked on him with much amusement. Harm saw that they were all involved in their gotcha moment on him. Sarah and Webb were the obvious ones, but Gunny knew about how Sarah slept as she confided that in him while they served together on the Guadalcanal.

"Just wait till we get back to DC. Remember I was the king of pranks in college," Harm retorted.

"Oh hush silly. It was just like you and I in Afghanistan and as far as pranks according to my sister and your mother you're all talk," Sarah started to elaborate but stopped when she saw over her brother in law's shoulder who was coming.

Coming up from behind Harm and without asking, Agent Hardy pulled up a chair to their table and just started right in with, "Well it's nice to see you all bright eyed and bushy tailed.

The three deferred to Webb to handle the introductions. Getting up and shaking his hand Webb said, "I'd like to meet my associates. This is my wife Sarah James, our logistics coordinator, Carlos Fuentes and my Security Chief Harmon O'Neil."

"Pleased to meet you," Hardy said shaking their hands in turn. Hardy knew of Sarah's masquerade as Webb had to reveal that much to him, for the sake of the mission. However he was unsure of Harm's or Gunny's true status as he never met them and wasn't privy to the mission planning from DC.

Hardy went right to the reason for his arrival, "I got a call from Garcia early this morning."

"What did he say," Webb asked.

"He wants to have a meet this afternoon to discuss terms of delivery," Hardy answered.
"Good, where?" Webb asked.

"On a road in the Chaco Boreal 30 miles outside town," Hardy answered.

"Do you know exactly where?" Webb asked.

"No I don't have a clue. But my assistant Alvaro is a native here and knows all the roads. He can go with you and also be your bodyguard," Hardy told Webb.

Hardy motioned to behind Harm for a swarthy man of medium height with unruly hair to step forward.

"Alvaro say hello to my friends," Hardy said waving his hand to encompass the four of them.

Webb stood up to greet him and handled the introductions with, "I'm Clayton James and this is my wife Sarah and these two work with me providing logistics and security, Harmon O'Neil and Carlos Fuentes.

"Pleased to meet you senors and senora," Alvaro replied sitting beside Hardy.

"How does he want the meet?" Webb asked.

"As a gesture of good faith Garcia said you can hold onto the cargo until you receive full payment when you verify the true value of the diamonds. However they want to see the circuit boards and test them out to see if they are the real thing. They will only allow you and your wife, the diamond expert, and only one other person to come. Alvaro, as your other person, can also be your guide," Hardy explained.

"What about us?" Harm asked motioning between him and Gunny.

"I guess you two will have to wait here for us to call you. I don't think they'll do anything to us because we still have to deliver the cargo," Webb said as he unobtrusively patted his coat where the homing pen was clipped to the outside pocket.

"Alright we'll go along with that," Harm agreed getting the meaning of Webb's gesture.

"Alright it's settled. We'll leave here with Alvaro at 1100 while you two go and wait with the cargo for us to call you,' Sarah instructed.

"Yes ma'am," Harm and Gunny said together.

1632 Zulu

Chaco Boreal, Paraguay

Before they left for the meeting, Webb and Sarah went back up to their room to freshen up for the trip. When Sarah came out of the bathroom Webb gave her a long jewelry box. Sarah opened it and gasped saying, "Clay this is too much."

Inside the box is was a necklace with about 25 carets worth of small diamonds.

Webb took the necklace out of the box and went behind Sarah to fasten it. He explained, "No it's not. Don't worry it's only for show. The necklace belongs to the company. It's worth about $25,000. (Sarah gasped at the amount.) You have to look the part of a woman who not only knows diamonds, but also appreciates them."
Sarah went to the mirror on the door and admired them. She said mischievously, "Maybe I can get John to get me one of my own."

"From what I know of him, he probably will," Webb said with a chuckle.

"You're probably right,' Sarah agreed with her own laugh.

Webb sobered up and said, "You know I accepted this assignment as a way to get me back into the good graces of the company. I really didn't expect you to come along and I really appreciate that you did."

Sarah went along with the tenor of the conversation saying, "Well to tell you the truth I wasn't going to go along. Remember Clay I had a baby less than two months ago and I have three older ones, so I wasn't looking to go on any overseas assignment, much less an undercover one. That's why I called John as soon as you started your pitch in Chegwidden's office. John would have helped you, but sent another agent from NI to take my place. But seeing as you went to the SECNAV first I had no choice. That's why John insisted on Harm going along and having the SEALS in the background."

"You know I'm damn glad that he did. Otherwise we wouldn't be meeting with Garcia in such a remote place," Webb acknowledged.

"Good now that we've got that settled, let's get going," Sarah said dropping her diamond kit into her bag and walking to the door.

Webb was totally amused that while they waited for the elevator, she was admiring herself in the mirror and how the necklace looked on her.

"You're all girl, you know that," Webb said to her.

"Yeah John says the same thing. Now hush we have a mission to finish," Sarah said sweetly kissing his cheek before they got on the elevator.

Now they were driving along a dirt road. Alvaro was at the wheel of a rented SUV with Sarah and Webb in the back. Immediately after Hardy gave them the news of Garcia's rendezvous, Harm and Gunny went right to the nearest car rental service to get it. They did that because they were assured that no one had the time to place any listening or homing devices in or on it.

Garcia gave them directions that had them driving on a road that led them deeper into the country. Eventually they came up to an intersection with another dirt road. There was a man leaning against another SUV. He was medium height, Middle Eastern looking with a four day growth on his face and an AK-47 cradled in his arms. Alvaro pulled up behind the other vehicle and rolled down the window as the man came to the car.

They spoke in Spanish, thinking that Sarah and Webb wouldn't understand. As she listened Sarah remembered Webb's briefing at CIA Headquarters as he said, "Remember that even though you know all those languages, don't indicate that to them. If they think that you don't know what they're saying, they will say something that will help us or tip us off. We just have to remember to 'not' tip them off."

Sarah had that in her mind as she listened to Alvaro say, "I have the people that your boss, our friend from Arabia, wants to see. He should like what they bring."

The other man nodded his head and told Alvaro to follow him. Alvaro put the car in gear and followed him as instructed.
They drove for another fifteen minutes until they came to a clearing. The clearing was surrounded by low, tree filled ridges. Two more SUVS, parked one behind the other, were waiting there. While the other driver went to park behind them, Alvaro pulled up until his car was parked about twenty feet from and facing the lead car.

Four men got out of the two cars and stood beside them. Two were Hispanic and the other two were Middle Eastern, with the colored scarves wound round their necks.

Another Hispanic man got out of the lead car to greet them. He was tall and skinny, with an immaculately trimmed mustache on a not bad looking face wearing a fine silk shirt and dark slacks

Sarah and Webb got out and meeting him halfway between the cars they shook hands.

"I am Raul Garcia, your host," Garcia said smoothly as he took Sarah's hand and kissed the back.

Webb spoke for the two of them saying, "Clayton and Sarah James."

It took all of Sarah's self-control to not wipe the back of her hand on the leg of her slacks. Garcia didn't notice that her smile didn't quite reach her eyes as she replied, "Charmed."

"Do you have what I need?" Garcia asked.

"Yes we do. The circuit boards are in the trunk. Let me get them," Webb offered and turned to go get them.

"My man will get them for you," Garcia offered.

Surprising Sarah but not Webb, Garcia called "Alvaro! Get Senor James' merchandise for him, please."

Same time

MTAC Control Room

NCIS Headquarters

Diane and John were watching the exchange between Sarah, Webb and Garcia via a satellite link-up. Lt. Rivers was about half a mile away on a ridge overlooking the clearing, training a video camera on the group. The picture presented was of an amazingly high quality. They were able to listen in on the conversation via the listening device in the pen in Webb's outer coat pocket.

"Uh oh!" Diane said when Garcia revealed Alvaro as a traitor.

John said into his headset, "Curtis does your shooter have a shot at Alvaro?"

"Wait just a second John. Let me check my shooter," Rivers answered. The shooter waited until he saw Alvaro bring out the case with the circuit boards and place them on the hood of Garcia's second vehicle. Then Alvaro stood off to the side behind Garcia in front of the lead vehicle. He nodded up to Rivers.

"Yeah now he does," Rivers answered confidently.

"What about Garcia's shooters?" Diane asked.

"We have a bead on them as well," Rivers answered.
"Okay now we sit and wait," John said.

Chaco Boreal

Sarah looked at Webb as if to ask, 'What now?"

Webb answered, "I'd like to see the diamonds."

"Very well as you examine the diamonds, my friends will test the circuit boards," Garcia said.

"Very well, Sarah if you would?" Webb said moving to allow Sarah to step forward with her diamond kit.

Sarah went over to the hood of Garcia's lead vehicle where he spread out a velvet cloth and emptied about two dozen diamonds on there. As she examined each diamond she commented on what she found.

"This one is good quality." She made the same comment on each one until, "This one was cut by Stevie Wonder." She examined the rest of them commenting satisfactorily at each one. She gathered them back into the pouch and put them in her bag.

Walking back to Webb she reached her hand up to cup his chin and gave him a heartfelt lip lock kiss and said. "Darling these will go well to our retirement fund."

At the same time the two Arabs examining the circuit boards nodded to Garcia to let him know that they were all tested out to be what they were advertised.

"Now that I have what I need what's to stop me from killing you?" Garcia asked mockingly.

MTAC

"Take Alvaro out now," John whispered into his mike.

Chaco Boreal

For the second time in her life Sarah saw a vehicle painted red from the brains and blood that came out of the back of someone's exploding skull. She didn't react as she saw Alvaro's head whip back then his collapse onto the hood of the car and then down to the ground. She saw the blood drain from the fist sized hole in the back of his head and stain the grass underneath. When Alvaro was shot the only sound that was heard was the breaking of the windshield of Garcia's lead vehicle.

Two men around the cars tried to bring their weapons up but were cut down in short order from two shots each to their chests. Then the front tires of Garcia's lead vehicle were shot flat.

That left the two men examining the circuits, who put their weapons down, the rendezvous driver and Garcia as the last men standing. They were held at bay by Webb and Sarah brandishing their own weapons.

"Drop the gun and move over to your boss! You other two move and stand with them." Sarah commanded the driver and the two circuit testers. They did what Sarah commanded.

After they all moved to where Garcia was standing in a state of shock, Sarah went to retrieve all the weapons and dropped them into the back seat of her and Webb's SUV. Then she got behind the wheel.

"That's what stopped you from killing us!" Webb said pointing to Alvaro and the other dead men.
He continued with a tone of reprimand, "You forgot that we still have the Stingers. If you killed my wife and me, you would never have gotten them. If we don't report back to my two men by 6 o'clock tonight, they will drive the truck with the Stingers out into the forest and blow them up."

Garcia made a face as if to ask, but Webb answered before he could ask, "Russian mercenaries, ex Spetnatz, you gotta love them. I hired them as my back-up security. They've been shadowing us since we landed at Montevideo."

Garcia hung his head realizing his blunder.

After he got into the SUV and before they pulled away, he stuck his hand out the window and scaled a playing card in such a way that it landed at Alvaro's dead feet. He had written his cellphone number on it. The playing card was the Ace of Spades.

He said to Garcia, "Now that Alvaro is gone call me at the number on the card when you are ready to pick up the Stingers."

With that Sarah drove away.

2037 Zulu

Chaco Boreal, Paraguay

Sarah was driving back the way they came. After they topped a ridge and were out of sight of what remained of Garcia's party Webb told her, "Stop the car."

Without asking why Sarah did so. Webb got out and opened the back door. He took the guns out one by one and heaved each of them as deep into the brush beside the road as he could.

Getting back into the car he said, "Can't have the policia stop us and ask where those guns came from."

"Uh huh," Sarah grunted as she started driving again.

"Mac what's wrong?" Webb asked.

"What's wrong? What's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. We were set up! That's what's wrong. Good God Clay, who do we trust down here, Hardy?"

"I never trusted Hardy. Don't you remember we came to the same conclusion that he may be the mole in his own bureau? That's why we have Harm, Gunny and the SEALs down here with us," Webb said.

At that his phone rang. "That was quick," Webb declared thinking it was Garcia calling.

"James," Webb said into the phone. Sarah only heard his side of the call. Webb said, "Okay," and then ended the call.

"Pull over at that crossroads Mac," Webb instructed Sarah.

Sarah did so. Before she could turn to ask Webb who was on the phone and why they were stopping, she saw out the front window a mound of grass get up and move toward his side of the SUV. Before she could react to that she saw another mound of grass get up and walk over to her door.

"You two okay?" she heard the second mound of grass ask her.
She recognized the voice and exclaimed, "Harm!"

"At your service and say hello to Lt. Commander Rivers," Harm said pointing to the first mound of walking grass now standing beside Webb's window. Sarah and Webb exchanged handshakes with Rivers who then walked around the SUV to Harm's side.

Harm and Rivers were in Ghilie Suits, made especially for concealment in the wild.

"You scared the crap out of me getting up like that. I still can't get used to it when you do that," Sarah said smiling.

Sarah noticed that Harm was carrying a Marine M40 sniper's rifle. "That your rifle?" she asked her brother in law.

"No it's not, but your husband was kind enough to have it included with the equipment drop that Rivers recovered the first night he was in country. I had to do a lot of adjusting till I was satisfied with it. Too bad I have to leave it here,' Harm explained.

Sarah nodded knowing that they all would be leaving the country the same way that they entered, without weapons.

"Were you the sniper that took Alvaro out?" Webb asked incredulously.

"Guilty as charged," Harm said grinning.

Another SEAL came up to them. He was carrying his own weapon and a large gym bag. Harm leaned his rifle against the car door, took off the Ghilie Suit and exchanged it for the gym bag. He then gave his rifle to Rivers and shook his hand saying, "We'll see you tonight at the hotel."

"You got it commander," Rivers acknowledged. He turned and walked back into the brush with the other SEAL.

Harm got in the back of the SUV. He had on a set of black BDUs and his face was covered in green, tan and black camouglage paint.

"Did you have any problem linking up with Rivers and his team after we left," Sarah asked.

"No, Gunny and I met them five minutes after we left the city. We followed you as best we could by tracking your homer pens, staying well enough behind you. We almost over rode the ridge that overlooked your initial meeting place. River's point men were waiting for us and stopped us in time. When we saw that you stopped, we went in on foot. We were just able to set up on the ridge and get our lines of sight fixed before Garcia revealed Alvaro as the traitor," Harm said.

"Where's Gunny now?" Sarah asked.

"Back at the ridge with the other team members watching Garcia and what's left of his men. They're going to follow Garcia to his mansion and report back to us tonight," Harm explained.

Webb was surprised that Sarah wasn't surprised at Harm being a sniper. He'd ask about it all later.

"You guys have all the bases covered," Webb said admiringly.

"Well John and Diane had almost a month to plan this operation before you almost blew it by coming to JAG and getting me involved. The only thing they had to do was switch their operatives with us. Unlike you he doesn't believe in going in unprepared," Sarah explained to Webb.
Webb had to acknowledge the lecture quietly. He knew Sarah was right.

While they were riding along Harm was busy removing the camo-make-up by using a hand mirror and almost a whole the pack of baby wipes from his bag.

He asked Webb, "Look and see if I missed any paint."

"The front looks good. Turn around a bit and let me see the back of your neck," Webb said. Not seeing anything he finished, "Okay you're good."

He changed out of his BDUs into the tropical shirt and slacks he wore before the SEAL rendezvous.

Soon they arrived back at the hotel.

2333 Zulu
Ciudad del Este, Paraguay

The three of them were sitting at the outdoor café again. Sarah was saying, "You improvised real well when Alvaro was shot and saying that your Russian mercenaries did it. The Ace of Spades was a nice touch."

"Well I liked your Stevie Wonder inference. That was classic," Webb said with a chuckle.

Webb then looked over to Harm and finally asked, "How long have you been a sniper?"

"That's classified," Harm answered with a smile.

"Who's the classifying authority?" Webb asked thinking he would be able to cajole that individual into revealing secrets.

"My husband is. You're not the only one with secrets Clay," Sarah answered for Harm.

"Well that kills that idea. He's not gonna tell me anything," Webb said resignedly.

"Damn right!" Sarah said with a triumphant grin.

Webb still wouldn't admit defeat and tried one more time asking, "Can tell me a little bit?"

"Okay I can tell you his much, Sarah's a sniper as well," Harm said.

Webb whipped his head around to her at that. He had only enough wherewithal to ask, "Really?"

"Yep and besides why shouldn't I be? You know every Marine is a rifleman or woman," Sarah said with a smile as she sipped her Tonic water.

"How did you get involved?" Webb asked getting exasperated at being fed the story piecemeal.

"Ah that's a story for another time, because here are Rivers and Gunny," Harm said as he looked past Webb's shoulder.

Webb turned and saw the two men Harm mentioned coming to sit at their table. After greeting everyone Harm asked, "So what's up with Garcia?"

"He's at his compound licking his wounds. One of my men was able to get close enough to use our parabolic mike to hear him say that he would be looking for you and Mrs. James, Mr. Webb," Rivers
answered.

"Well that puts a damper on everything," Webb said. As he said that his cellphone trilled. He answered with "James?"

"Senor James my friend wants you ship his merchandise that he has so generously paid for tonight," Webb heard Garcia say.

"Okay tell me where," Webb answered. Garcia gave him directions. "Okay they will be there tonight," Webb answered. He listened to Garcia a bit more.

"I'll keep that in mind," Web said and ended the call.

"What did he say?" Sarah asked.

"He said a few things about getting out of the country as soon as possible. Otherwise my pretty wife and I would be dead by the morning," Webb answered.

"Well what do we do about him? He's going to try and kill us before we leave Paraguay," Sarah said.

"Well we'll just have get Hardy to authorize something. Buying Stingers and selling them to a known enemy of our country, makes Garcia a clear and present danger. I think we go after him before he has a chance to go after us," Harm answered.

"Where does that leave us and the Stingers?" Webb asked.

"Gunny and Rivers and I can go ahead with the delivery and arrange for Rivers to follow us as usual. You and Mac will go see Hardy about dealing with Mr. Garcia," Harm explained.

Everyone agreed with that plan.

0021 Zulu

Somewhere in

Chaco Boreal, Paraguay

Harm, Gunny and Rivers went to drive the truck to rendezvous with the ultimate buyer of the Stingers. They hoped it was Sadiq. Sarah and Webb followed behind them into the Chaco Boreal for a time. They turned off to another road to meet Hardy. Webb was driving and as they cleared a turn, they found themselves in a clearing. In the middle of the clearing was a Semi-Trailer. They saw the ubiquitous SUV parked at the steps that lead into the rear of the trailer.

Webb pulled up behind the SUV then he and Sarah cautiously got out. Before they could take two steps away from their car, Hardy came out of the trailer. They immediately relaxed.

Hardy was smiling as he said, "I thank you for eliminating one of the possible moles in my bureau. I could never fully trust Alvaro."

"Glad to be of help Hardy," Webb dryly commented.

Hardy went on as if Webb didn't say anything, "Also since Mister Webb told me of Garcia's threat against his and Sarah's life, I knew he had to be eliminated. We have just the thing to do that."

Hardy waved his hand at the entrance to the trailer, beckoning them all to enter.
The inside of the trailer was filled with several monitors each being manned by an operator. Hardy began explaining, "This is our Drone Strike Command Center. From here we can attack any threat that comes along the way. We've interdicted many arms and drug shipments that tried to leave Paraguay."

"Don't you worry about it being exposed," Sarah asked.

"No this is the one place that I don't ever mention in my office. That's why it's stayed so secret. Besides we move it around once a day so that no one can get a fix on it," Hardy explained.

He moved over to a monitor where a female operator was using a joy stick to fly the drone. Besides the LED screen that showed her the controls and status of the flyer, there was another showing an image of a large house surrounded by a stone wall. They could also see on the monitors there were numerous guards patrolling around the outside.

"Do you have a fix on Garcia?" Webb asked.

"We do indeed. That picture of his home is being sent from a drone that is flying at 40,000 feet. All we have to do is press a button and it fires its missiles. Garcia is in his living room probably ranting about how he was ambushed today. He doesn't have any family, so he's alone with just his men. Give the word and he's toast," Hardy said.

"If he's alone get him," Webb said.

"Okay light it up," Hardy told the woman.

They all saw a crosshairs appear on the actual video screen. The operator centered it on the roof of the house. She thumbed a button and the screen was lit by the exhaust of the rockets that were launched from the drone. They all saw the rockets as they raced away and then impact the house. The explosion soundlessly filled the screen. When the initial brightness died down some, they all could see that the house was fully involved with fire.

"Well that's that," Hardy declared.

"You can say that again," Sarah declared.

"Now all we have to do is find out where Sadiq is hold up. We can use this to eliminate him as well," Hardy said.

"Well we'll be back at the hotel waiting to see what O'Neil can tell us," Webb responded.

"Let me know when you hear anything," Hardy said as Sarah and Webb walked out the door.

Sarah and Webb got into their SUV with Webb behind the wheel. On the way back into the city they rode along in silence. They both contemplated what they had wrought. Yes Garcia was a drug dealer, a vicious killer and a sure threat to them and their country, but giving approval to kill another human being still weighed heavily on them.

As they stopped at a blind intersection Sarah opened her mouth to say something only to break the oppressive silence.

"You know Clay.." she began as Webb started to pull away.

She was interrupted by a horrific crash that came from the driver's side. There was the sound of torn metal and broken glass as a larger SUV slammed into the car right where the front door met the
fender. If it collided just a foot back to the rear, Webb would have been killed instantly.

Sarah and Webb's SUV was spun 90 degrees to the right. The colliding car scraped along until it past their car. Webb and Sarah sat stunned. Only the fact that they were wearing their seatbelts saved them from serious injury.

Before they could come completely to their senses, strong hands reached through both windows and grabbed their heads and pushed them down. Sarah's head was turned so that she was able to see the man that grabbed Webb jab a syringe into where his neck met the shoulder. At the same time she felt the same thing being done to her. Then she saw only blackness.
Chapter 102

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 102

AN: Warning death of major character.

Wednesday May 21, 2003

1334 Zulu

Route Nine

Trans-Chaco Highway, Paraguay

Harm and Rivers were riding behind the truck Gunny was driving with the Stingers in another rented SUV. About two hours after Sarah and Webb turned off to meet Hardy they came into a clearing that they were directed to by Garcia. The three still didn't know that Garcia's home with him in it was bombed. The road bisected the clearing and there were no ridges to hide any snipers. It seemed Garcia learned his lesson.

On the side of the road there was a large black SUV. Two men got out, one from the front passenger door and the other from the back seat. One was dressed in a tropical white shirt with white pants. He had a goatee and longish hair combed neatly to the back of his head. The other was obviously Middle Eastern with the unshaven face and the red turban scarf around his neck. He was carrying an AK-47 across his chest. They both approached the truck.

When they saw the black SUV, Rivers pulled his watch cap mask down to hide his face. He got out of their car at the same time Harm did and stood behind the open passenger door. He held his own AK 47 at port arms across his chest so that it was plainly visible.

Gunny got out of the truck and met the two approaching men. The three walked together to the Harm's SUV.

The man with the goatee saw Rivers standing with his watch cap and rifle. He had to turn quickly to restrain his companion.

Goatee went forward saying to Harm, "I am Sadiq. You are James?"

"No I'm O'Neil. James is the money man that represents the seller. My partners and I, (indicating Gunny and the masked Rivers), are the heavy lifters. Unlike them we don't mind getting our hands dirty," Harm said in a correctly derisive tone.

"I understand, we all have our place," Sadiq commented. He then asked, "All the items are in the truck?"

"They are all there," Harm replied.

"Good my man here will drive it the rest of the way. You may tell your Mr. James that you did your job well. Also tell Mr. Ben Atwa that we may call him again."

"Is that what his name is? I never knew it. I guess he thought it was safer that way. All I get is a phone call telling me to go someplace, pick up whatever he says and transport it to where he tells me.
I didn't care as long as he wired the correct amount into my bank account. You may have compromised him," Harm said.

"Well no matter. I will be in contact with him if I need something again. I am grateful that you have aided me to continue the work for my cause," Sadiq said.

"Whatever, it's a living" Harm said in perfect California disdain.

At that Sadiq turned to leave. He didn't shake Harm's hand. He and his rifle bearing pal got into the cab. The truck and the SUV and were driven away. Gunny, Rivers and Harm stood in front of their car and waited till they were out of sight constantly surveying their surroundings for an ambush. Though they were confident of Rivers' SEALS (a.k.a. Russian mercenaries) would have had them covered. They rightly figured Sadiq knew that as well. After about fifteen minutes to ensure that no ambush was forthcoming, Harm started the car and turned and went back the way they came.

1523 Zulu

Route Nine

Trans-Chaco Highway, Paraguay

It was first light by the time they got to the intersection where they knew Sarah and Webb turned off to meet Hardy. A bit further on they saw that there was some sort of police activity. From where they were they saw that a wrecked car was being pulled into a flatbed. When they pulled up it was Gunny who spotted the other car first saying, "Sir that wrecked car on the side of the road looks like Mr. Webb's and the colonel's car.

Harm pulled up immediately behind it. He got out to check, but he was stopped by a man who judging by the uniform and the word POLICIA on the tab over his left shirt pocket and the three golden diamonds pinned to his epaulet that he was the one in charge.

"Can I help you senor?" he asked Harm.

"Uh that wrecked car looks like my friends' car. My I take a look inside to verify?" Harm asked politely.

"And you are?" the police man asked.

"Harmon O'Neil and you are Officer?" Harm asked offering his hand politely correctly laying on the charm.

"Captain Ruiz, Chief of this Policia District," Ruiz replied offering his hand in return.

After Harm endured a very hardy handshake from Ruiz, he went right to the car. He found Sarah's hand bag, but minus the wallet and cellphone. The homing pens were on the floor of the car.

"Damn, Damn, Damn," Harm cursed getting back into the car with the bag.

Ruiz walked up to him and said sympathetically, "I take it your friends are missing?"

"Yes they are. Was there anyone here when you arrived?" Harm asked.

"No one was here, just these two cars blocking the road. It appears to be a kidnapping. Were your friends wealthy?" Ruiz finished asking.

Harm thought fast if he told part of the truth he may be able to enlist Ruiz in the search for Webb and
"Yes they were they were diamond merchants. My other friends and I were just coming from Asuncion after we got a buyer lined up for them."

"Hmmm, maybe you will get a ransom call. If you do, call me and maybe I can be of assistance," Ruiz said giving Harm his business card.

"Thank you," Harm said taking it before he drove away.

"What do we do now commander?" Rivers asked.

"We go back to the hotel and wait. I have feeling I know who has them and if our SEALs are on the ball they may confirm my suspicions," Harm answered tersely. He was plainly worried.

"Don't worry sir. I'm sure they're still alive. Whoever has them may want them alive in exchange for the diamonds. The colonel left them in her room safe," Gunny said.

"Yeah I hope you're right Gunny," Harm agreed as he tightly gripped the wheel until he was white knuckled.

1640 Zulu

Nuevo Hotel Simpatico

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

They arrived in Sarah's room and packed her and Webb's things. He told the others, "Pack your things. We're leaving. We'll tell the hotel Sarah and Webb left on an emergency while we were out and that we're checking them and us out."

"What are we going to do sir," Gunny asked.

"We're going back into the Chaco Boreal and wait," Harm said.

Just then Rivers' cellphone trilled. He opened it up and listened. He then held it away from his ear and told Harm, "We can go back out there. But we don't have to wait."

Same time

Chaco Boreal, Paraguay

Petty Officer 1st Class (PO1) Bobby Gardiner liked this duty. His sister in law Emma was Sarah's Yeoman. Sarah didn't know that, but when Bobby heard that his SEAL Team was going on a mission involving her, his heart soared with pride.

Gardiner was driving the vehicle trailing the semi with the Stingers. His partner, PO1 Jimmy Quinn was monitoring the transmission of the signals coming from the homing devices set into the circuits in one of the Stingers. He would tell Jimmy to speed up or slow down to maintain a static distance from the truck so that they would not be seen.

Eventually Quinn called out, "Stop now!"

Gardiner pulled over to the side of the road. They were on the ascending side of a low hill. "Now we walk," Quinn ordered.

They got out of the car with their weapons at the ready. They went into the brush and as they went up the hill. Just before they reached the crest they crawled the last couple of yards to the top of the
They settled down and pulled out their binoculars and looked down into a sort of box valley. Down below they saw a mansion compound much like Garcia's place. The semi with the Stingers was parked off to one side. On the opposite side of the mansion they could see a large sort of utility shack. Two men in turbans were at the door holding rifles. They were obviously guarding whatever or whoever was in there. They saw the man that Rivers identified to them as Sadiq walk around the back of the mansion and into the utility shack followed by the two guards. They were in there for about five minutes. Then Sadiq walked out and along a path to a smaller shack that was set farther away from the house. Right behind Sadiq and being escorted between the two men with AKs was Clayton Webb. Two more guards came to replace the two escorting Webb.

Gardiner put his binoculars down and reached for his satellite phone and called Rivers. When the call was connected, "Commander, we have a problem."

In the shack

Sarah was waking up slowly as the barbiturate that she was injected with worked through her system. When she finally came to, she realized that she was not in her car. She stiffened as she remembered the crash. She also realized that her head was being cradled in someone's lap. She turned and looked up at the face of a blonde haired woman. The face was dirty and a bit bruised

"Well you decided to join us. I'm Karla Robinson and that's my husband Warren Robinson lying over there," Karla said.

Sarah looked over at Warren who was lying on a cot and showed obvious signs of being beaten. Sarah then asked, "Where am I?"

"You're in the residence of Sadiq Fahd. He claims to be the Hand of Allah as he and his brethren continue the jihad against the oppressors of Islam," Karla said.

"What are you doing here?" Sarah asked trying to gather her strength and determine exactly what her situation was.

"Warren and I are missionaries. Sadiq has been kidnapping missionaries for ransom. He took the diamond necklace from you saying that it would be a down payment for that," Karla explained.

"Where's my husband? Sarah asked, wisely keeping in cover.

"Sadiq took him because he was the first one of the two of you awake. I believe to the same place where he took Warren," Karla said with worry.

"Did my husband say anything before he left?" Sarah asked looking at the door.

"He said to tell you that he loves you and that he'll keep them away from you for as long as possible," Karla said.

Sarah sat and contemplated that. She didn't hear anything for about thirty minutes. Then she heard screams coming from across the yard. It was a man screaming in pain. Sarah put her hands to her ears and with her tears falling in torrents sobbed, "Oh God Clay!"

The screams were unending.

Four hours later
While Gardiner and Quinn waited for Harm, Gunny and Rivers to arrive, the rest of SEAL Team 5 rendezvoused with them. They set about getting positioned in spots surrounding the mansion compound. All through that time they were hard constrained to go down and stop it as they had to listen as Webb was screaming in the shed. They knew that they couldn't attack until they were ready and they were sure of Sarah's location.

Eventually Gardiner heard through his earpiece, "Colonel Marshall is in the shack where they pulled Webb out off. There are another woman and man in with her. The man is lying on the cot and doesn't look to be in good shape."

"Roger that, stand by," Gardiner replied.

Just then he heard a sound from behind him. He turned and saw Rivers, Harm and Gunny come up the hill. They were all in the identical black BDUs as the rest of the team. They were also carrying weapons. Gunny was carrying Marine M40 sniper's rifle while Harm and Rivers were carrying AKs.

"What's the situation Gardiner?" Harm asked.

"Sir, Colonel Marshall is in the utility shack nearest the house with the two ragheads guarding the door. Mr. Webb is in the smaller shack over there," Gardiner said pointing. Gardiner added, "Sir, he was being tortured."

Just then Sadiq walked out of the smaller shack toward the prison shack. He was followed by two men carrying an obviously incapacitated Webb by his legs and shoulders. When the two carrying Webb reached the door, Sadiq opened it and they went inside. They dropped Webb's body in front of where Sarah was sitting on the floor with Karla. Sarah went and cradled Webb's head in her lap. As tears rolled down her cheeks, Sadiq began his soliloquy.

"After four hours of torture with water and electricity, he has stuck to his story of being an arms broker. What you and your so called husband didn't know is that my agent inside the American Embassy confirmed to me that you two have come here trying to capture me. My agent also told me when you were meeting Mr. Hardy, but she didn't know where. So I waited for you on the road back to the city. The crash was very easy to set up. Now I will give you your last moments with your husband and I will strap you to the same table to get the answers I want," Sadiq said menacingly.

Sarah looked up at Sadiq with hate filled eyes as he turned and left.

Sarah bent her head to try and minister to Webb as Karla went to get some water. They managed to get a blanket under him and a small seed bag for a pillow. His face was bruised and his eyes were swollen almost completely shut. They saw the ligature marks on his wrists and ankles where the restraints were placed. There were also burn marks on the ankles and the opened his shirt and immediately saw the burn marks on his chest. They also saw that the left side of his torso was very badly bruised.

Karla palpitated Webb's torso and felt many broken ribs. The large bruise on the left side was red hot to the touch.

Karla she said to Sarah, "I think they ruptured his spleen. He's bleeding internally and needs surgery or he's going to die."

Just then Webb spoke up, but he was very weak. He looked up at Sarah as she cradled his head in
her lap. Her face was swimming in and out of focus. He reached up and cupped her chin and said, "Tell Catherine I love her and that I'm sorry I got her pregnant."

Sarah immediately thought of Catherine Gale the CIA's bulldog attorney "Don't say that Clay. You tell her yourself. She's going to have your baby," Sarah sobbed at him.

Webb's breathing was becoming labored as he tried to speak. He had to take a painful breath after every sentence.

"No, too late for me. I can feel it. All broken up inside. Did number on me. Hands started hurting, hit me so many times, went to baseball bats or clubs. Didn't start asking questions till they strapped me to table. Shocked me when I gave answers Sadiq didn't like."

"Oh Clay don't," Sarah sobbed again. She could feel him start shaking.

"S-S-Sarah so cold, s-s-so cold. H-h-old m-me," Webb gasped out.

Sarah tightened her hold on her friend. She held on to him for all her life, almost believing that she could pass over some of her life force to him.

He managed one last labored sentence, "John got you first, but always loved you too." He reached up his hand to the back of her neck and brought her head down to him as he kissed her cheek.

Sarah knew the moment of his death when the tight grip on her neck slackened and his hand fell to his side.

Sarah held his head to her breasts, smoothed his hair, kissed the top of his head and sobbed out all her grief.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 103

Wednesday, May 21, 2003

2105 Zulu

Chaco Boreal, Paraguay

As Sarah held onto Webb and cried over his death, Sadiq came back into the shack. Looking down at her he said, "You will see that I mean what I say."

Then two men came in behind Sadiq and roused Warren and pushed him and Karla out the door. They marched them to a spot between the torture shack and the prison shack.

Sadiq went up to them and said, "Your church has refused to pay the ransom. Now you will die for your God."

The two men shoved Warren and Karla until they were kneeling on the dirt sobbing with their heads on their knees.

After they determined that Sarah was in the shack, Harm and Gardiner moved to a position in the brush that was very close to the rear of the shack. Seeing that he was about to witness an execution Harm gave a snap order over their comm-link, "Blow the Stingers."

Back up on the ridge Rivers was overseeing the operation with Gunny at his side manning the sniper rifle. Without hesitation Rivers pushed a button on the transmitter he was holding and the Semi on the opposite side of the house erupted in a huge fireball. The shock wave caved in that whole side of the house. Anyone outside any part around the house was thrown to the ground, Sadiq being no exception.

The other SEALs having heard Harm's order over the comm link barely had enough time to cover their own heads before the explosion. Even before the debris completely stopped falling all the SEALs broke cover and charged into the compound. They made no battle cry or 'Rebel Yell'. They just starting shooting any enemy combatant that they encountered. They were covered from the ridge very ably by Gunny as he zeroed in on enemy targets as they emerged from cover to try and fire at the charging SEALs.

Harm made his way around one side of the prison shack with Gardiner behind watching the rear. When Harm burst around the corner he saw that the two raghead guards were still in a state of shock and awe. One of them saw Harm as he came from around the corner. He didn't have a chance to bring his AK up or warn his companion when Harm cut them both down with a short burst from his weapon.

Harm kicked the already dislodged door fully open. He saw Sarah's dust and small debris covered body lying face down on the floor next to Webb's body.

"Oh no," he cried as his stomach dropped with despair. He brightened when he saw Sarah move and then sit up.
Sarah was bending rather low as she held Webb when the explosion occurred. That position saved her from grievous injury and surely her life. Thus she had only been knocked flat by the explosion's shock wave, which was considerably dampened by the mass of the mansion in between. If the prison shack was on the same side of the mansion as the Semi, she surely would have been vaporized in the explosion. As it was her ears were ringing.

Harm bent down to her and asked, "Are you alright?"

Sarah nodded and then sobbed as she pointed to Webb's lifeless body.

"Ah shit, piss and corruption," Harm cursed aloud fearing the worst. He bent and felt Webb's neck at the carotid for a pulse. He visibly despaired when he didn't find one.

"He's dead Harm," Sarah managed to say. Now that Harm was there, she gaining control of her emotions.

Remembering the situation Harm sobered up and asked Sarah, "Can you walk?"

Sarah just nodded. Harm returned the nod, pulled out his sidearm and gave it to her. Just then two more SEALs came through the door.

One said, "Sir, Commander Rivers thought you were taking too long in here."

Harm replied, "Pick up Mr. Webb. We're taking our dead teammate home."

Without replying the two SEALs bent and wrapped Webb's body in the blanket. They pulled out some duct tape from their kits and wrapped the blanket closed at the usual points. They hefted Webb's body into a standing position and biggest SEAL bent and slung him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry.

When they were out of the shack Harm ordered the SEALs, "Take him to the rendezvous point. I'm going to look for Sadiq."

Sarah said, "I'm coming with you. I owe that bastard."

Harm was about to protest until he looked at his sister-in-law. Gone was the grieving woman. In her place was the steely determined Marine.

Without even thinking again about it Harm said, "Okay fine, Gardiner you're with us."

With that the trio went up to where the Robinsons were lying in the dirt. Just like Sarah their bodies were covered with dirt and some debris. Before he could bend and check them, Karla moved to get up.

Harm bent down to her and asked, "Where is Sadiq. He was here when the bomb went off."

"I don't know. I was already on the ground, but I saw him fall when the explosion happened. When I looked up after it cleared a little, I saw him running that way into the woods." Karla replied pointing back over Harm's shoulder.

"Ah nuts," Harm said.

At the same time Sadiq was running as fast as he could through the underbrush toward the tree line. He used the confusion caused by the explosion and the ensuing battle to get away. He knew that this day was lost. He had a bolt hole set up in the woods for just this occurrence. He would wait there
until dark and then find a car to steal. He rightly figured any chase into the woods would be very
difficult and dangerous for his pursuers. Sadiq had no way to know how many, if any of his minions
had survived.

Even in his desperation to get away, Sadiq paused at the edge of the woods and looked back. He
was glad to see the general confusion taking place. He turned his back on the compound and
continued into the woods.

Harm and Sarah went right after the SEALs carrying Webb's body to the rendezvous point where all
their vehicles were parked. The rest of SEAL Team 5 joined them after they finished mopping up the
compound. They had to kill some enemy combatants before they were able to approach what was
left of the mansion. They were unable to enter because the mansion was totally destroyed by the
explosion with massive piles of debris blocking access. They reported what they saw via the comm
link to Rivers, who ordered them to abandon the search and come to the rendezvous.

After some discussion it was decided that Sarah, Harm, Gunny and Rivers would return to Ciudad
Del Este to try and uncover Sadiq's agent in the CIA office, while the SEAL Team would exfiltrate
over the border to Argentina through Asuncion.

"I called John and he called a friend he knows in Argentina's Federal Police, a Colonel Jorge
Ordonez. He'll be expecting you at the border crossing. He'll help expedite your crossing and get you
to Buenos Aires and on the plane back to DC," Harm explained.

They correctly figured that if they encountered any Paraguayan policia, they had the story embedded
with Captain Ruiz of their wealthy friends, Sarah and Webb being kidnapped.

0045 Zulu

Ortiz Funeral Home

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

When they arrived back in the city, they went to the first funeral home they came upon. They
explained to the funeral director, Senor Tomas Ortiz that Webb was beaten by kidnappers when they
didn't get their ransom in time.

Ortiz protested saying, "In matters such as this, I must call the police."

Harm said, "Please do so. Captain Ruiz the Policia's District Commander knows of our situation."

Ortiz did as Harm suggested. Ruiz arrived at the funeral home to take a statement. He asked Harm,
"How did you make the exchange?"

"We were told to go to an abandoned farm. We were instructed to leave the diamonds in the mailbox
by the road and wait in our car in front of the house. We were there for about thirty minutes when
this black SUV pulled up. They had guns pointing out of the car to prevent us from getting out.
While one guy took the diamonds from the mailbox, another pushed Mr. James body and a tied up
Mrs. James from the car and drove away."

"I see. So you didn't get a look at the kidnapers?"

"No they were too far away."

"Do you know anything about an explosion at a mansion in the Chaco Boreal?"
"Only that we heard it from where we met the kidnapers," Harm said.

"Well I have what I need. I have to say that because you were unable to identify the kidnapers, we have a very poor chance of finding them," Ruiz finished as he got up to leave.

"I understand captain," Harm said as he got up to shake the hand that Ruiz offered.

0320 Zulu Time

Casa Blanca Hotel

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

While Harm talked with Ruiz and Sarah made arrangements to transport Webb's body back to the USA, Rivers and Gunny went to check them into a two bedroom suite in the Casa Blanca Hotel. They wisely wanted to avoid their previous hotel. Upon arriving at the hotel she and Harm went into their double, double bed room.

While Sarah took a quick shower Harm got on the phone to John and Diane in DC to update them on their latest activities. John and Diane were dismayed at hearing of Sadiq's capture of Sarah and Webb's and then of Webb's death at Sadiq's hands.

"I'll send the NCIS Gulfstream down to pick his body up. It should be there the day after tomorrow," Diane told her husband.

"That's fine. We should have this thing wrapped up by then," Harm replied.

"How's Sarah holding up Harm?" John asked.

"As well as can be expected for having someone die in her arms I guess," Harm answered with a sigh, raking his hand through his hair. He added his promise, "Don't worry I'll help her get through it as well as I can before she gets home."

"Thanks ace," John said.

"Before we hang up I need you to check on something for us," Harm said and gave Diane and John the information that they needed.

"Okay dear we'll get right on it. We'll call tomorrow," Diane promised.

"Thanks babe, I love you," Harm said to his wife.

"I love you to sweetie," Diane replied. Just as Harm heard that, Sarah came out of the shower dressed in a tee shirt and shorts asking, "Is that Diane and is John with her?"

"Yeah here," Harm answered giving her the phone.

"Diane?" Sarah asked.

"Hey Sarah, how are you doing?"

"As well as can be expected, I guess. Can I please speak to John?"

"Sure, here he is."

"Hey sweetie how're you doing?" John asked his concern evident over the phone.
"I don't know. I go from angry to sad to frustrated and back to sad again. I mean we trusted the wrong people John. I think if it wasn't for Harm and our friends, I would be lying beside Clay in the morgue," Sarah answered.

"Well I'm thankful that you're not. I wish I was there for you," John replied.

"I know baby. Harm will help me," Sarah answered simply looking at Harm who nodded for her. He then went in to take his own shower.

"I'm glad I insisted on sending him on this assignment with you," John sighed gratefully.

"And I thank you for that. I love you hot stuff," Sarah said her voice cracking. She bit her lower lip as she shed some quiet tears.

"I love you to ninja girl. Listen lean on Harm as much as you need to before you get home," John said, hearing the crack in her voice.

"I will I promise," Sarah said. They exchanged 'I love yous' one more time before they ended the call.

After Sarah hung up the phone Harm came in from his shower, dressed for bed. They were so exhausted, both emotionally and physically that as soon as they lay down in separate beds, they fell asleep almost immediately.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Harm was awakened by Sarah crawling into his bed. Without saying anything, Harm opened his arms and let Sarah lay with her head on his chest. They lay for quite a long time before Harm felt his sister in law start shaking from her silent crying. Harm didn't say anything as he held onto Sarah and let her cry herself into exhaustion. Then he was able to fall back asleep himself.

Thursday, May 22, 2003

0812 Zulu

Casa Blanca Hotel

Ciudad Del Este, Paraguay

Even though she took a shower the previous night, Sarah felt the need soak away the aches and pains of her ordeal. So she indulged herself and filled up the cast iron claw foot tub with water as hot as she could stand it and the bubble bath powder that the hotel supplied.

She soaked luxuriously and being in a playful fugue blew the bubbles off her hands. She was in the tub for about 20 minutes when Harm knocked and saying through the closed door, "Arrange the bubbles, I'm coming in."

"NO YOU'RE NOT!" Sarah cried indignantly, but still strategically arranged the bubbles to cover her body just in case. Despite her protest Harm opened the door anyway.

"We have company. Hardy's at the door," he said as he laid a sidearm on the bath table. He paused as he got a look at Sarah covered in bubbles. A look of longing came over his face that Sarah immediately noticed.

"What's wrong Harm?" She asked.
"I've forgotten how beautiful you Mackenzie women are. It makes me want to finish this mission all the sooner and get home to Diane," Harm replied.

Sarah was touched with gratitude as she said, "Ah you say the nicest things. Now scoot, I'll be out in a minute.

"No problem," Harm replied as he left the bathroom.

When he opened the door to let Hardy in, Gunny and Rivers were stationed on either side of the door, with Rivers behind it when it would open. When Harm opened the door wide Gunny grabbed Hardy and pulled him into the room, while Rivers shut the door. Gunny pushed Hardy further into the room until he was standing behind the living room couch.

"Hey that's no way to treat a friend. I came to help. I heard about the explosion and that various Middle Eastern men were found dead at a totally demolished mansion in the Chaco boreal," Hardy protested as he stumbled across the floor.

"A friend huh, then tell me, how did Sadiq know when to grab Sarah and Webb?" Harm asked him.

"I don't know I didn't tell anyone but my secretary, Maria Elena that we were meeting," Hardy answered and then he had the expected epiphany. He asked incredulously, "You don't think she told Sadiq?"

"Yeah I do!" Sarah said very loudly from behind Hardy.

At hearing Sarah, Hardy turned to face her. He barely had time to take a breath in to speak when Sarah struck him solidly and loudly with a solid right cross to his chin. She was winding it up as she exited the bathroom wearing just the hotel bathrobe.

The three other men in the room winced and then applauded as Hardy went tumbling over the couch from the force of Sarah's blow.

Sarah was standing there shaking her hand and wincing herself.

"Where'd you learn to punch like that colonel?" Rivers asked.

"In high school, some boys just couldn't take no for an answer," Sarah responded.

For his part Hardy had the good sense to stay down after he got over the shock. He rubbed his chin and said, "I guess I deserved that." He looked around the room in confusion and asked, "The black fellow I don't know and where is Webb?"

"This is our friend Mr. Negro (pronounced Nay-grow)," Harm introduced Rivers.

Rivers had the good grace to smile indulgently and went to take Hardy's hand. As Hardy got up he asked again, "And where is Webb?"

"In Ortiz' Funeral Home, he's dead Hardy," Sarah answered.

"He's dead, how?" Hardy sputtered.

"When Sadiq had us, he tortured Webb for four hours. They beat him until his ribs were broken and his spleen ruptured, then they waterboarded and shocked him until they got tired of getting the same answers. He died in my arms as he bled to death internally," Sarah cried as tears started to fall.

She ran into the bedroom to compose herself. Hardy just stood there dumbfounded. Harm asked him,
"How did you know we were here Hardy?"

"When I heard of the explosion, I went to your old hotel to ask you what you knew. I found that you checked out yesterday morning. So I started checking the other hotels by showing Webb's and Sarah's picture. This was the fourth hotel I checked this morning," Hardy answered.

"Does your secretary know where you were going?" Rivers asked.

"No I didn't tell her anything," Hardy answered.

"Good because we confirmed that she is definitely the leak," Harm said.

Hardy looked on incredulously before he asked, "How did you do that?"

"Last night I called our boss who back checked her with your friend from the DEA. Your DEA friend told him that Maria Elena once worked for Raul Garcia when he was an up and coming dealer. She had to be working for him all the time she was your secretary. She's been burning agents to him and through him to Sadiq. She is definitely the one who told him when to find Sarah and Webb on the road. Now that he is on the run Sadiq will probably contact her for help getting out of the country," Harm said.

He added, "What pisses me off was that if you had vetted her properly, you would've known all that and our friend would still be alive."

He had the sense not to dispute it and then to ask, "Now what happens?"

"Now we get Maria Elena to confess," Harm said.

"How are you going to do it?" Hardy asked.

"I'll do it tonight," Sarah said from the door to her bedroom.

While the men were discussing Maria Elena, Sarah was getting dressed. She was standing in the doorway dressed in a low cut red floral print dress that clung to her shapely figure and something else. Her chin length dark hair with red highlights was covered by a wig of long jet black hair.

Sarah went on to explain, "She's never met me and maybe I can get her to tell me who she's talking to.

The men saw the look of determination on her face and made the wise decision not to argue with her.
Timing Is Everything
Chapter 104
Saturday, May 24, 2003
1345 Local Time
Andrews Air Force Base, Navy Annex

The NCIS Gulfstream rolled into the Navy Annex hanger as directed by the grounds crew. After the pilot went through the shutdown procedure and the whine of the engines died, more grounds crew came to the rear cargo hatch to remove Webb's coffin.

NCIS Director Magnum, CIA Deputy Director Kershaw and Naval Intelligence Commander Admiral LaPorte were there with Diane, John, AJ, Mrs. Porter Webb and a now visibly pregnant Catherine Gale. SEAL Team 5 had arrived in DC the previous evening. They were in their Dress Whites and were lined up on both sides of the rear cargo hatch, standing at attention as the honor guard, to pay tribute to their fallen teammate.

After the hearse, the only other vehicles present were limousines for all the personnel there.

While this was being done, Sarah, Harm, Gunny and Rivers debarked from the plane via the front stairs. John and Diane were the first to greet their spouses and engulf them in tight hugs. Then they joined the rest waiting at the rear hatchway. They lined up on either side of the stairway and saluted as the coffin was brought out.

Porter Webb was dressed all in black with a hat and black lace veil that covered her face. Mrs. Webb did not shed any tears as her son was placed in the back of the hearse, but Catherine did. She wasn't blubbering or crying hysterically, but she didn't make the effort to stop those tears that fell down her cheeks.

Before they got into the waiting limousine, they went over to Gunny, Rivers, Sarah and Harm. The two women took turns to embrace each one of them. Mrs. Webb embraced Sarah last saying, "Dear I'm so grateful that you were with him at the end, that he didn't die alone."

"I'm so sorry Mrs. Webb," Sarah responded, barely holding back the tears that welled up in her eyes. Don't be dear. He knew what he was doing. We'll see you all at the wake," Mrs. Webb said to the group.

At that, she and Catherine got into the limousine and it drove away.

Then the Marshall and Rabb couples as well as Gunny and Rivers, along with all the other personnel got into the other limousines for the ride to NCIS headquarters for the mandatory debrief.

They all decided that Sarah would be the one to read the narrative that they prepared. She recounted all the events of the entire mission to AJ, LaPorte, Magnum and Kershaw.

"After we verified that Maria Elena was the CIA leak working with Sadiq, we decided on a course of action to try to capture him."
"What did you do colonel?" Kershaw asked.

"Hardy told me what bar Maria Elena usually frequented. I went there, struck up a conversation and asked her to get forged passports to Rio De Janeiro for me, Gunny and Commanders Rabb and Rivers."

Did she agree to get you the passports?" Kershaw asked.

"Yes she did. We set up a time to meet early the next day," Sarah answered.

"Was she able to meet you?" Magnum asked her.

"No she wasn't. That night she was found dead in an alley near the bar shortly after she left me. We only knew about it because Captain Ruiz of the District Policia called Hardy to tell him that his secretary was dead."

"Then how did you know that Sadiq was going to be at the rail station?" LaPorte asked.

"Hardy told us that Maria Elena already arranged a train shipment for him the next day. We deduced that Sadiq was going to attempt to leave country on that day. So the four of us staked out the rail station, it was the only lead we had," Sarah answered.

"So how did Sadiq get away then?" Kershaw asked impatiently.

"Sadiq seems to be a master of disguise. It was by sheer luck that I recognized him dressed as a conductor on the train. We chased him but he boarded another train. He even had the balls to wave to us from the back of the train as it went down the tracks. We followed the train to the next crossing but found that he jumped from it somewhere along the route," Sarah finished.

"So that's the last you saw of Sadiq?" Kershaw asked.

"Yes it was, but I don't think it will be the LAST time we ever see him," Harm commented.

"Oh why's that?" Kershaw asked.

"Because as the only two faces he saw that were still alive, he will try to kill us both," Harm answered.

"Well we will be on the alert for him. In the meantime take consolation in the fact that you kept the Stingers out of enemy hands and you found the leak in CIA's office," Magnum stated.

"Aye sir there is that," Sarah acknowledged for the four of them.

After dotting the 'I-s' and crossing the 'T-s' of the report the debriefing was adjourned.

Before they all left the office John announced, "With the permission of our respective agencies I read Dr. Vera McCool at Bethesda in on this mission. She will be available for any counseling you all may need. I know that this was a very traumatic mission." He handed out Vera's business cards to the four of them.

At that all the participants began to leave the room.

1845 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters
Washington Navy Yard, SE

The four mission colleagues gathered outside the NCIS front door to say their goodbyes.

"It was good working with you this time colonel," Rivers said moving to shake her hand.

"For saving my life, I'm afraid shaking hands just won't do commander," Sarah said and then surprised Rivers by giving him a brief hug and a kiss on his cheek. Rivers had the good grace to hug her back. When they broke apart, Rivers stepped back and snapped a salute that meant more than just common military courtesy.

Gunny wasn't spared Sarah's affections either as he saluted her in the same spirit as Rivers.

"I guess I'll see you all around. I imagine Captain Marshall has some more work for me, right sir," Gunny said looking at John.

"You're right gunny. But first after Webb's funeral, take the week off, go home see the family. After that mission, you'll need it. Oh and when you see your sister tell her Sarah and I may take her up on her offer as a camp guide," John said returning his salute and shaking his hand.

"Aye sir I'll see you at Mr. Webb's funeral" Gunny replied before he saluted and turned to go.

"Right Gunny, I'll let you know what the times are when I hear," John told him. They saluted each other before Gunny turned to leave. At that the Rabbs and Marshalls left the Navy Yard together.

2003 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

The Rabbs and Marshalls went to Florida Avenue. Earlier that day John and Diane carpooled from there after she left her children there in the company of her mother and Uncle Matt.

As soon as the Rabbs' minivan pulled into the driveway, the front door burst open as first Chloe and Les ran out followed by all the other Marshall and Rabb children. Deanne came out with David, while Matt had Natalie.

John and Diane stood back and just let the returned parents enjoy their reunion with their children. Sarah took hold of David asking Deanne, "How's he been?"

"Oh he's doing just fine dear. After we heard that you would be coming home, John and I went to see the doctor yesterday. He's gained another two pounds."

"Oh that's my boy," Sarah said smiling and cuddling David closer to her face. David just cooed happily knowing in some way that his mom was away and that she was now home.

Harm was enjoying his own reunion with his children, especially his youngest. "God, Natalie seems to have grown so much bigger since last week," Harm gushed as he gratefully cradled his youngest.

While John brought Sarah’s bags into the house, the group drifted inside. Because Deanne and Uncle Matt gave the children dinner before Sarah and John got home, they and the Rabbs didn't stay to have anything to eat. After saying good night to all of them, Sarah and John had a bite to eat themselves. David was in the infant carrier frame beside the table and the other kids were amusing themselves around the house.
After Sarah finished eating she brought David upstairs with her and put him in the bassinet so that she could change the rest of the way out of her uniform.

It was amazing that as soon as she shed everything down to her skin, David started crying for attention. Still completely nude, Sarah walked over to him and picked him up. Sensing that his true nourishment was at hand, after a week of formula, he immediately began to root for her breast. Sarah sighed with a great relief as he latched on.

For the first half of the week of the mission, her breasts were aching from the milk not being expressed or consumed. It was the injection of the barbiturate that calmed them down. After that ran through her system she didn't start to feel the ache of them being so engorged until she got on the plane Saturday morning for the trip home.

As she let David feed, she started crying in her silent way. She sat against the headboard of the bed sniffling and rocking herself with David attached to her breast and let the tears fall unchecked. She occasionally bent to kiss David's downy head. It was in this state that John found her when he came in to get ready for bed.

Before he went upstairs after Sarah, John asked Chloe, "Get the little ones ready for bed, will you please Chloe. I'm going to check on your mom."

"Okay Dad," Chloe said without hesitation.

Chloe was strongly tuned-in to how Sarah was feeling whenever she got home from assignments. She understood completely what her father meant that time a year ago when John explained to her Nana, John's mom Maureen, about helping Sarah "adjust" to the inevitable jet lag that came from traveling across the different times zones.

Also while John didn't yet tell her that the mission was dangerous or that Webb was killed on it and her mom was in jeopardy, Chloe somehow knew that something bad had happened. She saw it everyone's faces. So she came to the conclusion that her parents desperately needed the 'adjustment time'.

When John saw how Sarah was crying he went to sit beside her on the bed. He draped his arm around her shoulder and bent to kiss her head. He asked, "You okay?"

"No or least not completely," Sarah sniffed.

"Care to elaborate?" John gently asked.

"Well now that I'm home with my baby to my breast, I feel that the mission is finally over. But I'm still sad about Clay. He's never going to know this type of moment with Catherine," Sarah said.

"I know sweetie, it's tough on you when someone you know dies, especially when he dies in your arms," John said comfortingly.

They sat in silence while David fed. Unconsciously, Sarah switched David to the next breast to complete his feeding. After his son finally unlatched, John took him to change his diaper.

While he was doing this Sarah got up to turn the bed down. She asked her husband, "What are the older kids doing now?"

"Chloe is getting them ready for bed. I'm going to check on them and lock the house as soon as I finish with David here."
"After you do, come back to me, I really need you now." Sarah said stretching out on the bed.

"Okay honey, just give me a couple of minutes," John said without looking up from changing David. When he did look he had trouble catching his breath and his pants started to get uncomfortably tight. 'She isn't even going to bother to put any clothing on,' John thought to himself.

John enjoyed the sight of his wife stretching out on the bed in all her naked glory, striking a pose reminiscent of Kate Winslet in Titanic. She draped one arm above her head and the other down her side with the hand across her stomach. She lifted the knee closest to him up and drew the toes along her other leg from ankle to kneecap and back. She sensuously licked her lips, looked him right in the eye and said, "I'll be waiting hot stuff."

It had to be the quickest bed check and home securing task he had ever undertaken. He was grateful that Chloe, Caroline and Patrick were practically asleep when he checked them.

After he left Patrick and Caroline's room, he paused at his bedroom door. He had to remind himself that the upcoming lovemaking was mostly for Sarah's benefit, not his. With that he opened the door and gave himself over to his wife.

John quickly shed his clothing and joined Sarah on the bed. They started their kissing and then he moved onto giving her pleasure. It wasn't long before Sarah cried out, "John I want you NOW!"

John was eager to oblige as he slid into her. He waited until Sarah adjusted to having him inside her. From there, their love making heated up as Sarah cried out, "Faster! Harder". John gladly obliged her. Sarah screamed as she reached her climax, which sent John tumbling over the cliff as well.

As they came down from their sexual high John propped himself on his elbows and cradled her head as he lay on her. He looked his wife in the eye and asked, "I love you and I'll always be there for you. You'll always be the strongest woman I know." He sealed his loving declaration with a long slow kiss.

After the kiss ended and just like that time John made a similar post coital declaration when she defended the murdering wife abuser, Sarah started crying as she released all her pent up emotions. John gently rolled them over until Sarah lay on top. She buried her face in his shoulder and continued quietly sobbing and sniffling until she was totally drained.

As Sarah lay on top of him crying, John pulled the sheet up until it covered them to their shoulders and drew Sarah into a tight embrace.

After John felt that she settled down he asked her, "Feeling better?"

"Much," Sarah said kissing his cheek.

"Do you want to see Vera?" John asked.

"Yeah I do. In our past sessions she helped me realize that I have to take the time to mourn, be it my father, Eddie and even Chris dying, my mother leaving and anything bad that happens. But Clay dying the way he did has thrown me for a loop. I didn't reveal them to the admirals in the debriefing because it wasn't relevant, but he said two things after we were captured."

"Which were?" John asked.

"One, when they took him he said that he would keep them from me as long as he could. We both knew that Harm and the SEALs were out there. It was just a matter of time before they put the pieces together and came to the rescue," Sarah explained.
"And two?" John asked.

"After they threw him back into the shed with me he said that even though you got to me first, he always loved me," Sarah said as she tightened her hold on John as she waited for the explosion.

Instead John surprised her by saying, "I've always known that."

Sarah got up on one elbow to look at her husband to ask him, "How?"

"I could see it at the NATO Ball, then both trips to Russia, the mission into the Sudanese Embassy, the flight to Korea and don't forget that he went to Chechnya to bring Sergei out. He was always there ready to help when we least expected it," John began to explain.

"Of which we were so grateful," Sarah added.

"And that is the crux of the matter. He did those things to help us to gain your gratitude. Once he had that, he was satisfied. I didn't tell you this and I didn't figure it out till later, but when your flight to Korea was hijacked, he was totally afraid that you were going to die. He was like a madman putting us onto whomever we needed to speak with to keep your flight from being shot down."

"I had no idea," Sarah said.

"When the SECNAV forced me to fire him from NCIS, he was as disappointed as I was. He told to tell you he was sorry he let you down. He even hoped we'd be working together again," John said.

"He really hoped for that?" Sarah asked as she came to terms with the fact that two men in her life could have the same feelings for her.

"Yeah he did. That's probably why he asked for you for this mission to Paraguay. He probably knew that I would step in and be part of his team. He wouldn't have done that if he didn't trust you or me. And he trusted you because he was in love with you. Besides him being your back-up that was one of the reasons Harm went with you. While I trust you implicitly and I know nothing romantically would have happened, I couldn't trust Clay to keep his emotional distance to keep you safe," John explained.

"And you weren't jealous? You weren't angry that another man was in love with me?" Sarah asked.

"Of course I was jealous but what good would showing it to him have done? And I certainly wasn't angry. I told you once before that men fall easily in love with you. I was the lucky man that YOU fell in love with. Because I knew you were in love with me, loved me unconditionally, I trusted you. I was secure in knowing that. Clay certainly wasn't a romantic threat to me.," John explained.

Sarah smiled at that then she said, "You know he asked me how you and I made it work. You know with me on missions and deployments away so many times."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him it started with total trust. There has to be no deception, no secrets. I think he was looking forward to starting something nice with Catherine when we came back."

"Uh huh," John finished.

He and Sarah both didn't want to acknowledge that Webb wouldn't get the chance to do that. That's also when they both ran out of things to say. They kissed and settled down and fell asleep holding each other in their favorite positions.
Wednesday, May 28, 2003

1115 Local Time

Arlington National Cemetery

Clayton Webb's wake was held Monday and Tuesday at the Walter Campbell Funeral Home in Alexandria. The Campbell establishment was the default Funeral Home for the CIA. It had only one very large viewing room. When it wasn't hosting CIA wakes, it was hosting various high-level Washington wakes that needed to be thoroughly secured.

The funeral mass was the Wednesday after the Memorial Day holiday. That gave the Campbell morticians time during the holiday weekend to finish the work on Clay's body that the Ortiz morticians started. While they did an admirable job in Paraguay, they only prepared the body to be preserved enough for shipment to the United States. The morticians in Alexandria did the finishing touches so that there could be an open casket at the wake.

It was a crowded affair for both the sessions on the two days. Mrs. Webb invited the Marshalls, Rabbs and Chegwiddens to come to the family session with her and Catherine Gale. She further requested that the Rabbs and Marshalls come to the rest of the sessions.

The other sessions were for the various dignitaries from the CIA, Departments of Defense and State, the Navy, as well as President Bush. All of Clay's CIA colleagues came at the Monday evening session. That was when all the silly stories about Webb were told.

John and Sarah related their experience of their first trip to Russia. "While everyone in Russia was shooting at us, Clay was very worried that we would shoot back at the Russians. When he gave Harm and I each a weapon, he cautioned us, "For God's sake, don't shoot anyone." Ann Marie and Peter Matthews were also there and Ann Marie related how Clay had almost caught the Romanian Princess Alexandra at John's home. There were more stories to tell and despite the somber circumstances everyone enjoyed relating and hearing them.

Surprisingly the funeral mass was at St. Thomas Apostle, the Marshalls' family parish. It was a long motorcade from the church to Arlington. There Clayton Webb was given full military honors with the Twenty One Gun Salute and the Missing Man Fly Over, which Harm was honored to fly as the leader. Then Clayton Webb was laid to rest among those that gave their lives in secret service to their country.

Friday May 30, 2003

1530 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Sarah and John went together to see Vera McCool earlier that morning. She told the Marshalls that what they discussed the first night at home was right on the path for Sarah dealing with Clay's death.

They brought Chloe in with them. It was foolish of anyone to think that after going to Webb's funeral, Chloe wouldn't figure out what really happened. So even though she didn't know the details, Chloe knew Webb died on a CIA Mission, the same mission her mother was on. Chloe had a hard time reconciling that and the fact that Sarah was also very close to dying herself. Just like when John managed to get through the fire on September 11, Vera told Chloe, "Well she's here and safe."
"I know Dr. McCool but what's to stop the Marines from sending mom on another dangerous mission with the CIA or even into combat?" Chloe almost cried.

"While there are no guarantees that the Marines won't send me to do legal work in a dangerous zone, I'm not going into real combat or even on another CIA mission," Sarah replied.

John added, "Your mother's right because after this mission, Admiral LaPorte and I have set into place new rules that if the CIA needs Navy or Marine personnel, they are to go through our office at Naval Intelligence first and not do an end around us to the SECNAV."

"Well that makes me feel better," Chloe replied satisfied. She smiled as she asked, "Were you mad when you found out Mr. Webb asked for mom without telling you first?"

Sarah answered for her husband, "Oh yeah he was. When your father came into Admiral Chegwidden's office, the look on his face was priceless. Mr. Webb was a bit scared that your father was going to break his nose again. I had to get up to calm him down."

John had the good grace to feel a bit embarrassed at his wife's description while Chloe laughed. The session ended on that note. They left her office feeling better, confident that they were appropriately dealing with the aftermath of the mission.

Now Sarah, John, Diane, Harm and Gunny Galindez, were in AJ's office to discuss something that was gravely important.

John was saying, "Sadiq is still out there, lurking like Darth Vader. With him having got a good look at Sarah and Harm, he'll be coming after them for having a hand in shattering his organization. We have no idea of his movements. Before we came home, Hardy said he'd keep an eye out for him at the rails and airports. But seeing how screwed-up his bureau was down there, we don't put much faith in his abilities. I mean Hardy or the rest of the CIA could adequately vet someone to work as a secretary.

Harm continued, "So that being the case we have to go with the fact that Sadiq definitely got out of Paraguay, most likely on that day when we were chasing him. We can't trust anyone else to help keep us safe as we go after him."

"So what do you propose?" AJ asked him.

"I will need Harm to stay in Naval Intelligence as he and Gunny will team up and go about to actively hunt Sadiq down," John declared.

"How long do you think it will take?" AJ asked.

"I don't know sir." Harm answered.

"So what you and Gunny are going to globe trot after him?" AJ asked Harm.

"If that's what it takes to keep our families safe admiral, yes," John answered for Harm.

"The only advantage we have is that Sadiq doesn't know Sarah's or my real names. So when we do official inquiries, it may take him by surprise," Harm added.

AJ couldn't argue with that as he gave in and let Harm go to NI.

After their meeting with AJ, Harm and Diane went to his office to clear it of his personal belongings so that AJ could utilize it for his temporary replacement. While they crossed the bullpen, there was a
farewell celebration going on for Tiner. Jason had graduated college the week they were in Paraguay. Now he was on his way to OCS and law school.

Harm and Diane knew about it and had a surprise for him. Diane called Tiner over to Harm's office door.

"This is for you Jason from Harm and I," Diane said presenting him a gift wrapped box.

When Tiner opened it he was dumfounded, "Mrs. Rabb, Commander, this is too much. I haven't even graduated OCS yet." The present was a Commander's hat complete with the scrambled eggs on the brim.

"That's for when you do become a full commander and we won't accept anything less," Harm said for him and Diane.

"Well thank you just the same," Tiner said.

He became a bit confused at what was an appropriate way to express his gratitude but Diane solved that for him with "Oh come here." She drew him into a friendly hug and quick kiss on the cheek. Harm saved him further embarrassment by not saying the usual 'Hands off my wife'. After Diane finished hugging Tiner, Harm stuck out his hand for him to shake. He added, "Good luck Jason. I hope to see you back here as one of us lawyers."

"That's the plan sir," Tiner said appreciatively.

John and Sarah were standing outside AJ's door watching the celebration. They gave Tiner their own gift, a nice watch inscribed with the date of his graduation on the back.

After Tiner got through with the celebration, he left the bullpen for the last time until he graduated law school.

It didn't take Harm long to clear his personal stuff from his office. As he did when he went to sea, he asked Sarah to keep the model of the Stearman and a few photos in her office.

Just before the Rabbs were ready to leave, AJ came out of his office. He asked Bud to announce, "Attention on Deck!"

When everyone snapped to he called out, "At ease. As you are no doubt going to find out Commander Rabb is leaving us for a very important assignment in Naval Intelligence. We wish him well and to be safe in his mission. Also as Petty Officer Tiner has also left us for the greener pastures of OCS, I am happy and proud to announce that Petty Officer Jennifer Coates has been assigned as my yeoman. I know that you will treat her with the same respect, no belay that, better respect than you treated Tiner. I just hope she makes the coffee better than he did."

There were the expected chuckles from the staff before AJ called, "That is all, carry on!"

To make everything easier on the staff Jen went to stand with the Rabbs. The staff gathered around to wish Harm good luck and congratulations to her.

When that was finished Diane said to Jen, "You and Sergei come to our bungalow in Rehoboth tomorrow for the weekend. Now that you're 'our' family (Diane waved her hands between her, Jen and Harm), there is something vitally important we need to discuss."
Jen and Sergei arrived at the bungalow early that morning. After enjoying the beach in the company of the Rabbs and Marshalls, Jennifer was sitting on one end of the couch in the living room giving Natalie a bottle. Sergei was sitting at the other end of the couch giving David his bottle.

They heard the noise of the parents getting their children cleaned up from their day on the beach. John and Harm took Trey and Patrick out to the outdoor shower to wash the sand off their little bodies while the moms and Chloe had Sarah, Caroline and Samantha in the bathtub inside.

After the kids were cleaned, the adults set out to prepare dinner. All the kids ate what their moms prepared for them under their supervision with Jen's help. Sergei joined John and Harm to prepare dinner for the adults. Sergei showed himself to be a rather competent cook. He stir fried the vegetables while John grilled some steaks and Harm prepared the salad and his own dish of vegetarian fare. Alas he was the only vegetarian among the group.

After dinner and some snuggle time, the kids, including Chloe were finally asleep. The adults convened out on the front porch.

Harm started the discussion that despite the family fun of the day was foremost on everyone's mind.

"Without going too much into classified details, we were down in Paraguay to keep weapons from terrorists. The leader of the terrorists is named Sadiq. He managed to capture Sarah and Clayton Webb. Sadiq got away in the melee of rescuing Sarah and Mr. Webb. Unfortunately Mr. Webb passed away from the injuries he sustained during torture from Sadiq. Now we believe that Sadiq will attempt to come after Sarah and I as we are the only people he saw face to face that got away from him."

"What do you need Jennifer and me to do?" Sergei asked.

Sarah answered, "We are instituting something we're calling the Family Protocols. We all came up with that idea while ago. At the time Harm was meeting you in Russia, a Russian spy turned up on our doorstep."

"Sokol!" Sergei said in a curse. He made a motion of spitting on the floor.

Sarah replied, "Yes but we don't have to worry about him. It's Sadiq we're concerned with now. We need you to be aware that he is out there and be ready to assist us if we need to get the kids out of jeopardy. John's sister Ann Marie and her husband Peter, John's parents Jim and Maureen, Harm's parents Trish & Frank, our mom Deane and Uncle Matt are on board, all ready to help to keep the children safe, even to take them away from DC if we need them to."
"So you need Sergei and me to help with that?" Jen asked.

"Yes that's right. We also need you to keep an eye out for anything or anyone strange at JAG Headquarters. Admiral Chegwidden is aware of the precautions we're taking. He will have the Marines cut orders for you to join the Guard Detail there Sergei. Even you and Jen will be at JAG together, you still won't be in the same chain of command, so don't worry about that. Jen you'll help him out as you've been there long enough to get to know the regulars, the familiar faces. So don't be afraid to alert him to anything or anyone acting strange, asking a lot of questions about us or JAG in general," Sarah told them.

"That makes sense ma'am.." Jen started to say.

Diane interrupted her with, "Jen we're not in the office and you are family, so drop the ma'am's and sirs please."

Jen smiled chagrinned. Still she was thrilled to be part of this large and loving family. She asked, "But we're in the Navy Yard. There are so many layers of admittance, how can this guy get into us?"

"Sadiq is a master of disguise. He has the ability to alter his appearance to blend into any place or situation. I wouldn't put it past him to obtain a uniform and try to gain access to sites like the Navy Yard. We have one advantage in that he doesn't know our real names," Harm explained.

"Let's hope he doesn't delve into the video archives of Trial TV," Sarah said half kidding.

"Unlikely, if he doesn't know our real names, he certainly doesn't know that we're in the military or even that we're lawyers. He's more likely to think we are CIA. They may not screen foreign workers properly, but they're not telling anyone anything," Harm said.

"In the meantime we'll keep an ear on electronic and human intelligence through MTAC for anything on Sadiq," Diane said.

"So it's settled. While Diane, Harm, Gunny and I go about pursuing Sadiq, all the rest of us can do is wait and be ready to act if he attempts anything," John said concluding the discussion.

Everyone nodded in agreement. After that, they all enjoyed the rest of the weekend.

Monday, June 16, 2003

1045 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Naval Yard, SE

During the first Gulf War in 1991, PO Allison LaPorte, Admiral Robert La Porte's daughter, fell out of a medevac helicopter in Kuwait. She spent 12 years living with the Iraqi Bedouins that found her. Last week she was caught stealing an antibiotic from a US military truck.

Being that Bud was recertified for full duty, AJ sent him to Iraq with Eileen Nestor to investigate the incident. When Bud and Eileen interviewed Allison, she told them that after she fell from the helicopter she laid in a ditch with a broken pelvis for three days. After the three days the Al Hadi tribe found and cared for her. But without anyone to translate it was difficult to communicate. Allison had to learn Arabic to be able to tell them where her pain was.

Gradually the son of the Sheik, Jamal Ben Fahad, took a liking to her. He got to know her by
playing backgammon with her. Over the years she fell in love with him, embraced the Muslim faith, took the name Hiba and married him. When the Sheik turned the reins of authority for the tribe over to his son, Allison became the wife of the sheik.

During Allison's time with the Bedouins, a lot was happening in Iraq. After Saddam was defeated in the first Gulf War, he turned his anger onto his people. He undertook a wave of oppression against the Marsh Arabs that lived in the marshes or swamp lands between the Tigris & Euphrates Rivers. Saddam ordered the blocking off the rivers to prevent them from getting water. Allison's tribe of Bedouins got caught up with the conflict between Saddam and the Marsh Arabs. They called that time ten years ago the 'Black Years'.

After she was brought back to the USA, LaPorte went to see her in the brig. It didn't go well though as Allison treated her father very rudely. When he left the brig, LaPorte told Bud, "Do what you need to do to lock her up."

On that note Bud was assigned to prosecute and Eileen was assigned to defend. By the sheer coincidence of the court scheduler, Sarah was the presiding judge.

While Bud was conducting the investigation in Iraq he heard from the Naval Intelligence commanders in Iraq of suspicions that Allison's tribe was spying on the Americans by listening to the American radio transmissions and relaying them to Saddam. When he returned home Bud went to the Pentagon to interview LaPorte about that.

LaPorte told him, "We knew that the Bedouins were funneling information about our movements to Saddam's forces. This was confirmed when our operatives found sophisticated listening devices on some members of the tribe they detained."

Bud then asked LaPorte, "Sir did you have any idea where your daughter was at any time?"

"No lieutenant I did not. When we finally returned to Iraq in 2002, I gave orders for our operatives to be on the lookout for her. I was totally surprised to find out that Allison was traveling with that tribe," LaPorte answered him truthfully.

Bud seemed satisfied by that and he said, "Thank you sir I think I have what I need." He left the Pentagon and went over to NSA Headquarters. There he received recordings of allied radio transmissions from the time the Bedouins were following them.

Now at the Article 32 hearing the witnesses were pretty strong against Allison. Eileen was able to counter them on cross examination by eliciting testimony that while the tribe may have been spying for Saddam, Allison was unaware of it. Eileen even called Allison's father as a witness.

LaPorte testified, "Allison is apolitical and guileless, trying to save the world with love. She became like that after her mother left us."

That worked until Bud cross examined him.

Bud asked, "Sir you said in an earlier interview that you knew that Bedouins were using listening devices and funneling information of US troop movement to Iraqi forces."

"That's correct lieutenant," LaPorte answered.

Bud turned to Sarah and said, "Your honor I obtained recordings of those transmissions from the NSA. I would like to enter them into evidence at this time."

"Has the defense heard these recordings?" Sarah asked.
Eileen stood up and said, "Yes your honor we have."

"Very well Lieutenant you may proceed," Sarah said.

"Thank you your honor," Bud replied. He turned to LaPorte and said, "Admiral LaPorte please listen to the recording and tell me what you hear."

Bud started the recording and he and LaPorte listened for about a minute.

When it finished Bud asked, "Were the transmissions from our forces clear to you admiral?"

"Yes they were lieutenant."

"What language did you hear?"

"English of course," LaPorte answered impatiently.

"Sir if our forces were speaking English and the Bedouins who were funneling the information from those transmissions to Iraqi forces were not, how do you explain how they were understood?"

"I don't know what you're getting at lieutenant," LaPorte answered confused.

Bud answered, "Sir wasn't your daughter Allison the only one in the tribe who could speak English."

LaPorte was floored by the revelation. He said truthfully, "That never occurred to me."

"I have no more questions your honor," Bud told Sarah.

"You are dismissed admiral," Sarah told LaPorte.

He stepped down and as he passed the defense table he gave a look to Allison that said, 'How could you?'

After that, the court was recessed so that Eileen could mount a defense to the revelation. When they came back in Eileen was able to show that Allison brokered a deal with Saddam to open a river. However when he did the water from there was so contaminated that it was brackish and the tribe members all got sick. That was why she needed the antibiotics she was stealing. However Eileen's efforts were to no avail. The evidence against Allison was too strong.

After both sides finished presenting their evidence Sarah did the only thing that the law allowed her as she announced, "Based on the evidence presented at this hearing, the defendant Allison LaPorte is to be bound over for court-martial on the charges of desertion and aiding the enemy. The trial will commence on Wednesday, June 18 at 0900. This court is adjourned." She banged her gavel and walked off the bench.

Later on when LaPorte visited Allison in the brig he told her, "I'll find your husband and tell him that we're looking out for you." Allison thanked him for that kindness.

Tuesday, June 17, 2003

1530 Local Time

Office of Naval Intelligence

Pentagon, Arlington, VA
John was striding purposely from his office to his boss, Admiral La Porte's office. He had an idea what was going to happen there. He would be totally surprised though because what he thought would happen was much, much different than what would actually transpire.

LaPorte's yeoman let John go in without stopping. As he walked in John saw two things. One, LaPorte's yeoman was looking rather despondent and two, LaPorte was packing his personal belongings into a file box.

Without commenting on his observations John stopped in front of LaPorte's desk, stood at attention and said, "Reporting as ordered sir."

"At ease John and have a seat," LaPorte said warily.

After John settled LaPorte asked him, "Tell me how Sarah will run Allison's trial?"

John pursed his lips as he considered his answer, "Sarah will apply the law, keeping the counselors in her judicial box and let the evidence decide the trial."

"Have you spoken to her about it?"

"No sir I have not. That would be unethical," John replied warily.

"Good answer, I expected nothing less. That's why when I handed Sheffield my resignation first thing this morning, I recommended you to be my replacement," LaPorte told him.

John was completely floored by that. He was expecting LaPorte's inquiries about the trial, but seeing him packing his belongings, then hearing of the resignation and then his recommending John as his replacement totally floored him.

"He asked LaPorte, "But sir, why do you think you need to resign? You certainly didn't know that Allison was with the Bedouins that were spying for Saddam."

"That's certainly true. But there is another perception."

"What's that sir?"

"One where why didn't a high ranking naval officer, the father of another sailor that was missing for twelve years, put more effort to find her once he had the overall authority to do so."

"Admiral that is certainly not true. You told me of Allison missing and the efforts you were undertaking to find her as soon as we came into NI. I mean what the hell did they want you to do, your own grid search of the whole damn country?"

LaPorte snorted at that as he said, "Be that as it may, but a lot of the senators who were talking to Sheffield are parents as well. So you can understand their outrage."

John had to nod at that but he said, "Sir wouldn't you think I'd be painted with the same brush?"

"Not necessarily. Sheffield told me that those same senators never brought your name up. While in1991 it was front page news that Allison, the daughter of a naval officer, was missing somewhere in Iraq, you were certainly occupied elsewhere as a SEAL Team leader and then with your injury to pay much attention to that at the time. Remember you just said that I only told you of her situation when you came on board here," LaPorte explained.

"That makes a lot of sense. So when does your resignation take affect sir?"
"At the end of the month, in the meantime Sheffield is submitting a list of names with yours at the top, to the Senates' selection committee. Sheffield promised me that he would ensure that you get a fair shake. He said he would like the hearings to commence before Congress recesses for the 4th of July holiday. Hopefully you should know before then."

"Well that's good to hear. Still I hope my inexperience doesn't show."

"You know Captain you can be very annoying at times," LaPorte snapped at John in exasperation.

"Sir?" John asked.

"You have that irritating habit of selling yourself short. I would suggest that you adjust your attitude accordingly. People in congress like to see someone that is self assured and confident, someone who believes that he can do the job better than anyone else. Between NCIS and here you ran many successful operations that netted a lot of convictions and a lot of very useful intelligence. Look at those operations in Russia and this last one in Paraguay. Granted the selection of your wife to the team was shoved down your throat, but you picked the other people that would give you the best chance at success. That's why Grafton and Magnum recommended you as my deputy?"

John smiled at what LaPorte said. He knew that self deprecation in the Navy was a handicap. He said, "I'll certainly keep that in mind when I speak to the committee."

"See that you do Captain," LaPorte said. He softened as he said, "Now take the rest of the day and go tell your lovely wife of the news. I'm sure she'll be thrilled."

"Thank you sir I will," John said as he stood up to leave.
Chapter 106

Timing Is Everything
Chapter 106
Tuesday, July 1, 2003
1130 Local Time
Secretary of the Navy Office
Pentagon, Arlington, VA

After the usual hearings and the requisite time of deliberation, the Senate selected John to command Naval Intelligence on June 25 and his deputy on June 30. He was promoted two grades to O-8, Rear Admiral upper half, from below the zone. While frocking to that grade was authorized, his official date of promotion and appointment was today. Now he, Sarah, their children, the Rabbs and Matthews and their children as well as John parents were in SECNAV Sheffield's conference room for the swearing in ceremony.

With Natalie and David asleep in a pram being rocked by Chloe, Maureen and Jim kept the Marshall children in order. Sarah proudly held the family bible for John to lay his hand as he was sworn in.

"I, John Patrick Marshall having been appointed Admiral in the United States Navy, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the office of Commander of Naval Intelligence. So help me God."

Sheffield shook John's hand and turned to Sarah saying, "This next part is yours Colonel Marshall."

"Aye, aye sir," Sarah said enthusiastically. She stepped up to John and wrapping her arms loosely around his neck, gave him a heartfelt kiss appropriate for the formal setting.

When they broke apart John said, "I love that we keep doing this."

Sarah giggled and there were the indulgent chuckles and smiles as John turned to welcome his children into his embrace and then he accepted congratulations from the rest of his extended family.

After the ceremony they all adjourned to the reception set up in the special event dining room. There Sheffield asked John, "So admiral when does Captain Pike report for duty as your deputy?"

"Well Mr. Secretary, Meg will be here Monday, July 7, the official date of her promotion to Captain. Right now she is with her family visiting her mom in Texas for the 4th of July holiday. She only just got selected by the Captains' promotion board on June 27. When I heard that frocking was authorized, I didn't hesitate to ask her to be my deputy. She was thrilled to accept and I put her appointment request before the Senate the next day. She was confirmed by them yesterday," John explained.

"Good, glad to see you're not letting the grass grow under your feet. I'm sure we are leaving your agency in good hands," Sheffield said.
"Thank you sir," John answered.

"In the mean time I'll let you go to and enjoy this party with your lovely family and the holiday yourself," Sheffield said before he turned to leave.

"Thank you sir," John said shaking his hand once again.

As John joined his family for the lunch Sheffield did the usual rounds before he walked out of the party.

A bit later John and Harm were sitting alone as their wives took the babies into the Ladies Room to feed and change them.

John asked, "So Harm are you okay with me picking Meg as my deputy? She outranks you now."

Harm shrugged his acceptance as he answered, Oh I'm fine with that, though I wonder why my name hasn't been before the Captain's Board yet."

"Give it another year. You've only been a Commander for three years. She's been one since just after Caroline was born in 1999, that's four years. You have a good record and have been in JAG since you graduated law school. It's a good thing you didn't change designations when you went back to flying," John explained.

"Yeah there's that," Harm said reassured.

John changed the subject as he asked, "So what have you and Gunny heard of Sadiq?"

"We heard from the DEA that he may be in Mexico. Victor and I are going down there to see what we can see," Harm answered.

"Great, now let's get the families together and go home," John said patting Harm's back.

"Aye, aye Admiral," Harm said cheekily.

John smirked indulgently at him.

The family left the Pentagon shortly after that

Friday, July 4, 2003

1645 Local Time

Marshall Cabana, Sun Point Beach Club

Atlantic Beach, NY

John was on the rear deck of his parents' cabana sitting in a lounge chair holding David in his arms and giving him a bottle. He had on the usual beach wear, NCIS tee shirt and a bathing suit.

Sarah was so happy to see that David didn't fuss between taking his milk from the bottle or the breast. Being that was the case Sarah expressed as much milk as she could so that John could enjoy being close to his son. Sarah also took advantage of their bonding time to devote more time to her other children.

As David finished, John put him onto his shoulder to burp him. Just as David let go a good belch, Patrick came onto the deck from the sand. Right behind him was Caroline, Chloe and Jim and
Maureen Marshall. They were all coming back from their time at the ocean. The two youngsters each had a pail full of seashells that they collected. While Caroline only had sand caked on her feet and ankles, Patrick was a walking sand bar. He had practically taken the whole beach along with him as he walked.

"What were you guys up to?" John asked the group.

"Well while we girls went about collecting seashells, you father and son decided to build sand castles. When it was time to come back here, Patrick took great joy in diving onto them to knock them down," Maureen announced.

"I think he's going to be a demolition engineer," Jim Marshall said smiling down at his grandson.

After he nodded his head in agreement with his grandmother, Patrick declared, "Daddy I'm tired."

John laughed as he said, "It's no wonder what with all the digging you did. Okay let me get David's diaper changed. Then we'll clean the sand off you so you can settle down out here in the other chaise lounge, okay buddy?" John suggested as he got up with his second son in his arms.

At that Sarah came out from the front of the cabana where she was relaxing in the relative solitude of the end of the cabana row, where the Marshall's was located. She was wearing a bright pink bikini with a matching sarong skirt. The filmy piece of fabric was knotted at her hips.

Taking her second son from John, Sarah said, "Here let me have David and you get our little sand hog cleaned up. After you two finish in the shower, Chloe and Caroline can get cleaned."

"Aye,' aye ma'am," John replied as he took Patrick into the shower. After he was done they walked down to the lavatory at the end of the court. When they returned, Patrick lay down on the lounge next to John's. He covered his son with a large dry towel, gave him a kiss and settled onto the other lounge chair. Patrick was asleep in no time.

Pretty soon Sarah bought David out. She set her second sleeping son into the pram and went to lay down on the lounge with her husband.

"Where are Chloe and Caroline?" John asked.

"They went to the playground. Caroline wasn't ready to go into the shower yet. Besides she wasn't as dirty as our son," Sarah replied nodding toward Patrick.

As he tightened his hold on his Sarah John asked, "Where are my mom and dad?"

"They went over to their friend's cabana. Your mom said we needed a bit of alone time," Sarah replied.

"I couldn't agree more," John said as he let Sarah snuggle deeper into his body.

As she sunk into his embrace Sarah thought of the talk she had with Maureen when they were walking on the beach earlier that morning.

Flashback

Six hours earlier

Maureen and Sarah were walking along the water. Sarah was wrestling with what she and John decided to do to protect their children.
"I don't know mom. I don't want the kids to think we are abandoning them," Sarah said.

At that Maureen stopped and turned to face her daughter in law. She took hold of her shoulders and said, "Sarah Mackenzie-Marshall you are the strongest woman that I know. You have to be to go what you've gone through. First dealing with your uncle and his band of fanatics, then having Clay die in your arms.

I'm the administrator of a nursing home and the only thing I need to worry about is whether Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so Alzheimer's' Patient wanders out alone. You have to worry about catching a stalking terrorist while still protecting your family. You are doing the right thing in getting the kids out of DC. Caroline and Patrick will love it here, Chloe will love it in Kentucky learning how to ride horses and David is still too young to understand that someone other than his mom is taking care of him. So don't you ever feel guilty at doing what you need to do to keep your family safe."

Maureen paused and smiled before she continued, "Besides if I know my son, he's got something planned to stop that character. Sadiq doesn't stand a chance."

Sarah had to laugh as she thought to herself, "He sure does. I just hope it works."

With that Sarah wrapped Maureen into a grateful hug saying, "Thanks mom, I just needed to hear that from someone else."

"You're welcome dear," Maureen replied.

They hooked their arms together and walked back to the cabana.

Before they climbed onto the rear deck Maureen said, "Later this afternoon Jim and I are going to a friend's cabana for cocktails. That will give you and John some 'alone time' you'll need to reassure each other about what you planned."

"Thanks mom," Sarah said in tearful gratitude as they climbed up on the deck.

End flashback

"John, do you think we're doing the right thing with the kids?"

"Yeah I do. After what Harm and Victor found out in Mexico Wednesday, it's the only thing we can do. They just missed Sadiq by one day. That means he's either on his way to DC or he's there already. So getting the kids up here right after my promotion ceremony was the right thing to do."

"Yeah I suppose. What do you think the kids will think?"

"Like Mom said Caroline and Patrick are going to love spending the summer here. It will give them a chance to bond with their Nana and Pop-pop. Chloe's going to love being on the Barkley's farm in Kentucky. Remember Emma has been telling us that her sister Chelsea wanted Chloe to come there so they could ride together. Emma's mom said she'd teach Chloe how to ride competitively. Now that she's sixteen, it's the perfect time. She can continue that when she comes home. Northern Virginia is the perfect horse country for that. She can't wait to get on the plane Sunday."

"And what about David?"

"Well you know Ann Marie is going to take care of him on the Rabb Farm in Belleville with Gram and Natalie. Her kids, Andy and Diane are going to love it there to."

Sarah sighed as she asked, "Have you heard from Harm and Diane yet?"
"Yeah they got their kids out to LaJolla yesterday to celebrate the holiday on the Burnetts' yacht. They're going to leave the older kids there until Labor Day or until we catch Sadiq," John answered.

Sarah sighed again as she said, "I can't wait until this shit with Sadiq is over. Then we can get our kids home and live semi-normal lives."

"Amen to that," John said, pulling his Sarah tighter to him.

Friday, July 18, 2003

1445 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Jen agreed to be Loren's chauffeur to Bethesda in the event Loren went into labor while at the office. Loren didn't think that was going to happen as AJ expressly told her that she was to start her maternity leave two weeks before her due date of July 30. Today was to be her last day at work. To keep herself from getting bored out of her skull, AJ agreed to have her handle FOIA requests while waiting at home. Jennifer volunteered to shuttle between the office and Loren's home to exchange the completed requests for new requests.

Now Loren was putting some of them into her briefcase as she got ready to leave. AJ allowed her to secure early for her last day.

Just as she turned to leave she felt a very queer sensation in her abdomen, then there was a great gush of water down her leg that puddled at her feet.

"Damn it junior you were supposed to wait until we got home," Loren said as she looked down to her abdomen.

Oddly enough she didn't feel any labor pain. Still in all Eve Baldwin's instructions were explicit, "If your water breaks get your six to the hospital ASAP."

So with that in mind, Loren opened the door to her office and seeing PO Janine Ryerson passing by, got her attention saying, "Mrs. Ryerson would you please call housekeeping and have them clean up the spill on the floor in my office. I'm going to go into Admiral Chegwidden's office to tell him I'm going to the hospital."

Janine looked down and saw the slight staining on the front of Loren's white skirt and drew the right conclusions saying, "Aye ma'am I'll take care of everything. Do you need me to get you a ride?"

"No thank you, Coates will help me with that," Loren replied.

Aye ma'am," Janine replied then went to get a housekeeper.

Loren left her briefcase on her desk and picking up her purse and cover calmly walked over to AJ's office and was imminently grateful that Jen was there. She told her, "It's time."

To her credit Jen didn't ask any questions and didn't panic. She just picked up the phone and called into AJ's office. When the call connected she said, "Admiral I'm taking Lt. Austen to Bethesda, it's time."

Loren was mystified and shocked at the expression on that appeared on Jen's face and the next
sentence out of her mouth, "Oh my God, you're kidding!"

At that AJ came out of his office saying, "No I wasn't kidding. Sydney's in labor as well. Let's go you two. We'll go in my car."

"Aye sir," both Loren and Jen chorused.

On the way through the bullpen AJ saw Janine supervising the clean-up in Loren's office and said, "Mrs. Ryerson, take over for Coates. I'm going to Bethesda, Sydney's in labor as well."

That declaration was overheard by everyone in the bullpen. They all stood up and broke into cheers and applause.

AJ smirked happily and let it wash over him as he walked to the double doors. As he reached them he turned back and said, "As you were. Thank you all and get back to work."

The staff bent back to work but with smiles on all their faces.

Four hours later

Navy Medical Center
Bethesda, MD

If someone was in the parking lot when the trio reached AJ's Escalade, they would have laughed their sixes off. After she and AJ got Loren settled into the back seat, Jen had put her hand out and ordered AJ, "Give me the keys Admiral."

"I will drive Coates," AJ practically growled at her.

"No sir you will not. You can court martial me later for insubordination but I will only say this once. Get your ass in the back seat with Loren, sir."

AJ looked at her stunned. As he took a breath to rebuke her Jen continued.

"You're the one that knows how to deliver babies, I don't. In case Loren goes into active labor, you need to be there to play Mike Piazza," Jen calmly explained.

AJ had to agree with that. He did say facetiously as he got into the back seat with Loren, "We'll talk about your tone at your court martial Coates."

Yes sir, just as long as the lieutenant will defend me, sir." Jen replied nonplussed as she pulled the seat forward and started the car.

"I didn't hear a thing Admiral. It's your word against hers," Loren replied.

"Uh huh I figured that's how you would play it," AJ sighed smiling. Inwardly he was thinking that he was very glad he wasn't driving as nervous as he was.

Now he was past nervous and onto exasperation. While Sydney went into labor, it was a long one. Like Loren, Sydney's water broke while she was on the job. And like Loren she wasn't dilated enough to deliver. AJ was walking her around the maternity ward. Right beside them was Loren and Bobby Austen.

After Loren was admitted, Jen called Bobby at his office in the J. Edgar Hoover Building to tell him Loren was in labor. Bobby wasted no time in getting to Bethesda. Both ladies appearances were far
beyond the Navy's uniform code. They were disheveled, sweaty and downright miserable looking.

Sydney looked across at Loren and said, "First one that gets the checkered flag buys the drinks."

Panting through her latest contraction Loren replied, "You're on"

They passed the waiting area and saw a sleeping Jennifer Coates. She was leaning precariously over on one of the very uncomfortable looking plastic chairs. Loren gathered herself a bit and urged Bobby to walk her over to Jen.

Jen started awake when Loren nudged her shoulder. "Uh-mm Loren did you have the baby yet?"

Loren smiled and stood straight and gathered her hospital gown around her baby bump saying, "Not yet, but any hour now though. Jen why don't you go home, it's gonna be awhile."

"Okay fine I was just waiting for Francesca to get here. She was up in New York when I called her for the Admiral. I called Danny as well he's on his way from Norfolk."

At that AJ broke in saying, "They're already here and I sent them to my place to wait. It's only 20 minutes from here. Why don't you take Loren's advice and go home. Even the Roberts, Rabbs and Marshalls left after they came in. They know what this whole process is like."

"Okay, okay but you two better promise to call me as soon as either or both of you deliver," Jen admonished them.

"Aye, aye ma'am," Sydney said with a mock salute. That was cut short as she doubled over with a strong contraction. That was followed by Loren experiencing the same thing.

"That's it I'm invoking 'Admiral's Privilege. We're going back to delivery. I don't care who gets there first, I'm buying the drinks," AJ said as he led everyone away.

Unbeknownst to the two expectant couples, Jen just sat back down in the chairs to wait. She picked up her cellphone and called, "Francesca, it's getting very close. Yes any minute now I think. Right, you're welcome. I'll see you and Danny later."

When Loren and Sydney got back to the labor room that they both shared, Eve Baldwin came in to examine them, Sydney first.

"Okay Sydney, you're dilated enough but you're not crowning yet. It will still be a few minutes, at least within the hour."

As she examined Loren she said, "Oh boy you're ready to go. The baby's crowning. Sydney, I'm handing you over to Ben Steinman. Loren's ready to give birth now."

As Loren was wheeled out of the room Sydney nodded her head as another contraction hit her. She wasn't worried as during her time serving at Bethesda, she got to know all the doctors and knew Dr. Ben Steinman well.

On the way to the delivery room Eve instructed Loren, "Okay go through your breathing. I don't want you to push until I get you onto the delivery table."

Loren nodded as Bobby walked alongside holding her hand. They arrived in the delivery room and Loren was transferred over. The nurses set up the draping and had all the instruments Eve would need standing by.
Eve scrubbed in and donned the surgical garments and set herself in front of Loren's splayed knees. She said, "Okay everything looks great, the head slipped out a bit. Loren I want you to take a deep breath. When the next contraction hits I want you to push. Bobby I want you to count to ten along with her."

Loren nodded and taking a breath and started to push as the contraction hit. While Bobby counted, she could actually feel the slight tearing of her vaginal walls as the baby's head slipped out.

"Okay Loren stop pushing, the head is clear." Eve used the aspirator and sucked out the nose and mouth. Immediately there was a faint cry as the baby took its first breath. Loren's eyes welled up and tears started streaming down her face.

"Okay mom you have to push again we have to clear the shoulders. After that it's easy," Eve instructed.

As Loren took a deep breath as Bobby counted down from ten, Eve slipped her finger in to help clear the shoulders. Then in a rush the baby was revealed and as she looked up at the clock Eve announced, "It's a girl, time of birth, 2125."

Loren started crying with the cessation of pain and the joy of having a little girl.

"You guys pick a name for her yet?" Eve asked.

"Antonia Teresa Austen," Loren announced. We can call her Toni.

Same time

Adjacent delivery room

Just as Loren was being transferred onto the delivery table, Dr. Steinman came in and examined Sydney. He was a middle aged man about Sydney's age with a short beard and short curly hair shot with gray. He had a nice way about him, which AJ instantly appreciated.

He said, "And we have another one ready to go. Sydney you're crowning as well. What are you in a race with your friend?"

"Uh huh, last one done buys dinner Ben," Sydney joked through the pain.

"Okay then let's get you into delivery as well," Ben said as the nurses came in and pushed Sydney's bed out.

They went into the room next to Loren's. After Ben scrubbed and gowned, he sat in the receiving position. Sydney's baby was crowning rather fast as well.

"Okay Sydney, take a good breath and when I say, dad you count down from ten while Sydney pushes. Okay now, PUSH!" Ben called.

AJ counted down from ten while Sydney pushed for all she was worth. She stopped when Ben called "STOP!"

"Oh God I'm so tired," Sydney complained.

"Come on doctor, you've done this before," AJ said trying to encourage her.

In between pants Sydney said, "Twenty three- years ago- and it was a- Caesarian birth."
"Well we're almost there Sydney. Just one more push. Take a deep breath and push, now.

As AJ counted again, Sydney pushed. She felt the head clear and then Ben said, "Alright take a short break the head is all the way out. Let me suction."

Ben did the usual and soon this delivery was filled with the cries of a newborn.

"Okay one more push to clear the shoulders," Ben instructed.

Sydney gave the required push to birth her new, "Boy, it's a boy, time of birth 2125," Ben announced.

As Sydney cried for joy, AJ wasn't too far behind as the nurses handed him the scissors to have him, "Cut the cord admiral."

Soon the afterbirth was done and the nurses were cleaning Sydney and her and AJ's new son.

"What do you want to name him?" Ben asked.

"Michael Arthur Chegwidden, we can call him Mike or Mac," Sydney announced.

I'm sure Sarah Marshall would be thrilled to have another Little Mac around," AJ said. Tears rolled down his eyes as he took hold of their son.

Pretty soon he walked out with him and met Bobby outside the delivery rooms. In scene right out of the movie, "Father of the Bride-II" the two new fathers exchanged the good news and the names.

"Maybe we can get them married," Bobby proposed.

AJ just gave a good laugh at that, which Bobby joined. Soon they were met by Jen, Francesca and Danny. They all cooed and gushed over the two newborns.

Same Time

Interstate 64 outside of

Lexington, Kentucky

Sadiq was driving a car that he acquired from one of the coyotes that helped him cross the border near Calexico, CA three days before. To avoid being detained, he took extraordinary precautions in traveling. He only drove at night and kept to the posted speed limits. He also put his disguise abilities to good use. He dyed his hair blond and used pancake makeup to hide the dark tint of his skin. He looked nothing like he did in Paraguay.

As he drove along, unbeknownst to him, he passed within 5 miles of someone he would have loved to take his revenge out on. But he was satisfied that when he got to Washington DC, he would use the Arab community living there to ferret out the information on the infidels that foiled his dreams of jihad.

Speaking out loud in the empty car he swore, "Soon very soon you and your friends will be fully known to me Sarah, whoever you are. Then I will have my revenge."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 107

Monday, July 21, 2003

0830 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

During the weekend AJ was too preoccupied with being a new father that he told Jen to wait until Monday until she notified the staff of his son's birth. He already had standing orders prepared naming Turner as the acting JAG for two weeks of his paternity leave. All Jen had to do was add the date.

Loren went along with that as well. She and Sydney shared the same semi-private room and only saw Meg and her husband Bob, the Rabbs, Marshalls and Roberts when they came to the hospital on Saturday. Loren's parents came down on Sunday to see their first grandchild.

Now as Jen walked through the bullpen she was inundated with the staff asking her questions. She held off answering them saying, "Please wait and let me tell everything once. I have things I need to do first."

She saw PO2 Janine Ryerson and asked her, "Please, when Commander Turner arrives, ask him to come to the admiral's office. The admiral has orders for him."

"No problem Jen, he won't even pass 'Go' and collect his $200.00," Janine said with a twinkle.

"That's my girl," Jen replied as she got herself settled at her desk.

It wasn't very long before Sturgis came to her desk and cheekily said, "Commander Turner reporting as ordered, Petty Officer."

Jen smiled and said, "Commander, here are you orders from Admiral Chegwidden. They outline all you need to know."

Sturgis scanned them and said, "Very well Petty Officer I'll assume these duties forthwith. Can you give me information of his and Mrs. Chegwidden's baby as well as Lt. Austen's baby?"

"Yes sir but if you don't mind, the staff has flooded me with those same questions. If you would call the bullpen to order, I'll only have to make the appropriate announcement once," Jen respectfully requested.

"Very well petty officer," Sturgis pleasantly acquiesced. He then let her precede him out to the bullpen where he called, "Attention on Deck!"

When everyone came attention he said, "At ease and please listen up. Petty Officer Coates has news of the newest members of our JAG family."

"Okay first off Michael Albert Chegwidden was born to Admiral & Mrs. Sydney Chegwidden on Friday, July 18 at 2125 hours. He weighed in at 7 pounds 8 ounces, at 23 inches long. Mother and
Michael are doing well."

There was a smattering of applause and soft exclamations of very nice before Sturgis called their attention back with, "And we have news of Lt. Austen's new baby as well. Petty officer if you will."

"Right sir, Antonia Teresa Austen was born to Mr. & Mrs. Robert and Loren-Singer Austen also on Friday, July 18. And get this, also at 2125 hours," Jen announced.

There were gasps of surprise and "wow what are the odds" before Jen continued, "Loren and Antonia are also doing well. Antonia weighed in at 8 pounds, 10 ounces at 24 inches long. Both mothers request that if you would like to send cards, please send them to this office and I will ensure they get them. That's all I have."

After Sturgis called, "company dismissed!" the staff broke out into applause before they disbursed.

On their way back to AJ's office Sturgis asked, "Petty officer, do you have any word as to when Commander Rabb will be returning to JAG? With him TAD to NI and now Lt. Singer-Austen out for the next six weeks, we're a bit shorthanded."

"No sir I do not. Also sir I have been instructed by Admiral Marshall and those orders have been confirmed by Admiral Chegwidden to report any questions concerning Commander Rabb and Lt. Colonel Marshall to Admiral Marshall," Jen told him.

Sturgis pursed his lips and said, "Very well when you report my inquiries to Admiral Marshall would you please tell him that as acting JAG I need to know when we'll be fully staffed," Sturgis commanded.

"Aye sir," Jen said. She had the grace to wait until Sturgis turned toward his office to bring his work into AJ's office before she picked up the phone and dialed John's Pentagon office. Also she wisely bit her tongue before she let slip what went through her head, 'No you pompous windbag, Admiral Marshall will tell YOU what YOU need to know.'

When she connected with CPO Pierce, and then got John on the line, he asked, "Jennifer, what's up?"

Knowing John used her first name because she was going to be family, she still wisely stayed in her office mode when she replied, "Sir, Commander Turner has been appointed acting JAG while Admiral Chegwidden is out on paternity leave. The first thing he asked and said he had a need to know was when Commander Rabb will be returning to JAG."

"Oh he did huh, put him on the line please Jennifer," John responded tersely.

Just at the moment, Sturgis was returning to AJ's office. Jen spoke up and said, "Sir, Admiral Marshall on the line for you."

Sturgis wanted to say, "That was quick", but instead said, "I'll take it inside petty officer."

When he picked up the line he didn't have a chance to offer any greeting before John said, "Commander Turner, meet me at the Pentagon's Ground Zero café at 1145 hours. I will inform you on what you need to know," John commanded.

Sturgis could only say, "Aye, aye sir." before John hung the phone up.

1145 Hours
Sturgis was, if anything, habitually punctual. He spotted John at the booth near the back of the café as he stood up when Sturgis walked into the door.

John smiled and shook Sturgis' hand and waved him to sit opposite him.

John spoke in a normal conversational tone as he said, "Don't worry about the adjacent patrons overhearing us. These booths are made to keep all normal tones in." He indicated the sheets of decorated Plexiglas rising from the top of the bench backs to the ceiling.

"Sir I don't wish to step on any toes, but as acting JAG, I need to know whom I can assign as counsel when the need arises."

"I can understand that commander, but put the idea that Commander Rabb is returning to JAG anytime soon out of your mind. He is doing something vitally important for NI and me. I will say that if you hear of anyone else asking about Harm or my wife, you are to inform me forthwith. I also instructed Petty Officer Coates to keep you in the loop if she hears anyone asking about them as well. That way you're not kept entirely in the dark and treated like a mushroom," John explained with a smile.

Sturgis had to smile at that as John continued, "Also I do know of at least one person who will be reporting to you this afternoon, so half of your personnel problem will be solved," John explained smiling.

"Oh can you give me any clue? Is he or she someone known to us?" Sturgis asked.

"Well at least she's known to me," John said. His smile told Turner that he would have to wait and be surprised.

"Now that we got that out of the way, would you like to order, I'm buying," John said pleasantly.

1355 Hours

JAG Headquarters

When Sturgis returned to JAG he was met by Jen at the bullpen entrance who told him, "Sir we have a new officer reporting for duty. Here is her file."

As he walked through Sturgis scanned the file saying, "Impressive, an Annapolis graduate, first in her class there and at Stanford Law, member of the California and New York Bars, high fit-rep marks from her postings in LSO Norfolk and then at Naples from Captain Simms, the Force Judge Advocate, Europe." He saw one other thing, but he kept still about it.

When he walked into Jen's office she saw a blonde 27 year old Navy lieutenant sitting with her cover on her knees. When she stood at attention to greet Sturgis, she was just as tall as his five feet, eight inches.

"Sir Lieutenant Catherine McMahon reporting as ordered."

"Lieutenant, step into the office here," Sturgis said shaking her hand and then allowing her to precede him in. He had enough class to not call AJ's office his.

As they went in Sturgis went to sit behind the big desk said, "At ease and have a seat. I'm impressed with your file. Tell me how much litigation have you done?"
"Plenty sir, I have a few convictions and defense wins under my belt," McMahon answered.

"That's fine because you'll be doing a lot of that here. Do you also have Legal Assistance and Administration experience?"

"Yes sir at LSO Norfolk. I was told that Lt. Colonel Marshall made that a mandatory first posting when she was named JAG Chief of Staff."

"That's correct, speaking of which it shows in your file that you have recommendations from Admiral and Lt. Colonel Marshall. How are you acquainted with them?"

"Sir Admiral Marshall is my godfather. He and my mom Rose Mary McMahon are cousins. Mom is a retired Master Chief Petty Officer as well as my uncle, her brother, Peter Tierney."

"So the Navy runs in your blood," Sturgis commented favorably.

"Yes sir, it was really special that when I graduated Annapolis in 1997, mom was the first non-com to render officer's honors and salute me," Cathy said with pride.

"I'm sure it was, so it was your mom and two uncles that inspired you to enroll at Annapolis?" Sturgis asked.

"Yes sir and it was my Uncle John that further inspired me to go into law when he defended Uncle Pete on a case. Uncle John was the one who recommended me to Admiral Chegwidden," Cathy answered, not afraid to mention her bonifides.

"Well I see that you'll fit in well here. Still I have to note that because of the Rules of Professional Responsibility you will not be able to appear in court before your aunt, Lt. Colonel Marshall," Sturgis reminded her.

"That's not a problem sir, there are plenty other judges," Cathy replied smiling.

Standing up and going around the desk he shook Cathy's hand and said, "I'm sure Petty Officer Coates has arranged an office for you and if you'd like to, you can take the rest of the afternoon to get settled, get your voicemail set up and maybe visit your Aunt Sarah up in the Judiciary chambers. We all usually get here at 0800. We'll start you fresh tomorrow at the 0900 Staff call."

"Aye sir and thank you," Cathy said shaking his hand before she turned and left the office.

After Jen put her in one of the smaller rear offices, Cathy did take advantage to set up her voicemail and other things. Then she went up to the third floor to visit Sarah.

When she entered Sarah's chambers she stood in front to Emma's desk and formally said, "Lt. Catherine McMahon to see Lt. Colonel Marshall, chief."

Emma looked down at the phone to see if Sarah was available. She saw the red light of Sarah's private extension blink out and then she buzzed in.

"Colonel, Lt. Catherine McMahon to see you ma'am. Yes ma'am," Emma said.

Before Emma hung up Sarah burst out of the room and moving to Cathy with open arms practically shouted, "Cathy how are you?" She enveloped Cathy in a good hug.

"I'm great Aunt Sarah, how about you?" Cathy said as she returned the hug.

"Oh you know work and family keeps me busy," Sarah replied.
"How are the kids?" Cathy asked, but after seeing Sarah's smile waver, thought better of it.

"Oh they're fine. The little ones are visiting John's parents for the summer and Chloe is at Emma's family farm in Kentucky learning to ride. Still come on inside and I'll tell you what's going on. Emma will you join us please," Sarah said as she led them into her office.

Inside Sarah told Cathy about Sadiq being after them, the family protocols and to inform her if she heard anyone asking about her or John or even Harm and Diane.

"Wow you guys are really going after this Sadiq. Still if I know Uncle John, he's loaded for bear. That snot Sadiq doesn't stand a chance," Cathy said.

"That's what Maureen said," Sarah affirmed. Sarah then asked, "Where are you staying?"

"At Uncle Peter's place in Arlington, I'll be there until I find a nice apartment," Cathy said.

"Well I have one lined up for you already in Georgetown. I just found it that it became available so I put a deposit down on it when John told me you were coming to work here. It used to be mine before I married your uncle," Sarah said.

"Oh that's great Aunt Sarah. We can look at it tomorrow after work," Cathy gushed.

"Alright after you secure for the day, come to my house for dinner," Sarah said. Cathy agreed as Sarah wrote directions to Florida Avenue.

2045 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

After dinner John, Sarah and Cathy had a little talk.

"So your credentials at JAG passed muster?" John asked.

"Yes Uncle John they did. I heard that Captain Simms in Naples vouched for me when Commander Turner called him to verify my fit reps," Cathy answered.

"Trust Sturgis to do the expected," Sarah said smiling ruefully.

"Are you already settled into the apartment?" John asked.

"Yes I am. I went over it with my scope. It has the view that you need," Cathy said.

"Good now all you need to do is your job at JAG and be ready to move when we need you to. Just don't blow your cover," John told her.

"No problem Uncle John. After all I'm taking care of family," Cathy assured him with a coquettish smile.

Cathy McMahon was not at JAG just to become another attorney. She was there on another assignment. What the Marshalls and even the Rabbs knew, but everyone else, including Jen and Sergei, at JAG didn't know was that Cathy was an agent in NCIS.

Yes she was related to John as she said. Yes she graduated Annapolis and Stanford Law and passed the bar for New York and California. Yes she did serve in Norfolk, but not in the LSO, but in NCIS
as an agent under Tim McGee's supervision. Cathy was also in Naples and her CO was Captain Simms and he was the Force Judge Advocate of Europe, but he was also the Navy Intelligence and NCIS Liaison for the Mediterranean Region which meant that he also ran NCIS operations for that region.

Also Cathy really was inspired to go into law by her godfather Uncle John. It was just that when he was assistant director he recruited her for NCIS, after she served her first posting after law school in the legal department under Diane at Naval Intelligence. That part of her resume was purposely left off.

While John had Sarah and Harm trained to be snipers, he also sent Cathy there to train to be a spotter.

Yes he had something planned for Sadiq. Now all the players on the good guys' side had to do was wait for him to show up in DC. John even had a plan for that.

Tuesday, July 22, 2003

1025 Local Time

Office of Naval Intelligence

Pentagon, Arlington, VA

"Harrison what can you do for me," John said into the phone. He had Deputy CIA Director Harrison Kershaw on the line.

"I need a pilot for a couple of missions. The one I had, had a car accident and landed in the hospital," Kershaw told him.

"Let me guess who you have in mind," John said grinning.

Since Clayton Webb died, it was so much easier dealing with the CIA. They were more transparent and even polite when they asked NI for something.

"Commander Rabb is at the top of my list," Kershaw replied. John could almost hear the grin in his voice.

"How soon do you need him?" John asked.

"Tomorrow would be nice. He can come to our field and be flown out from there," Kershaw said.

"He's sitting right here with me, you can ask him. I'll put you on speaker," John said pushing the button.

"Go ahead Harrison," John said.

"Commander Rabb I need a pilot for a couple of missions. I can't go into details over the phone, but I can assure you that all we have planned for you is flying. Are you interested?" Kershaw asked.

Harm looked at John and John nodded. Harm spoke up and said, "Okay I'll meet you tomorrow morning."

"Thank you commander," Kershaw said with a sigh.

"Harrison before you go I want assurances that when I need Harm for the assignment he's working
here for, I can have him," John said.

"You got it John, just so long as we can be in on the kill," Kershaw requested.

"No problem," John said with a smile.

"Talk to you later John and thanks," Kershaw said as he hung up.

John hit his own disconnect button and said, "Okay Harm meet them and do the flights. You better call Diane first though. She'll be pissed if you keep this from her."

"No problem John. We both know how explosive a Mackenzie sister's temper can be," Harm said smiling.

"You got that right. Still while you're there, keep your ears open. You may hear something about Sadiq and I may need you back here at a moment's notice," John said

"You got it John," Harm said as he got up to leave.

July 23 to August 22 2003

Harm went to the CIA to fly three missions. But he didn't just fly. The first flight to the Philippines was to air-drop a bugged car to monitor a traitorous general. That was compromised by their contact being exposed and killed. Harm and his copilot, Beth O'Neil, his former client and was now working exclusively for the CIA, landed and made the car switch themselves. They barely managed to fly off, seconds ahead of the rebels that were chasing them.

The next mission was in the ultra-top secret Aurora. The highest flying plane built. They had to survey the Korean peninsula to determine that the North Koreans weren't using tunnels under the DMZ to invade the south.

The third benefited both the CIA as well as Naval Intelligence. Harm and Beth went to Libya to meet an agent in the desert, who happened to have information on Sadiq's network. Unfortunately that agent was also compromised by the Libyans and he also brought his entire family with him as he fled the country. They barely escaped capture by the Libyan Army that pursued the agent into the desert. But as they were taking off, the Libyans, shot holes in the plane's fuel tanks. Crossing the Med and running out of fuel, the only option Harm and Beth had was a landing their C-130 on the Carrier Seahawk. They barely accomplished that near impossible feat.

Unfortunately the landing was televised by a TV crew embedded on the carrier and Harm was filmed carrying one of the children off the plane and across the deck. Harm's name was flashed across the bottom of the screen.

Thursday, August 22, 2003

An apartment in the DC Arab Quarter

Sadiq was in Washington for almost a month trying to track down Sarah and her friend. So far all his inquiries were fruitless. Now he was watching ZNN strictly for the amusement. When he saw the coverage of the C-130 landing on an aircraft carrier, he sat straight up and smiled. He finally had a clue as who his prey was.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 108

Monday, August 25, 2003

0900 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

During his two week paternity leave AJ and Sydney went to JAG one day to show off young Michael. He and Sydney drank in the admiration and affection from the staff. Now he was walking along the corridor with Harm and Bud talking about babies. "I tell you Michael has a great sense of timing. For the first three weeks he was up every night around 0300 wanting to be fed. It wasn't until you two told me to have Sydney feed him as late as she could did he sleep through the night."

"So now Little Mac is sleeping through the night," Harm asked.

"Yeah and now he's waking up at 0500 every morning. No matter how quiet I am when I wake up to go on a run, he seems to sense "Daddy's up, time to play". So to give Sydney some peace, I change and bundle him up and take him on the run in his jogging stroller. He just giggles and squeals as if he's telling me "Faster daddy"," AJ proudly reported.

Harm and Bud smiled at that, but before they could comment, they reached the conference room doors. AJ opened the doors and allowed his two officers to precede him. They assumed their usual places as Sturgis called, "Attention on Deck!"

"As you were," AJ called pleasantly. He began the meeting, "First off, welcome back Commander Rabb. Nice job landing that C-130 on that carrier."

Harm waited until the applause died down before he responded, "Thank you sir and everyone, nice to be back."

"Alright onto new business," AJ said as he started to hand out the days assignments. He finally came to Harm, "Commander you and Lt. McMahon will defend Marine Lance Corporal Crawford. Commander Turner you will prosecute. The lance corporal allegedly boasted of killing an Iraqi POW to his date. The date turned out to be a newspaper reporter hungry for a good story." AJ slid the folders accordingly across the table.

"Aye sir, we'll get right on it," Harm said taking the folder for him and Cathy.

After Harm and Cathy gathered their things from their offices, they set out to walk across the Navy Yard to the Brig. They spoke with Crawford for about an hour then left him to return to headquarters. It was near lunchtime when they got to their offices.

Harm suggested to Cathy, "Why don't we get your Aunt Diane and go out to Giovanni's for Lunch?"

"Sounds good to me Uncle Harm," Cathy said.
The lunch was good and the good company made it more delectable. They waited outside to have their car brought around. As they chatted, a beat up Toyota slowly turned the corner. Harm was looking in that direction for his car and just happened to see the Toyota turn. He then saw that the rear passenger window was down. He then spotted the muzzle of a firearm sticking out from the back window.

"GUN, get down!" he yelled to Diane and Cathy. He moved to get in front of them and that's when the gunman fired three shots.

Harm crouched down and turned so that the right side of his body was exposed to the gunman. That's what saved his life. The gunman held the rifle low and as he fired it kicked up. One bullet caught Harm on his right side, deflected off a rib and grazed the outer edge of his lung to exit his front, the second grazed off the top of his shoulder blade and the third sailed high and embedded in the restaurant façade. Then the car sped off burning rubber as it went.

Diane was the first to get up. She saw Harm lying on his side. She saw blood soaking his white uniform shirt. She screamed, "Call 911!"as she bent to her husband and tried to staunch the flow of blood.

1525 Local Time

George Washington Hospital ER

The ambulance that transported Harm and Diane to the hospital came within 5 minutes of the first call. Harm was assessed by Dr. Matt Franklyn and rushed up to surgery. The operation was 2 hours long.

As Diane waited in the doctor's lounge, all her family and friends came to be with her. Cathy, Sarah and John were the ones Diane asked to stay after she shooed all the others away to home with assurances that she would call if there was any news.

As soon as they were alone Diane's grieving faced vanished and was replaced by a look of cold anger. She asked, "John how far along are we to rounding up Sadiq and his DC network?"

"I was on the phone with Kershaw and Magnum when your call came in. We can move tonight."

"Good, set everything up. I want that son of a bitch!" Diane exclaimed.

Just then Matt Franklyn came into the lounge. He was smiling. Diane brightened up considerably as she anticipated his news. Matt didn't disappoint her. "Well Mrs. Rabb your husband was lucky. We were able to trace the wound track through his lung and close it off. As for the shoulder, the bullet went through the shoulder blade very cleanly and we were able to reduce that wound as well. We transfused three pints of blood and he should recover thoroughly after some therapy. Right now he is in recovery."

"Oh thank you doctor," Diane said as she went to shake his hand. It was only after Franklyn left that she finally let go the floodgates. Sarah gathered her into her arms a let her sister cry it out.

As she finished she picked her head up and said, "Now we finish this and get our family back to normal."

1645 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters
When Diane returned to her office Tom Magnum handed her a pink message. It read, "I know who shot your husband Sarah!" The caller also left a phone number.

"What do you want to do Diane?" Magnum asked.

"Well he must think I'm my sister and Sarah was just my cover name. I say we go along with that," Diane said.

At that Magnum handed her a cellphone saying, "Use this. It has a GPS in it and we can monitor you even when the phone is off."

Diane took the phone and dialed the number.

A man with a Middle Eastern accent answered asking, "Is this Sarah?"

"Yes it is you bastard," Diane said.

"You hair has changed in the months since I last saw you. It is longer. It certainly did not look like the wig you wore in Paraguay," Sadiq said smoothly.

"Well you know us American women, we change our styles twice a year," Diane said touching on his misogynist bigotry, trying to goad him on.

"I would teach you how to cover what you value as beauty," Sadiq said.

"Why don't we meet so that you can do that or are you afraid to face a woman alone you coward," Diane sticking the needle in further.

"I am afraid of no woman," Sadiq thundered over the phone.

"Okay tell me where and when," Diane replied.

"The Al Salar Café on Potomac and 33rd in Georgetown at 10:00PM tonight."

"I'll be there, how will I know you?" Diane asked.

"I will call you when I see you in the café," Sadiq said.

"See you then," Diane said just before she folded the phone closed to end the call.

Diane walked along the sidewalk and entered the café, sat down and ordered some tea. There was a woman singing Iranian songs. She didn't have Sarah's grasp of Farsi, so she didn't understand the song. As she sipped her tea, her cellphone rang.

"Hello," Diane answered.

"Sarah stay there I will walk across the street to you," Sadiq said over the phone.

As Diane waited she listened to the music. She found that even though she didn't understand the
words she knew it was a sad song. Her reverie was interrupted when a man sat down in the chair opposite her. Diane could tell that his blond hair was a wig and that he had pancake make-up all over his face. He was dressed in light blue slacks with a white shirt and tie. He had the matching suit coat over his arm.

Before she could say anything he said, "I have a gun pointed at you from under my coat. Pay the bill for your tea and then get up slowly."

Diane did as he said. They walked out of the café. They walked two blocks and entered an apartment building and rode the elevator to the 4th floor. There Sadiq handed her his keys and said, "Unlock the door and step well into the apartment without closing the door." Diane complied.

When Sadiq entered, he closed and locked the door. Diane turned to him and asked, "Now what?"

"Now you will sit and behave. You are out of place and with no man to protect you."

Diane laughed and mocking his fear said, "You're the one who shot my partner and now you're the one that's holding a woman at gun point."

In disgust and no longer fearing her Sadiq stuck his gun into his waistband and put his jacket back on.

Diane saw a bulge in the right hand pocket of the jacket. She asked him, "What drives you Sadiq?"

Sadiq was proud to answer as he explained, "This year is the 25th anniversary of the Iranian revolution. I was nine when I saw Ayatollah Khomeini in person. At that moment I had an enlightenment about world justice and peace under Islam. My father was killed by the Shah's secret police and within a year I was in the army which set Tehran in flames as the war began."

"So what is the end game to the war you started?" Diane asked.

"America's downfall, which you have made so easy," Sadiq answered.

"How so Sadiq?"

"Your problem is that everything is for sale, even, triggers for nuclear weapons, bought from your arsenal and paid for with your diamonds."

"Is there anything that you would give up your Jihad for?"

Sadiq asked Diane in return, "Are you making an offer?"

"Do I have something you want?"

"I want you to make me tea," Sadiq answered motioning for her to get up and move into the galley kitchen.

As Diane went into the kitchen she knew she had to keep him talking for the rest of the plan to work. She asked, "What is it that attracted you to me? Is it the same thing that angers you, my independence?"

"Independence, fah, what is that? Independence just means that you are pretending to be a woman, no man, no children. You are weak, a whore, you live a barren life in a prison of fear," Sadiq yelled at her. He had no idea that that particular weapon was not loaded.

Turning away from him she smiled a bit, but it disappeared when she turned back to him. She saw
that he was moving around the apartment. She heard through the earwig in her ear, "Get him to stand still. Tell him to turn on the TV to WUSA, channel 2."

Coincidentally the tea was done. After Diane prepared the pot and put it on a tray with the accoutrements, she walked into the living room. After she placed the tray on the low table, she said, "Here is your tea. Let me turn on the news for you." With that she turned on the channel she needed.

She immediately saw the "BREAKIN NEWS" banner across the top of the screen. Underneath the banner showed the blond head of Joanne Lowell. She was standing on a street in front of many police cars with their lights flashing.

Joanne was saying, "We learned that a combined Task Force consisting of agents from the FBI, NCIS and the Department of Homeland Security have just raided more than a dozen apartments. In those apartments were alleged to be members of a terrorist cell that was headed by this man whose name was Sadiq Fahd. It has been reported that Fahd was killed as he held an undercover member of the task force hostage."

Sadiq looked on in horror as he saw his photo appear on the screen. He turned toward as she unbuttoned her blouse and showed him the wire that she was wearing.

While Sadiq was concentrating on the TV, Diane slipped her pumps off her feet. She stood ready for anything he would do.

Sadiq roared with rage and reached into his waist band and withdrew his gun. Before he could train it on Diane, she kicked the gun out of his hand. She tackled him so that he fell onto the couch with her on top. She slugged him repeatedly and punctuated each blow with, "I am not weak! I am not barren! I am not a whore! I have a husband! I birthed four children!"

Seeing that he was stunned from her blows Diane jumped off him and dove to where he dropped his gun. As she picked it up and aimed it at him, Sadiq stood. He was in full view of the window. As he reached into his coat pocket and withdrew another gun, there was a tinkle of broken glass and a crimson stain began to spread out in the middle of his chest. A bullet went through him and embedded in the wall behind him.

As Sadiq stood dumbfounded and looked down at the blood on his chest Diane said, "That was for my husband." She took aim and before she pulled the trigger she said, "This one's for Clayton Webb!" She fired and shot Sadiq through the forehead.

Just then the door flew open as in flooded the SWAT agents from the Task Force. Among them were Kershaw, John, Magnum, Gibbs and Kate Larkin.

Diane raised the gun at they shouted, "Stand Down!"

John went up to her took the gun and asked, "You okay?"

"Yeah John I'm fine, just some bruised knuckles," Diane replied rubbing her hands.

John let her get her shoes back on and then gently led her through the door. As they got to the street John held the car door open for her. She said, "Now that that bastard is gone, let's go get our kids and live a normal life again."

"Amen to that sis," John said as he got behind the wheel and drove them away into the night.
Sarah and Cathy went right to Cathy's apartment after they left the hospital to set themselves up for their part of tonight's operation.

First Sarah and Cathy pulled all the shades down and changed out of their civilian clothing into sets of black sweat shirts and black jeans. They blackened her face and put black ball caps on backward to hold their hair back off their faces. They put on the combined headphones and microphone sets that were attached to the portable radios clipped to their belts. They were tuned to the same frequency as Diane's earwig. They installed the extra leafs into the extra sturdy dining table to elongate it specifically for their use and pushed it to in front of the window.

Sarah set two clips that wrapped the end of the table and set the two legs of a stand into the grooves of the clips. She clicked the muzzle of a sniper rifle with a noise suppressor into the groove on top of the stand and she laid down on the table and set the rifle into her shoulder.

Cathy turned off all the lights and pulled up the shade and opened the window and the screen. The rifle was well inside the darkened apartment. It wouldn't do for the suppressor to stick out of the window to alert passersby.

The weapon was Sarah's own Marine M40 sniper's rifle. It was set up specifically for her, by her. It was issued to her in Sniper School by retired Gunnery Sgt. Ray Crockett. John and Harm convinced him to exclusively teach her and Harm the right way to be a sniper. It wasn't hard for Sarah as she was already an expert marksman with a rifle. It was true what she told Webb in Paraguay, "Every Marine a rifle man/woman."

She looked through the scope, made a couple of minute adjustments for focus and settled in. Through the scope she saw into the living room window of Sadiq Fahd's apartment. It wasn't Sarah who rented Cathy's apartment, but NCIS. Yes it used to be Sarah's, but that was purely coincidental. NCIS rented the apartment for Cathy just after Sadiq rented his. Cathy's had an unobstructed view of his apartment, two blocks away.

Cathy, who was also dressed and made up like Sarah, looked through her own scope at the same thing Sarah was looking at. She sat behind a tray table set up next to the dining table. Her scope was also resting on its own tripod stand.

"Now we wait," Sarah said.

"Aye, ma'am," Cathy acknowledged.

"Cathy, knock off the ma'am shit. You're my niece and my spotter for goodness sake and we haven't got time for protocol right now."
"Gotcha Aunt Sarah," Cathy said cheekily.

Sarah just turned and smirked indulgently at her. Cathy smiled back in return.

Soon they heard Diane's and Sadiq's conversation in the café. Shortly after that they heard them enter Sadiq's apartment and saw the lights go on. Sarah set the rifle into her shoulder and put her eye to the scope, ready to fire as soon as she heard the signal. As the conversation progressed Sarah kept her crosshairs on the center of the window.

Cathy said into her radio, "Get him to stand still. Tell him to turn on the TV to WUSA, channel 2."

She and Sarah both heard Diane as she went about goading and enraging Sadiq. They heard Joanne Lowell on the TV and then the sounds of Diane's desperate struggle. They clearly heard Diane's blows and declaration of, "I am not weak! I am not barren! I am not a whore! I have a husband! I birthed four children!"

As Cathy and Sarah listened to the fight, they kept their scopes trained on the window. It was only Sarah's professionalism and training that kept her from moving her eye from the scope or prematurely squeezing the trigger.

She and Cathy both saw Sadiq stand in full view of the window and reach into his jacket pocket and withdraw another weapon. Cathy's order of "Fire" was just a nanosecond ahead of Sarah's squeezing the trigger. They saw that Sarah's shot was true as they caught a brief glimpse of blood at the center of Sadiq's shirt. Then they heard Diane's declaration of, "That was for my husband. This one's for Clayton Webb!" Then they heard the shot and saw Sadiq fall as Diane administered the coup de grace.

"Break it down!" Sarah ordered.

Cathy closed the screen and the window and pulled the shade back down before she turned the light back on. Sarah disassembled the rifle and stowed it away in its carrying case. She would clean it later at Quantico. Then they set about rearranging the apartment back to its previous order. They took the extra leafs out of the table and pushed the table back to its original position, rearranging the chairs around it accordingly. After they finished rearranging the furniture Sarah then found her shell casing and put it in her pocket. A sniper always policed her brass.

The two women changed out of the black outfits and then took turns showering. They checked each other to ensure all the black was washed off. They took the time to dry their hair, dressed and left the apartment. Cathy was carrying Sarah's duffle bag while Sarah carried the rifle case.

When they reached the sidewalk outside the apartment building, John and Diane were sitting in the car waiting for them. John popped the trunk for the ladies to stow the bags. Then Sarah and Cathy shared a hug. When Sarah got into the car, she shared another hug with Diane as John drove them home to Florida Avenue.

2345 Local Time

Marshall Residence

When the threesome arrived John said, "Diane, I set up the guest bed and put your bag in the den like you asked. It was a good idea that you suggested spending the night here. We can all go together to see Harm in the morning."

"Thanks John I know I'd feel lonely without Harm at home. I was alright waiting for him to come back from his NI & CIA missions, but now that he's in the hospital, I don't want to go bumping
around in my empty house alone. I can't wait until we call to get the children back home," Diane said.

"That makes three of us," Sarah agreed.

The two Mackenzie sisters shared a hug. When they disengaged, Diane gave John a sisterly kiss on his cheek. She then went into the bathroom to change into her night clothes. John and Sarah retired to their own bedroom.

Tuesday, August 26, 2003
0230 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Diane was finding it difficult to stay asleep. Unlike Sarah, she didn't suffer for chronic insomnia. What kept Diane up was the throbbing pain in her left hand. Getting up she turned the bedside light on. When she looked at her hand, she saw that it was swollen to almost twice its normal side.

"Ah damn I think I broke it," Diane winced as she tenderly probed it.

She went and knocked on Sarah and John's bedroom door. Sarah was the one to answer. Even without her glasses, as soon as her eyes adjusted to the light in the hallway, she could see Diane's hand was almost grotesquely swollen.

"Aw man that's not good," Sarah said. She added, "Give me a minute and I'll get some ice and ibuprofen. Then we'll go to GW."

"Okay let me get my wallet. They'll need my insurance information," Diane said.

After she went into the den, she changed into her jogging sweats and put her sneakers on. She met Sarah in the hallway and they both went to the kitchen. Diane took the pain killers, got the hand wrapped in ice and then out the door she and Sarah went.

It was a short ride to GW. Thankfully it was a slow night and Diane didn't wait too long for an orthopedic doctor to see her. The x-rays confirmed her diagnoses. She broke two bones in her left hand just blow the knuckles of her index and middle fingers. Unfortunately the hand swelled to such a degree that they could only splint the hand and wrap it in cling wrap and an Ace bandage.

"We'll wait 48 hours for the swelling to go down before we put a cast on. In the meantime you can pick out your color," he told Diane. He gave her stronger painkillers and then discharged her.

As Diane and Sarah went through the exit, Diane said, "Listen, you go home. I'm going to Harm's room. I have this overwhelming need to be with my husband."

"Is he still in Intensive Care?" Sarah asked.

"No he isn't. While I was waiting to see the orthopedist, I called Intensive Care and they told me Harm's condition was improved so they moved him up to the Critical Care Unit on the 4th floor."

"Okay then, I'll stop by tomorrow with your work suit," Sarah assured her.

"Thanks Sarah."

Sarah accompanied Diane up to Harm's room on the fourth floor. There they found that he was awake.
"Hey you!" he said weekly as Diane was the first through the door

"Hey yourself how're you doing?" Diane said after she gave him a brief kiss.

"Better. I just used the pain pump, so I am mellow," Harm said.

"Are you in much pain?"

"A little, when it gets too much, I push the button."

Even in his drug induced haze he could see that Diane was favoring her left hand and then saw the bandage peeking out from under her sweatshirt sleeve cuff.

"What happened to your hand?"

"Oh I got into a fight, broke two bones in my hand. Someone said that you were no good for me."

"Really?" Harm asked.

"But I'm fine. You should see the other guy." Diane joked to ease her husband's worry.

"Well as long you're alright." Harm commented sleepily, the reference that Diane's opponent was a guy going right over his head.

"Go to sleep darling," Diane said stroking his cheek with her good hand and giving him a kiss on his lips.

"Yes ma'am," he said. He patted the left side of the bed and said, "Lay down with me."

Harm scooted over a bit and Diane said, "With pleasure." She maneuvered around any tubes and wires and lay down on her side. Harm put his arm across her shoulders as she laid her injured hand across his chest.

"You know this reminds me of a song," Harm said in a slurry voice.

"Which one sweetie?" Diane asked, half knowing but wanting to confirm.

"You know the one on the CD we just bought, you know by Kellie Coffey, "lie near me" or whatever," Harm said unable to properly wrap his tired mind around his thoughts.

"When You Lie Next To Me," Diane furnished for him, kissing his cheek.

"Yeah that one." Harm replied in a whisper as sleep claimed him.

As they fell asleep the charge nurse came into check on the acceleration of Harm's vital signs that registered at the desk. She wasn't smiling when she came in to see Diane sound asleep against Harm's uninjured side. She took a breath and was about to say something when she heard a command of, "Don't you dare!" from behind her.

Sarah left Diane alone with Harm and went down the hall to use the pay phone to call and let John know what was happening. It was easier than going outside to use the cellphone. As she hung up the phone she saw the stern faced nurse go charging into Harm's room. She hurried over and saw over the nurse's shoulder the tender scene therein.

The nurse turned and had to blink as she saw Sarah looking at her with a 'DON'T SCREW WITH ME' look on her face. Before the nurse could protest Sarah said, "My sister has had a very tough day
and she needs to be with her husband as well as he needs her to be with him. If you care to recheck his vitals, you'll see that they are steady and normal." Sarah pointed to the monitor alongside Harm's bed.

"But hospital policy..." The nurse began to protest, but Sarah shushed her and urged her out the door to keep her from waking the Rabbs up.

They walked a good distance away from the room. In a low and threatening tone Sarah said to her, "Let me tell you something. Earlier tonight my sister went medieval and beat the shit out of the terrorist that shot her husband. You know the one that was on the news. That's how she broke her hand. Now that guy is in the NCIS morgue. So if you think she's going to stand by and let you separate her from the man she loves more than anything, which she almost lost today, you got another think coming."

Seeing that she wasn't getting anywhere, the nurse retreated to the desk.

Sarah turned and walked back to Harm's room and cracking the door, peeked in. She went in and got the extra blanket from the room's cupboard and put it over it over Diane's back. She bent and gave her sister a kiss on her temple and going around to the other side of the bed gave Harm a kiss on his forehead.

"I love you Diane," Harm said in sleepy response.

Sarah smiled and tenderly stroked his hair and softly replied, "Love you to Harm."

She walked out of the room and went home.

0815 Local Time

George Washington Medical Center

Cathy met Sarah at Florida Ave and they went together to GW. Sarah brought Diane's tan business suit with a short sleeve cream blouse with the matching tan pumps. At the hospital Diane took advantage of the kindness of the nurses on duty for the day shift as they gave her a feminine toiletry kit and assisted her to take a shower in Harm's bathroom, taping a plastic bag over her splint. Diane was able to shave her legs in the shower.

As Diane exited the shower Cathy McMahon came in with Sarah. Cathy helped Diane dry off. After Diane helped herself into her lingerie, Sarah helped her get her thigh band stockings on, buttoning her blouse and zipping her skirt up.

"Oh God, how are Harm and I going to take care of ourselves and the kids when they get home," Diane fretted as Cathy helped her get the splinted arm into her suit jacket and then settled into the sling the nurses gave her.

"I spoke to Trish and Maureen and even Ann Marie early this morning. They said that they're ready to stay at your place until Harm is on his feet and you have full use of your hands," Sarah said.

"That's good to hear. I haven't spoken to anyone since before we got Sadiq. When you spoke with them did they tell you when are the kids were coming home?" Diane asked.

"Ann Marie is driving down from Belleville with the babies this morning. Jim and Maureen are flying down on the shuttle this afternoon with ours. Trish and Frank left this morning with yours and should be in the same time as the Marshalls," Sarah answered.
"What about Chloe?" Harm asked from his bed. His pain was such that he didn't need the medicine to control it so he was able to participate lucidly in the conversation. He wasn't especially happy when his wife told him that she faced Sadiq alone, but he was comforted that she had the back-up from John and Sarah.

"Robert and Frances Barkley are driving to their farm in Reston tomorrow. They are taking Chloe's horse, Aberdeen, along with them. That's where Chloe can continue her equestrian training," Sarah replied.

"She really dove into that didn't she?" Harm asked.

"Yeah she did it helped her cope with the problems Sadiq gave us," Sarah said.

"She knew about Sadiq?" Harm asked surprised.

"Not his name and the circumstances, but she was smart enough to tell me just before she got on the plane to Kentucky to 'Don't worry about me, just get the bastard," Sarah said.

"Smart girl," Diane said adjusting the sling to her comfort.

"Yeah she is," Sarah agreed with a watery smile. She sighed and asked, "Ready to face the music sis?"

"Ready, willing and able," Diane said. She went over to Harm to give him a long kiss. Harm used his good hand to hold her for a brief time.

"Keep that up flyboy and we'll be making another baby," Diane said as they came up for air.

"Just tell me when. Love you," Harm said.

"Love you to, see you later," Diane replied and then left the room.

0930 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

John was waiting for Cathy, Diane and Sarah outside the hospital with his Town Car. They all got in and rode the short distance to the Navy Yard and entered NCIS Headquarters by driving down into the garage under the building. They met Gibbs there and got on the elevator.

"Chegwidden, Kershaw and the SECNAV are already here in MTAC with Director Magnum," Gibbs said.

"Chief Pierce distributed copies of the whole operation starting with what Harm and Gunny found in Mexico," John said.


"They will participate via a secure video feed from MTAC," Gibbs answered.

The elevator stopped and opened on the second floor. When they got out and started to walk to MTAC, first one person and then another started to applaud. It was picked up by the whole company present in the bullpen. It followed the group as they walked along. Diane was the recipient of many handshakes from those she met along the way as well as signs of 'Thumbs-up' from those she spied
across the bullpen.

Diane's genuine smile was wide and bright as she acknowledged everyone. She felt like a great weight was lifted from her shoulders.

Gibbs retina-scanned them into MTAC where the staff present as well as the visiting officers also applauded.

Now Diane was thoroughly embarrassed and barked out, "As you were people." She didn't care that there were a few people of higher rank present.

"Okay now that we got that out of the way, let's begin," John said calling the meeting to order. He called out for the record all that were present either in person or by way of video.

"We're going to present this briefing in order. That means the narrative for last night's operation will be presented last. To begin, after a fairly successful operation in Paraguay to prevent Stinger missiles from being used by terrorists, we mounted a search for the head of the organization responsible for buying the Stingers, Sadiq Fahd. We sent NCIS, NI and CIA agents into the field to beat the bushes. We also put BOLOs out to all our other intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Those efforts brought us to Mexicali, Mexico."

"What did you find there?" Sheffield interrupted.

John thanked that the lighting in the room masked him rolling his eyes at the interruption. He continued, "Agents from ATF and DEA in Mexicali notified us that they had spotted Sadiq. I dispatched my operatives Commander Harmon Rabb and Gunnery Sergeant Victor Galindez to Mexicali. There they gained entrance into the apartment where Sadiq was staying. They just missed him, but he left behind an encrypted flashdrive. We weren't able to read it until we got it back to our experts in NCIS. When we finally broke the encryption we found a list of Sadiq's contacts in DC. Apparently Sadiq unknowingly dropped the flashdrive in his haste to flee apprehension. He wasn't too far ahead of Rabb and Galindez because there was a hot cup of tea on the table in the kitchen. While they were there, Rabb and Galindez received a call from their DEA contact that Sadiq obtained a car and was spotted driving toward the border crossing at Calexico, Ca."

"What was done then?" Sheffield asked.

"Since we still needed to decrypt the flashdrive, we instructed ICE's Border Guards to allow Sadiq to enter the country," John answered.

"Why did you do that? You had already determined that he was an enemy combatant and a threat to National Security," Sheffield asked impatiently.

"Yes sir he was, but he also had an extensive network present in the US. We knew this from NCIS' and NI's interrogations of the arms dealer, Ahmad Ben Atwa. Until we could access the flashdrive, we needed to keep Sadiq moving so that he felt safe enough to contact his people," John explained patiently.

"So what did you do to keep him under surveillance?" Sheffield asked a bit mollified, but not totally satisfied.

"After he crossed into the USA we put a GPS tracker on his person," John explained.

"Weren't you afraid that he was going to find it?" Sheffield asked suspiciously.

"No sir we weren't. Harrison, would you care to explain?" John asked indicating Kershaw.
Kershaw got up and produced a plastic evidence bag containing a SD card. He handed it to Sheffield saying, "That looks like a SIM Card that you would find installed in any cellphone. It has the latest GPS feature that is in use in the latest cellphones. Except this one is made in such a way that if it was installed in your cellphone, you would not be able to deactivate or turn off the GPS feature, even when you turned your phone off. We installed it in a phone that Sadiq bought once he crossed over into California."

"How did you do that?" Sheffield asked. Now everyone was getting impatient with his impatience. He was the only one not reading from the report Carolyn Pierce handed out.

"Ben Atwa told us that Sadiq's modis operandi indicated that he uses "pay as you go" or burn phones. When you buy one, the clerk at the store has to open the cellphone package up and activate then install the SIM card for you. That way the payment method, be it cash or credit information is properly entered. So we had agents stationed at the next few 7/11s and cellphone stores that were on the way out of Calexico to do just that. Fortunately he bought one at the last one he came to before he left Calexico proper," Kershaw explained. He added, "It's on page 12 of the report."

Finally getting the hint, Sheffield picked up the report and started to read along. "So what happened next?" he asked wanting to get past his embarrassment.

John took it back up again, "We tracked him on his trip across the country. By the time he finally arrived in DC, we were able to decrypt the flashdrive and read his contacts list. All during Sadiq's time in DC, we were also able to keep him under surveillance and detail who he visited in DC. That's how NCIS, the FBI and Homeland Security were able to make the numerous arrests we made last night. After we observed him rent an apartment, we rented one where we could keep him under constant surveillance. And that is where we come to last night's operation."

"Where is Sadiq now?" Sheffield asked. His ignorance was starting to grate on everyone present.

"His body is in the Morgue downstairs, Mr. Secretary," Tom Magnum answered.

"In the morgue, who killed him? We could have gleaned a lot of information from him," Sheffield accused.

"Mr. Secretary if you would open the report detailing last night's operation, you'll find the answers there," John said.

Again Sheffield made everyone wait until he read enough to catch up. He looked up at Diane and Sarah as they sat impassively looking at him.

"You two shot him?" Sheffield asked rhetorically.

"Sir, like the report states it was self-defense. Lt. McMahon and I observed the fight from our vantage point. After Diane subdued Sadiq, she had him under his gun. I fired only after I saw that he pulled another weapon. Also sir as you said, he was an enemy combatant," Sarah said.

Grimacing at that, Sheffield turned to Diane and asked her, "After he was shot, why didn't you wait until he surrendered before you put the bullet through his brain?"

"Sir like my attorney says, it was self-defense, he was pulling a gun. I was in fear of my life," Diane stoically replied.

Sheffield looked around at the assembled players and sighed. He knew that he was not going to gain any advantage over anyone here. As a professional politician he took pride in finding that one thing that gave him an advantage over anyone. He felt that helped him gain control over his environment.
Looking around at the people assembled in MTAC, he knew that wasn't the case here.

He sighed and said, "Very well, just make sure you tell the Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee the same story," he said resignedly.

"Aye sir," John said for everyone concerned.

Sheffield then left MTAC.

1305 Local Time

Marshall Residence

After the briefing, Sarah and Diane were given the rest of the day off to wait for their children to come home. So they went to wait at the Marshalls.

During the wait, Sarah and Diane discussed the killing of Sadiq.

"You know Joanne Lowell jumped the gun announcing that Sadiq was killed, before he really was," Diane said.

"Yeah I know. But Sadiq brought his death upon himself. If he surrendered, then we could have had her do a retraction, saying that she was given the wrong information," Sarah replied.

"You're right about Sadiq. He seemed willing to die for his cause. He just wanted to take me with him," Diane said.

"Oh yeah and no matter what Sheffield says, we are better off that Sadiq is dead. We don't ever have to look over our shoulders for him again," Sarah said.

Shortly after 1:00PM there was the sound of a car entering the driveway. The sisters got up and ran out to meet the new arrivals.

Ann Marie was the first out of the car and without a word hit the button that electrically opened both of the sliding doors of her Chrysler Town and Country minivan. Sarah and Diane practically dove into the car. There were squeals as both Natalie and David were picked up and hugged by their mothers.

1530 Local Time

Reagan National Airport

Delta Airlines Terminal

After Diane and Sarah spent a bit of reunion time with Natalie and David, Ann Marie volunteered to stay at the Marshalls while Diane, Sarah and John went to the airport to meet their children. John drove their Trailblazer, while Sarah drove Ann Marie's minivan. Diane rode with Sarah. They knew that there was a large contingent of people returning with them. Coincidentally both flights from California and New York were coming into the same airport, scheduled to arrive within thirty minutes of each other. The Burnetts with the Rabb children were scheduled to land first. The three parents waited at the gate and saw the 767 from San Diego pull up and stop. Time seemed to move very slowly as the jet way moved into position against the plane.

The Rabb children were the first passengers off the plane. Sarah Cate was holding Trey and Samantha's hands as they practically ran through the jet way.
"MOMMYYYYY!" the Rabb children squealed as they spotted Diane standing at the head of the rope line with her good arm open. The three children rushed forward and happily collided with their mother as she doled out kisses and hugs as fast as she could.

"Oh I've missed you all so much," Diane happily cried as she moved them away from the line.

Sarah and John greeted Trish and Frank as they debarked just slightly behind their grandchildren.

"Is everything alright now?" Trish asked Sarah and John.

"Yeah, except for Harm being in the hospital, everything is fine now," John replied.

"Good!" Frank said as he and Trish turned to greet Diane.

"Oh thank you so much for taking care of them," Diane said as she was hugged very tightly first by Trish then by Frank.

"That's what grandparents are for darling," Trish said. She looked down at Diane's sling and asked, "What happened to your hand?"

"Oh just a slight accident," Diane fibbed.

Trish smiled indulgently, suspecting otherwise.

"How is Harm?" Frank asked wanting to forestall any more of Trish's interrogation.

"He's doing well. He's out of Intensive Care. We're going to see him after we leave here and pick up Natalie at Sarah's.

Having gotten the first set of greetings done, the group went to meet the elder Marshalls. They were walking toward their arrival gate when they heard two voices scream, "MOMMY, DADDY!"

Sarah and John looked up and saw two dark haired missiles running unconcerned through the milling crowd, homing in on them. Caroline and Patrick were picked up and fiercely hugged by their parents, Patrick to Sarah and Caroline to John. After doling out the proper degree of affection, the parents switched children to start the greeting process over again.

Maureen and Jim weren't too far behind as they stood back and watched the joyful reunion.

As John and Sarah properly greeted them, Jim said, "Our plane got in a bit early. So we went looking for you at the Burnetts' gate." Then he asked, "Is everything alright now?"

"Everything's okay. Come on let's go home." Sarah said sniffling through her watery smile.

The whole retinue grouped together and proceeded to the parking lot and got into cars to do just that.
Chapter 110

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 110

Tuesday, August 26, 2003

1645 Local Time

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

For the ride home John was driving the Trailblazer while Frank drove Ann Marie's minivan. His offer to drive was accompanied by, "I'll take the company's car."

In the Trailblazer Sarah was listening to her children chatter away about all the things they did with their grandparents in the two months they'd been away. She also marveled at how tan they were and even though their hair was still dark, it was highlighted with lighter strands of blonde from the sun's bleaching affect.

"We went to the Bronx Zoo one day. We rode a camel. Then we went to Rye Playland. We rode the Dragon Coaster. Then we went to City Island and rode a boat with Uncle Billy," Patrick was saying.

"Don't tell everything, I want to tell some," Caroline whined. She continued before her brother could respond. "If we weren't at the beach, we went to Dorney Park and Wild Water Kingdom, then to Great Adventure. We saw Bugs Bunny. We saw the whales at the Coney Island Aquarium. The other days we spent at the beach we had a real cool baby sitter, named Caroline, just like me. We went to swimming classes. Patrick and I can swim across the pool without touching the bottom," Caroline proudly stated.

"Wow sounds like you guys had a great summer," Sarah said happily. Inwardly she was pissed that Sadiq forced her and John to give up those happy times with her children. Still she was grateful for her extended family chipping in like they did.

The kids were still reciting their summer adventures as Caroline added, "After we went to Dorney Park, we went to visit David, Natalie and Aunt Ann Marie at Grams farm. Grams let us pick the eggs from the chickens, and we rode Buttercup, her neighbor's pony. We were there for a whole weekend."

Patrick added to the tail, "Yeah and Papa Frank and Nana Trish came in with Sarah, Trey and Samantha. We went swimming in the creek. I saw a turtle. We had a great time."

John and Sarah sighed again. They knew that all the kids met up at Belleville on the weekend it happened. Again they were melancholy at missing the good time. That was offset by the joy of finally ending the Sadiq affair and having the children home.

Thursday, August 28, 2003

Barkley Riding School and Farm

Reston, VA
John pulled the Trailblazer up the long driveway of the farm. Heck the path they were on was too long to be called a driveway. As they turned a bend they saw a group of large buildings. There was the main house, a long barn and a workshop and a huge garage.

Sarah was looking out the window anxiously looking for the first sign of her oldest daughter. Chloe must have spotted them from inside. As John pulled up to the front entrance, she came bounding out of the house. Sarah's side of the car was facing the house and she flung her door open and ran and met Chloe halfway between the house and the car. They engulfed each other in crushing hugs.

"Oh baby I've missed you so much," Sarah happily sobbed.

"Me to mom," Chloe sniffled just as happily. She pulled back to look up at Sarah and asked, "Is it alright to come home now?"

"Yes baby, no body's going to bother us. Your father's plan worked just the way he wanted, well except for Uncle Harm getting shot, but he's going to be fine."

"Uncle Harm was shot!" Chloe shouted.

"Yeah and like your mother said, he's going to be fine," John said as he came up holding David with Caroline and Patrick right behind.

The two older children beat him to Chloe as they playfully collided to give her a very enthusiastic greeting.

Chloe forgot about being concerned for her Uncle Harm as she drank in the chatter of her siblings.

Eventually Robert & Frances Barkley and their daughter Chelsea came out to greet the Marshalls.

After the initial settling down and partaking of lunch they all spent the day touring the farm. Chloe led them right to Aberdeen's stable.

Aberdeen was a deep chestnut colored mare with a white stripe going down her forehead. She was a good sized horse of about fifteen hands or about sixty inches tall at the shoulder.

"Isn't she beautiful mom, dad?" Chloe asked excitedly.

"That she is sweetie," John answered, not wanting to get too close.

Chloe saw this and said, "It's alright Dad, you can pet her. See watch," Chloe said as she gently pulled Aberdeen's bridle down and gently scratched above the nostrils.

"Here, pet her down her neck she likes that," Chloe said.

John went over and gingerly stroked the right side of Aberdeen's neck. He was rewarded with a grateful snort from Aberdeen.

"I want to pet her," Patrick called.

"Yeah me to," Caroline joined in.

"Okay, but let Daddy pick you up," Sarah said.

John picked Caroline up and then Patrick. They both petted Aberdeen just as John did. The giggled at Aberdeen's grateful snorts.
Chloe showed them how to give Aberdeen a carrot and feed her sugar cubes from their hands. The younger Marshall children giggled as they felt Aberdeen's lips caress their hands as she took the treats. Aberdeen was very gentle and didn't bite the hands that fed her. Chloe gave her a good pat and a little kiss on the nose before they all walked away.

"Daddy, when can I learn to ride like Chloe?" Caroline asked as they walked away.

"When you get to be Chloe's age and if you still want to, we'll speak with the Barkleys," John assured her.

Caroline's smile was wide and bright at that announcement.

"What about me daddy? I want to learn to ride, but I want to be a cowboy," Patrick chimed in.

"Again, just like your father said about your sister, when you get older, we'll speak with the Barkleys," Sarah assured her son.

"Cool!" Patrick said.

Frances was with them and said, "We'd love to have them. If they are anything the rider Chloe is they'll do well."

"We can't thank you enough for helping us out Frances," Sarah said.

"Nonsense Sarah, we already planned this before your crisis. It was no trouble. We're all just glad that everything turned out alright," Robert reassured Sarah.

"Well remind us before we leave that we have to discuss Chloe's school schedule and her lessons here. When do you think she can compete," John asked.

"Oh I'd say next spring. There are a few horse shows in the area where she can compete in the junior class. Until then she'll have the fall and winter to practice. When it gets cold, we use the indoor course in the riding barn. Chloe has shown a great aptitude for riding and established a great rapport with Aberdeen. So she can be ready by then," Frances said.

"Well as long as Chloe keeps her studies up to par, we'll look forward to getting her prepared," Sarah said.

Everyone smiled in agreement.

Soon it was dinner time and then time for the Marshalls to go home. Chloe packed her things she was taking home with her into the car. She left the necessary clothing and equipment needed for her lessons in the room Frances set aside for her.

The Marshalls said goodbye to the Barkleys and drove home.

Labor Day 2003

1330 Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Harm was home from the hospital one day. His arm was in a sling and he still had bandages taped to his torso at the entry and exit wounds at his chest and shoulder. All his wounds were closed over and
healing well. He was also doing well in the physical therapy to rehabilitate his shoulder. He had one of his Navy tee shirts on to cover the bandages.

Even though she and Harm were still recovering, Diane insisted on having company over because they wanted to salvage a nice weekend together before the end of the summer. Having all their children and the rest of their family around helped to do that.

Now he and Diane were sitting in a lounge chair by their pool. They were watching all the Rabb, Marshall & Matthews children having a good time. Diane's hand was in a light blue fiberglass cast and it already had all the kids' wishes and signatures written all over it in permanent ink or crayon.

Maureen and Trish were being the perfect hostesses while their husbands were helping keep their grandchildren in line.

Diane asked her husband, "Harm, are you comfortable enough?"

"Yeah honey I'm great. It's great to be sitting somewhere where I don't have to count the ceiling tiles anymore," Harm replied with a satisfied sigh.

Diane smiled at that.

Just then Jim Marshall came up with two virgin Pina coladas for the happy couple. "Here you go just what the doctor ordered."

"Thanks Jim. Thanks Dad," Harm and Diane said respectively. Jim like that Diane called him and Maureen Dad & Mom.

"So how are out two favorite patients?" Maureen said as she came over with some sandwiches.

"We're fine. We can't thank you guys enough for staying over to help us while we recover," Diane said.

"Dear it's no problem. I just happy to help,' Maureen said sitting down with her own meal in the lounge chair on Diane's other side.

"Well since I finally got the cast, I'm getting pretty good and manipulating things with it," Diane said.

"Are you ready to testify to the Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee tomorrow?" Maureen asked.

"Yes John and I have been preparing for that this last week," Diane replied.

Just then John came up holding David. "We think the comm-edy will be satisfied with what we have to tell them," he added.

He asked Harm, "What time frame is the doctor giving you until full duty?"

"Dr. Franklyn said that for a wound like I had, it's usually six weeks. He did say that as long as all I'm doing is lawyering, I can go back the week after this. Typing and writing is okay, but no lifting," Harm replied.

"What does AJ say about that?" John asked.

"He said he'll take me as long as I can stand. He just won't send me out or town for any JAG-Man investigations. Also he said that when he doesn't need her, I can have Jennifer to do the paralegal work for me. She has to train someone to replace her for when she goes on her honeymoon."

anyway,” Harm reminded them.

Just then Jennifer and Sergei arrived for the party. After properly greeting everyone, Jennifer said, "I heard my name being thrown around by all you officers."

"You'll be doing paralegal work for the human target here," Diane said pointing to Harm.

"Well no one will shoot anything in JAG so I think I'll be safe," Jennifer said with a smile.

At Jennifer's statement everyone shared a snort of suppressed laughter. That made Jennifer a bit embarrassed as she asked, "What did I say that was so funny?"

John came to her rescue as he said, "It's not that we have to worry anyone shooting at Harm, it's Harm doing the shooting that we have to watch out for."

Jennifer cocked her head in bewilderment and then the light bulb went on as she asked incredulously, "You mean it's true? Harm really did shoot up a courtroom?"

"Yep I did. I got a lot accomplished when I did that," Harm said a bit too proudly for Diane's liking. Luckily for him, she was on his uninjured side as she smacked his arm. It was reminiscent of when John used to get smacked.

"Ow, hey I'm an injured man," Harm exclaimed indignantly.

"Not on that side mister. And beside don't be so freaking proud of that little episode. It cost you a whole month's pay to fix the damage and you almost got dishonorably discharged," Diane reminded her husband.

"Yeah there was that," Harm said chagrined.

To break the ice John said, "Well anyway the three weeks between now and then should give Harm enough time to get a bit more independent before Jennifer goes on her honeymoon."

Everyone there agreed with that as the day went on pleasantly enough to usher in the new season.

Tuesday, September 2, 2003

0900 Local Time

Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee Hearing

Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, DC

John, Diane and CPO Carolyn Pierce were wearing their Navy uniforms as they sat at the witness table waiting for the hearing to begin. They were going over the narrative detailing the whole affair from the capture of Ben Atwa to when Sadiq was finally killed.

The hearing room for the committee was a small room with sound dampening panels installed on the walls and ceiling. There were only going to be four senators present to hear the briefing.

Soon the senators filed in and took their seats.

John leaned over and whispered into Diane's ear, "Uh oh Adele DeLong is the chairwoman."
"Isn't she the one Sarah had a problem back in '97 in that 'Crossing The Line' incident?" Diane asked.

"Yeah that's the one," John acknowledged.

"Wonderful, she never liked what Harm had to say during that affair," Diane said.

He added, "Also watch out for Senator Norton sitting next to her. He's got a problem with the civil rights of enemy combatants. He thinks Gitmo is one of the rings of hell. He's going to be like Sheffield and ask us why we didn't try to take Sadiq alive."

"Understood, we're ready for him," Diane said confidently.

Senator DeLong called the hearing to order. She began by jumping to a conclusion. She said to Diane, "Captain Rabb, it's nice to see you again. When did you switch from the Marines to the Navy?"

Diane smiled and said, "Good morning Senator DeLong. I'm Diane Rabb. I am the Assistant Director of NCIS. You are obviously confusing me with my sister, Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall. She is still in the Marines and she changed her name from Mackenzie when she married this guy here."

Diane said pointing her right thumb at John.

John smiled both at Diane's familiarity with him and for the other senators benefit as they shared a chuckle.

To her credit DeLong recovered well and said, "Well it's nice to meet you Captain Rabb and Admiral Marshall. Please give my regards to your sister."

"Thank you senator we will," Diane graciously replied.

"Are you related to Commander Harmon Rabb?" DeLong asked.

"Yes senator, he is my husband," Diane proudly replied.

"I see. Well shall we begin? I believe you and Admiral Marshall are here to tell us about how you managed to thwart a far reaching terrorist plot," DeLong said.

"Yes senator. I have a narrative prepared and if you will break the 'Top Secret' SEALs on your copies that Chief Pierce is distributing, you may follow along," John said as he opened his copy.

Starting with the capture of Ben Atwa John went into the details of the operation in Paraguay and the reasons that Sadiq got away. He segued onto the joint operation of CIA/NCIS/Naval Intelligence operation to track down Sadiq. "We had Sadiq under surveillance once he crossed the border at Calexico, CA. We had a blip in our surveillance here in DC when we weren't fast enough and he slipped out the back way of a convenience store to get into a friend's car on his way to shoot Commander Rabb.

"Why did he go after Commander Rabb specifically? How did he know who he was?" DeLong logically asked."  

"Well as stated in the part detailing the events in Paraguay, Harm was one of the people Sadiq saw up close and blamed for smashing his operation. Also Sadiq obtained Commander Rabb's identity from ZNN. Harm was filmed by an embedded news crew when he landed a C-130 on the deck of the Seahawk. His name was flashed at the bottom of the screen. Commander Rabb was shot as he and Captain Rabb and another navy officer left a restaurant."
"Captain Rabb, how is your husband?" DeLong asked.

Diane smiled at the question, "Oh he's fine, thanks for asking. He's resting at home. Though with four children ranging from six years to a few months running around the house he doesn't get much rest. (The senators shared a laugh with Diane and John.) The doctors say he'll make a full recovery."

"That's good to hear," DeLong said sincerely. She looked at John and said, "Sorry for the interruption admiral, please continue."

John acknowledged her apology and continued, "Thank you senator, well after we decrypted Sadiq's flashdrive we were able to follow him around as he met each and every one of the contacts detailed on the lists we found on the flashdrive. It was only his shooting of Commander Rabb that accelerated the operation to apprehend him and the others in his network."

"How were you able to get him into the apartment you had under surveillance?" DeLong asked.

"We had an agent pose as one of the faithful in the mosque where Sadiq went to pray. Sadiq told him that he was looking for a place to stay, besides a motel room. Our agent recommended that Sadiq go to a certain rental office. We had another agent in the rental office to ensure that Sadiq actually rented that apartment," John answered.


"It was a safe house that we used to hide witnesses who desired to be hidden as they waited to testify in a trial, senator," Diane answered.

"So you lured him into an apartment that you already owned," Norton said incredulously.

"Yes senator," Diane answered.

"Isn't that entrapment?" Norton asked.

John went to answer that, "No senator it is not. A person is 'entrapped' when he is induced or persuaded by law enforcement officers or their agents to commit a crime that he had no previous intent to commit.

However, there is no entrapment where a person is ready and willing to break the law and the Government agents merely provide what appears to be a favorable opportunity for the person to commit the crime. For example, it is not entrapment for a Government agent to pretend to be someone else and to offer, either directly or through an informer or other decoy, to engage in an unlawful transaction with the person. So, a person would not be a victim of entrapment if the person was ready, willing and able to commit the crime charged in the indictment whenever opportunity was afforded, and that Government officers or their agents did no more than offer an opportunity.

We never asked or induced Sadiq to commit any crime. As I said, he was ready, willing and able to commit the crimes he was planning. We let him go about his way and put him in a place to observe him if he did. After we rented the apartment to him, our agents didn't have any further contact, other than remote observation."

"I see. So you allowed him to run amok in our nation's capital. How do you know that he didn't plan anything else?" Norton thundered.

"Oh we knew everything he was doing. We had court authorized microphones in his apartment and the phone we gave him in Calexico also had a microphone that, along with the GPS chip, you couldn't turn off. We heard every word he said," Diane answered.
"Alright I'll give you that. Let's go to the concluding operation. Captain Rabb, weren't you too close emotionally to operate effectively? Your husband was shot by the man. Weren't you seeking retribution?" Norton asked.

"Yes I would say I was senator, but still Sadiq demanded to see me, again confusing me with my sister, whom he saw in Paraguay. I had no other choice but to go," Diane answered.

"Is that how you broke your hand?" DeLong asked.

"Yes it was Senator. It happened when I punched Sadiq several times during our fight," Diane answered smugly.

"I see and when you had him subdued, you still shot him," Norton yelled.

"Senator, when I had him stunned, I grabbed his gun and held it on him. As I did so he reached into his coat, brought out another gun and pointed it at me. That's when our sniper fired on him and I shot him myself. I was acting in self-defense," Diane calmly answered.

"According to this transcript, you put a bullet through his head after the sniper fired the fatal shot," Norton said.

"Again senator, I was acting in self-defense. I had no idea if the sniper's shot was a fatal one. I wanted to ensure Sadiq was no longer going to be a threat to me,' Diane answered.

"Okay Captain Rabb has answered those questions. I have another one, Admiral Marshall, who was the sniper?" DeLong asked.

"That information is classified beyond this committee. For their own protection we don't reveal the names of our operatives to you or anyone. The sniper was in position to back up Captain Rabb and fired only when Sadiq demonstrated that he was still a threat."

"I can see the logic in that," DeLong acquiesced.

Norton jumped in to ask, "I notice that you don't use gender pronouns when you refer to the sniper. Is that one more way to keep his or her identity a secret?"

"Yes senator it is," John answered simply.

Norton continued his personal attack as he asked, "Admiral Marshall, Captain Rabb, you stated that you are married people and with children. Where were your children during the time of this operation?"

"That is not relevant to these proceedings Senator Norton. What Captain Rabb or I do to ensure the safety of our children and extended family is no one's business but ours," John flatly stated.

"Weren't they out of the capital during your operation?" Norton persisted.

"Again where our children were or are now is none of your business, senator," John said menacingly.

"Well Admiral I'll determine what is my or this committee's business. We should have been told that Sadiq was in DC planning destruction. What gives you the right to spirit your children out of harm's way when there is danger. Don't you think we all have that right? What if he had a nuclear device? Perhaps I'll subpoena your children and ask them where they were," Norton thundered.
"Senator Norton that is enough, Admiral Marshall is right," DeLong said to him.

Norton was about to respond to DeLong but John calmly interrupted him. Diane could hear the menace in his voice. "Two things Senator: Sadiq wasn't after you or anyone else. He was after my wife and brother in law because they were the ones he saw in Paraguay when they helped smash his operation there. Secondly if you or anyone else goes near my or Captain Rabb's children, I'll see you in Leavenworth after I break both your legs."

"Are you threatening me Admiral Marshall?" Norton asked.

"No senator, I'm just responding to YOUR threat. I am like any other parent. I will do anything to protect my family," John answered.

"Senator Norton, I'll say it again, Admiral Marshall is correct. I would not take his statement as a threat, but a promise of consequences if his family is threatened. Their location during the operation is none of yours or this committee's business. We will strike his and Senator's Norton's statements regarding the question of the children's location and the verbal confrontation from the record," DeLong said getting the hearing back to order.

"Thank you senator," John said. 'She's not such a bitch after all.' John thought. Still not entirely mollified, Norton asked one more question, "Seeing as you admitted that Sadiq was after your spouses, was it your intent to capture him alive or to kill him?"

"Senator we always want to capture subjects like Sadiq alive. Alive they can yield beaucoup amounts of intelligence. When Captain Rabb subdued him and got to his gun first, Sadiq had a choice to surrender or die. He chose not to surrender when he pulled his second weapon out. In doing so he demonstrated himself to still be a threat to the well-being of Captain Rabb. In any operation, the safety of our people takes precedence over the safety of the perpetrator. Sadiq chose to be a martyr. We simply accommodated him," John said simply.

"I think that answers your question Senator Norton," DeLong stated. She added, "If there are no more questions, this hearing is adjourned."

After she banged the gavel, she and the other senators got up and left.

After putting their stuff away, John, Diane and Carolyn left as well.

Now the Sadiq affair was finally over.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 111

Saturday, September 27, 2003

1415 Local Time

Navy Yard Chapel

Washington Navy Yard, SE

The planning for Jennifer and Sergei's wedding went very smoothly. The bridal shower was well attended by Jennifer's colleagues, both officers and enlisted, from JAG.

Sergei's bachelor party at McMurphy's was as sedate as John's, though as Sergei's best man, Victor hired a stripper to entertain the groom.

Sergei moved out of his studio apartment into Jennifer's one bedroom apartment. The move was no trouble as they had their apartments on the same floor and Sergei was already moved in shortly after their engagement.

Jennifer spent the night before the wedding at the Rabbs while the Marshalls put Sergei up for that night. John's logic was, "That way he won't get lost on his way to the chapel."

While the men of the bridal party waited at Florida Avenue, the women of the bridal party all went to Fairfax.

The pairings just kind of fell into place; Loren and Victor as Matron of Honor and best man, John and Sarah, with Harm and Diane rounding out the bridal party. Harriet and Bud stood in as Jennifer's surrogate parents in the absence of the Reverend Coates and Jennifer's late mother.

Now standing in the bridal room Jennifer was going nuts. She was twisting and untwisting the silk handkerchief. Sarah and Diane were very amused because they found it to be reminiscent of Sarah's wedding.

Just at that point Loren walked through the door. Seeing how nervous the bride was. She stepped forward and doing her duty as Matron of Honor, put her hand on Jennifer's shoulder in an attempt to comfort her friend saying, "Jennifer calm down. You'll rip your mother's handkerchief. I just saw Sergei in the chapel and he's more nervous than you."

"Oh I'm not nervous. I'm just excited. This day is finally here," Jennifer replied.

"Yes it is and now let's get you ready. The reverend is waiting," Loren said.

It wasn't long until Jennifer marched down the aisle behind her bridal party and joined Sergei in holy wedlock.

After the ceremony at the Navy Yard Chapel the reception was at the Army Navy Country Club. After all the usual wedding reception activities, Jennifer he had a wicked gleam in her eye as she shoved a huge piece of cake into Sergei's face. She had her own fit of giggles when he returned the favor. All of the spontaneous kisses, the lingering touches weren't lost on the other guests, most of
them married. It ended late into the evening when Sergei swept Jennifer up into his arms and carried her out to the waiting limousine and their first night as husband and wife.

Sunday, September 28, 2003

1130 Local Time

Grace Aviation Hanger and Flight School

Manassas Regional Airport

Manassas, VA

The previous spring Harm and Diane decided to move their Stearman biplane "Sarah" from Blacksburg Airport to Manassas Regional Airport. Manassas was only 30 minutes away from their home in Fairfax. The other factor in their decision was that the rate to store Sarah at Manassas was cheaper than at Blacksburg. When they went to check out Manassas Airport, Tom Johnson, the owner of Grace Aviation stepped up and offered a nice monthly rate that Harm and especially Diane, as the family "exchequer", could not refuse as it was much lower than the rate at Blacksburg.

John and Harm along with their eldest daughters, Chloe and Sarah or Les were at the airport celebrating little Les' 6th birthday. Harm promised her a flight when she reached that age. In preparation to the outing Harm had only one glass of champagne at Jennifer's wedding, knowing the rules of there having to be 8 hours between "bottle and throttle." Since it was a much shorter ride to this airport, there would be a party at the Rabbs' in Fairfax later that afternoon. Sarah, Diane and Ann Marie along with their respective broods were in Fairfax preparing the house for the influx of a dozen 6 year olds.

John and Chloe were watching from the open hanger door as Harm brought the Stearman in for a landing. Chloe grinned as she saw two arms sticking up from the front seat of the cockpit. She knew Les was enjoying her first flight. Chloe was anticipating her own flight with her Uncle Harm.

Harm brought the Stearman over and stopped it so that it was parallel to the hanger entrance and shut the engine down. While Harm waited in the cockpit John climbed up to help Les unbuckle her seatbelt. Sarah sat on a thick booster pad that raised her high enough so she could see over the edge of the cockpit. Still her legs were still too short to reach the pedals.

"How was it Les?" John asked his niece.

"Oh Uncle John it was great. Much better than flying in a big airplane," Les exclaimed as she took her earphones off.

John helped Sarah out onto the wing where Chloe was waiting to help her hop down. Les stayed there as John handed the booster pad down to her then he helped his own daughter climb up and buckled her properly into the seat.

Climbing down John took Les' hand. They walked into the hanger as Harm started the engine again and taxied back out to the runway. After they watched Harm and Chloe take off, they turned to walk through the hanger to the food court set behind the hanger.

As they walked through the hanger they passed the "Grace Aviation Flying School" office. Les stopped suddenly and pointing into the office exclaimed, "Uncle John there's Mattie!"

John turned in the direction where his niece was pointing and asked, "Who's Mattie?"
"She's over there." Sarah said as she dragged her uncle along with her on her way to the open office door.

As they moved along Les explained, "She's my babysitter."

As John looked through the office window he saw a young blonde girl, he guessed to be fifteen or sixteen years of age, working at a desk. John hadn't seen her when he and Harm first arrived with their girls.

When they arrived at the door Les exclaimed, "Hi Mattie!"

When Mattie turned and John got a better look at her, he did recognize Mattie from when she babysat his children at the Rabbs on Loren's wedding day.

John also saw the look on the pretty face change from surprise to pleasure as the teenager recognized Les. She put aside the paper work she was doing to answer, "Hey Sarah how are you?"

"Oh I'm great cause today is my birthday and daddy took me up for my first plane ride in Sarah. He named it after my Grams," Les happily replied.

"That's great honey. Are your mom and dad giving you a party?" Mattie asked.

"Yes my mom and aunts are giving me one at home. All my cousins and friends are coming," Les happily replied.

While the girls were talking, John looked around. He saw that the form Mattie was working on was an invoice. His eyebrow ticked up as he also saw the words "Past Due" stamped diagonally across the form. He was able to see the other forms spread out on the desk. Now both his eyebrows went up in surprise as he saw other forms with the same "past due" stamp. He noticed that Mattie was paying attention to Les and thus didn't notice that he was looking around the office.

John's surreptitious inspection was interrupted when Les said, "And this is my Uncle John Marshall."

John stuck his hand out as Mattie offered hers. As they shook, John said, "Happy to meet you. Helping your parents with some office work?"

John was immediately distressed at the total change that came over Mattie's face as she stammered out an answer, "Ah uhm my mom died in a car crash last 4th of July weekend."

"Oh I'm uh so sorry to hear that," John said sympathetically. He added, "Is your dad around?"

"He's out today talking to a few farmers about crop dusting their land. He asked me to run the office today. Heck I was doing it with my mom before she died so I know what to do and stuff," Mattie replied evasively.

John just nodded skeptically as he said, "Well I hope he does well."

"Thanks Mr. Marshall," Mattie replied. Still John saw her avert eyes, making him believe that she was about to get caught in a lie.

Totally oblivious to the interplay between her uncle and friend, Les said cheerily, "Well Uncle John and me are going to get a drink. Then when Daddy lands with Chloe, we're going to my party"

"Well, have a good time Sarah," Mattie replied obviously anxious for John to leave.

Seeming to get the clue, John said, "Well give my regards to your dad, Mattie."
"Thanks Mr. Marshall, I will," Mattie replied.

With that John took Les' hand and led her out of the office to the food court. As John passed the office window that looked out to the hanger's interior, he saw Mattie let go a sigh of relief. John promised himself that he would take the time to investigate Mattie Grace Johnson further.

In the meantime Harm and Chloe landed. As Harm pulled the plane pointing into the hanger this time and shut the engine down. After Chloe climbed out and took Les' hand Harm, John and the ground crew pushed the plane to its parking spot and tied it down. Then the two fathers and their respective daughters piled into the Rabbs' Lexus for the drive back to Fairfax

John waited until they were half way home before he asked Harm, "Harm how well do you know the Johnsons? You know the people who run the Grace Aviation hanger"

"Diane and I know them from our church. We were surprised to see that they owned the hanger when we came here looking for a new place to store the Stearman. Because we knew the family from church, Tom and his wife offered us a good rate," Harm replied.

Harm then asked, "Why?"

"Did you know that Mrs. Johnson was killed last July 4th weekend in a car crash?" John asked in answer to Harm's question.

"No I didn't, but then again consider what we were all dealing with last summer. I was more out of town working for you and then flying for the company. Today was the first time I was even out to the airport after we transferred Sarah there last spring," Harm explained.

Harm then voiced another thought, "Come to think of it, Diane and I haven't seen the Johnsons at church since before the 4th either."

He then asked, "Why the sudden interest John?"

"When Les and I were in the office, their daughter Mattie was there by herself. Also there was a stack of bills marked "past due" on the desk. I think she and her father are in trouble or at least their business is in trouble," John explained.

"Where was Tom?" Harm asked.

"When I asked Mattie that same question, she said that he was out drumming up crop dusting business," John answered.

"Crop dusting, no way not from that airport," Harm explained.

"How do you know that?" John asked.

"Manassas airport isn't like Blacksburg. All the planes flying out of there are private passenger not industrial like a crop duster. That's one of the reasons Diane and I decided to move Sarah from Blacksburg. We didn't want the kids to be exposed to the chemicals. Besides Manassas is too far away from the farm country that needs to be dusted. Crop dusters don't have the range to get out there from Manassas and then fly back," Harm explained.

"So you agree something is not right about what Mattie said?" John asked.

"Yeah I'd say so," Harm said.
"I think we ought to check it out," John said.

"You're right if you could figure out that something's wrong, then the FAA and Virginia Child Welfare or whatever they're called will cotton onto it as well," Harm agreed.

"I'll make some calls tomorrow," John said.

"Yeah let me know what you come up with, I'd like to help. Let's talk it over with Diane and Sarah about it tonight," Harm agreed.

"You got it Ace," John agreed.

Just then Chloe spoke up from the back seat as she asked "Dad is Mattie in trouble?"

"I don't know sweetheart, possibly" John answered his eldest.

"Well if she is, then you and Uncle Harm are the best guys to help her. Please do what you can Dad, Uncle Harm" Chloe pleaded.

Harm and John shared a look before John said, "We'll do our best honey," John said lovingly to his very special and precious daughter. He was so proud that she was willing to help someone she hardly knew.

Monday, September 29, 2003

1030 Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

716 Sicard Street,

Washington Navy Yard, SE

It wasn't John who made the phone calls but Diane. After they cleaned up from Les' party, the four parents talked over Mattie's plight while they sat and had some after party coffee. It was decided that a forensic examination of the Grace Aviation books needed to be done. Diane was in a better position to make the inquiries. So when she got to work this morning she called Tim McGee into her office.

"Tim, does Jethro have you working on anything vital?" Diane asked her agent.

"No Mrs. Rabb. I'm doing some computer maintenance," Tim replied.

"Good I need you to make some phone calls. But you have to realize that it's personal. I think a teenage girl Harm and I know may be in trouble," Diane replied.

To his credit Tim asked, "How can I help?"

Well, it's like this," Diane began as she explained Mattie's predicament.

"I'll get right on it ma'am," replied after the briefing.

Tim's first call was to Grace Aviation itself. Mattie was the one to answer. Tim was prepared for this he rightly figured it was Mattie as he recognized an immature voice when he heard it.

He asked, "I'm looking for Tom Johnson please."
"He's not in right now. Can you tell who you are and what he can do for you?" Mattie asked all business.

"Well I'm looking to take flying lessons," Tim began before Mattie cut him off.

"Mr. Johnson isn't available to give lessons at this time," Mattie said. Tim could hear that she was anxious to get him off the phone.

"Oh I see. Okay can you tell me your name please," Tim asked.

"I'm Mr. Johnson's office manager. I can have him call you when he is available, goodbye," Mattie said as she hung up.

"Oh boy that wasn't good," Tim said.

For his next step Tim looked on the internet for reports of car accidents in Virginia on July 4th. He verified that Mrs.' Johnson was killed in a car accident the weekend of the 4th. He did a search of the court records. He went to notify Diane immediately on what he found.

"Mr. Johnson is in jail. He's been there awaiting trial since the accident on suspicion of DUI in the accident that killed his wife. Apparently he wasn't able to pay his bail. Mattie is supposedly in the custody of his sister, Edna Johnson. Ms. Johnson is also the only living relative to Mattie and Mr. Johnson. Her mother was an only child," McGee told her.

Diane pursed her lips as she said, "That would explain why the child protection services aren't on to her yet. Still I wonder why the aunt hasn't been keeping up with her."

"Maybe Mattie has been sneaking away from school and then going home in time for dinner. Still doesn't explain the fact why the school hasn't acted yet on her truancy," Tim surmised along with Diane.

"Well school has only been open for about four weeks. They probably haven't followed up on truancy cases this early in the school year yet. Still it's something that needs to be checked. I remember Tom and his wife Mary were decent people. Tom seemed to have it together. It seems a bit unusual to think that he was reckless enough to drive drunk," Diane commented.

"What do you want to do Mrs. Rabb?" McGee asked.

"Well we don't want Mattie to get pulled out of her aunt's home and placed into the system if it isn't warranted. But we, as in Harm and I, are officers of the court. That means that since we have suspicions of her status, we are obligated to report her situation to the child welfare people. Still as I said all we have are suspicions. That isn't much to go on," Diane said to Tim.

Diane was remembering her sister Sarah's story of reporting a turbulent home and the child advocate who visited being completely fooled.

"What would you like me to do ma'am?" Tim asked.

"Run a check on Mattie's aunt and get me an address. Then do some forensic accounting and let me know of the financial status us of Grace Aviation. Knowing what shape her company is in will help Harm and I make a better decision on how we can go about helping Mattie," Diane replied.

"Yes ma'am," Tim said. He returned to his desk and did as he was ordered. Shortly before the end of the business day, he brought back the fruits of his labors to Diane.
After she and McGee went over the information he gathered, Diane said, "Well Tim, I think my husband and I need to go to Manassas to check up on Miss Mattie Grace," Diane said.

"As officers of the court," Tim said with a grin.

"You're learning Tim," Diane returned with a smile.

Saturday, October 4, 2003

1000 Local Time

Manassas Regional Airport

Manassas, VA

Harm and Diane pulled up to the Grace Aviation hanger and walked across the hanger floor to the Grace Aviation Flight School office. As they neared the office they saw Mattie speaking with a man a business suit.

The couple could clearly see that Mattie was in distress. When they reached the open door they heard Mattie cry, "But I need this business. You can't take it away from me."

"And that is the problem young lady. When the FAA found out that your father was in jail since last 4th of July and that a sixteen year old was running this business, they called the bank holding your father's note and scheduled an auction. I'm going to bid on it and I'm going to be the new owner. After I win the bid you'll have two days to clear out," the man said to her.

At that Diane and Harm stepped into the door. It was Diane who said, "Excuse me Mr.?"

The man turned to confront the two intruders, ready to yell about their interruption. When he saw that Harm was wearing his uniform he softened his stance and said, "Harry Clark. I'm going to be the new owner of this business."

"Well Mr. Clark how can you say that when the auction hasn't happened yet?" Diane asked.

"Because I'm the only one interested in buying this broken down business," Clark acidly replied.

At that Diane and Harm looked around. Knowing firsthand what his wife was thinking, Harm said, "It doesn't look broken to me. In fact I see a lot of potential. That's why my wife and I are here. We found out about the auction and we're prepared to put in a bid on Grace Aviation ourselves."

Diane looked at Harm as she nodded in agreement with him. Turning back to Clark she said, "So Mr. Clark, if you're through verbally abusing a teenage girl, I suggest you leave. Since the business isn't yours yet, you're trespassing," Diane said. Menace was practically dripping from her tone.

Harm could clearly see that his wife went into her "mothering mode" with the famous Mackenzie temper simmering just below the surface. Being that he was mostly the target of that fury either from Diane or her sister Sarah, he rarely got to sit back and watch the show as their ire was directed at another person. He was totally amused that Clark was visibly intimidated.

Clark was able to put some of his ego back together as he stammered, "Well uhm in that case I'll just go. But you won't see the last of me."

Diane and Harm's gaze followed Clark as he walked out of the office. When they turned back to face Mattie, she asked them, "Are you really going to try to buy my parents business?"
"Well yes we are, in a way" Diane began.

She had to hold her hand up to stop Mattie from asking the inevitable question before she continued. "After doing some investigation into your situation, Harm and I decided you need some help. Yes we're going to place a bid on your business."

How did you find out that my parents business was going into auction," Mattie asked suspiciously.

"I am the assistant director of a national law enforcement agency. I did some checking of your situation when Mr. Marshall expressed some suspicions that your company wasn't as solvent as it should be. He saw all the "past due” notices on your desk when he was in here last Sunday," Diane explained.

"Oh I see," Mattie said as she looked down knowing that she was caught.

Diane saw that and continued, "Originally Mr. Rabb and I went looking for you at your Aunt Edna's apartment in Manassas. When we didn't get an answer to our knocking we went to see the next door neighbor. Her neighbor told us that your aunt has been in the nursing home for the last three weeks recovering from a broken hip.

"That happened at home when the chair she was standing on to change a light bulb collapsed from under her. I found her that night when I came home from here. She's 70 years old. She had no business being up on the chair to change a light bulb. She should have had the superintendent come and change it," Mattie said.

"Well be that as it may. When the neighbor told us which nursing home Edna was staying, we went to see her. Your aunt told us quite a few things. One of them was she hasn't seen you since the accident," Diane told Mattie.

"What did she say?" Mattie asked in trepidation.

Diane replied, "She loves you and is worried about you. She was wondering why you haven't been to visit her since right after she was admitted there."

"Well I've been here trying to run this business. I didn't want to be a burden to her," Mattie said.

"Well Edna figured that as well. She asked us to try and help you," Harm said.

"I don't need your help," Mattie replied truculently.

"Oh yeah! Judging from Mr. Clark and what we found out from the bank, you do," Diane said.

"How did you find out about all that?" Mattie asked trying to sidestep the Rabbs' inquisition.

Diane tapped her head saying, "Assistant Director of a law enforcement agency, remember."

"Oh yeah that," Mattie replied chagrined.

Before Mattie could comment further Diane asked her, "So tell me if you haven't been staying at your aunt's apartment where have you been staying?"

Mattie sighed as she knew that lying wouldn't get her anywhere. She replied, "I've been staying at my mother's house. She left it to me and I've been making payments on the mortgage by running the business," Mattie explained.

"That explains how you dodged the authorities. But it doesn't explain why you haven't been to
"Well I go in the morning and then I come here after classes," Mattie explained.

Diane thought, 'That answers the question about any truancy.'

Diane then asked, "So how have you been doing it?"

"Well you know my mom's house is only ten blocks from yours. My school, Centerville High School, is only twenty minutes from the airport by car. I'm 16 and I have a driver's license. I drive my dad's truck to and from," Mattie explained triumphantly.

"When did you turn 16?" Harm asked.

"In March," Mattie answered.

Harm and Diane grinned. They both knew that in Virginia one could be at least 16 years and 3 months of age to obtain a Virginia driver's license.

Diane sighed saying, "Still you're a minor and you need an adult to stay with you. Your Aunt Edna is in a nursing home recovering. Even after she does recover, she's not going to be in any shape to be the responsible adult that the child protection services require to keep you out of foster care."

Mattie thought about this and asked, "If I agree to stay with you, will you help me run this business?"

"Well we are going to bid on it and if we win, we'll consider the asking price to be a loan. We'll also find someone we can all trust to run it for you until you're of age to legally take over. Still I'd like to get your aunt's official blessing," Diane answered.

"Okay in that case I say we go see her and get it. I know you both since I baby sat for your children so I guess it's alright to stay with you," Mattie said with a smile.

"Good that's settled. Let's go visit your aunt then," Harm said.

Mattie couldn't lock the office fast enough to follow the Rabbs out to their car.

It was a funny scene when Harm saw the shape Tom Johnson's pick-up truck was in. It was a twelve year old Ford. The sides were rusted through. One could see the road through the rusted out cab floor.

Harm went into his own parenting mode when he said, "No way are you driving that thing. It's not even worth to be sold for scrap."

Mattie could only shrug as she got into the backseat of the Rabbs' Lexus.

1230 Local Time

Manassas Nursing & Rehab Center

Manassas, VA

The nursing and rehab center was also only a five minutes' drive from the airport. As Mattie and the Rabbs walked toward her Aunt Edna's room, they heard an alarm going off. Then they heard the most dreaded announcement of "CODE BLUE, ROOM 509"

"That's my Aunt's room," Mattie cried.
The trio hurried down to 509. They were stopped at the door by the charge nurse who told them, "Please wait. Ms. Johnson just coded."
Chapter 112

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 112

Saturday, October 4, 2003

1400 Local Time

Manassas Nursing & Rehab Center

Manassas, VA

Mattie, Harm and Diane stood outside Edna Johnson's room as the nurses and doctors worked on her. It was the third call of "clear" and then the noise of the defibrillator being used that completely undid Mattie.

She cried out, "Aunt Edna!"

Diane wrapped her arms around the teenager and led her into the lounge at the end of the hall.

That's where the doctor on call, Dr. Cecora, found her. Mattie looked up when she heard him open the door to the lounge. As he reached the trio he put his hand on Mattie's shoulder he said in a kindly voice, "I'm sorry Mattie, we weren't able to revive her."

That caused Mattie to become even more distressed as she cried, "Noooo! Now I don't have anybody."

Diane just pulled the crying teenager to her breast and let her cry it out.

As Mattie sobbed quietly Harm asked Dr. Cecora, "What happened doctor?"

Scratching his bald head Cecora said, "Well as near as we can figure Mrs. Johnson shot a blood clot. Even though the surgeons at the hospital looked for it during her surgery to repair her hip, her injury most likely damaged the blood vessels in her pelvis. That caused a clot to form. The blood clot went into the lung and caused a pulmonary embolism. Her heart wasn't strong enough to withstand the trauma."

"Thank you doctor," Diane said.

"Are you related to Mattie? I read in Edna's file that Mattie was the only relative, except for Tom who is in jail," Cecora said.

"We're friends of hers. We know Mattie's parents. We'll take care of her," Harm offered.

Doing his due diligence Cecora asked the inevitable question," Are you sure Mattie?"

"Yes doctor I'm sure," Mattie firmly answered having now gotten some control of her emotions.

"Okay I'll have Social Service get in touch with you about Edna's funeral arrangements. Again I'm sorry for your loss," Cecora said shaking first Mattie's hand and then Diane and Harm's.

"Thank you doctor," Diane said.
After Cecora left, the nurse came in to ask, "Mattie do you want to say goodbye to Edna before we take care of her?"

"Yeah I guess," Mattie answered with a sniffle.

Looking at Diane and Harm she asked, "Can you guys come in with me?"

"Of course sweetie," Diane said as she draped her arm across Mattie's shoulder.

When the trio walked in they saw that the room was cleaned of the detritus from the emergency. The bedsheet was neatly covering Edna's body. The nurse went to the side opposite side of the bed from where Mattie and the Rabbs were standing and folded the sheet down to below Edna's chin. Mattie had tears running down her cheeks as she bent to kiss her aunt's forehead.

"Goodbye Aunt Edna. I'm sorry that I didn't spend as much time with you as I should have."

Harm looked at Diane and saw that she too had tears running down her cheeks.

The trio turned and walked out of the room as the nurse pulled the sheet back over Edna's face.

Sunday, October 5, 2003

1245 Hours

Rabb residence

Fairfax, VA

After Edna died, there were a lot of arrangements that needed to be made with the Social Worker. When they left the nursing home, they stopped at the Johnson home so that Mattie could pack an overnight bag. So it was well into Saturday evening when the trio arrived at the Rabbs home. Fortunately Diane had prevailed onto Sarah and John to spend the afternoon with the combined Rabb and Marshall children at the Rabbs.

Mattie found it very amusing watching the two sets of parents arguing with their children as the Rabb children wanted the play day to continue and the Marshall children just being a bit put out that they had to leave their cousins and their good time. It was Chloe who was a big help in corralling Caroline and Patrick, getting them ready to go while Sarah took care of David. All the Rabbs, including Mattie waved goodbye from the driveway as the Marshalls pulled away.

As Harm cooked dinner, Diane set Mattie up in the guest bedroom for Saturday night.

Sunday morning found the Rabbs going to church and then after breakfast out as a family, discussing with Mattie what she wanted to do with her future.

"Well I can't do anything until my dad's DUI case is resolved one way or another. One of the biggest reasons he's still in jail is that he didn't want to put the business or my mother's house up as collateral for the bail money. Also we can't afford an attorney beyond a public defender."

"Has your dad spoken with one yet?" Diane asked her.

"The one time I visited him after the funeral he told me he did. He wanted dad to cop a plea for a year's jail time followed by probation," Mattie answered.

"What did Tom say?" Harm asked.
"He said no and wanted a trial. Though I don't know why? I mean the police said he was drunk at the scene of the accident," Mattie said.

"It would appear so. According to the breathalyzer test the officer's administered, he was well over the limit. The rest of the accident report that my agent obtained for me said that when the police arrived they found your mom lying on the pavement near the ditch where the car was found with the front end wrapped around a tree. Your father was also sitting there cradling her head in his lap. Apparently he managed to get her out of the car. The accident investigation report also showed that there was another car involved. There were skid marks that didn't match the path of your father's car. Apparently when your father had to swerve out of the way from an oncoming car, he left the road and collided into the tree," Diane explained.

"How did my mom die? The doctors didn't tell me," Mattie asked.

"She died from blunt force trauma. The autopsy found impact trauma and lacerations to her head. The lacerations were embedded with glass fragments that came from the broken windshield on the passenger's side. That area was also stained by blood that was shown by DNA analysis to be your mom's," Diane told her and Harm.

"So that confirmed that mom was the passenger and dad was driving," Mattie said.

"Yeah he told me he was. Dad never let mom drive with him as a passenger. He was always a lousy back seat driver," Mattie explained.

"Still I'd like to hear Tom's side of the story," Harm said.

"You're going to take his case?" Mattie asked astonished.

"Well Mrs. Rabb and I discussed this when she found out that he was arrested and we both agreed that your father could use our help," Harm answered.

"What can you do for him," Mattie asked.

"Well if I'm going to be his attorney we need to see him today. After we speak, I'll have a better idea as to what I can do," Harm answered.

"Maybe we can put up the money for his bail," Diane added.

"No I can't let you do that," Mattie said emphatically.

"It's okay, we can afford it. Besides it shouldn't be that big a figure that we can't cover," Diane reassured her.

"Okay I can see that. Though, I still don't know what to say to him. I'm still angry at him for killing my mom," Mattie said.

"Well maybe it's time to clear the air. Like I said before, the report mentioned the possibility of another car," Diane said.

"I guess," Mattie admitted. She had another thought and said, "If you can't get him out of jail what happens to me. Since Aunt Edna died, I'll be put into the system," Mattie said realizing what that meant.

"Well if we can't get your dad out of jail, we might have a way to avoid that," Diane offered.
"How?" Mattie asked before Diane could elaborate.

"My sister and her husband are listed as foster parents in Virginia and DC. They had to be as they adopted Chloe. When Mr. Rabb and I go to the family court and petition to leave you in our care, we'll have Mr. Marshall come with us. If the court decides to leave you in foster care, then he'll be a viable alternative to throwing you into the system. If we're lucky we'll go to the same judge that approved the Marshalls' adoption of Chloe," Diane explained.

"Do you think that will work?" Mattie asked.

"We can only try. Still I think the court will see things our way," Harm said reassuring Mattie.

"When will you need to do this?" Mattie asked.

"Well your aunt's funeral is this Wednesday. We'll go to the family court tomorrow," Harm said.

"What about my dad? Even when he's in jail won't you need to get his permission?" Mattie asked.

"Yes we do and since we know him from church, he shouldn't have a problem with us taking care of you," Diane explained.

"Okay when we see him today, we'll ask him?" Mattie said. She was finally seeing the light at the end of her long dark tunnel.

Diane and Harm chuckled at Mattie's enthusiasm as Diane said, "Yeah sweetie we'll go right now if you like."

1530 Hours

Fairfax County Detention Center

10520 Judicial Dr., Fairfax, VA

After getting the next door neighbor's 16 year old daughter to mind the children, Mattie and the Rabbs set off to see Tom. The Fairfax County Detention Center was only 20 minutes from the house. After going through the necessary checks for parking and visitor entry into the exterior of the complex, the trio arrived at the Visitor's Registry Desk.

"How may I help you folks?" The guard, whose name plate on his shirt stated, Conroy, at the desk asked in the usual politeness.

"We'd like to see my dad, Tom Johnson," Mattie offered.

"Okay let's look in the computer registry to see where he's staying and we'll call his cell block and have him meet you in the visitors' room. Give me a minute," Officer Conroy said as he perused the computer at his station.

After a minute of browsing the computer, Conroy looked up perplexed.

Harm saw this and before Conroy could say anything he asked, "Something wrong officer?"

"Well I wouldn't call it anything wrong. It says here that's it was done by the book. I was just wondering why you, his daughter wasn't notified,' Conroy answered.

"Notified of what?" Mattie asked fearfully. The first thought was that her father was dead from some inmate altercation.
Conroy turned the computer screen around for Harm to see as he explained, "Well it says here that prisoner Johnson was released. The reason noted was that his lawyer got him out over three weeks ago."
Chapter 113

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 113

Sunday, October 5, 2003

1550 Hours

Fairfax County Detention Center

Fairfax, VA

Mattie stood and looked at Conroy in astonishment. It was Diane who found her voice first when she asked, "Who posted his bail?"

"No one did. It says here that the public defender got him released on his own recognizance. Haven't you seen him Miss Johnson?" Conroy asked.

"No I haven't. He hasn't come home," Mattie cried.

Conroy had no answer for that. He was becoming to get embarrassed at watching the personal and private drama play out before him.

Unwittingly Harm came to his rescue when he said to Diane and Mattie, "Come on we'll go to Manassas and try to find him."

Diane nodded. She draped a reassuring arm across Mattie's shoulders as she led the distraught teenager out of the building.

The first stop the trio made was back at Mattie's house. Harm went into the master bedroom and into the walk in closet. Harm saw that while the clothing on the feminine side was hung neatly, the masculine side was in a state of disarray as if someone packed only what he could carry in a hurry leaving gaps on the shelves.

When he came out he asked Mattie, "Have you gone into your parents' closet since your mom's funeral?"

"I was only in there to get one of mom's dresses for the funeral director. Since then I haven't been into this room," Mattie answered.

"Well take a look at your father's side of the closet and tell me what's missing," Harm instructed the teenager as he stepped out of her way.

When Mattie looked in she said, "My father's work boots as well as, all his jeans and sweatshirts are missing."

"And so it seems, are his underwear and socks," Diane said from outside the closet.

When Mattie came out from the closet, she saw Diane standing in front of her father's chest of drawers. She had the dresser drawers open. When Mattie looked in, she confirmed Diane's conclusion.
Going right to the conclusion that her father abandoned her Mattie wailed, "But why would he go somewhere without telling me?"

"Maybe he left a note somewhere," Harm said in an effort to console Mattie.

Unfortunately, there was no note to be found. That set Mattie off even more. It was all Diane could do to embrace her and then get her out to the Lexus.

It wasn't until Harm pulled into the driveway at home did Mattie ask, "Now what happens?"

"Well we'll go through the Child Protection Services and try to get you placed into our custody. Then I'll have my people at work look for your father," Diane answered.

"I don't care if you find him or not. He's apparently abandoned me," Mattie said in a petulant tone.

"Be that as it may young lady, we are still obligated to try," Diane said in a semi-chastising tone.

"Well I hope you don't find him," Mattie said in defiance.

Diane could only sigh in resignation as she looked at her husband. Harm rewarded her faith in him as he looked back and nodded his head in agreement with his wife.

2130 hours

Rabb Residence

It was a fairly early night for the Rabb family as they got their children ready for bed. Dinner was a quiet affair as the Rabb children, seeming to sense Mattie's distress, were unusually silent during the meal. They didn't even argue when their parents got them ready for bed kind of early.

Diane walked back into their bedroom after her usual check of her children. Harm was lying in bed dressed in his usual bed clothing of a tee shirt and gym shorts.

As Diane shed her robe, Harm held the bed covers up for her as she got into bed and snuggled up to him. As Harm wrapped his arms around her, she settled into his embrace before she asked, "What are we gonna do Harm?"

"Well while you were checking the kids I was on the phone with Sarah. She's going to represent us before the family court when we apply to have Mattie placed in our custody," Harm replied.

"Good, I'll stop by the county courthouse to get the applications on my way to work tomorrow. Then when I get to work, I'll have McGee start looking for Tom Johnson. I don't want to think what Mattie would be like if something bad happened to him," Diane said in reply.

"Me either," Harm said just before they settled down to sleep.

Monday, October 6, 2003

1120 hours

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Diane sighed as she walked into her office. To make her morning easier, Harm took the kids to the Navy Yard Daycare Center as she went to the courthouse to obtain the custody applications. It was
to say the least an experience in frustration. From what she saw of the application, the custody process would take a long time. Diane looked at her secretary Cynthia and just motioned her head to have her follow her into the office.

After Diane settled behind her desk, she gave Cynthia the envelope full of documents that she had to fill out. "I'll be damned if I'm going to write this thing up so please scan these into the computer for me Cynthia."

"Right away Mrs. Rabb," Cynthia said as she walked out of the office.

When Diane was alone she sat down into her very comfortable office chair. She turned in it to face out the window at the Capitol building. She closed her eyes and took a bit of a rest, thinking about her surprising experience at the court house.

Flashback earlier that morning

After she watched Harm drive away with the kids, Diane drove to the Fairfax Municipal Courthouse. There the lobby guard's directions brought her to the Family Court Clerk's Office. Sitting at one of the desks was a middle-aged female who was of medium height, with a nice figure and a pleasant face.

She had her breakfast of what looked like scrambled eggs, bacon and melted cheese on a croissant, a cup of yogurt and a bottle of orange juice spread out on the desk before her.

As Diane entered the office to stand at the barrier counter, the woman had just picked the croissant up to take a bite. She looked up at Diane over the top of her brown framed glasses. She surprised Diane when she smiled, put her croissant down and placed a napkin over it before she got up. She further surprised Diane when she reached over the counter to shake Diane's hand and asked, "Hi I'm Mrs. Wilkerson, how may I help you?"

Diane was totally surprised at the reaction. She had expected to be treated with the indifference inherent in most civil service workers. She was used to that type of woman as she saw it many times in her dealings with the Washington bureaucracy.

Diane returned her smile with a brilliant one of her own and asked, "Well Mrs. Wilkerson I'm sorry to interrupt your breakfast. I've come to inquire about applying for legal guardianship of a child."

"Just a second, I'll get everything you need," Mrs. Wilkerson returned with a smile.

Mrs. Wilkerson returned a few moments later. Turning the papers over one by one she patiently explained the process to Diane. "Well, here is everything you need to know. You need to complete these forms, answering all the questions honestly. Here is the list of what the court fees are. Here is the form explaining the criteria that need to be met for application for a court hearing. It also explains the need for home visits and an interview by the Guardian ad Litem and so on".

In the space of three minutes the woman's attitude had succeeded in brightening Diane's morning. When Mrs. Wilkerson ended her explanation, she clipped the forms together and placed them in an envelope. Diane picked up the envelope and tucked it into her briefcase. Diane put her beatific smile back on, reached back over and shook hands and said, "Thank you Mrs. Wilkerson. You were very helpful."

Diane turned and walked out of the office with a nice spring to her step.

End of Flashback
Now sitting at her desk Diane thought to herself, 'The DMV should take lessons in customer service from Mrs. Wilkerson.'

After she relaxed for a while her intercom buzzed. She turned and pressed the button to answer with, "Yes Cynthia?"

"Mrs. Rabb, Colonel Marshall is here to see you," Cynthia said.

Diane brightened at that and said, "Send her in please."

Just as she said that, Sarah came into the office. Diane got up to greet her sister. After their customary embrace, Sarah handed the application documents to Diane and a corresponding computer flashdrive. "Cynthia finished scanning these in. If you want, I'll help you navigate through them."

"Oh that would be wonderful sweetie. I can use all the help I can get for this," Diane happily replied.

"Okay then. Let's get started," Sarah said as she sat down on the same side of the desk as Diane as they both settled behind the computer to fill out the applications.

They finished forty minutes later. As Diane sent the forty five page document to print, the sisters sat back and sighed together.

"Wow they don't leave a stone uncovered. They want to know everything, from your childhood to your net worth," Diane commented in wonder.

"You're not kidding. John and I went through the same thing when we adopted Chloe. Don't forget to have this notarized by the way," Sarah answered.

"I'm so glad Harm and I have you to represent us. Thank you," Diane said gratefully.

"You're welcome. You know we're always there to help you guys anytime you need it," Sarah replied as she gave her sister's hand a squeeze.

As they sat there Diane looked at Sarah and her still sharp uniform, with not a button undone. Then she looked down at her own attire and noticed that she had undone her civilian suit coat and the first two buttons of her blouse. She rolled her eyes and in the spirit of really wanting to, she asked, "How is it that you can stay so buttoned up and sharp where as I always feel the need to undo something whenever I'm sitting for so long.

Sarah put on her best smile as she sat up prim and proper as she replied, "It's a Marine thing."

Diane rolled her eyes good naturedly as she had another thought which she voiced, "Don't you have any cases to preside over today?"

"Not today, but Wednesday I'm going to Yuma to preside over a trial. I was handed the case this morning just before I came over here. I ordered a continuance so that I could help you out with the custody case. So before I came over here, I scheduled an emergency hearing in Fairfax Family Court for 1100 hours tomorrow morning. There we'll submit the application," Sarah explained.

"Oh thank you sweetie. The lady at the clerk's office led me to believe that it would take months to get our first court date," Diane said gratefully before she asked, "How did you do that?."

"Well I used my position as a judge to get the hearing citing a need to place Mattie in your care since her aunt died and her father can't be found," Sarah explained.
"Oh Sarah that's so great of you," Diane exclaimed.

She then asked, "If the court date is tomorrow, when do you leave for Yuma?"

"I'm leaving late tomorrow afternoon. John and I are making it a working family holiday. He and the kids will follow out Friday afternoon after Chloe finishes school and we'll stay at Aunt Mehry's and see the other aunties over the weekend," Sarah replied.

Diane asked, "That's great. What's the case about?"

"A Marine pilot is being court martialed for opening fire in a civilian hostage situation in spite of the federal law that limits the use of military involvement in civilian affairs?" Sarah answered.

"Oh yeah I remember it now, it happened last week. I heard about it from our watch desk. Who's trying the case," Diane asked.

"Mike McBurney is prosecuting while Loren Singer is defending. They're already out there. The trial is going to be in the Pichaco Library because the Yuma Courthouse is being renovated," Sarah replied almost wistfully.

"I sense a touch of nostalgia there sister mine," Diane said teasingly.

Sarah sighed. "It's not nostalgia, just some melancholia."

"Really, how come?" Diane asked intrigued and worried about her sister's state of mind.

Sarah explained, "I spent a lot of time in that library because it was the only place I could study in peace. I went there to avoid the craziness at home. Most times when I came home late from there, daddy would be asleep while mom waited up for me. She would make me a plate for dinner and I would go to bed."

"What about after mom left?" Diane asked encouraging Sarah to go on.

"Well after that, I was playing whatever sports were in season so I got home late those days anyway. The days when I went to the library, I would stop on the way home from there to eat. I wanted to stay out long enough for daddy to pass out either in bed or in front of the TV. I would try to be as quiet as possible as I got into bed. But a lot of times he would wake up and start yelling, asking if I was home. Most times he did that, he woke me up. Then I would lay awake, afraid he would come in and start yelling at me or do something else."

"Did he ever molest you?" Diane asked her sister, horrified at herself by the implication and instantly angry at her biological father for harming Sarah.

"No he never did, but I was very much afraid that he would. I told you once that when he was sober he was kind of nice to me. It was only when he was drunk that he would call me his 'stupid tramp daughter'. What really made me leave was one day after he called me stupid and a tramp for the millionth time, he also said, 'maybe you could get by on your looks'. That's when I knew he stopped looking at me as his daughter," Sarah explained.

"How do you mean?" Diane asked, half knowing the answer. She could also hear how difficult it was for Sarah to control her emotions.

"Before that he would always tell be to cover up when he saw that my robe was coming open after I came out of the bathroom, or he would avert his eyes when I would bend over just at the same time he was turning his head and he would accidentally catch a glimpse down my blouse. After he said
that about my looks, he stopped averting his eyes. That's when I knew, drunk or not, I had to leave. I was afraid that he would come into my room and take advantage of me. Then look at what happened after I moved out, Ragle did just what I was afraid daddy would have done, he raped me," Sarah said with a choke in her voice.

"Oh sweetie," Diane said as she leaned over and took hold of Sarah's hands.

Sarah sighed a little as she held back the tears welling in her eyes before she continued, "When I went to counseling with Jordan and Vera I told them all that. We came to the conclusion that's when my insomnia started. I was so afraid of being molested or raped again that I slept very lightly or not at all so I could be ready to fight off any attack or intrusion."

"And now?" Diane asked.

"Well since I met John I've slept much better," Sarah answered brightening up.

"Probably because he gets you exhausted from chasing you around the bedroom," Diane said mischievously.

"Yeah you're right," Sarah agreed with a giggle.

Diane sighed in relief now that they got past the somber interlude. Then she brought the conversation back to Mattie and the guardianship petition as she asked, "So what do we need to do now?"

"Tonight I'll come over to your place so that we can strategize our case. I want to be totally ready for any argument that the judge may bring up."

"Like what?" Diane asked.

"She or he will ask why you want to take care of Mattie. Also why are you going to buy Grace Aviation? They're going to assign a guardian ad litem to come and verify all the answers to the questions in that document. Then she'll assign someone else to come and inspect your home. While I got a quick hearing scheduled, it is only a preliminary emergency hearing. You're not going to be granted full guardianship tomorrow. It's going to be a long process. I wouldn't be surprised if the final decision wasn't handed down until around Christmas time," Sarah explained.

"Wow I had no idea," Diane said in wonder.

Sarah went on, "Yeah the lady in the clerk's office was right, it's a long process. The biggest reason Chloe's adoption ruling was handed down so quickly was because it was in her father's will that we adopt her. Also don't forget that Mattie's father still being alive complicates guardianship. You still have to determine where he is and if he is still alive."

"Yeah I thought of that as well. I have Tim McGee calling the police forces around Fairfax and the surrounding communities looking for him," Diane explained.

"It would be nice if we knew where he was before tomorrow," Sarah said hopefully.

"Yeah that would be nice," Diane said as she got up with Sarah. After hugging her sister said, "I'll see you tomorrow in Fairfax."

"I'll meet you at the courthouse," Sarah replied as she hugged her sister back just before she walked out.

Tuesday, October 7, 2003
Diane and Harm were sitting on either side of Mattie at the courtroom petitioners' table. Sarah was sitting on her sister's right side preparing her notes so that she could present her case. None of the adults were wearing their uniforms. Sarah was dressed in one of her grey business suits. Diane wore a black suit and Harm a dark grey suit.

At precisely 1100 the bailiff called, "All Rise! This court will come to session, the honorable Judge Kay Smith presiding."

Sarah watched as a tall distinguished looking woman came from chambers and sat down behind the bench. Addressing the bailiff Judge Smith asked, "Sam what do we have today?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Harmon and Diane Rabb are requesting to be granted custody of the minor child Mattie Grace Johnson," Sam said handing over the application to Judge Smith.

"Is this document in order?" Smith asked perfunctorily.

"Yes your honor the clerk has verified that all the questions have been answered properly. It only awaits proper verification by the investigators," Sam replied.

"Very well I will hear verbal arguments from the petitioners," Smith said crisply.

At that Sarah stood up and said, "Mrs. Sarah Marshall representing my sister and her husband."

"Very well Mrs. Marshall you may state your case."

Sarah took a deep breath just before she began, "Your honor Mrs. Rabb and Mr. Rabb have known Mattie and her family for a number of years through association at their church. They only learned about Mattie's plight when Mr. Rabb was at the Johnson's place of business, Grace Aviation at Manassas Regional Airport, during a family excursion with my husband John Marshall."

John was sitting in the first row of the audience behind the petitioners' table. He was there to offer familial support.

Sarah continued, "Mr. Rabb was asked to check up on Mattie after my husband informed him that Mattie seemed to be in trouble."

"Is your husband here to testify about his observations?" Judge Smith asked.

"Yes your honor he is," Sarah answered pointing to John sitting behind her. John gave a small salute touching his head in acknowledgement.

Judge Smith nodded and said, "Very well we'll decide if we need to hear from him after you finish your presentation Mrs. Marshall."

"Yes your honor. The Rabbs did a cursory investigation into the financial health of Grace Aviation. They found out that the business was being sold for auction. That's also when they found out that Mrs. Johnson had passed away last July from injuries sustained in a car accident."

"How were the Rabbs able to find out about Mrs. Johnson's death?" Smith asked.
Mrs. Rabb is the Assistant Director of the Naval Criminal Investigation Service. As an officer of the court she used the resources of her agency to perform the investigation, Sarah explained.

"I see, please continue Mrs. Marshall," Smith instructed.

"One of the other things Mrs. Rabb found out in her investigation was the reason that Grace Aviation was going to be sold for auction was that the bank found out that the company was being run, not by her father, but by Mattie, a 16 year old. That was because Mr. Johnson was supposedly incarcerated in the Fairfax County Detention Center under charges of DUI. Mr. Johnson was driving the car in the accident that killed his wife and he was shown to be driving drunk."

"You say supposedly. Where is Mr. Johnson now? Has he asked you to take custody of Mattie?"

"Your honor at this moment we don't know where he is. When the Rabbs took Mattie to visit him in jail, they found that he was released on his own recognizance three weeks prior. After they left the detention center they went home to see if he had ever returned there or even if there was a note. They found some of his clothing was gone and no note left behind." Sarah explained.

"I see and where had Mattie been living during the time Mr. Johnson was incarcerated?"

"Child services placed her in custody of her Aunt Edna, Mr. Johnson's sole remaining relative."

"Where is Aunt Edna now?" Smith asked.

"Your honor, if you will turn to page 23 of the guardianship application, you'll see that Aunt Edna passed away this past Saturday in the nursing facility where she was recovering from a broken hip. Her funeral is tomorrow," Sarah explained.

"Ah yes I see," Smith said satisfied from reading the section Sarah indicated. But before Sarah could continue Smith asked, "So that explains this petition and the emergency hearing."

"Yes your honor," Sarah replied.

"Where has Mattie been staying since Aunt Edna passed?" Smith asked.

"She's been staying with the Rabbs your honor since Saturday," Sarah explained.

"I see. The application states that Mr. Rabb is an attorney for the Navy, stationed at JAG Headquarters in DC. Are you also in the Navy Mrs. Marshall?" Smith asked.

"I'm a Marine your honor. I'm also a judge at JAG," Sarah explained with a wry grin.

Smith smiled at that and said, "Well from one judge to another and seeing in the section in this application noting alternative custody that you and your husband are registered foster parents, I'm temporarily placing Mattie in your custody. That will be until the court is satisfied with the inspection of the Rabbs' home by the guardian ad litem. After that I will hear arguments as to the suitability of the Rabbs as parents."

Sarah was a bit surprised as she said, "Your honor the Rabbs are the parents of four of their own children."

"Yes I see that in the application, but it also states here that the children are not teenagers yet. On the other hand, as noted again in this application, you Mrs. and Mr. Marshall are the adoptive parents of a teenage girl. That makes you ideal candidates for foster care of Mattie. During that time the
investigation will proceed. When they are prepared, I will read the reports from the guardian ad litem and the home inspector. We will reconvene in this court four weeks from this date. We are adjourned."
The Rabbs and Mattie walked a bit desponded from the courthouse. While they didn't get custody of Mattie, they got the next best thing, that of Mattie staying with family.

Sarah and John had lagged behind so that they could sign the required papers with the court clerk. Now they were walking quickly, almost running from the courthouse. When they caught up with the Rabbs, Diane could see that Sarah had a big smile on her face.

When she and John reached them Sarah said, "On our way out John and I went to the Family Court Clerk's office. We met Mrs. Wilkerson and we have some good news.

Flashback 20 minutes ago

Family Court Clerk's Office

Mrs. Wilkerson saw the Marshalls as they entered the office. When they reached the counter, she stuck out her hand to Sarah and asked, "What can I do for you Mrs. Rabb?"

Sarah smiled at the usual mistake, took the offered hand and said, "Hello I'm Sarah Marshall. You met my sister Diane earlier. This is my husband John. I'm representing the Rabbs in their custody application. Judge Smith granted us temporary custody of Mattie. We would like to get some clarification of what we are allowed to do as Mattie's foster guardians."

Mrs. Wilkerson smiled at them. She lifted the hinged part of the counter and said, "Come with me to the conference room. I'll pull the rule book out and go over what you need to know."

On the way to the aforementioned room, John asked, "Why did Judge Smith grant us custody when the application showed that the Rabbs were great parents?"

"Well Judge Smith must have seen some quality in you that the Rabbs didn't have," Mrs. Wilkerson commented.

Sarah replied, "John and I are registered in DC and Virginia as 'foster parents'. We adopted a teenage girl."

"Well there you go. Judge Smith did a Solomon. She is obligated by law to put Mattie in the system. Granting custody to you as foster parents registered in the system, followed that obligation, but also kept her in the Rabbs' extended family. That gives Mattie a more loving and generally safer environment to stay in while the Rabbs are further evaluated by the guardian ad litem and the home inspector," Mrs. Wilkerson answered.
Sarah and John nodded in agreement with the judicial reasoning.

When they entered the conference room Mrs. Wilkerson retrieved a well-worn law book from the shelf and opened it on the table saying, "Okay we need to see Section 2.4, which states the roles and resources families and other individuals can provide"

When she got to the section she wanted, Mrs. Wilkerson read aloud from the book, "Relatives, siblings, friends and significant adults may assume diverse roles and provide different resources and support for the child. Individuals not related by birth, marriage, or adoption to the child, but who have emotionally significant relationships with the child, may be willing to fulfill the functions of a family relationship for the child in foster care. The roles of individuals may include, but are not limited to the following:"

Mrs. Wilkerson only read the bullet points relating to the Marshalls' questions, "• Helping identify potential relative caregivers. • Providing respite or temporary care for the caregivers, transportation, financial resources, or employment and housing options. • Providing a permanent family for the child or youth."

As Mrs. Wilkerson read on Sarah and John smiled.

Mrs. Wilkerson finished reading with, "Okay to boil it down to the simplest terms, foster children need not be restricted from contact with the extended relatives of the foster parents as long as there are no disputes outstanding. In other words, you and your sister are not fighting over any legal issues are you Mrs. Marshall?"

Sarah chuckled as she said, "No we're not."

Mrs. Wilkerson continued, "So as long as you two get along, the Rabbs can still play a significant role in caring for Mattie, including her staying with them. You have to remember though you, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, must regularly visit the Rabbs to ensure Mattie is being adequately cared for."

"Well that's not a problem. Our families see each other just about every day of the week," John said.

"So it's settled then. I think you and the Rabbs will do well in caring for Mattie," Mrs. Wilkerson said smiling.

"Oh thank you very much for all you help Mrs. Wilkerson," Sarah said shaking her hand.

End of flashback

Sarah finished explaining with, "So as long as we deem that Mattie is staying in a safe environment, she can stay at your place. John and I just have to be there when the guardian ad litem and the home inspector come to visit your place."

"Oh Sarah that is great news," Diane said hugging her sister.

"So where do I stay tonight?" Mattie asked.

"Well if you don't have any objections you come back to our house," Diane said.

"Oh that's so great. Let's stop at my mother's so that I can get the rest of my stuff from my room," Mattie said gleefully.

"Well let's get started," Harm said leading the way to the parking lot.
The Rabbs spent the rest of the day settling Mattie into her temporarily/permanent home.

John and Sarah went home only long enough for Sarah to change into her uniform, grab her go-bag and drive to Andrews. She made her 1800 hour flight to Yuma with twenty minutes to spare.

As John kissed her goodbye he said, "I'll go to Fairfax to check on Mattie tomorrow and Thursday. Then the kids and I will see you in Yuma Friday evening."

"That sounds good to me. Too bad the Rabbs can't come out to see the aunties. They would have loved to see them again," Sarah said.

"Yeah that and to experience the feeding frenzy that is dinner at Aunt Mehry's," John said cheekily.

"It's not that bad," Sarah said slapping John's arm in the usual way.

"Yeah but it is fun to be there," John acquiesced smiling.

"Yeah it is that," Sarah agreed.

Sighing she said in closing, "Well I'll see everyone Friday evening. I hope the trial doesn't go past the weekend. Otherwise we'll be there until Tuesday because of the Columbus Day holiday. I'd like to come home with you and the kids Monday night," Sarah said.

"If it goes over, we'll deal with it. At least Harm isn't trying it. You know how he loves to be theatrical," John said with a smile.

"Yeah don't I know it," Sarah aid with a smile before she gave John another quick kiss. She went through the exit and up the steps to the military 707.

Sunday, October 12, 2003

1830 hours

Yuma International Airport

Yuma, AZ

Sarah's case was decided early Friday afternoon. That being the case she was able to meet her family when they flew into Yuma that evening. She was able to change into comfortable shorts. Sneakers and polo shirt top at Aunt Mehry's before she went to the airport.

She spotted John as he walked off carrying David on one shoulder and the baby bag on the other. Chloe was only two steps behind with Caroline and Patrick in tow on each hand. They broke away from their big sister when they spotted their mother.

Sarah delighted in the squeals of, "Mommieeeeeee!" She happily endured their collision as she stooped to gather them into her outstretched arms.

'God I'll never get tired of this,' she happily thought as she rain her affection onto her children. She stood up to receive her husband's and then Chloe's affections.

As John handed David to her, Sarah loved the way her son brightened up when she took hold of him. She had to hoist him up to her shoulder when he began rooting for her breast.

"This kid is impatient," Sarah said in happy exasperation.
"Yeah I know just how he feels," John asked after he received his kiss. He was totally amused with David's antics.

He then asked, "How's it going ninja girl?"

"Fine the trial ended this afternoon. Since they don't have to leave until tomorrow morning, I invited Mike and Loren to Aunt Mehry's for dinner," Sarah said.

"Oh my God, I can't wait to see the looks on their faces when dinner is served," John said.

"Yeah either can I," Sarah agreed with a grin.

They went to collect their luggage from the carousel. Sarah had borrowed Mehry's minivan to transport her family.

"How did you get around all week?" John asked as they got everything in the van.

"Well just like you have 'admiral's privileges' I have 'judge's privileges'. I was given one of the newer Crown Vics from the base motor pool," Sarah answered as she strapped David into the infant carrier.

Soon they were on their way. John let Sarah drive.

When they reached Aunt Mehry's, they were greeted by Mehry herself as she came out the front door to embrace Chloe as she was the first one out of the car. When Mehry got to John she said with a big smile, "So Mr. Bigshot you're an admiral now."

"Yeah Mehry I am. The Navy scraped the bottom of the barrel when they chose me," John replied with tongue firmly in cheek.

Mehry slapped his arm just like Sarah does, "Stop being so modest. You deserved it."

John replied, "Yeah my former CO said the same thing. Also is that slapping thing embedded in the female gene, because you, my wife, her sister, my sister do the same thing to me?"

"It's a way for us women to keep our men in line. Come on let's get out of this heat," Mehry said smiling as she hooked her arm into John's and lead him into the house.

When they entered the living room John saw Mike McBurney and Loren stand up from the sofa to greet them.

John shook Mike's hand and then he received Loren's almost familial hug. He was totally amused to see Patrick run to hug Loren around her legs. Patrick giggled in delight as Loren bent down to pick him up and give him happy pecks and tickles. Caroline was a bit more sedate, but just as happy when she greeted her mom's friend.

It was Chloe who was the most emotional as she gathered her friend into a crushing hug, greeting her like a long lost sister.

"Oh Loren it's been so long since we saw each other. You live ten blocks from us and we had to come out to Arizona to see each other. It seems like every time I come to JAG to meet mom, you're either out of the office, out of town or even in court," Chloe said when they broke apart.

Loren smiled one of her genuine smiles as she lovingly cupped Chloe's cheeks with both her hands and said, "You know the Navy. It keeps me busy. I'm out of town more than I am in. And then there's my own family. What do you say next weekend, if the admiral doesn't send me out of town
we let our husbands take care of the babies and you, Sarah and me go on an all girls day out?"

"Oh that would be great," Chloe said as she looked at Sarah. Sarah nodded in agreement.

Sarah looked on the two with one of her watery smiles. Ever since they met, Sarah was very happy in having Loren as someone else Chloe looked up to. She was especially grateful that Loren also considered Chloe as one of her closest friends, even though Chloe was still a teenager in high school.

Feeling a bit left out Mike McBurney smiled and said, "What am I chopped liver?"

"Good afternoon Mister Liver," John said as he put his hand forward.

Everyone had a good laugh at that as McBurney greeted the rest of the Marshalls.

During all this Aunt Mehry came in and said, "Okay enough of the chitter chatter. Dinner is getting cold and Uncle Asad and the boys have been waiting all afternoon for you and the children to arrive and they are getting impatient to eat."

As they walked into the dining room, John whispered to Loren and Mike, "Listen, you two are on your own. Just remember the spoils go to the quick."

Loren and Mike looked at him quizzically. John just smiled and shrugged as he sat down next to Sarah.

When the group sat down at the table and the meal commenced, Sarah and John had the biggest smiles on their faces as they watched Loren and Mike deal with the frenzy of the relatives throwing their arms in front of them as they reached for the plates of food. Loren remembered what John said as she saw the Marshalls get into the swing of serving themselves. First she and then Mike dove right in and reached for their own servings from the plentiful amount of food in the middle of the table. No one left the table without loosening their belts a notch or two.

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

1500 Hours Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

The Marshalls left Yuma early Monday morning. That gave them the Monday night and Tuesday to acclimate back to the Eastern Time zone. At work Tuesday morning Harm visited Sarah in her chambers.

After they exchanged pleasantries and greeting kisses Harm handed her a legal document.

When Sarah opened it she read aloud, "It says here that the guardian ad litem, one Donna LeMoyne and a home inspector, one Morgan Wattley will be at your house Wednesday evening. Are you and Diane ready to receive them?"

"Oh heck yeah, while you were out in Yuma for your trial and the visit to the aunties, Diane, Mattie and I spent the holiday weekend transporting the rest of Mattie's room to our house. She's set it up into her own private space. We sealed up her mom's house. Diane got a service to box her mother and father's things as well as put the furniture into storage."

"Did the foreclosure auction for Grace Aviation take place?" Sarah asked.
"Yes last Friday. Ours was the winning bid. We won because we were able to present the plan that would keep it going, put the profits in escrow for when Mattie reached 18 years. The other guy would have just sold off all the assets just to make a buck," Harm explained.

"I don't want to pry but as your attorney in this case I have to know, how can you and Diane afford it?" Sarah asked.

"Well when I told my mom what Diane and I had in mind, Frank agreed to help. He floated us a loan," Harm explained.

"Well that will make things a bit easier," Sarah explained.

Sarah then asked, "What time are LeMoyne and Wattley coming?"

"LeMoyne called last night and said between 6 and 7 o'clock," Harm answered.

"Why don't we do this then? John and I will be there with the kids and we can make a family evening of it?" Sarah suggested.

"That sounds good. Also Ann Marie called. She and Pete want to offer their support," Harm replied.

"Why don't you call her back and ask her and Pete to come over Wednesday as well," Sarah suggested.

"Yeah nothing says stable family better than a house full of kids," Harm said with a chuckle.

Sarah had to smile at that in agreement.

Wednesday, October 15, 2003

1700 Hours Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

To say that Ms. LeMoyne was totally overwhelmed by the reception that she received upon entering the Rabb household would be understating things. The Marshalls arrived well in advance of LeMoyne. Shortly after they arrived the Matthews showed up with their brood. To make a full family affair, Jennifer and Sergei arrived just as LeMoyne was getting out of her car.

After Jennifer and Sergei dished out their affections, Diane was holding Natalie in one arm as she waited by the opened door for LeMoyne.

Upon reaching the door LeMoyne shook hands with Diane saying, "Mrs. Rabb?"

"Yes you must be Mrs. LeMoyne. This is my daughter Natalie. She just turned 1 year on the 9th. Natalie say hi to the nice lady," Diane said.

"Hi nice lady," Natalie said shyly as she kept her cheek tucked into Diane's shoulder.

Both women laughed as Diane said, "She tends to be a bit literal."

"Oh that's alright I think it's charming. I was going to ask if she ever listened to Burns and Allen," LeMoyne asked with a chuckle.
LeMoyne and Diane shared another laugh. As they attempted to walk into the living room they had to wait as a train of children ran by them on the way in with the Twister game box. LeMoyne watched in wonder as Chloe and Mattie spread out two of the game mats and had all the cousins lined up ready to play.

Walking through the general melee, Harm came over saying, "Hi I'm Harm, Diane's husband. This is Diane's sister Sarah and her husband John Marshall. Sarah is representing us in the custody case. This is John's sister Ann Marie and her husband Pete Mathews and my sister in law Jennifer and her husband my brother Sergei Zhukov.

"Zhukov not Rabb?" LeMoyne asked somewhat bewildered.

"It's a long story we'll tell you after we get everything else out of the way. Would you like something to drink?" Diane said as she put Natalie in the playpen with David.

"A ginger ale would be great," LeMoyne requested.

Harm brought it for her as she sat down on the couch. She opened her briefcase and spread out her documents on the coffee table.

"I have to say that you seem to have a very happy home. What with all the children running around. Are they all family?" LeMoyne asked.

"Thank you, and yes they are. Two, Andrew and Diane are Ann Marie and Pete's. Four, Caroline, Patrick, David and Chloe are the Marshalls and the other four, Sarah, Trey, after Harm, Samantha and Natalie are ours," Diane replied.

"Where does Mattie stay?" LeMoyne asked.

"She has her own room. We helped her bring her things here from her house," Diane explained.

"It says here that you Mrs. Marshall have temporary custody of Mattie. Why is she staying here?"

"Well it's close to her school. We saw her report cards for the last marking period which showed that Mattie was doing well. That being the case Mr. Marshall and I felt it was better that she continue at that school. Since the Rabbs live very close to Mattie's school she needed to stay here. We didn't feel the need to totally disrupt Mattie's life," Sarah explained.

LeMoyne nodded as she said, "That's a reasonable explanation. It also says here Mrs. Rabb that you are the Assistant Director of NCIS, the Navy's criminal investigative arm. What has your search for Mattie's father brought?"

"Nothing so far, we've checked all the surrounding police agencies and also the morgues. It seems Mr. Johnson does not wish to be found," Diane answered.

"Also since we've known about Mattie's plight, I've checked the different places where they have A.A. meetings. So far I've come up empty as well," Sarah offered.

"Why would you check the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings places? Besides don't they have to stay anonymous?" Mrs. Marshall.

"Yes that correct. The reason I checked A.A. meetings is because Mr. Johnson has a history of being an alcoholic. You see I'm an alcoholic myself. I've been sober for over 15 years. I go to meetings now offering myself as a sponsor for anyone who needs one. So I've gone to different meeting places in hoping to see Mr. Johnson. So far with no luck," Sarah explained.
John felt the need to grasp Sarah's hand. Even after all the years, he knew that it was always difficult for Sarah to admit to her addiction.

"I see," LeMoyne said as she picked up and flipped through another folder. She said, "Ah yes I see here about your alcoholism."

She leaned forward and said to Sarah, "I have to confess. I thought you looked familiar. I saw you at one meeting in Manassas a couple of weeks ago. You see I'm an alcoholic myself. I've been sober for 10 years."

Sarah brightened up at that.

LeMoyne got the meeting back on track as she asked questions of the Rabbs, Marshalls and even the Mathews of their relationship with the Rabbs.

Soon it was Mattie's turn to answer LeMoyne's questions.

"Mattie, why do you want to stay here?"

"I know the Rabbs from my church and from my family's aviation business at Manassas Airport. I tried staying by myself, but I know that eventually the authorities would catch up with that. So when the Rabbs offered to take me in, how could I say no," Mattie replied.

LeMoyne nodded and wrote the answer on her pad. It wasn't long before she finished her questions and started to gather her things into her portfolio. As she got up to leave, she said, "Well Mr. and Mrs. Rabb I have what I need. I see that you have a very stable and happy home. I'm sure Mattie will thrive here."

"Thanks Miss LeMoyne," Diane replied.

As Diane and Harm escorted her to the door LeMoyne shook hands all around. Just as Diane was about to open the door, the doorbell rang. When she opened it she saw a tall African man with a nice suit that was a bit rumpled.

LeMoyne was the first to speak as she merrily said, "Morgan welcome to the party. Watch out for the Twister mats."

She chuckled along with the Rabbs as she made her way to her car.

As they let Morgan in Harm said, "You must be Mr. Wattley the home inspector. I'm Harmon Rabb and this is my wife Diane."

"Pleased to meet you and yes I'm Morgan Wattley," Wattley replied with a smile.

"Won't you come in please," Diane said. After introducing Wattley to everyone Diane offered him a drink.

"Water is good. Also if you don't mind I'd like to commence with the inspection," Wattley replied.

Harm brought him a fresh bottle of water as they walked around the house. Sarah accompanied them.

As they walked around Wattley took notes and looked into the well stocked cupboard and refrigerator. He made a cursory glance into Mattie's room.

Wattley asked, "Mr. Rabb it says in your affidavit that you are a lawyer, but that you used to be a full
time pilot. Do you still fly?"

"Yes I do, for the Navy when I go for my semi-annual qualifications," Harm answered.

"What do you fly?" Wattley asked.

"Originally I flew Tomcats. Now I'm qualified to fly Hornets and other aircraft. I also have my own plane."

"Really what kind of plane?"

"It's a Stearman biplane. It was my late father's. I keep it at Manassas Regional Airport in the hanger where Grace Aviation is based. That's how we came to know of Mattie's troubles. Her family used to own the hanger. We bought the business at a foreclosure sale when we found out that Mr. Johnson was in jail and subsequently abandoned the business after he ran off after being released," Harm explained.

"It also says that you crashed twice," Wattley said.

"Yes that's true once during the first Gulf War. It was due to an eye infection that caused night blindness. I couldn't see clearly enough and I had a ramp strike. The next time was a couple of years ago when the Tomcat I was flying had a total systems failure."

Harm wasn't about to tell him about being shot down with John in Russia. That incident was classified.

"So despite those instances you intend to keep flying," Wattley said a bit derisively.

Sarah went immediately to Harm's defense as she said, "Mr. Wattley I have flown with my brother in law and he is an excellent pilot. Sometimes his modesty gets in his way. He failed to mention that he has two distinguished flying crosses. One was for landing a disabled Tomcat on an aircraft carrier at night while still dealing with the night blindness. The other time after he had the night blindness treated was in Bosnia. He used the Tomcat he was flying to push another disabled Tomcat by its tailhook so that the crew could parachute safely out of enemy territory. His flying should not have a bearing on this "home" inspection." Sarah held up her hands in air quotes at home.

Seemingly oblivious Wattley continued, "As military officers, do you have firearms in the house?"

"Yes we do. I am the Assistant Director of NCIS. I have to carry my weapon door to door. When we're at home we keep them safely locked up. Mr. Wattley we have been parents to our own children for over six years," Diane reminded him.

Wattley acknowledged the animosity as he said, "You have to understand Mr. & Mrs. Rabb I have to ask these questions. I will say that you both are refreshingly candid. I don't get that often enough. I will say that everything looks good from my standpoint. I can see that you have a thriving household."

"Well thank you for that," Diane replied.

"I also see that Mattie and the younger children seem to get along quite nicely," Wattley said.

"Yes they do. That's because before Mattie's family had their troubles, she was one of our regular babysitters," Diane told him.

"That certainly helps. Well you'll get the details from Judge Smith's office after I file my report. Have
a good evening Mr. & Mrs. Rabb," Wattley said as they stood at the front door.

"Thank you Mr. Wattley," Harm replied as he and Diane shook his hands.

When the door closed the Rabbs each exhaled in relief. One hurdle obstructing their bid for custody was cleared. They would just have to wait to clear the next.
Chapter 115

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 115

Wednesday, October 15, 2003

1930 Hours Local Time

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

While the Rabbs and Sarah were dealing with the guardian ad litem and the home inspection, John and Sergei watched the kids and Ann Marie and Jennifer went about preparing dinner. Diane already had a large meat and sausage lasagna for the adults, along with vegetarian lasagna for Harm in the oven. Jennifer and Ann Marie were preparing the salad as well as the meals for the children.

Just after Harm and Diane said goodnight to Wattley, Jennifer came out to announce, "Hey everybody dinner's ready!"

All the adults came in with the children to sit down in the dining room. Both babies were put in the high chairs and given bottles. The middle of the table was resplendent with the lasagna trays and two huge bowls of salad and warmed garlic bread and portions of "kid friendly" meals.

While Harm and the other mothers stocked the smaller children's plates, Diane went to her head of the table and said, "Okay before you load up on the bread and salad, pass your plates and I'll fill them up with the pasta.

Soon everyone had their share and dug right in.

John commented, "This is much more sedate that the meal at Aunt Mehry's. You should have seen the looks on Loren's and McBurney's faces when dinner started."

Everyone chuckled at that. When the laughter settled down, Diane asked "How are Aunt Mehry and Uncle Asad?"

"They're great. They were kind of disappointed that you couldn't make it out for the holiday weekend, but they understood totally that you couldn't leave Virginia until Mattie's custody was settled. Mehry said she can't wait to meet Mattie. She said we can use another member to the family."

"Funny you speaking about adding to the family," Jennifer said.

"Why's that Jen?" Harm asked.

"Well since Sergei and I returned from our honeymoon last week I've been feeling a bit rundown. At first I thought it was exhaustion from all the running around sightseeing we did."

"Is that all you did was run around sightseeing? I would have thought you had enough sights to see in your hotel room," Ann Marie said cheekily.

Jennifer blushed as Sergei nearly choked on his food.
Sarah smiled and said, "ANN MARIE! You haven't changed since my wedding. You said the same thing then."

Jennifer recovered enough to say to Ann Marie, "You're so bad."

Ann Marie just shrugged her own smile as she ate.

Jennifer continued, "But after the last week at work I still felt drained and my period was late by about a week and now I'm nauseous occasionally. I didn't know what was wrong so I followed my husband's advice and set up an appointment for my yearly physical a bit early. I went after work yesterday."

"And did the doctor say what I thought she said?" Diane asked hoping she was right.

"Dr. Baldwin said that the timing's about right for it to have happened about three weeks before our honeymoon," Jennifer said mischievously.

"What happened before the honeymoon?" Ann Marie asked playing along with Jennifer.

"That the timing was right for the baby being conceived then," Jennifer finished with a big smile.

"You're having a baby! Oh that's so wonderful" Diane exclaimed.

"Couldn't wait for the honeymoon eh?" Ann Marie asked as cheekily as ever.

Jennifer and Sergei just blushed crimson.

How far along are you?" Ann Marie asked lovingly.

"About five weeks," Jennifer replied.

"Oh then just wait the interesting parts are just beginning," Ann Marie said.

The other mothers at the table nodded and smiled in agreement.

"Make sure you tell the admiral and take off at least two weeks before the baby is due. He's already delivered two babies in his office. Try not to make it three," Sarah advised good naturedly.

"I'll keep that in mind your honor," Jennifer said cheekily.

"See that you do," Sarah said with a smile as she dug into her lasagna.

"There is one more thing. It concerns you most of all Harm and Diane," Sergei announced.

"What's that?" Diane asked totally intrigued.

"Jennifer and I are changing our last name from Zhukov to Rabb," Sergei announced.

"We've already went to Legal Services and forwarded the papers to BUPERS. It'll be effective in two weeks," Jennifer continued as she saw the look of surprise on everyone's faces.

"Oh that's just great, Chegwidden's going to have a ball with that,' Harm commented ruefully.

"Yeah when he calls "Rabb!" very loud he'll be calling you. When he calls "Rabb" nicely, he'll be speaking to Jennifer," John said to Harm with a chuckle.

Everyone shared in the merriment as dinner continued. It wasn't long before all the other families left
the Harmon Rabbs to settle in for the night.

Thursday, October 16, 2003

1045 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Harm and Loren were in his office going over the case they were assigned at Staff Call. They were traveling out to the Mediterranean Sea and the USS Gilchrist to investigate a fatal mishap. One Seaman Duncan was electrocuted when the radar rig he was attempting to repair was turned on by PO Ferrier when she didn't see the "work order tag" on her console.

After they went over the specifics of the case and the itinerary Loren sat back and sighed, "To bad we'll be out there past the weekend. I promised your niece we'd go out shopping."

"Yeah Diane got wind of that and wanted her and Mattie to join you, Chloe and Sarah in your female bonding," Harm said with a chuckle.

Loren chuckled along with her friend saying, "They'll just have to go without me."

Before Harm could comment further, there was a knock on his closed door. He looked up and smiled the biggest smile Loren had ever seen him give to a non-family member.

Loren turned to look at who knocked as Harm got up to open his door for to behold, "Carolyn Imes!" Harm exclaimed.

"Harm it's so good to see you again," Carolyn said as she allowed Harm to gather her into his embrace. Carolyn was dressed in a simple gray business suit with a cream colored blouse. She had the same slim pre pregnancy figure Harm and Loren remembered.

After they broke apart, Loren got up to share her own hug with Carolyn. "How have you been Carolyn?" she asked.

"Well as you can see I had the baby," Carolyn announced.

"Oh, where and what is it, a boy or girl?" Loren asked.

"I had him in Michigan last July 15. His name is Joshua Michael Paget," Carolyn started to explain before she was interrupted.

"Paget, not Imes?" Harm asked.

"Well Paget is my real family name. Remember I changed my name to Imes. Imes was the name of the deceased member of the Michigan bar, yada, yada. I had to give my son my real name after all," Carolyn explained.

"Oh yeah," Harm replied. He continued to ask, "So you're now Carolyn Paget?"

"Yes, it has been since midnight September 1. I filed in Michigan. I waited for Joshua to grow a little and weaned off my breast before I came back to DC. I just came up from Legal Services to have them change all my records.

"You're coming back to the Navy?" Loren delightedly asked.
"Yeah I just need to show Admiral Chegwidden my new Law license," Carolyn said presenting her briefcase.

"And you passed the Michigan Bar," Loren exclaimed again as she gathered Carolyn into another, this time congratulatory embrace.

After Loren released her, Harm took Carolyn's hands in his own, leaned in and gave his own congratulatory peck on her cheek.

"Well I'm sure the admiral will be glad to see you," Harm commented before he had another thought. "So where's Joshua now," Harm asked.

"He's back up in Michigan with my folks. He'll stay with them until I find a place suitable for us to live here in DC," Carolyn explained.

"Well when he starts living here and when you ever need a play date, you know where to find us. We all have children close to that age," Loren offered.

Harm nodded in agreement.

"Thanks guys. Now I have to see the boss," Carolyn said in appreciation.

When Carolyn entered the outer office Jennifer got up to stand at attention.

After Carolyn said the usual, "As you were," Jennifer offered her hand greeting Carolyn with "Commander Imes! What a pleasant surprise. It's good to see you."

"Jennifer it's good to see you also. Congratulations on your wedding. Also you know I never got the opportunity to thank you and Sergei for saving me when Lindsey dumped me in the Potomac. If it weren't for his romantic notion of proposing there, I don't even want to think of what would have happened otherwise," Carolyn said.

"Oh ma'am you're welcome. I'm glad to see that you're looking well. What brings you back to JAG ma'am?"

"Well I passed the Michigan bar and I'm rejoining the Navy," Carolyn said proudly.

"That's great ma'am. Let me buzz the admiral and let him know you're here," Jennifer offered. Carolyn gently interrupted her saying, "When you do, please say my new name. It's Paget."

"Yes ma'am," Jennifer replied. She buzzed AJ saying with a trace of amusement at which Carolyn smiled said, "Sir there is an old friend out here to see you, a Commander Paget sir."

Carolyn and Jennifer shared quiet chuckles.

At Jennifer's announcement AJ was a bit confused. He didn't know any Commander named Paget. He did say, "Send the commander in."

AJ's confusion dissipated when Carolyn stepped through the door. He got up to greet her warmly, taking her hand and guiding her into one of the guest chairs

Taking the opposite chair AJ said, "Commander, it's a pleasure to see you again. I take it you had the baby. What's his or her name and why Paget?"

"His name is Joshua Michael Paget sir. I changed my name back to my original family name,'
Carolyn replied.

"Ah ha, that explains that. Are there any pictures of young Mr. Paget?" AJ asked.

Carolyn dutifully reached into her purse and pulled out two photos from her wallet.

"Handsome fellow, he takes after his mom," AJ commented.

"Thank you sir," Carolyn commented.

Then AJ surprised her by pulling out his own photos of Little Mac.

Carolyn gushed at seeing AJ's son. "Oh he's adorable admiral. You and Mrs. Chegwidden must be very happy."

"Yes we are and you can call her Sydney. You were such good friends when you were working here," AJ offered.

"Thank you sir, in the meantime here are my papers for reinstatement. They just need your signature," Carolyn said as she pulled the folder from her briefcase and handed it to AJ.

"Well why don't I do that now," AJ said as he walked around back behind his desk.

He signed them with a flourish. He had a twinkle in his eye when he looked up and said in a commanding tone, "Commander, you're out of uniform. I expect you here next Monday morning at 0700 in proper uniform ready to resume your duties."

Carolyn had trouble properly suppressing her smile as she stood at attention and replied, "Aye, aye sir!"

"Dismissed," AJ said.

Carolyn executed a perfect about face and strode to the door. As she reached it AJ said, "Oh and Commander?"

Carolyn turned and replied, "Sir?"

Welcome back," AJ said with a warm smile.

"Thank you sir, see you Monday." Carolyn replied in kind before she walked out the door.

After the door closed AJ said out loud to himself, "Maybe then we can get rid of the case back log."

Thursday, November 27, 2003

Thanksgiving Day

Rabb Farm

Belleville, PA

Life for the Rabb and Marshall families went on as usual. Well as usual it could get for the members of the Navy's JAG Corps & Naval Intelligence. What with a war on terror going on in two places and many cases being dealt with, it was a wonder that no one was deployed for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Since that was the case it was decided that since the Rabb and Marshall children really loved it there, Thanksgiving would be celebrated at Gram's Farm in Belleville.
It was reminiscent of the first Thanksgiving at John's house, but with more children pleasantly underfoot as they clattered through the crowded house. In addition to the "baseball team" that the Rabbs and Marshalls' children formed, Jennifer and Sergei as well as Ann Marie's family and the elder Marshalls and Burnetts and finally Deanne and Uncle Matt came to celebrate and give thanks.

Grams really enjoyed having a full house. When the plans were made, she had insisted that no one bring anything, saying, "I did a big shop and I have everything here. The turkeys will be fresh and all the vegetables are from around here. I baked all the pies this week. So all you children just come and enjoy."

During the day she sat back a watched happily as three generations of women all gathered in her kitchen to prepare the meal. All she needed to do was give out instructions, telling them where everything was.

When it came time for dinner, Harm was seated at one end of the table with Gram at the other. Harm stood and looking at Diane sitting to his right and Sarah sitting to his left offered the toast.

"This year marks the sixth time we have all been together as one big family. Since then it has grown in leaps and bounds as we all welcomed and expect to welcome our children into the world as well as welcoming new and then faraway relatives (bowing to Jennifer and Sergei). Through all those years we all faced some hardships and trials, but we've all come through stronger for it, with an appreciation for what our family is all about. And I say our family, as in one family. For though we all go by different names, we are all related by more than blood; we are related by the struggles we shared as well as the triumphs that we achieved. Our latest struggles culminated in the turmoil of last summer. For out of that turmoil we received a reward for the difficulties we were forced to face as we now have a new addition to the family in Mattie Grace."

Before Harm could continue, everyone gave a polite applause. Mattie, though blushing furiously from embarrassment over the attention, was overjoyed by the welcome.

Harm continued after the applause died down, "So though Mattie's final legal status is still to be determined, Diane, the children and I have come to know her already as being part of the family. So on that note may we finally see a permanent decision on her status handed down very soon and may we all be together at Christmas and thereafter to share in Mattie being in the family officially."

No one could argue as they raised and clinked their glasses in agreement.

After the feast later that evening, everyone settled down to set up the sleeping arrangements. Gram's four bedroom house was more than enough to accommodate her, Diane & Harm, Sarah & John as well as Ann Marie & Peter. Natalie and David each slept in the portable crib in each of their parents' rooms. Deanne, Uncle Matt, the elder, Marshalls, Burnetts and Jennifer & Sergei stayed in the local Best Western hotel.

It was a touching scene that saw the older Rabb, Marshall and Matthews' children all asleep on the air mattresses set up around the living room floor in front of the fire. Mattie and Chloe volunteered to sleep in the queen sized pull out sofa to keep an eye on them.

Sarah, Diane and Ann Marie sat on the stairs looking over their children as they slept. The two sisters turned when she heard Ann Marie sniffle on the step behind them.

"Hey what's the matter honey?" Diane asked stroking Ann Marie's knee in comfort.

Waving at the kids Ann Marie explained, "Oh nothing I'm just having a feeling of déjà-vu. They all did this last summer when we were up here. My cousin Gail would have loved this. We used to do
this at her and Peter's home when we were kids. She was the sister I didn't have and my maid of honor when I got married. I miss her, especially at times like this. You girls are so lucky you found each other."

"Yeah don't we know it?" Sarah then patted the space between her and Diane continuing with, "Come down here there's enough room."

She and Diane slid over so that Ann Marie could sit on the step between them.

Sarah put her arm across Ann Marie's shoulders and said, "Now you listen to me Annie, you're our sister to. Diane and I are lucky we found YOU. I loved that you were very happy to tell me where John went to church. Also I know that I could never have gotten through that time when John was shot if it wasn't for you and Diane, but most importantly you. During his recovery yours was the first face I saw in the morning and the last I saw before I slept."

Diane chimed in saying, "And when I had the problem carrying the twins, you came to see me every chance you could, even though you were also pregnant with little Diane at the time. I'll never forget that Saturday when you brought the spa people to the house for all three of us to get pampered. I'll always be grateful for that."

Sarah continued, "Then there was the time you answered the questions about my time on 'Trial TV'. I was so touched when you called me family. I was so happy to be related to you."

"Also you're a great aunt and godmother to our kids. When you stepped up and stayed here to protect Natalie and David when we were dealing with Sadiq last summer, Gram said that you never complained. That went above and beyond. I know it couldn't have been easy," Diane said.

"Oh it was alright. The babies were easy to care for. Gram helped a lot with that and caring for Andy and little Diane. The hardest part of the whole thing was when the older kids came here and kept asking "When are we going home and will we see mommy and daddy?" Ann Marie admitted.

"Yeah when we were finally reunited they said as much. They also said that they had a lot of fun with all the things you and Gram had them doing here on the farm," Diane replied.

"You have become such a big part of our lives that I don't even want to contemplate where we would be without you. You were a rock for John, a rock for me and for Diane. I think you're the glue that holds us all us Rabbs, Marshalls and Matthews together," Sarah finished.

Ann Marie felt so overwhelmed by their declarations she found it very difficult to hold back her tears. She shared a tearful hug with each Mackenzie sister saying, "Thanks guys that means a lot."

"You're welcome. Here endth the lesson," Sarah replied.

The three women shared cathartic giggles before they got up and joined their husbands in bed.

Monday, December 8, 2003

1030 Hours Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Diane was working at her desk when her secretary Cynthia buzzed her, "Mrs. Rabb, there is a messenger at the main entrance with documents from the Virginia Family Court that you need to sign
Diane had to take a breath to control her excitement. She was the "go to" receiver of any news from the court as she was the one between her and Harm less likely to be out of town on a case. She waited a couple of beats before she pressed her send button to say, "Okay Cynthia I'll go down myself and sign for them."

Diane got up, straightened her suit and walked out of the office. When she arrived at the main entrance, she barely controlled her trembling as she received the documents and signed the receipt. She tucked the envelope under her arm and marched back to her office.

As she passed Cynthia's desk she said, "No calls for the next hour Cynthia."

"Yes ma'am," Cynthia acknowledged with a smile.

First Diane read all the documents. She smiled at what she read. Then she called Sarah's office. She got her Yeoman CPO Emma Gardiner, "Good morning Lt. Colonel Marshall's office, this is Chief Gardiner."

"Good morning Chief, this is Diane Rabb," Diane replied.

"Good morning Captain Rabb. How may I help you?" Emma responded with a smile.

"Is my sister in the office?"

"I'm sorry ma'am, the colonel is in court. She's presiding over Commander Sturgis' case."

"Oh really, I didn't know she got that case," Diane said.

"Yes ma'am, the colonel was the next judge up for a case, so she got that one," Emma confirmed.

"Well that should be interesting," Diane said aloud.

Diane thought about the circumstances of the case. Sturgis was accused of racial bias that allegedly cost the Navy valuable intelligence. In early November Turner was sent to the USS Cathedral City. The sub's crew had rescued some North Korean sailors when their minisub sunk on a reef. The North Koreans were spying on South Korea and the US Sub. Naval Intelligence's Pearl Harbor field office had also dispatched a Korean American Lt. Ye out to the Cathedral City to conduct intelligence interviews of the North Koreans and interpret for Turner.

The charge of racial bias stemmed from Lt. Ye. Ye and Turner did not hit it off very well. It seemed that Ye held a long running hostility toward African Americans from when Ye's father's store was burned down during the Los Angelis "Rodney King" riots.

As head of Naval Intelligence, John received the report and called Diane to have NCIS investigate any criminal charges against Turner. It came to an Article 32 hearing. Bud was defending Turner and Loren was prosecuting.

Sarah was able to preside over the case as a judge because she was not privy to any case investigation until after its conclusion. As intelligence operatives if there was one thing Sarah's husband and her sister did very well was compartmentalize their job lives from their family lives.

Until Turner was cleared of the charge, Harm was acting chief of staff.

Diane replied to Emma, "Well when Sarah recesses for lunch, can you please ask her to come down
the street and join me."

"Will do Captain Rabb," Emma said pleasantly.

"Thank you chief," Diane answered.

Diane then called her husband. "Hello mister 'chief of staff'. Care to have your wife for lunch?"
Diane asked in a sultry voice.

"I certainly would. Say where," Harm replied in kind.

"My office at 1200," Diane said.

"Won't Cynthia mind the noise if we do it on the desk?" Harm asked in a playful sexy voice.

Diane laughed and said, "Relax lover boy, it's not that kind of lunch. I can have you at home any
time. Sarah's going to be here as well. I just got LeMoyne's and Wattley's inspection results from the
Family Court. They were very favorable. Also we have a hearing about Mattie's status next week. I
want to get a head start on strategizing. I'll have lunch brought in."

"Okay, I'll meet up with Sarah and we'll walk over together. Love you sweetheart, see you later,"
Harm said.

"I love you to flyboy," Diane said as she ended the call.

1200 hours

Diane's Office

Sarah and Harm arrived to see a hot buffet of Chinese food on Diane's office credenza. They filled
their plates and joined Diane at the conference table.

Diane began, "Okay Wattley's home inspection and LeMoyne's interview reports were very much in
our favor. LeMoyne sees that Mattie is happy living with us. Wattley liked the whole familial
environment. They both mentioned that having the whole family there showed that Mattie would
benefit from being in a normal family setting, as extended as it is."

"Nice to know you can call in the troops when you need to," Sarah said with a smile.

"You got that right," Harm agreed.

Just then Diane's intercom buzzed. Diane got up and reaching from the front of her desk answered it,
with, "Yes Cynthia?"

"Mrs. Rabb, Agent McGee is here to see you. He says it's very urgent," Cynthia informed her.

"Okay Cynthia, send him in," Diane said. She stood at her desk as Tim came in.

Seeing who was in the office with Diane Tim knew he didn't need to keep his notice private as he
said without preamble, "Mrs. Rabb, we've found Tom Johnson."
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 116

Monday, December 8, 2003

1245 Hours Local Time

NCIS Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Seeing who was in the office with Diane Tim knew he didn't need to keep his notice private as he said without preamble, "Mrs. Rabb, we've found Tom Johnson."

"Where is he?" Harm asked from the conference table.

Diane gave him a stern look that clearly said, 'Let me handle this.' Then she turned to McGee and said, "Well Tim?"

"He's dead. His body is in a Baltimore morgue," Tim announced.

Diane, Sarah and Harm all visibly wilted.

"Oh my God, how are we going to tell Mattie," Diane said with a sigh.

"It's Chloe's situation all over again!" Sarah reminded her sister.

Harm nodded in agreement as he asked, "What made you search up there?"

"Well after not finding him in the towns in and around the Beltway, I started to cast a wider net. I've gone as far south as Richmond and up north to Baltimore. Tony put me onto people he knows up there," Tim explained.

"Did you find out how he died?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, when Tony's friend, a Detective Barnard, called me to tell me that Mr. Johnson was dead, he also faxed me the police report of the accident. According to the report, Mr. Johnson got run over by a taxi near Camden Yards a week ago today."

"How did he get run over by the cab?" Diane asked.

"Detective Barnard said the cabbie that hit him said that Mr. Johnson just fell in front of him onto the street from behind a parked car. The traffic footage backs up the cabbie's story. Also when they did the blood toxicity screen on Mr. Johnson, they found that he had a blood alcohol level that was three times the legal limit," Tim explained.

Diane shook her head in resignation as she asked. "Where had he been living and what did he do for money?"

"The police found a worker's ID card for the Baltimore Convention Center. Barnard checked at the convention center. He found that Johnson was working there as a shape-up public area cleaner since
last October. When Barnard checked Johnson's employment record at the convention center, he gave his Fairfax address as his main home address. Also Johnson was staying in an SRO hotel. Barnard found a room key. When they searched the room they found all his papers."

"What kind of papers?" Diane asked.

"His will.

"We'll have to get a death certificate and present it to the court," Sarah said.

"The funeral home will get it for us. We'll call the one that had Clay's wake," Diane said going behind to sit at her desk and reach for her desk phone.

While Diane and Harm expedited the funeral arrangements, Sarah called John to tell him the sad news.

1530 Local Time
Rabb Home
Fairfax, VA

Monday evening Diane and Harm were waiting for Mattie as she came home from school. Like her sister Sarah, Diane was not looking forward to this scene.

"Hey guys what's up?" Mattie asked.

Diane and Harm were rarely home when Mattie came in from her school day.

"Mattie we found your father," Diane said.

"Oh really, where?" Mattie asked in a tone mixed with resignation and trepidation.

"In Baltimore," Harm replied.

"Mattie your father was hit by a cab. He suffered massive injuries," was all Diane got out before Mattie let out a long keening wail and collapsed on the floor.

As Mattie knelt on the floor she had lowered her head resting it on her fists. Diane knelt down beside her and started rubbing her back, saying as many soothing words as she could.

"I know honey, it hurts, I know," was all Diane could say.

Eventually Mattie allowed Diane to help her off the floor and into the living room. There Diane gathered her to her bosom and let her cry out many more tears.

Sunday, December 14, 2003
1900 Local Time
Walter Campbell Funeral Home
Alexandria, VA

Detective Barnard stepped up big time as he assisted in getting Tom's body released from the Baltimore Morgue. The men from the Campbell funeral home went up to Baltimore on Wednesday
to retrieve Tom's body back to Virginia.

After she accepted that her father was gone, she and the Rabbs set down to make the funeral arrangements. Mattie didn't want to draw anything out as she wanted to have the wake for only one day and the funeral at their church the next day.

The Rabb and Marshall families sat in the front two rows. Diane kept an eye on Mattie as they sat next to each other. Amazingly Tom's face was spared the ravages of the collision so they could have an open casket.

All the families sat with Mattie as the staffs of JAG and NCIS passed through the wake to pay their respects.

Monday, December 15, 2003

1030 Local Time

St George's United Methodist Church

Fairfax, VA

The funeral at the Rabbs and Mattie's church was attended by all that came to the wake. Everyone also attended the graveside service as Tom was laid to rest beside Mattie's mom.

During the repast at the Rabb home, Harm saw how withdrawn Mattie was. After a few hours of accepting condolences she excused herself and went into her room. The guests took the hint and after helping the Rabbs and Marshalls clean up, left.

Eventually after John and Sarah gathered their family and left, Harm went and knocked on Mattie's door.

Even though Harm heard a soft "Go away!" come through the closed door, he still opened it. What he saw broke his heart. Mattie was lying on the bed on her side facing away from the door, crying her eyes out while clutching her favorite stuffed animal, a lion.

Harm went and sat on the edge of the bed. He put his hand out and lay it Mattie's shoulder and asked, "How're you doing Mattie?"

Without turning around Mattie answered petulantly with, "How the hell do you think I'm doing? I don't know how to feel. Should I be sad that he's dead or glad because now that he's dead, there's nothing that keeps me from staying with you and Diane? I do know that I'm very angry that he didn't come back to get me before he died? I just don't know if it's alright to feel all that at the same time."

Harm softened as he answered, "All those emotions are very valid. If there's one thing us Rabbs and Marshalls have is experience dealing with them. One thing our counselors have said is, don't ever ignore what you're feeling. The more you acknowledge your feelings, the better it is to deal with them."

"Did you feel this way about your father?"

"Yeah I was sad when he was first reported missing and then in Russia when I finally realized my dad was really dead."

"Did you ever get angry that he didn't come back to you after all those years?"
"Oh yeah I did, especially after the second time I was in Russia and found out about Sergei. Besides being angry that he didn't come back home, I was angry because I thought he betrayed my mother by having a baby with another woman."

"But you love Sergei like a brother!" Mattie exclaimed.

"Yeah I do but that's because of two things. One it wasn't his fault that my dad and his mom found comfort with each other. Secondly Dad knew he was never getting home to America, so what else could he do. I just accepted it."

"Does the pain ever go away?" Mattie asked.

"No it doesn't go away. Over time it just gets to be a little less painful."

"How did you deal with it?"

"I dealt with it by sharing with my family and friends. I have Diane, Sarah and John and everyone else with me all the way. Mattie, we're all going to be there for you. You will never be alone in this world again," Harm softly declared.

At that Mattie rolled over and launched herself into Harm's arms and had a good cry. Harm just held her as she sobbed and sobbed.

Outside in the hall, Diane shed her own tears of relief. She turned away to let Harm and Mattie have their moment softly saying, "No wonder I love that man."

Monday, December 22, 2003

1030 Local Time

Virginia Family Court

Fairfax Municipal Courthouse

Fairfax, VA

The final hearing to hear Judge Smith's ruling on the Rabbs petition to be Mattie's guardians was postponed two days due to Tom Johnson's funeral. After being presented with Tom's Death Certificate the previous Friday, Judge Smith had very understandingly acquiesced to the slight delay.

The courtroom was packed. All of Diane's and Harm's family were there. While John sat at the table with Sarah, Diane, Harm and Mattie, the first row behind the petitioner's table sat Harm's and John's parents. They were next to Ann Marie & Peter and Jennifer & Sergei. The next row was filled by Deanne and Uncle Matt, Harriet & Bud, Sydney & AJ and Loren & Bobby as well as Meg & Bob Pike.

They all got up at the call of, "All rise!"

Judge Smith took her seat and smiled out at the crowded courtroom. She began with, "Mr. & Mrs. Rabb, I see you brought your cheering section."

Sarah stood up and spoke for the group and with a smile said, "Yes your honor, these are our friends and family. They are here to testify as to qualifications of the Rabbs to be Mattie's guardians. The Rabbs and I have prepared a brief and they all have prepared statements that we are sure will bear under your scrutiny."
Sarah held up the folder containing her brief and all the statements.

"Well I will take custody of those statements and review them. I'm sure that they will only confirm what my decision actually is," Smith said.

Sarah had to hold back her smile. She was comforted though as she saw how Smith was finding it hard to hold back her own smile. She still had to keep the legal machine moving for appearances sake. Before Smith read from the statements she said, "For the record Judge Marshall I have examined Tom Johnson's death certificate. I find that it is in order. Mattie you have my sincere condolences on your loss."

"Thank you your honor," Mattie replied as she respectfully stood for Judge Smith.

Smith then took the time to read Sarah’s brief and then some of the statements. After the third statement she asked Sarah, "Judge Marshall I would assume that all these statements say the same thing?"

"Yes your honor, they do," Sarah replied with still another smile.

At that Smith handed them to her clerk and said, "Very well let them be entered into evidence." She then coughed dramatically before she intoned, "After reading the Rabbs' brief and these statements, I grant custody of Mattie Grace Johnson to Mr. and Mrs. Harmon Rabb. They will be given all parental rights concerning Miss Johnson as well as the option to adopt Miss Johnson if they all choose to agree for one to go forward. This court is adjourned."

As Judge Smith banged her gavel and walked off the bench, the family and friends erupted into cheers as all of them gathered around the now larger Rabb family.

Wednesday, Christmas Eve, 2003

2330 Local Time

Marshall Home

Florida Ave. NE

It was the Marshalls' turn to host the Christmas Eve open house. Deanne, Uncle Matt, John's parents and Harm's parents came in to celebrate the holiday. As usual Sarah decorated the house to hilt. There was the usual big tree, mistletoe and the enormous assortment of fresh baked goods.

AJ and Tom Magnum allowed their senior staff to work only a half day so that the holiday could be celebrated. All through the afternoon the JAG and NCIS staff members stopped or just passed through to deliver holiday wishes. All the closer friends and family stayed behind and helped the Marshalls with the party.

Children were pleasantly underfoot. Most of the staff with families brought their own children and since most of them were participants in the Navy Yard Daycare Center, there was no worry that they would get along as they all mingled. Only David and Natalie were in the play pen. But not for long as their grandfathers picked them up to give them a feeling of being in the party. Jimmy Roberts was the only true infant. He lay in the baby carrier, giggling and happily drinking up all the attention given to him.

"At 3 months I can't believe how big he's got Harriet," Jennifer said as she bent to give him a good look.
"Do you want to hold him Jennifer?" Harriet asked.

"Oh I'd love to," Jennifer gushed.

Harriet unbuckled Jimmy from his seat and picking him up, laid him in Jennifer's waiting arms. Jimmy settled in and everything was fine until Jimmy began rooting for the breast and Jennifer's bigger pregnancy breasts were his target. Before Jennifer could pull him away, Jimmy tried to latch his mouth onto Jennifer's blouse.

"Oh Harriet I'm so embarrassed," Jennifer said holding the baby away from her chest, which now sported a wet stain where Jennifer's right nipple was under her clothing.

"Oh relax Jennifer he does that to me all the time. Just put him over your shoulder," Harriet said as she dabbed at Jennifer's blouse with a receiving diaper.

Then she moved in to help Jennifer adjust Jimmy accordingly. She put a receiving towel over Jennifer's right shoulder and settled Jimmy so that he was looking back over Jennifer's shoulder. Soon the little tyke settled down as he happily peered at the goings on.

"See you're a natural. It won't be that long for you Jennifer," Harriet said. She was amused that Jennifer began to unconsciously rock herself and rub Jimmy's back.

Jennifer smiled as she looked down to her own baby bump. She was just beginning to show being three months along.

"What are you hoping for?" Bud asked.

"Happy and healthy, but I really want a boy," Jennifer said still rocking Jimmy.

"Another boy would be nice. By this time next year we'll know. It seems ever since we all met there's been someone of us with an infant at Christmas, starting with you and Diane, Harm," John said.

"How many babies is that now," Sydney asked as she and AJ came into the room with Little Mac over AJ's shoulder.

AJ started to answer, "Well let's see there're Diane and Harm's four in Les, Trey, Samantha and Natalie. Then there is Sarah and John's three in Caroline, Patrick and David, making four girls and three boys."

Ann Marie picked it up saying, "Then there's my two, Andy and Diane making those cousins five girls and four boys. Then there are Bud and Harriet's three, AJ, Sarah and Jimmy. Loren and Bobby's Toni and finally there's yours and Sydney's Michael, AJ. It all evens out at seven boys and seven girls."

"So a total of 14 babies and two teenagers in Chloe and Mattie, making the total number of 16 children we've brought into the family," Sarah concluded.

"So Jennifer and Sergei will make it 17 by the summer and then we'll have another infant who will have his or her first Christmas," John concluded.

All the "parents" in the room nodded in happy agreement.

"Wow that's some family when you sit down and set the numbers like that," Bud said as he picked
Jimmy up and gave him a bottle.

And a family is exactly what it was. Even though they weren't all related by blood, they were related by the shared comradeship that permeated through them all.

John asked, "So Harriet how did producing that Overseas Christmas show for the troops turn out?"

Harriett, answered, "Next to raising the kids, this is the most important thing that I've ever done. I'll tell you though some of the artists I booked were hilarious. When I started to book them and prepare their proper traveling papers, one guy kept giving me his stage name. It wasn't until I asked what name his mother called him did I get the right name."

Everyone shared a good laugh at that.

"I heard one of the artists you booked, Varese Chestnut, was snow bound in Reno. How did you get her out?" Loren asked.

"Well I got her out thanks to Sarah. She suggested a Marine extraction from Fallon. So I called the CO at Fallon. I used the SECNAV's name and the CO had a chopper pick her up in Reno, bring her to Fallon and get her out in a Toys for Tots C-130 that was bound for DC," Harriet said nodding her thanks to Sarah.

You're welcome Harriet," Sarah graciously acknowledged.

Soon enough the guests stopped passing through and it was time all the adults and teenagers to go to the traditional Navy Chapel Service held for the personnel who worked at the Washington Navy Yard. AJ asked Reverend Turner to do the service again. Deanne, Uncle Matt, the Marshall and Burnett Grandparents stayed behind to watch all their younger grandkids while the other parents made their own arrangements for their children's care during the service.

1945 Local Time

Navy Yard Chapel

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Reverend Turner's sermon was as usual inspiring. He advised that, "There are many reasons to turn to God, consolation, healing the brokenhearted, deliverance, liberating the bruised and guidance."

Mattie unconsciously took Diane's and Harm's hands. Diane could only smile as she acknowledged Mattie's gesture with a tender squeeze.

Chloe settled into her dad's embrace. John pulled her a bit tighter and kissed the top of her head.

Reverend Turner continued, "God has answers if we are willing to listen. But often we are lacking the ability to hear what he's saying. We're too busy in our lives, lost in our own misery, deaf to the sweet music there is. He gives us forgiveness for ourselves and others. So go out and celebrate the birth of his only begotten son by letting yourself forgive and be guided in God's love for you."

When the congregation filed out, the Rabbs, Marshals and Matthews said their goodbyes and wishes for a good holiday as they set off to visit "The Wall" and pay their respects to Harm Sr.

2330 Local Time

Marshall Residence
After they came home Sarah and John helped load the Rabb and Matthews kids into their parents' cars and said goodbye and Merry Christmas to everyone in the driveway. After they settled their own children for the night, they got out all the presents they had hidden away and put them under the tree. When they completed that task, they got themselves ready for bed, though they didn't want to sleep. On the first Christmas Eve after they got married they started a tradition of making love as they welcomed the joyous holiday.

Now they took a shower together, rubbing and caressing each other as they stood under the warm water. They didn't want to do anything in the shower as they wanted to save their energies for the holiday consummation in their bed. After they dried they walked out of the bathroom, silently thanking that it was an ensuite bathroom, holding hands, naked as the day they were born. The stopped beside their turned down bed, embraced and shared a long kiss. As they kissed, they managed to lower themselves until they were lying fully on the bed. Then they had their way with each other. They bridged the time into the holiday in a very passionate and satisfying session of lovemaking.

Thursday, Christmas Day 2003

0115 Local Time

Sarah was lying on her stomach with her head cradled in her crossed arms. She sighed in contentment as John massaged her back and shoulders.

John bent to kiss her shoulder and said, "Merry Christmas Mrs. Marshall."

"Hmmm Merry Christmas back at ya Mr. Marshall," Sarah said dreamily. She was sated and relaxed after two love making sessions.

'I really love this tradition,' she thought to herself.

"Would you like to open any presents?" John asked breaking Sarah out of her reverie.

"I think I just did," Sarah said with a giggle.

"No silly not that one, this one," John said as he reached over and opened his night stand drawer. He withdrew a small gift wrapped box.

Sarah followed her husband's movements and rolled over under John's knees onto her back. When he gave it to her, Sarah sat up and gleefully opened it.

She gasped as she saw what the box contained.

John explained, "Merry Christmas sweetie. They're my old set of Captain's eagles you gave me when I was promoted. I took them to the Pentagon's Military Jeweler and had them cleaned and re-plated in white gold. They're yours now "Colonel" Marshall."

She looked up at John and with happy tears running down her cheeks she asked, "Oh baby thank you. When did you find out?"

"Admiral Morris called to tell me last week. The promotion board came through with the news on the 15th. While frocking is authorized now, the official time in grade begins as of the New Year."

"Oh John, that's great. I've been waiting so long for the board to meet and come down with its findings. I'm very happy they did it for the holiday," Sarah said.
John explained, "Well Morris said it took so long for a promotion board to meet after you entered the promotional zone because of the war. Morris also told me that he is going to have a promotion ceremony on Friday at 1000. Mom & Dad and Trish & Frank are staying until Sunday. We can have them all there while Chloe and I pin your eagles on," John suggested.

"Does she know about my promotion as well?" Sarah asked.

"No we'll tell her tomorrow. I wanted to have this surprise all to myself," John said.

"You always have all the fun," Sarah said saucily as she put the now closed box on her night stand. She pulled her husband down and laid a deep kiss on him. She felt him having her favorite reaction.

"What do you say to another round of Christmas Auld Lang Syne?" Sarah asked huskily.

"I think we can make this Merry Little Christmas a bit merrier," John replied in kind as he sealed his lips to hers.
Timing Is Everything
Chapter 117
Christmas Day 2003
0900 Local Time
Rabb Home
Fairfax, VA

Harm & Diane and Trish & Frank watched the usual Christmas mess unfold. As usual Les led the parade as the Rabb children stampeded into the living room and beheld the mass of presents under the tree. Harm placed Natalie on the floor and watched her happily crawl around after her siblings. As it was her second Christmas she was just beginning to enjoy the whole idea of the holiday. Harm was capturing it all on video.

As she sat crossed leg on the carpet, Mattie pulled Natalie into her lap. She reached for a present with Natalie's name on it and gave it to her. Natalie gleefully ripped the paper off.

Natalie gasped a happy sound and said, "Waggady Annie!"

Everyone oohed and ahhed as Natalie hugged her new dolly. Everyone continued to open their presents with the usual enthusiasm and exclamations.

"Wow a baseball glove," from Trey.

"Oooh a Malibu Barbie doll and convertible, it looks like your red car daddy," Samantha said.

"I love my guitar," Les said as she unwrapped the big box. At her birthday she told her parents that she wanted to learn to play the guitar like her daddy. Diane and Harm promised her that Santa would get her a guitar for Christmas.

After everyone opened the rest of the presents, Diane went to the bookcase and pulled out a large manila envelope. She went over and handed it to Mattie.

"Merry Christmas Mattie," Diane said as she handed her the envelope and kissed the top of her head.

"What's this?" Mattie asked holding the envelope up.

"Well open it and find out," Harm urged.

Mattie smirked indulgently at him as she carefully opened the top and pulled out some legal papers. After she scanned them, she got up and practically leaped into Diane's arms.

"What does the paper say," Les asked in total bewilderment.

"It says that if Mattie wants, we can adopt her and she can change her name to Rabb. All she has to do is sign the papers," Diane said as she held Mattie to her breast as the young girl cried in happiness.
"Oh wow when will she become a Rabb?" Samantha asked.

"Well after Mattie signs and we file the papers next week, it takes about six months for the adoption to become official. We can celebrate at next year's 4th of July picnic." Harm said.

"Oh that'd be cool. We can have fireworks and everything," Trey said.

"Or we'll go see them at the park," Diane reminded her son. She had a very sensible aversion to things that went boom.

After that the Rabbs got ready to go to church.

The Rabbs were having their Christmas feast at Fairfax. So after church, they picked Grandma Deanne from her home in Alexandria. Just after they arrived home the Marshalls, both Jim and John's families pulled up. Ann Marie and Pete arrived soon thereafter with their brood.

Soon Uncle Matt pulled in with Gram in tow. He drove up to Belleville that morning to fetch Sarah Rabb. The snow that left only a few inches in DC on the 23rd dumped over a foot of snow in Belleville. It took all of Christmas Eve for the roads there to be plowed. Thus Gram was unable to get down to DC in time for Christmas Eve.

When Sarah Rabb walked in, she was inundated with, "Gram!" from all the children as they surrounded her.

"Oh dear where did all these children come from?" Gram said with joy.

Sarah Rabb allowed the children to pull her into the living room. There she was met by everyone else. Uncle Matt took her coat and Gram sat in the easy chair.

As the oldest grandchild Les brought her the first gift and then the fun began. Sarah Rabb was very appreciative of everything she got. There were the arts and craft gifts that the older grandchildren made for her in school, the Jean Nate products from Chloe and Mattie and then the traditional gifts from the other adults.

To keep the memories Harm was using the family video camera while John went about snapping photos of Gram as she received her gifts from the children.

Soon the gift giving was over and the family settled down to prepare the Christmas feast. The women went into the kitchen while the men gravitated to the play room. Sarah and Diane fed, changed and burped Natalie and David then set them both down in the large playpen that was placed just inside the large kitchen. The rest of the kids spread out among the rooms in the house. Chloe and Mattie split up to help keep an eye on them.

The making of the Christmas feast took the usual time. The women were so engrossed with preparing the meal that they didn't pay as close attention to the babies in the playpen as they would have. They were secure in the knowledge that they were safe. No one paid any mind to Natalie as she stood up and walked around the playpen rail. After all Natalie was just about fifteen months old and Diane witnessed that feat many times.

If any of the women in the kitchen turned to look they would have seen the expression of awe on David's face when Natalie reached the corner of the rail and pulled herself up a bit and lifted her ankle to the top of the rail. From that position she then was able to pull her rear end up until she was completely straddling the top of the rail. Then as if she was doing it for a long time, Natalie lowered herself down onto and then crawled across the kitchen floor.
None of the women knew what happened until Natalie reached to where Gram was sitting and grabbing Gram's skirt, pulled herself up to stand. Gram exclaimed delightedly, "Oh my word! Ladies it looks like we have another helper."

The other mothers turned and looked as Natalie smiled brightly up at them, seemingly proud of her super-baby feat.

"Oh we have an escape artist do we," Diane said with a smile as she picked her daughter up and gave her a congratulatory tickle.

"Should we be whistling The Great Escape?" Sarah asked with her own smile.

"Just call her Stephanie McQueen," Ann Marie offered.

The women chuckled as they had all gone through this phase with the other children. Still Diane was a bit chagrined as she called, "Harm we have a problem."

Harm hurried into the kitchen. When he saw Diane holding Natalie, he asked, "What's the matter honey."

"Our latest has shown the ability to escape the playpen. Here take her and keep an eye on her while we get dinner ready," Diane ordered as she handed Natalie to Harm.

"No problem honey," Harm said as he took Natalie. "Now what are we going to do with you little miss?" Harm cooed to her.

"Oh and Harm, send John in to get David, no sense keeping them apart," Sarah instructed her brother in law.

Harm waved his acquiescence as he called, "John, your wife needs you."

John came in and after Sarah told of Natalie's escape picked his son up. David was obviously distressed at seeing his best friend taken away. He cheered up considerably as he was reunited with Natalie on a blanket set in the middle of the man-cave play room. There the men set to watch the TV and the kids.

Dinner was served a bit later. After everyone was seated to Harm's instructions and "Grace" was said, he offered the holiday toast.

"Not to repeat myself from Thanksgiving, but as we gather here on this holiday, we are thankful that we now have a permanent member in the family in Mattie Grace. The judge granted us full custody last week. This morning Diane and I gave Mattie the adoption papers. Well right after we came home from church she gave them back to Diane and I, signed. We just have to file them next week and wait until June 30 for the adoption to become official. So here's to Mattie Grace "Rabb" and all the rest of the Rabbs, Marshalls and Matthews. May we all be as happy in the future as we are now."

Everyone touched their glass of sparkling grape juice in salute.

Friday, December 26, 2003

1100 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE
The ceremony for Sarah's long awaited promotion to full "bird" Colonel was being held in the largest courtroom in JAG Headquarters. Sarah's family sat in the front row behind the prosecutions side while the Rabbs were seated in the front row behind the defense's table. Deanne and Uncle Matt sat in the row behind the Marshalls along with John's Mom & Dad with Ann Marie & Peter's family behind them. The Burnetts were seated in the row behind the Rabbs along with Sergei and Jennifer. The whole company of the Judiciary and Legal Staff filled the pews behind the families.

Soon the call of "all rise" preceded Admiral's Morris arrival into the courtroom. He went to the middle of the area in front of the bench and called, "Lt. Colonel Sarah Marshall and Admiral John Marshall please step forward."

Sarah and John walked up and stood at attention in front of Morris. When they reached Admiral Morris they saluted. Sarah looked splendid in her Dress Blue Uniform. John had the family bible in his left hand.

As Morris returned the salute he had a twinkle in his eye as he said, "Colonel, admiral we're going to do this ceremony a little differently. Admiral Marshall since you are the appropriate rank, you may administer your wife's oath of office."

There was a collective gasp from John, Sarah and the audience and then a smattering of applause.

Getting over his surprise John answered, "Aye sir, also may I request that our oldest come up and hold the bible."

Without waiting to be asked, Chloe came up to stand between her parents to proudly comply with her father's request. She too had her own dark blue suit on and her hair bundled up just like her mother's in a French braid. The three looked the very proper image of a military family.

Sarah laid her left hand on the bible, raised her right hand as John administered the oath:

"I, Sarah Catherine Marshall, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of Colonel in the United States Marine Corps. So help me God."

As Sarah put her hands down and Chloe stepped back, John said, "I don't need to be prompted on the next part."

Sarah smiled in anticipation as she said, "Easy officer."

"Aye aye Colonel," John said as he cupped her cheeks for the traditional kiss.

As he laid a deep but still appropriately long kiss on his wife the audience broke out into applause.

During the applause it was Chloe who counted slowly to twenty and coughed extravagantly to signal the end of the kiss and then said, "Geez get a room."

That elicited many chuckles from the audience as Sarah and John broke apart. Sarah's smile was wide and bright.

She stood at attention as Morris handed John the box with her Colonel's Eagles. She had a hard time holding back that same smile as John and Chloe replaced the silver Lt. Colonel's Oak Leafs with the white gold eagles.
After that task was done the three stepped back in line in front of Admiral Morris. He started with Sarah as he shook their hands with his own wide smile on his face. He was very amused when after Sarah and John saluted him, the three Marshalls executed a perfect about face as they turned to leave.

There were 5 other officers being promoted, three to Lieutenant-JG, and two to Lt. Commander. Each officer was sworn in and their relatives or significant others were on hand to ceremonially switch the ranks.

When the ceremonies ended, the whole company adjourned to the commissary where a full holiday buffet luncheon was set out. Admirals Morris and Chegwidden wisely decided that no courtroom sessions were happening the Friday after Christmas.

The Marshalls and the other promoted officers and their families lined up just outside the entrance of the commissary to receive their congratulations.

Maureen and Jim came up with the three youngest Marshalls in tow. Chloe took David from Maureen's arms and gathered Caroline and Patrick around her so that the grandparents could go in to sit.

As she greeted her own well-wishers Sarah watched as Chloe shook hands with everyone. At 16 years of age and with her pumps on, she was almost Sarah's height.

As she stood watching her daughter Sarah thought, 'Oh my God Chloe has grown so much this past year. Soon she'll be dating and driving. John's going to have a hard time fending off the boys that come around. She is so beautiful.'

During her musings AJ and Sydney reached Sarah as he shook her hand and said, "Congratulations Colonel."

"Thank you sir," Sarah replied graciously as she snapped out of her reverie and to attention

"At ease Sarah," AJ said before motioned his head toward Chloe saying, "I saw you looking at Chloe with this sense of wonder on your face. I still can't believe she was that obnoxious kid that hid above the elevator five Christmases ago."

"Yes sir Chloe has come a long way from that confused child. She's thinking of going to the Naval Academy when she graduates in two years," Sarah acknowledged.

"Really, when did she decide that?" AJ asked astonished.

"She got the idea when the Rabbs and we stopped at Annapolis on our way to the beach house in Rehoboth the weekend after Labor Day. Harm & Diane conducted a little tour. She wants to major in Maritime Law," Sarah proudly announced.

"Well you and John certainly have a reason to be proud," Sydney said.

"Thanks Sydney. Also congratulations on your promotion Lieutenant," Sarah acknowledged.

Sydney was one of those officers promoted to Lt. JG today. She also looked splendid in her own Navy Blue uniform.

As AJ moved on the Rabbs came along. Harm warmly embraced his sister-in-law saying, "Ya done good Sarah, congratulations."

"You know Harm you're just below the zone, your time may come next spring," Sarah said.
"I know. Still it's a good thing I didn't change designator when I returned to fly. Otherwise I'd be waiting a much longer time for my fourth stripe," Harm said.

"Well I hope we'll have the same celebration then," Diane added.

Amen to that sis," Sarah added.

Soon everyone was lined up at the buffet stations and lunch was consumed. Only those on the skeleton watch stayed behind as the rest of the Corps went home for the weekend.

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

New Year's Eve Military Ball
Willard Hotel,
Washington, DC, NW

The Chegwiddens, the Marshalls, the two Rabb couples and the Roberts were at their own table. Chloe was sitting at another table with Justin Maxwell, a boy she and her parents knew from one of her extracurricular activities. The rest of the couples sitting at that table were all sixteen to eighteen years of age.

The teenagers were there because being that it was a Military Ball that not only included all the services, but also included the members of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Composite and Cadet Squadrons from around the DC area which included the Maryland, National Capital and Virginia Wings.

Chloe was a member of the Challenger Cadet Squadron of the National Capital Wing that met at Bolling Air Force Base, just across the Anacostia River from the Navy Yard. That was the reason for her perfect about face at her mom's promotion ceremony. While she was living with the Marshalls before her dad and grandmother passed away in the fire, John told her about his time in CAP. After her adoption by the Marshalls was finalized, Chloe expressed an interest in joining. Sarah and John fully supported her, as with the right tutoring, CAP taught leadership skills that would be invaluable to Chloe in her adult life. They did their due diligence as parents in researching the local CAP units. In June 2000 shortly after she turned 13, Chloe joined the Challenger squadron, being that squadron was the most convenient to their home.

She now held the rank of Cadet 1st Lieutenant, a rank she achieved in three years with the required studying and hard work. Justin held the rank of Cadet 2nd Lieutenant. They were the two highest ranking cadets in their squadron. Chloe was the squadron's cadet commander.

Justin was wearing his Air Force/CAP blue uniform, but with a white shirt and black bowtie. Chloe was in a shimmering royal blue silk gown with nice puffy sleeves that was cut modestly for a teenager.

Justin's parents were also at the ball as they were in the Air Force. Julia Maxwell was a Lt. Colonel who worked as the office manager in the Pentagon for the office of the Air Force's Chief of Staff. Steve Maxwell was also a Lt. Colonel and worked as a surgeon in the 79th Medical Wing at Andrews Air Force Base.

One of the other couples at Chloe's table was Mattie and her date, one David Stiles. Mattie was dressed in a red gown that Diane and she shopped for together. It was a nice halter gown, with a high enough back appropriate for a teenage girl.
Mattie was also a member of CAP at the Fairfax Composite Squadron of the Virginia Wing, which met in the Fairfax American Legion Post, just 5 minutes from the Rabb home. Being that she was near planes with her parents in the aviation business, it just seemed natural for Mattie to join CAP when she was 14 years.

After they settled Mattie's family issues, Diane and Harm encouraged Mattie to continue her activities in CAP which she let fall to the wayside when her mom passed away and her father abandoned her. Going to school and running a business alone did not lend itself to any other extracurricular activities. Before she had her hiatus, she achieved the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer.

David was also a member of the same CAP squadron as Mattie. He also achieved the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer. He was also wearing his CAP Uniform the same way Justin did.

David’s parents were Matthew and Jackie Stiles. Matt was in the Army coincidentally as a lawyer stationed at the Army's JAG Headquarters in Crystal City, VA across I-395 from the Pentagon. His wife Jackie was also an attorney in a private practice that specialized in children's advocacy. The Stiles lived fifteen minutes across Fairfax from the Rabbs.

Besides enjoying themselves, the parents were also the unofficial chaperones for the Civil Air Patrol teenagers and their dates.

All the adult military personnel were in their respective services/genders Evening Dress Uniforms.

Dance music was struck and the adult couples moved to the dance floor. Being the adventurous one Chloe grabbed Justin’s hand and led him onto the dance floor. Mattie followed suit with David. Soon all the other teenagers flowed onto the dance floor.

Sarah and John were very amused that when Chloe and Justin got onto the dance floor she positioned his hands in the appropriate manner for “teenage” dancing. Chloe did let Justin lead. The Marshalls shared a glance with Justin’s parents. They nodded approvingly to each other.

"You think our daughter is appreciating her first date?" John asked Sarah.

"I don't think she'd call it a date. We are chaperoning," Sarah reminded him.

"Yeah there is that, but they are sitting at their own table. Also Justin seems like a nice boy," John said.

"You just like him because he calls you "sir" all the time," Sarah said.

"Hmm, you're right. I hope that trend continues," John replied.

Sarah lightly smacked his shoulder saying, "Now don't start pulling rank on him. It's bad enough he gets that from his dad," Sarah reminded him.

"Yes dear," John wisely said to his wife.

Across the floor Diane and Harm were sharing the same thought about Mattie.

"I'm so glad that you and AJ were able to convince the organizers of this soiree to invite the CAP squadrons. Mattie seems to be having a good time," Diane said.

Harm looked over to where Mattie and David were dancing as he replied, "I don't know. They look a little afraid to move. It reminds me of the first time Sarah and I danced at the NATO Ball."
"Yeah you two did look a bit awkward. Though you two soon relaxed before the Princess came in and the shooting started," Diane reminded him.

"Yeah that was a hell of a night," Harm said as he thought back to that time.

The rest of the ball went on as the adults danced and dined and the kids were put through The Grand March which sparked many smiles and laughter from the participants and spectators alike.

Soon the time came for the countdown to the New Year.

Sarah with her usual sense of time was leading the countdown as all the participants stood waiting on the dance floor or at their tables.

"Five, four, three, two, one, Happy New Year!" the whole ballroom chorused. The applause was followed by the each participant kissing his/her significant other.

"Happy New Year Darling," Diane said as she and Harm embraced.

"Happy New Year my love," Harm returned. They fell into a deep kiss.

"Happy New Year Ninja Girl," John said to Sarah.

"Happy new year Hot Stuff," Sarah returned before they sealed the declaration with their own deep kiss.

After they came up for air they and Diane and Harm caught each other's eye and couldn't help but smile at each other as they all spotted Jennifer and Sergei in their own embrace as well as Chloe and Mattie with their dates.

"I'm glad this year is over. It was a rough ride," Diane said as she held onto Harm.

Harm rubbed his hands up and down his wife's back as he replied, "Yeah but through it all, look at what we have in Mattie and each other. Hell if we can weather this last year, we can get through anything."

Before Diane could reply, Sarah and John as well as Jennifer and Sergei came to stand near them.

After the usual exchanges of New Year wishes, John asked them, "Ready for the New Year?"

Jennifer replied for them all, "Considering how the past year was and we're all still together, you bet we are".
January 2004 was a pleasantly dull month in the offices of JAG. If one could call the regular crimes that were being tried, dull that is. All the attorneys were busy with their own caseloads. AJ finally had a full staff as he had Harm wiggle a few more FTEs (FTE= Full Time Employee) into the operating budget. Sarah Marshall was hearing a variety of cases in her time on the bench.

The normal routine came to a halt when the international community came calling. The Athens bar association filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court charging the US President, Secretary of Defense, SECNAV Sheffield and others with war crimes. The charges referred directly to an incident in Tikifa, Iraq involving a platoon of the 1st Marine Division. After the platoon was pinned down by cross fire coming from a hospital, they called fire down on the hospital. During the bombing of the hospital there were secondary explosions and several civilian buildings were destroyed. The ICC was calling the Iraqi War the "Iraqi Incursion."

When the news came down even though the US didn't recognize the International Criminal Court, Sheffield announced that the Bush administration was shifting policy and he chose himself to go to the Hague and answer the charges in order to "improve the US image" with the rest of the world.

He notified two admirals under his command that he needed two things done. One would provide the best legal representation and the other would investigate the true circumstances of the incident that brought about the charges. AJ Chegwidden and John Marshall set about to perform those tasks.

In the Navy Yard headquarters AJ called Harm and Sarah into his office. When they stood in front of AJ's desk he said, "At ease and have a seat we're still waiting for the third member of your legal team to arrive. The CP desk in the lobby called just before you entered and told me she was checking in."

Before either Sarah or Harm could ask who the third member was there was the expected buzz of the intercom as Jennifer Coates announced, "Admiral, Captain Pike is here sir."

"Send her in Coates," AJ said.

After the usual knock and "enter" from AJ, Captain Meg Austin-Pike walked into the office and stood in front of AJ's desk and said, "Reporting as ordered admiral."

"At ease and have a seat," AJ said.

Harm vacated his chair and had Meg sit while he brought over another guest chair from the setting in front of the fireplace for himself.

After Meg properly greeted everyone AJ announced, "So now that all the players are here we can
begin. First off your husband, Colonel Marshall, is loaning us Captain Pike to be on the legal team because of her master's degree in International Studies. That will give a leg up on the proceedings. There will be no first chair. The three of you will present a united front to defend Sheffield."

"Aye sir," The three officers chorused.

"Second of all, we need to win this because if we lose, we will be branded an outlaw nation by the entire civilized world," AJ reminded them.

"Understood sir," Meg responded for the three of them.

"In the meantime, NCIS is working the case to gather as many facts to present as possible. In fact Tom Magnum said that Diane is going with Gibbs to Iraq tonight to get witness statements from the locals," AJ informed them.

"Diane already told me this morning that she was going there, but that was before we knew that I would be defending Secretary Sheffield," Harm acknowledged.

"So now you know what needs to be done. Take the rest of the day to get your personal affairs in order. All three of you are scheduled to be flying with the SECNAV on his official aircraft out of Andrews tonight at 2100. If there's nothing else dismissed," AJ said.

The three officers rose snapped to attention and left the office.

As they walked through the bullpen Sarah asked, "Is Bob still in town Meg?"

"Yeah he is. He's scheduled to be deployed with his air wing to the Eisenhower in June. He's been working out of Oceana for the time being. Taking care of Catherine won't be a problem as she's in 3rd grade. I can't believe she's already eight. Where did the time go?" Meg said. She then asked Harm, "What about you Harm? How do you manage with you and Diane going out of town at the same time?"

"Well Sarah and I have Uncle Matt and Sarah and Diane's mom Deanne in town to step in and stay at the house. They enjoy their times there anyway. It also helps to have Mattie in the house to help Matt and/or Deanne stay on top of things," Harm replied.

"And you Sarah?" Meg asked.

"Well John isn't going anywhere so that question is moot," Sarah said with confidence.

She wasn't aware of how wrong she would be.

Monday, February 9, 2004

1000 Hours Local Time

Office of Navy Intelligence (ONI)

Pentagon, Arlington, VA

As usual with his wife out of town John suffered through a miserable weekend after he kissed Sarah goodbye at the airport Friday evening. He and Sarah arranged to correspond by phone each about this time since then. Chloe was a gem as always keeping the younger Marshalls or as her Cousin Mattie started to call them, "the younglings" in order. They were all used to their mother having to leave town for a case abroad.
John was reading the evidence report of the case Diane had forwarded from Iraq to Tom Magnum who passed it onto John in ONI when his phone rang.

As John continued reading the report, he reached for the phone and put it to his ear without looking and said automatically "Admiral Marshall!"

"Dobroye utro admiral," a distantly familiar voice replied.

John glanced at his phone console for the first time and frowned as saw two things. One the call came in on his dial in direct line and two the caller ID showed a Russian, specifically a Moscow telephone prefix.

Knowing how the game was played John asked, "Good morning to you as well Marc. Is February as nice there as it is here? How's a Houston boy like you standing the cold?" He also pushed a button on his phone console to start recording the call.

"You know as well as I do Admiral that those of us brought up in the US south can't stand the cold. I'm miserable as all hell here. Every day it feels like it's going to snow, but the cold just squeezes the moisture out of the air before it does anything," Marc Sokol, ne Falcon groused.

"Well I know you didn't call my direct line to grouse about the weather. So what do you want?" John asked getting to the point.

"Since the last time you and your brother-in-law were in Russia, I sent a team into the Siberian Taiga around Svischevo. You know where you met Sergei's mother," Sokol responded.

"Yes go on," John replied now thoroughly intrigued.

"We found some skeletal remains," Sokol said drawing out the tension.

"What skeletal remains?" John asked going along.

"Four male bodies, each about their mid twenties when they died, dressed in Russian Army uniforms buried in a mass grave and another male about fortyish dressed in peasant clothing buried in his own grave nearby. The clothing all had gunshot punctures in vital areas that point to the causes of death," Sokol said all pretense of sparring aside.

"So you called me first because?" John started to ask.

"No I called you after I called JAG headquarters in the Navy Yard. They told me that Mr. Commander Rabb and the lovely Colonel Marshall were out of town. Congratulations on her promotion by the way. Then I called NCIS and they told me that Mrs. Captain Rabb was also out of town. You were in essence my fourth choice to call," Sokol said with a chuckle.

"Okay that's fair. So how do we proceed to verify the identities of the bodies?" John asked.

"Well someone with experience with deciphering skeletal remains needs to come here. Our forensics people aren't as advanced as yours. Do you know of anyone who can do that?" Sokol asked.

"I may have someone I mind," John said noncommittally.

"Well I suggest you get in touch with that person and arrange to come here. They bodies are being kept in a mortuary in Belovka," Sokol informed him.

"I hope you're not planning to shoot us down on the way there like the last time," John said half
joking referring to his and Harm's flight back in 1998.

"No that's not on the itinerary but I suggest you take the train from Moscow. Winter is not a good season to fly in Siberia," Sokol suggested in the same tone.

"Fair enough. Let me make some calls and arrangements. Can I call you back at this number?" John said copying the number from his caller ID screen.

"Yes it's my cell number. You can reach me day or night," Sokol replied.

"Good, I'll call as soon as I can. Do svidaniya and spasiba Marc," John said sincerely.

"You're welcome John," Sokol said before he disconnected the call.

John hit the disconnect button himself and then the intercom and said, "Chief get in here please. I need you to transpose a call I just recorded."

After he gave the tape with the recorded call to Chief Pierce, John dialed another number. When it was picked up he heard a female voice, "This is the Jeffersonian. How may I assist you please?"

John replied, "I'd like to speak with Dr. Daniel Goodman please?"

"Whom shall I say is calling please?" replied the receptionist.

"Admiral John Marshall, Director of Naval Intelligence," John replied.

"Just a moment please admiral," the receptionist replied. John waited as he heard the line click and then a stentorian voice come on with. "Admiral Marshall, a pleasure to hear from you again. What can the Jeffersonian do for you today?"

"Well Dr. Goodman seeing as how your work in identifying Vietnam Servicemen remains is going well, I have a favor to ask. I need your best forensic anthropologist for a delicate job," John asked in a tone that was both humble but insistent.

Dr. Goodman gave an amused snort before he asked, "Where do you need Dr. Brennan to go?"

"I need her to go with me to Russia, doctor. I just got a call from one of my friends – so to speak – in their intelligence community. He notified me that the remains of my brother-in-law's father were exhumed from his grave in the Siberian Taiga."

"So why not bring them to Washington for Dr. Brennan to verify them here?" Goodman asked.

"Not a good idea. I need to have her verify them in Russia so that there is no doubt that I'm bringing the right set of remains home. That way when I do tell my brother-in-law we found his father, it's the truth. He's been through the ringer with this since he was five years old."

"Alright, I'll tell her that you and she will be going together. When do you plan to leave?" Goodman asked.

"Within twenty four hours. I'll make arrangements on military transport out of Andrews. Before that though, I have to arrange my child care issues. My wife along with said brother-in-law, are out of town on an assignment defending the SECNAV before the World Court in The Hague," John stated.

"Yes I remember reading about the case. I'll have Dr. Brennan call you to make your travel plans. Good luck admiral," Goodman said.
"Thank doctor, goodbye," John said as they ended the call.

John then dialed another number and waited for, "Ann Marie I need your help. I just found out that I have to go out of town. Deanne and Uncle Matt are tied up with the Rabbs' kids"

"How long are you going to be gone?" John's sister asked.

"I'll probably be gone a week. I need to go to Russia. It seems that Harm Sr.'s remains were found in the Taiga. I'm going there with an anthropologist from the Jeffersonian." John explained.

"It's not something dangerous, but still I'd feel better if you took family with you to watch your back," Ann Marie lovingly and strongly hinted.

"Yeah you're right. Right after I hang up with you, I'm going to call Sergei and Diane. He'll leave with me from Andrews and Diane will meet me somewhere along the way from Iraq," John said.

"That's good. Still I noticed that you didn't say that you'd called or even said you were even going to call Harm," Ann Marie said with concern.

"We don't need him to be distracted while he's defending Sheffield. Even though Sarah and Meg are there, we need to show that we can put aside personal agendas," John answered.

"I see your point. Okay I'll call mom and see if she wants to spend a week with her DC grandchildren," Ann Marie said with a sigh.

"That's my girl. I'll call this evening and let you know when my flight out of Andrews is leaving," John said.

"Okay I'll be there this in the morning after I get Andrew and Diane to school," Ann Marie said.

"Thanks sis," John said as they ended the call.

He then called Carolyn Pierce back in saying, "Secure my office please. I'm going up to the CNO's office to notify him of the call from Sokol and what he wanted. Then I'm going to the Navy Yard to speak with Chegwidden and Magnum. Could you please call them and let them know I'm coming and why."

"Aye sir," Carolyn said.

At that John got his cover and coat from his coat tree and walked out of the office. As he walked down the Pentagon's halls he thought, "Jesus, I hope Sokol isn't pulling a fast one."

1400 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

John left the CNO's office shortly after 1300. It took him less than an hour to drive to the Navy Yard. On his way through the Lobby CP John gathered Sergei from the headquarters detail office in the lobby. When he got to AJ's office he motioned for Jennifer to let the Navy's JAG know he was there.

"Yes Mrs. Rabb," AJ said over the intercom. AJ thought that only using the "Rabb" was a bit disrespectful to Jennifer's marital status.

"Sir, Admiral Marshall and my husband are here," Jennifer announced. She had no idea why John
was there or why he asked Sergei to join him. She looked at her husband who shrugged unknowingly.

Jennifer was totally surprised to hear long with "Send them in Jennifer" she also heard AJ say, "and you come in with them. You're going to want to hear this as well."

AJ and Tom Magnum were waiting for them in the sitting area around the fireplace as he said, "At ease and have a seat Sergei, Jennifer."

Now Jennifer was getting scared. AJ hardly ever used her first name. She asked, "Sirs what's going on?"

AJ looked at John and said, "John we're waiting on you."

John took a breath and began, "Thank you AJ. To begin with Jennifer and Sergei are totally knowledgeable of whatever goes in our family, including what happened with Serge and Harm's father."

"Okay" Jennifer said rightfully expecting more.

"Along those lines Sergei, I received a call from our mutual friend, Marc Sokol, concerning yours and Harm's father," John said.

"Bozhe Moi," exclaimed Sergei.

"Yeah MY God is right. He said that he sent a team into the Taiga around Svischevo and the team found skeletal remains of five males. Four dressed as soldiers in a mass grave and another in a single grave dressed as a peasant. The clothing had traces of blood around gunshot holes."

"Are they able to verify who they were?" AJ asked.

"No that's why Sokol asked for our help," John explained.

"So what happens now?" Jennifer asked.

"Sergei and I go to Russia. We pick up Diane and Jethro Gibbs along the way. We're bringing our expert from the Jeffersonian, Dr. Temperance Brennan. She's the best forensic anthropologist in the world. She'll ensure that the remains are intact and arrive as such to the Jeffersonian for a thorough examination," John explained again.

"Have you told Harm?" Sergei asked.

"No he has enough on his plate right now with the SECNAV's trial. That's why we're picking Diane up along the way, to watch out for his best interests," John replied.

"Sounds like a plan," AJ said. He continued, "While you were on your way here John, Tom and I were in a conference call with the CNO. He was in agreement with you going, and that you are taking Gibbs along as a bodyguard. At least he's someone who's not emotionally involved," AJ explained.

John nodded in agreement as he voiced another thought, "Jennifer why don't you stay at my place while Sergei and I are in Russia. It shouldn't be too hard. Chloe has a good hand with the younger kids and David. She just snaps her fingers and they get in line with her…"

John said before he was interrupted by AJ with, "I wonder where she learned that from?"
The others chuckled as John smiled at him indulgently at the reference to Sarah as he finished with, "I just need another adult to stay there."

"Yeah I can do that. I don't relish staying in my apartment alone while Sergei is gone anyway," Jennifer confirmed.

"Good then I suggest we all start to prepare for this. I'll call tonight with the appropriate arrangements," John said concluding the meeting.

Wednesday, February 11, 2004

0900 Zulu

Shermyetevo Airport

Moscow

When Tom Magnum sent orders for Diane and Gibbs to report to Capodichino Airport, he only said that it was for a new and delicate assignment. They only knew John was coming and he would brief them upon his arrival. John thought that it was a very bad idea for Dr. Brennan, Sergei and he to fly directly to Moscow without first briefing Diane and Gibbs on the reason they were all going onto Moscow. After Diane met them at Capodichino, John waited until they met up with Gibbs at the Naples Hilton to tell her the whole story.

"I'm glad you didn't tell Harm yet. You're right he has enough on his plate now. Have you told Sarah?" Diane asked after the story recital.

"Yeah I have. She swore herself to secrecy and did wish us good luck," John replied.

When they stepped off the plane in Moscow, it was bitterly cold. John commented, "No wonder Napoleon and Hitler had a hard time conquering this country. How can you stand the cold, Sergei?"

"Heh, this is nothing. It's only ten degrees, practically Spring like," Sergei replied with a smile.

John looked sideways at him, but still pulled the collar of his overcoat up a little higher. As they all exited the terminal they met a familiar face.

"Dobroye utro once again Admiral and you as well Mrs. Rabb," Sokol said shaking John's hand and bending and kissing Diane's.

"Always a pleasure Marc," Diane said sweetly.

He turned and greeted Sergei with, "It is good to see you again Staff Sergeant. You're getting fat. I guess married life agrees with you."

"It is very good if you have a good woman," Sergei replied letting Sokol shake his hand.

Marc turned to Gibbs and Brennan saying, "You I know Jethro."

Gibbs let slip his famous grin as he shook Marc's hand saying, "Marc, it's hasn't been long enough."

Marc grinned in return as he greeted the others in the party with, "And this must be Dr. Temperance Brennan, the best forensic anthropologist in America."

Marc also took her hand and kissed it.
"In the world," Brennan said without false modesty. She truly believed that she was definitely the best in the world.

"Well I believe that you'll be able to verify the remains we found," Marc said in acknowledgement of her genius.

"Well Marc now that you're done showing off the FSR's far reaching knowledge by knowing everyone without an introduction, can we please get out of this cold?" John said in not so mild exasperation.

"Yes we can. I've arranged for us to go directly to the train. I reserved sleeping quarters for everyone in your party. It's an overnight trip to Belovka

"Lead on Marc," John urged.

Marc led them to a limousine that could accommodate all of them. They arrived at Moscow's rail terminal where they boarded an old fashioned sleeper car that reminded them of the Orient Express. A rail porter showed them to their compartments. They were in adjoining rooms, Diane and Brennan in one and the three men in the other.

"It's almost seven hundred ten miles to Belovka, so make yourselves comfortable. We'll be there tomorrow," Marc urged.

"Thank you Marc," Diane said for them all. They all settled down in their accommodations.
Chapter 119

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 119

Thursday, February 12, 2004

1400 Zulu - 1800 Local Time

Belovka, Saratov, Russia

When the American party arrived at Belovka, they were chauffeured from the train station to the local inn. It was a fairly new building and it had large and warm beds. Again the ladies and gentlemen shared adjoining rooms.

After they checked in they went to dinner. Just as they finished eating Marc stopped by their table.

"Are the accommodations satisfactory?" Marc asked

Without deferring to John Dr. Brennan asked Marc, "When can we see the remains?"

"We'll go to the mortuary first thing in the morning after breakfast Dr. Brennan. Now get some rest," Marc replied.

"No I'm fine, I rested very well on the train. I need to see the remains now," Brennan insisted.

Marc sighed as he relented, "Alright doctor you and Admiral Marshall please come with me."

"I'll take care of the bill John," Diane said.

Marc said, "Don't worry about it. The Ministry of Defense is picking up the tab for this whole thing."

"Thanks Marc," Diane acknowledged.

"Okay Marc shall we go then," Brennan said as she put her coat on.

John and Marc looked at each other, sighed and grinned at each other. They went out the door and hung a left. Before they walked to far away they heard from behind them, "Wait up!" The three turned and saw Jethro and Sergei coming out to meet them.

They all fell in step together and walked on.

"The funeral home is just on the next block. I'll make sure the proprietor can help you out" Marc said as they walked along. When they entered the mortuary reception lobby, they were met with a pleasant face woman who was about 60 years along.

"Dobre nocha," she said to Marc.

"Good evening Annashka," Marc said pleasantly using the affectionate form for Anna. They embraced in the Russian way kissing each others' cheeks. When he broke away he said in Russian, "My friends need to see the remains of the one from the single grave. This one here – (indicating Sergei) – is his son."
"Ah yes, come with me then," Anna said still speaking in Russian hooking her hand in Sergei's elbow. They walked to the back and then down three steps to a back room. Anna turned on the wall switch which revealed that they were in the room with the refrigerated body storage lockers. They were arranged three high and four wide. She went over and pulled out one of the middle drawers to reveal a black zippered body bag.

Brennan looked between John and Sergei. As John stepped back with Marc and Gibbs, Sergei nodded for her to open the bag. She pulled the zipper down and spread the opening to reveal a skull and then the rest of the skeleton. The torso was covered by a ragged silk shirt that was gray, but could have been purple. The shirt showed the bullet hole and a stain that looked very much like blood.

Brennan picked the skull up and held it up to the light. She shifted her gaze to Sergei and told him, "Stand still and look this way."

Sergei looked her way while she did her cursory examination. She said, "From what I see of the bone structure, I would say that pending a more thorough examination, this could be Sergei's father."

"Is she that good?" Marc whispered to John in Russian.

Apparently he didn't whisper low enough for Brennan heard him and replied in fluent Russian, "Yes I am. When can we bring the skeleton back to the Jeffersonian for a thorough examination?"

Anna replied with a smile, "I can prepare him to be returned with you tomorrow. If you like you can supervise the preparation."

"That will be fine," Brennan said. She then took a permanent marker pen from her pocket and finding a smooth part on the skull scrawled her initials there.

Anna nodded knowingly saying, "I do the same thing. That way I never get anyone mixed up." She zipped the bag closed and then closed the drawer.

Brennan smiled at that and said, "We can go back to the inn now. When will the next train be going back to Moscow?"

"The day after tomorrow at 1300," Marc said.

Brennan nodded at that. The party walked back out to the reception area.

Before they walked out Marc tugged at John's arm saying "May I have moment alone please."

John looked to Anna who overheard the request. She said, "This way" and directed them into her small office.

John let Marc precede him in and when he closed the door he asked, "Okay Marc what is it?"

"We need you to take the rest of the bodies," Marc said.

"You mean the other soldiers that Harm Sr. shot." John asked bewildered.

"No, the other POWs," Marc replied.

It dawned on John as he thought, 'The List.' He could only think to ask Marc, "How many?"

"All of them."
"Oh my God that's over 100 men."

"Yes, there are one hundred twenty seven men."

"Where are they?"

"They're in a semi-trailer at the train station. I'll put them on the train on a flatbed car and ship them to Moscow and onto a private hanger at Shermyetevo Airport. From there you can load the coffins into one of your military cargo planes that are flying to and from Dover and take them away."

John sighed as he realized that Marc was getting in a dig on the war America was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. He put aside the response he wanted to make as he said, "You know right after you called me the other day, I hoped that you weren't pulling a fast one, but I never expected this. All I can ask is why now?"

"It comes from after you and Commander Rabb saved Putin's life. He said do whatever I need to do to get the bodies out of Mother Russia. He only asks that it be kept quiet. Let the families know after you get them to Dover."

"Okay, but everyone one of them better match the list or you will hear from me through the New York Times and the Washington Post," John warned Marc.

"Agreed," Marc said holding out his hand.

John took it and gave it a hearty shake saying, "I have to let Diane and Dr. Brennan know and then my superiors."

"Good let me know what you come up with," Marc said.

They walked out of the office to rejoin Gibbs, Sergei and Brennan.

When they got back to the inn John called everyone into his room to tell them of Marc's bombshell.

"Oh my God it really happened like Harm thought," Diane said in shock.

"Yeah it did. Temperance, you're going to be busy," John said.

"Yes we will. There is one question. How did they all die?" Brennan said.

"That will be for you and your team to determine," John said.

"Do you think Sokol will give us records of their time here? That is if any were kept," Gibbs asked.

"Hopefully, we can only ask. If he's not forthcoming with them, we'll have to look elsewhere. That will be your job Jethro. If we don't have the records when we get the bodies on the plane to Dover, you're going to look for them. It'll be like when we first started our commission in '98," John instructed.

"Well, try not to get shot this time," Gibbs warned with his grin.

"You do the same Jethro," John replied with the same grin.

Turning to Sergei he said, "You and Dr. Brennan are to stay with the trailer and ensure that all the coffins don't get lost between here and Dover. After we break this meeting I'll start making the calls so that the plane is waiting for us at Shermyetevo."
"Sounds good John," Diane said.

At that everyone got the idea that rest was needed. It was going to be a very tense and tiring trip back to Moscow. They knew that they wouldn't be able to fully relax until the plane with the POWs' remains landed at Dover.

Friday, February 13, 2004

09000 Zulu - 1300 Local Time

Belovka, Saratov, Russia

Early the next morning Brennan set out to do a preliminary examination of the bodies/remains. They were in body bags that were folded into thin rough wood crates that were stacked in the semi-trailer. They were all smaller than full sized coffins. Marc, Sergei and Gibbs along with three of Anna’s workers from the funeral home were along to do the heavy lifting and opening the crates. Fortunately the crates weren't nailed shut, but held closed with padlocked hasps, locked simply by plastic ties.

Each body bag had a piece of silver duct tape with the name of each prisoner written there. Anna was able to supply enough numbered plastic ties which John and Diane used to SEAL each crate and log the numbers accordingly with the name of each POW in a new ledger that Anna also supplied.

The whole team worked well through the day and into the evening examining all 127 sets of skeletal remains. Just as with Harm Sr.’s remains Brennan wrote the number from each SEAL onto each of the skulls.

The work on the last set of remains was finally completed well into the evening. The truck was padlocked Sealed with one of the numbered markers. Marc gave the only set of keys for the lock to John.

Before they turned in, John, Diane and Brennan met to discuss the findings.

"A more thorough examination of each skeleton will support my findings, but it seems that most of these men died of natural causes. There were no signs of trauma that would point to any one cause of death," Brennan announced.

"What did they go through, living in captivity?" John asked rhetorically.

"Probably a lot of interrogation on how they flew their missions," Gibbs surmised.

"But why were they held so long after the war was over?" Brennan asked.

"To preserve a despicable secret," Diane spat. She calmed enough to continue. "When we first found out about the list of Vietnam War American POWs taken to Russia we discovered that they were all pilots. You have to remember that the North Vietnamese air force was trained by the Russians. That being said, the Americans pilots regularly defeated the NVAF pilots. The Russians wanted to know why. So they started taking some of the American pilots out of the POW camps to Russia. One could surmise that they were maltreated or deprived of the basic things they needed to survive for being resistive to the interrogations."

"We would know more if we had the records of their captivity," Gibbs added.

"Okay now all we need to do is get the bodies to the USA," Sergei said.
"John what are the transportation arrangements from Moscow?" Diane asked.

"Last night I phoned the CNO. He called SECDEF Rumsfeld and he will have the Combined Services Brigade at Dover divert a C-17 Globemaster from Ramstein to Moscow. The trailer is a regular cargo container which will fit into the plane and we can load it up without any fuss and fly nonstop to Dover with in-flight refueling over the Atlantic. We'll fly home that way as well," John announced.

"Good I'd rather tell Harm after he gets home after Sheffield's trial," Diane said.

Monday, February 16, 2004

Shermyetevo Airport, Moscow

Early Sunday morning before departing Belovka they placed Harm Sr.'s coffin in the trailer with the other "coffins". They placed another numbered SEAL tag on the trailer lock. As promised Marc loaded the semi-trailer onto a flatbed railcar for the long strange trip back to Moscow. Gibbs and Sergei took turns sitting in the rear of the car that overlooked the flatbed with the semi-trailer. Thankfully the rear door was facing in that direction.

When they arrived in the Moscow area, they stopped at a siding just outside the station. There Marc unloaded the trailer and hooked it up to a tractor truck. Gibbs got into the cab of the truck with the driver as John and the rest got into the waiting limousine. They followed close behind the truck on the ride to the airport.

When they reached the secluded hanger where the C-17 waited, the driver backed the truck up the ramp and onto the plane. After the tractor was disconnected and driven away the plane's crew set about properly securing the trailer. It wasn't long before they were wheels up and flying out of Russia.
Chapter 120

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 120

Monday, February 16, 2004

2000 Zulu

Halfway over the Atlantic Ocean to Dover

Diane and John were sitting together in the passenger seats in the forward passenger compartment of the plane. John adjusted his seat to recline as he was sleeping. Diane's seat was also reclined and she was resting her head on his shoulder as she was fast asleep herself.

John being the lighter sleeper was the first of them brought out of sleep by the pilot announcing, "We're getting ready to rendezvous with the KC-135 for refueling. All passengers please stay in your seats and fasten your seatbelts."

John looked at his left shoulder and saw a mass of dark hair resting there. He leaned his head over and kissed the crown of Diane's head saying, "Hey sleepyhead time to rise and shine. We gotta get a bit more secure here. They're gassing up."

Diane woke up and looked at her brother-in-law and smiled. John thought, 'Geez she looks just like Sarah with her hair all askew and that sleepy smile.' He said, "Welcome back to the world Mrs. Rabb. Sleep well?"

"Just fine, you and Harm have got to have the softest shoulders. You make us Mackenzie women feel so safe and comfortable," Diane said.

"We aim to please. Besides I owe him for taking care of Sarah all those times in the field," John said.

"Well I'm sure my sister has said this enough times to my husband, but I think you're the best brother-in-law a girl can have."

"Why thank you ma'am, I will say that you're a real good sister-in-law yourself. Look at all those times you were there for me when Sarah was away or in trouble, like in Aceh that time. Hell, I was beside myself with worry. You helped me keep it together," John reminded her.

"Well what you just helped doing goes beyond the pale. You're bringing Harm's father home. Finally he can really close that chapter," Diane said.

"Yeah thanks. You know we still have to call Trish," John reminded Diane.

"I know I'll do that after we verify the remains. I wonder how far along Sheffield's trial is," Diane said in wonder.

"Sarah called me a while ago. They're into closing arguments. It shouldn't be long."

"Good we can have Harm go directly to the Jeffersonian when he lands at Andrews. That way he's there when Temperance does her work," Diane added.

"In the meantime, let's speak with Jethro about finding out how the others died," John said.
Jethro seemed to know he was being spoken of as he appeared in the seat beside John.

"You rang?" Gibbs said with that famous grin.

"Yeah we did," Diane said. She continued. "When you start your investigation on the POWs, you should start with the guy Harm spoke to at Consolidated Aircraft in California oh damn what was his name?"


"Yeah him, he'll know what was going on with the POWs," Diane finished.

"I'll go there after we get to the US. I'll take Dinozzo with me," Gibbs said.

"Good to hear. Now let's get some rest. I see the refueling has been completed.

The team settled down for the remainder of the flight.

Wednesday, February 18, 2004

1200 Local Time

Arrivals Terminal

Andrews Air Force Base

Washington DC

The plane with the team from Moscow landed at Dover about 3 hours after it refueled. The trailer was hooked up and driven directly to the Jeffersonian with the Rabb team following close behind in a limousine. After Brennan ensured that the trailer was under strict Jeffersonian evidentiary control protocols, the team said their good nights to each other. Diane went right home to Fairfax while John and Sergei met up with Jennifer at Florida Ave.

The next day John and Diane and Bob Pike sat waiting for their spouses to arrive at Andrews. Sheffield's trial was over as he was acquitted in the World Court. He wasn't aware that the Vietnam POWs' remains were retrieved.

Sheffield debarked from the plane first, with Sarah, Meg and Harm right behind. There was a bank of press microphones and the usual press that covered Andrews waiting for a statement from the SECNAV. He didn't disappoint.

After answering the usual question and he acknowledged his legal team, Sheffield turned to them and shook each of their hands saying, "Thank you for a job well done. Now I see that your families are waiting for you."

"You're welcome sir," Sarah said for them all.

Soon the three met their respective spouses and shared in some very much welcomed PDAs as each couple indulged in long slow kisses. Some other Air Force officer came in from another flight and sniffed and tisked loudly at the display. Unfortunately for him he was only a major. John, being in his uniform heard him and when he disengaged from his kiss with Sarah he said very loudly in his New York tone, "You got a problem MAJOR? If you do I think you better keep it to yourself as EVERYBODY here out ranks you anyway."

The major saw the Rear Admiral-Upper Half stripes on John's uniform cuff and was immediately
"Sorry, he let his puritanical attitude show through. "Uh sorry sir, I'll think better next time."

"See that you do. Now get lost," John said in the same New York tone. He turned his back to the major before he walked away.

As they walked, John said, "Harm, Meg, we're going to get busy for the next week."

Meg and Bob Pike weren't in the know about John & Diane's trip to Russia.

"What's going on?" Harm asked.

When they reached the passenger side of the Rabbs' Lexus, John stopped and looked directly at his brother-in-law saying, "Marc Sokol called and told me that he and a team went into the Taiga near Svischevo to look for something. He found what he was looking for. As a result of what he found, Diane and I went to Russia last week. Harm, we brought your dad home from there."

The shock of hearing that news caused Harm's face to go white and he swayed on the verge of total collapse. It was Bob on one side and Diane on the other who kept him from falling completely to the ground. Sarah and Meg moved quickly to open the front door of the Lexus to have Harm sit down. Harm lowered his head to between his knees to fight back the feeling of nausea.

After a minute, Harm got some of his equilibrium back. He had a small grin on his face as he looked up at John and said, "You know that's the one thing that always ticked me off about you. You don't sugar coat anything. You just rip the "band-aid" right off."

"What can I say," was all John offered in return with a grin of his own.

"So where is his body?" Harm asked.

"He's at the Jeffersonian. Dr. Temperance Brennan will be doing the examination to verify his identity. If you're up to it we can go directly there," John said.

"Yeah I think I'd better," Harm said now completely recovered. He asked Bob and Meg, "You're welcome to come along."

Meg and Bob both nodded as he said, "We wouldn't miss it."

The families piled into their respective vehicles and set off.

During the ride, Harm asked Diane, "Has anyone called mom yet?"

Diane explained, "No not yet. I decided in your best interest that we need to be rock solid in our verification before we call her. So far Dr. Brennan has concluded that Sergei in the son of the remains that we found. He's already given blood samples for a positive DNA match and sat through a video scan of his head. You need to do the same things. It's only after that when we can be certain."

"Yeah that sounds good to me," Harm said in agreement.

It wasn't long before they pulled up to the entrance of the Jeffersonian.

Dr. Goodwin met them there. After being introduced he said to Harm, "Commander thank you for coming straight from the airport. The sooner we get this done, the sooner you can do what you need to for your father."

Harm went in and was introduced to the team that was going to perform the verification.
"This is Dr. Brennan and Dr. Hodgins. Dr. Brennan is the best in the world at forensic anthropology, particularly as it related to identifying skeletal remains."

Harm shook their hands.

Turning to another lab coated women Goodwin introduced, "This is Miss Angela Montenegro. She will be doing the face reconstruction of your father's skull."

Harm shook her hand as she said, "Commander I'm so sorry for your loss. I hope what we do here will give you the comfort and the closure you need."

"Thank Miss Montenegro," Harm acknowledged. He asked, "Is there anything you need me to do?"

"Yes come with me and we'll take a blood sample. Then we'll sit you down for a video scan of your head."

Angela led the way to her work station. She had Harm sit in a chair with an array of video equipment on an overhead track. The chair in which Harm sat was on its own turn table. A phlebotomist came to take the requisite blood samples. Then Angela came over and made adjustments of the equipment to accommodate Harm's height. There was a clear plastic face rest similar to the one that the eye surgeon used when Harm had his eyes fixed.

After she finished her adjustments Angela said, "Okay, just rest your chin and forehead on the frame and hold perfectly still."

Harm did so while Angel went to sit behind a computer console.

While Angela was taking the necessary time to get her computer program ready, Harm asked, "Is this an x-Ray?"

"No it isn't. It's just a modified video camera. The images it records will be downloaded into my computer. From there we can virtually overlap your image onto your father's. Now sit perfectly still and no more talking. I'm going to start the scan."

Harm sat as he first watched the video array revolve and then his chair rotate in place. It was over in under a minute.

"Okay that's it," Angela announced.

When Harm got up, she led him back to where Diane and the others waited. He asked Brennan, "Can I see my father's remains?"

Brennan looked to Goodwin who nodded yes.

"Come with me please, commander," Brennan said.

As she led Harm and Diane away, the Marshalls and Pikes decided to wait to let Harm have his moment alone with his wife and father. Brennan led them to another room and over to an illuminated table in the middle of the floor. There was a skeleton orderly laid out on the table.

Brennan began with, "After we cleaned the bones we started our examination. We found post-mortem remodeling of four of the front ribs. This indicates the four bullet wounds he received. That was the obvious cause of death."

She picked the skull up and told Harm, "Look at me and stand still." She held the skull up and
looked intently between Harm and the skull. She finally said, "From what I see, this is definitely your father or a very close relative. The blood test and the video reconstruction will verify my findings."

"You're that sure from just what you see?" Harm asked incredulously.

Before Brennan could respond Diane, "She is the best in the world."

"Thank you." Was all Brennan said as Harm shook his head in wonder.
The Jeffersonian team did their work very well. They were able to definitively verify that the remains that Sokol found were indeed Harmon Rabb Sr. As soon as Dr. Goodwin signed off on the report, he notified Harm. Harm in turn called the Walter Campbell funeral home to expedite the funeral arrangements. Diane and he notified the rest of the family.

Today after Staff Call he told AJ and the other officers present those arrangements. He asked Harriet to post a notice of the funeral to the rest of the headquarters company via the bulletin board and the HQ Intranet. Those in the company not in the know of Harm's history were quickly educated.

Then at lunch time Harm went into his office and used his personal cellphone to make the call he dreaded to make. He so hated to make his mom cry.

"Hey mom how're you doing?" Harm said when Trish picked up.

"Harm darling how is everyone in DC?"

"Everyone's great mom, uh mom Diane and John Marshall went into Russia while Sarah and I were in The Hague," he told her.

Trish had a feeling of something not quite right. Still she asked, "What did they find?"

"Mom they found dad," Harm said. He took John's advice of not hemming and hawing when giving that news.

"Alive?" Trish said quietly.

"No mom, his remains were exhumed from where Sergei's uncle buried him," Harm said.

"Oh my, finally we know for sure," Trish said.

"Yeah mom we do," Harm said.

Trish sighed before she asked, "When is the funeral?"

"It's March 3rd. His burial will be at Arlington. I wanted to give you and Frank time to get out here and settle in. Uh Mom I don't know what to feel about this."
"Oh Harm I'm feeling the same way. The only thing I can say is it's always better to know. There was always that feeling of your father still being alive until the second time you came home from Russia with news of Sergei. That's why Frank and I renewed our vows then. But this news just cements everything. Now we can really move on with clear consciences."

"Yeah you're right Mom ~ as usual," Harm added lightheartedly.

"Well Harmon, nice of you to finally say so. By the way have you called Gram yet?"

"As soon as I hang up with you I will. We'll make arrangements to get her down here."

"Okay Harm. Frank and I will call you when we finalize our travel plans. Goodbye darling," Trish said lovingly.

"Bye mom," Harm replied as he ended the call. He sighed in relief on getting that chore out of the way. He speed dialed Gram's number. Sarah Rabb was a bit less sad when she heard the news. "Well now we can finally put him to a peaceful rest."

When Harm ended that call he heard a knock on his door. He looked up, smiled wearily and waved his hand in a come-in gesture. Sarah came in asking, "Hey flyboy how're doing?"

"I'm fine, I just got off the phone with mom and Gram?"

"How are they doing?"

"Fine, they both accepted the fact that now we're FINALLY getting closure on this whole thing with my father," Harm replied.

"Did Gram say how she was coming down here?"

"No not yet. But she always finds a way to get where she's needed."

"Well I just got off the phone with Maureen Marshall. After I told her of the funeral, she said she and Jim would like to go to Belleville to pick Gram up and bring her down here. Would that be alright?"

"That sounds like a great idea. It would save me and any other family members in DC a lot of trouble in driving on two round trips. I'll call Gram and the Marshalls back this evening to tell them it's a go."

"Good, in the meantime I'll see you later. I have to get back to court."

"Oh that's right you're presiding over the Maravelis case, the navy research tech who stole the synthetic diamonds that he was making. What's it like watching Loren and Bud gang up on Sturgis?" Harm asked with a chuckle.

"Oh it's something to see. Bud and Loren make such a great team. They remind me of when you and I or John and I were working together. They're putting up a good argument for the Navy to close Marvelis' bank accounts and get into his safe deposit box that when Sturgis objected, I had no choice but to overrule him."

"When will it go to the members?" Harm asked.

"Probably by the end of the week," Sarah replied.

"Alright I'll see you later," Harm said as he politely stood as Sarah got up to leave. Then he got ready
to resume work on his own case.

Wednesday, March 3, 2004

1100 Local Time

St George's United Methodist Church

Fairfax, VA

The small church was packed as the whole headquarters companies of JAG, NCIS and ONI attended the funeral. The families filled up the first five pews on the right side. President & Mrs. Bartlett, AJ and Sydney, Admiral Stiles and Mrs. Morris, Tom Boone and Jack Keeter were among them as they were invited as family. The JAG Headquarters Company filled up the rest of that side of pews.

The left side of the congregation saw SECNAV Sheffield and former SECNAV Nelson, the CNO Admiral Charles Prescott, with their wives in the front pew with the rest of the NCIS and ONI companies behind.

After the funeral mass was over Harm went up to deliver the eulogy.

"First of all I would like to thank President & Mrs. Bartlett, Secretary & Mrs. Sheffield, Secretary & Mrs. Nelson, Admiral & Mrs. Prescott, Admiral and Mrs. Chegwidden as well as all the JAG, NCIS and ONI headquarter companies for attending. You all do a great honor to my dad and my family by being here. I can do a good job arguing a case in court, international and otherwise, but when it comes to this kind of speaking, I still get nervous. So please bear with me."

The whole congregation gave indulgent chuckles.

Harm continued, "What does a son say about his dad that he hasn't seen since he was five years old. Dad was shot down and taken prisoner on that Christmas Eve. He wasn't returned with the other POWs at the end of that war because the Soviets took him to Russia in an attempt to learn why our pilots were kicking the crap out the NVAF pilots the Soviets trained. From what I learned in the years I went looking for him, he resisted with every ounce of his will and even escaped their captivity, though he could not escape their country. In his attempt to freedom, one woman took him in. That kindness brought about my brother Sergei. Still, Sergei's mother Svetlana told me that he never stopped looking for a way home, a way out of Russia. That came to an end when he rushed to save her when Russian soldiers attacked her because they thought they had a right to. That's when he died a hero."

Harm paused to gather himself some more.

"Still even before that he'd always been my hero. He was the reason I wanted to be a flyer, a Naval Aviator. You see the aviator gene runs very strong in the Rabb line. It goes back to our grandfather, also a Naval Aviator. Even Sergei became an aviator in our Marine Corps. But along with that is a curse of sorts. No Rabb man since my grandfather has lived long enough to see his son or children grow up. Well Sergei and I hope to change that. My beautiful wife Diane has given me four beautiful children and we adopted another and Sergei and his beautiful wife Jennifer are expecting their first child that we can together watch grow up. So even in my father's too short life, he did well. He gave my mom a son, I hope, she can be proud of. He gave Svetlana another fine son in Sergei that I know she is proud of. Harmon Rabb Sr. is the standard that we in our military community should live and abide by. He knew his duty and he served it."
So when we perform our duties, think of him and what he sacrificed. He was the best and he was my father. Thank you."

Harm returned to his seat to respectful applause.

After the church, the funeral proceeded to Arlington. Harm, Diane, John, Sarah AJ & Bud were the pallbearers as they marched beside the caisson bearing Harm Sr.’s casket. Reverend Turner performed the graveside service. The beautiful but haunting ceremony was perfect. The flag was folded and given to Trish, "on behalf of a grateful country" by the Sgt. of the Marine Honor Guard. The honor guard fired their guns in salute and the bugler played Taps, its mournful notes washing over everyone there. And through it all, Diane and Harm's whole family was there, sharing the mournful experience.

He whispered to Diane, "This is good. This is what we needed to finally give him what he deserved."

"Yes sweetie I know," Diane replied intertwining her fingers with his.

The Rabb's decided that the repast would be at the JAG Headquarters Commissary. That would allow all of Harm and Diane's colleagues to come pay their respects. The Rabb and Marshall extended families were sitting together.

CIA Director Harrison Kershaw came over to pay his respects, "Mr. and Mrs. Burnett and Mr. and Mrs. Rabb my condolences. I'm very glad that Harmon Sr. is finally resting at home."

"Thanks Director," Harm replied for his family

"I also want to say that I'm looking forward to working with you Diane to try and ascertain how the rest of the prisoners died. It just doesn't seem right that they all died from natural causes."

Diane replied, "I am as well. The people at the Jeffersonian are working on that now. From what I know they are the best in digging out the truth in this type of matter."

"Yes that's so, and we'll be working closely with them," Kershaw said.

"Great we'll get together tomorrow," Diane replied.

As Kershaw excused himself Diane got up to greet, "Porter, thank you for coming."

As Porter Webb hugged Diane and received an embrace and respectful kiss from Harm she replied, "Thank you for inviting me dear. I know Clayton worked very hard to get the information on Harmon Sr."

"It's too bad he didn't live to see it come to fruition," Harm said.

"And there is another gift he didn't live to see but he left for us. Catherine had a baby girl last December 28. She named her Mary Kathryn. I like to call her Mary Kate," Porter said with a smile.

As the group offered their congratulations, Porter produced the baby pictures and passed them around.

"She's a cutie, John said.

"Catherine moved in my house. She's doesn't lack for child care as you can figure. Also it's nice to have child in the house. Every day I find one more thing in a different room reminding me of that."
"It's always that way," Sarah said with a smile.

After that the gathering started to break up as the last of the JAG, ONI & NCIS Headquarters staff started to return to work.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 122

Thursday, April 1, 2004

1245 Hours

JAG Headquarters

Washington Naval Yard, SE

Harm & Cathy McMahon were coming in from lunch. Just as they reached Harm's office, they were approached by Jennifer.

"Sir, the admiral wants to see you and Lt. McMahon," Jennifer said.

"Right behind you Jennifer," Harm said for him and Cathy.

As they walked along Harm asked his sister-in-law, "Is Sergei excited about graduating Virginia Tech with his aeronautic engineering degree next May," Harm said.

"Yeah he is excited at that. Even though he had to take a lot of courses each semester, it's a good thing they accepted his credits from when he attended university in Russia that he was able to graduate so soon. He's also excited to start OCS in September. Though I think he's more excited at being a dad," Jennifer replied.

"When are you going on maternity leave Jennifer?" Cathy asked.

"I'll be on maternity leave when I secure two weeks from today, on Friday the 16th. That way I'll be well away from the office before my due date of May 6th," Jennifer explained.

"I'm sure Admiral Chegwidden will be grateful," Cathy added.

"That he will be," Jennifer said ruefully as they reached the admiral's office.

Harm knocked and let Cathy precede him in when AJ bellowed "Enter!"

When they entered they saw AJ had a guest. Before they could brace and formally report, AJ got up to make the introductions with, "At ease you two. This is Professor Alicia Montes from Georgetown Law. She has a cold case she needs our help on. Professor Montes these two are Lt. Catherine McMahon and Commander Harmon Rabb, one of our finest legal teams."

Cathy and Harm nodded at the compliment as Cathy asked, "How cold is the case?"

AJ handed over the case file on his desk to Harm for him and Cathy to read as Montes replied, "Twenty-two years. Seaman Saul Wainwright was convicted of the murder of a transvestite hooker named Tamaray in 1982. Wainwright contends that he was induced to go into an alley by Tamaray thinking "he" was a "she". However when they were in the alley, and Wainwright realized that Tamaray was a transvestite, he wouldn't pay. So Tamaray pulled his knife and cut Wainwright on the face. Wainwright said that defending himself, he wrestled with Tamaray, and the knife accidentally stabbed Tamaray once."
"What convicted him," Cathy asked.

"Tamaray's blood on Wainwright's knife, the knife cut on his face, his and Tamaray's blood on Wainwright's shirt and his prints on the knife, all led to Wainwright being convicted," Harm said pointing to the document indicating the verdict.

Montes continued, "Wainwright claimed that after the fight he ran and threw the knife away. When Tamaray was found by the police he was stabbed 12 times. One of my students, Rachel Hanna uncovered new DNA evidence which she felt proved that Saul Wainwright didn't commit the murder of Tamaray."

"Where did she get the DNA evidence from," Harm asked.

"Hanna found that there was another murder of a prostitute the following day, by someone named Waldo Sapphire. She subpoenaed records from the office of the ADA who prosecuted Sapphire, Henry Kale. The records showed that Sapphire was willing to confess to "another murder," for a plea bargain. The records also showed that Sapphire's shirt was still in the evidence box, which Hanna had tested for the DNA evidence," Montes explained.

"So why wasn't it brought forth in discovery in the first trial?" Cathy asked.

AJ replied to that with, "Kale's notes state that he gave the information to Wainwright's prosecutor. But that evidence wasn't brought forth in violation of the "Brady Rule" which as we all know requires full disclosure of evidence to the defense, which brings us to here. Wainwright was convicted in a Navy Court."

"Who was the prosecutor?" Cathy asked.

"Lt. Cdr. Marvin Bolton - now a Senator Bolton. I believe that you are familiar with him commander," AJ said.

"I'm not, but Diane is. He's on the Senate's Intelligence Committee. She and John Marshall briefed them on that case we were involved with last summer," Harm said obliquely referring to Sadiq affair in deference to Montes' presence.

"That's correct. I brought you in because I want you and Lt. McMahon to uncover all the inconsistencies in this case before you bring it to retrial," AJ explained.

"But after so long a time only the President could order a retrial," Harm said.

"That's where I come in," AJ said.

"Sir?" Harm asked.

"It seems that after you and Colonel Marshall successfully defended Secretary Sheffield from a World Court conviction, I'll bet that if we ask him to intercede with the President, he'll be amenable to the request and we can get the retrial," AJ explained.

Harm smiled as he said, "Well it wouldn't hurt to try."

"Your problem will be dealing with Senator Norton. If the president orders a retrial based on his "Brady" violation, Norton will claim payback for his opposition of the president's weapons program. You have to have everything lined up to make it easier for the President to order a retrial. Am I being clear?" AJ asked.
"As crystal sir," Harm answered for him and Cathy.

"Alright you two and Ms. Montes get together and strategize. Write the motions as you need to and submit them appropriately when they're ready. If or when we get a retrial, I'll decide then on who will prosecute. Until then I will reassign whatever cases you have pending until this one is done. So carry on," AJ said in dismissal in deference of Alicia being present.

After they reached Harm's office, they sat and Harm began, "Well we have to examine all the evidence in order to form a strategy."

Alicia nodded in agreement as she replied, "I agree. There is one thing though that you need to know."

"What's that?" Harm asked.

"Rachel Hanna is Wainwright's daughter. She's the one who brought the case to my attention. Her father being in jail inspired her to go to law school just so she could be in a position to get him cleared," Alicia said.

"I see a possible conflict of interest and there may be charges of evidence tampering. We (Harm motioned between him and Cathy.) have to look at the chain of evidence, especially her subpoena and the motion she wrote to get it."

"That's fine. Can we schedule a dinner to discuss what needs to be done?" Alicia asked hopefully.

"Sure, how about we make a date for tomorrow night? That will give the lieutenant and me a chance to reassign our cases and do our research," Harm replied.

"Tomorrow is good. I can recommend a restaurant," Alicia suggested.

"No that won't be necessary my place will be fine. It's more comfortable and my wife Diane is very used to me bringing my work home. I find that even though our kids are running around making noise, I think better in that relaxed atmosphere," Harm said.

He wrote his address and directions down for Alicia.

Montes took the slip and got up saying, "Well I'll have Hanna get everything together. She and I will bring it over then. What time is good?"

"Say about 7:00 PM. That will give Diane and me a chance to get the kids fed and settled down for the night," Harm replied with a smile.

"Good see you then," Montes said as she left.

When she cleared the bullpen's doors Cathy said, "Boy she was flirting with you. I don't even think she saw the wedding ring and then the wedding picture of you and Aunt Diane on the shelf behind you."

"Yeah I saw that," Harm said. He changed the subject with, "In the meantime since we don't have court, let's go to the Jeffersonian to see how many more POW remains they've identified."

As they walked to the parking lot, Cathy said, "I can't believe that they all died from neglect or that they were starved to death just to hide the Soviets' sick secret."

"Yeah either can I, but after reading of Stalin's camps it doesn't surprise me that the communists
"perpetuated that despicable practice," Harm bitterly replied.

"How many are identified so far?" Cathy asked.

"About sixty so far, President Bush told me in the meeting with your Uncle John and I last month that he was not looking forward to writing and signing all one hundred twenty seven of those letters to the families," Harm said.

"What about keeping it out of the press?" Cathy asked.

"President Bush said he wouldn't be the one to spill the beans and he cautioned that the families shouldn't, but he wouldn't stop them if they did," Harm said.

"What about the funerals?"

"Well they would have a choice to bury them wherever they wished, be it at Arlington, another national cemetery or even the family cemetery plot."

"What did Gibbs find out from Lushov?"

"That the camp commandants didn't keep written records and that all the pilots were extremely uncooperative. All the psychological tricks he and the other interrogators tried proved to be useless. The pilots were left to fend for themselves as best they could in the confines of the different camps. The communists didn't lift a finger to supply for their needs," Harm said. By now they had reached the Jeffersonian main building.

"Let's pause this until later," Harm said as they got out.

Friday, April 2, 2004

1300 hours

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Chloe Marshall was at JAG-HQ not only for her regular after school rendezvous with her mother but also for a school project.

As she approached the CP Desk, she was greeted with, "Good afternoon Miss Marshall," by Gunnery Sergeant Walters of the HQ Marine Detail.

"Good afternoon Gunny. How's the family?" Chloe replied as she routinely showed her Military Dependent ID card and signed the Visitor Log.

"Just great, except my oldest, Virginia, just received her notice of acceptance into West Point," Walters said as he gave Chloe her Permanent Visitor's Pass with her name.

Chloe chuckled at Walters' shudder of his contemplation of one of his children going into the Army and not the Marines.

"Well I'm sure she'll be fine," Chloe said before she turned toward the elevator.

As Chloe waited for the elevator, a Mediterranean looking woman approached the elevator and seeing the up button was pushed, stood back and waited.
When they entered the elevator, the woman's cellphone rang. She answered and spoke rapid fire into the phone in a language other than English. Chloe was only just able to maintain a neutral expression as she discreetly listened. The elevator reached the 4th floor and Chloe got off without giving any sign that she understood what she heard. Chloe hung back and made a show of getting out a legal pad and pen from her school bag. She allowed the woman to go into a courtroom alone.

Once the doors closed Chloe ran back to the elevator. When she got out on the 3rd floor she went right to the Ops Bullpen. She didn't see any attorneys that she knew, which included Harm, Loren, Coleman or McBurney to mention a few, in their offices so she went straight to AJ's office. She sighed in relief when she saw Jennifer was at her desk.

"Aunt Jen…" Chloe began.

Jennifer looked at her and said, "Chloe how many times have I told you, it's just Jen. Even your mom said that was alright to call me that."

"Well Jen I need to see Admiral Chegwidden. It's very important," Chloe said in a rush.

Almost indulgently Jen keyed the intercom saying, "Admiral, Chloe Marshall needs to see you on something very important."

"Bring her in Jennifer," AJ said.

When they came in AJ was waiting in front of his desk directing them to the sofa in front of the fireplace saying, "Have a seat." AJ sat in the wingback chair facing them and asked, "What's so important?"

Chloe started with, "While I was on the elevator, I overheard Stuart Dunstan's assistant, Ginny Baker, talking to someone in Farsi." (&)

"You understand Farsi?!" AJ asked incredulously.

Chloe gave him a look, which only teenagers could get away with, that said, 'Well DUH!' What she spoke was, "Well I am Sarah Mackenzie's daughter."

AJ nodded at that chagrined that he didn't come to that conclusion first. He asked, "What did she say that got you so excited?"

"She said, "Don't worry no one will know who you are and that I sent you the coordinates of his location with the SEALs." Then she went on telling him to calm down and not say anything to anyone or her cover would be blown," Chloe finished.

"How do you know Miss Baker is Dunston's assistant?" Jen asked.

"I've been coming to the trial for school each day. I'm writing a paper for my Legal Studies course in school on how the media should act with the military. She's been with him every day supposedly to give him comfort and advice," Chloe explained.

AJ sighed at that and said, "If you're totally sure of what you heard, we can't tell your mother, otherwise she'll be recused from the case. Have you and she discussed the case at home?"

Chloe gave him that 'DUH!' look again as she said, "Since Mom's been a judge she never, ever, brings work home or even discusses it with Dad or even me. It's too sensitive."

Jen smiled at AJ's look of annoyance that was tinged with just smidgen of admiration. He said, "Well
let me call your Aunt Diane. She has people who speak Farsi working in MTAC. She'll bring one over."

AJ went to his desk and called, "Diane I need you and one of your Farsi translators over to my office at JAG-HQ. Your niece Chloe brought us a problem that needs to be solved. It has to do with Sarah's case, so that means we can't tell her yet."

"Is she or Chloe in trouble AJ?" Diane asked.

"No they're not. Chloe overheard something that could get someone else in trouble," AJ reassured Diane.

"Okay I'll be over with a translator shortly," Diane said as she ended the call.

It wasn't long before Diane walked in with another woman dressed in the traditional Muslim garb of a black Hijab, blue themed ¾ length Kaftan dress over dark blue slacks and sensible black heels.

Diane made the introductions with, "Admiral Chegwidden, Petty Officer Jennifer Coates and Chloe Marshall, this is Rena Ali. She translates Farsi for us in MTAC."

AJ and Jen bowed both shook hands as Chloe put her hand over her heart, bowed and offered, "Salaam Alaykum."

"Alaykum al salaam," Rena returned. She launched into a fast question in Farsi.

Chloe smiled as she answered in Farsi and then in English for everyone else's benefit, "One's an ass the other is a useful farm animal." (*)

Before anyone could comment Rena and Chloe had a quick conversation in Farsi. Eventually they stopped as Rena smiled and told Diane, "She understands Farsi."

"What was the question?" AJ asked.

"What's the difference between a Taliban and a donkey?" Rena replied.*

AJ, Diane and Jen grinned indulgently at that. Diane asked, "So what did you overhear in Farsi?"

After Chloe told them, Diane said, "Well we have to get a judge to issue a material witness warrant to detain Miss Baker."

"I'll call Stiles Morris now. I'll see if he can issue one from here after he hears Chloe's testimony." AJ said picking up his phone.

It wasn't long before Admiral Morris came down to AJ's office. He greeted Chloe with, "Miss Marshall I'm told you have something to offer concerning Mr. Dunston's case."

"Yes sir I do. I've been attending the trial to write a paper for my Legal Studies course in school. I know Ginny Baker is Stuart Dunston's assistant. I overheard her as she spoke in Farsi on her cellphone when we were on the elevator together. She said that no one would know that she gave that person Mr. Dunston's coordinates when he made his satellite call from the SEALs location in Afghanistan," Chloe replied.

"I see. AJ, do you have a Material Witness warrant prepared for me to sign?" Morris asked.

"Mrs. Rabb is working on that now," AJ replied indicating Jennifer typing at his desk computer.
When Jennifer completed filling in the Material Witness PDF boilerplate on the JAG Intranet, Morris signed it. At that AJ sent for Gunny Walters.

Morris ordered, "I want you to go into Courtroom 3 and detain Ginny Baker as a material witness. She's in there as she is Stuart Dunston's assistant."

Walters went into the courtroom and stood in the back. He caught Sarah's eye and raised the blue covered document.

Sarah said, "Excuse me counselors. Approach Gunnery Sergeant."

Walters approached the bench and gave the warrant to Sarah. She opened it and read it. She was careful to not show emotion or surprise. She gave the warrant back and said, "Miss Ginny Baker, please accompany the gunnery sergeant."

Stuart Dunston looked back at her to question why she was being asked to leave. He was surprised when she looked back at him with contempt as she wordlessly got up and went with Walters.

The prosecutors Commander Faith Coleman & Major Michael McBurney looked at each other. Neither one had a clue to offer the other.

Dunston's defense council Sturgis Turner got up and asked, "Your honor, what was the meaning of that and does it concern my client's case?"

"Yes it does concern your client. I am declaring a recess so that you and trial counsel can do your due diligence. I suggest you start with Admiral Chegwidden," Sarah replied.

She banged her gavel and got up. She waited a bit as the trial corporal intoned, "All Rise!", then she walked out.

Sarah went straight to AJ's office. Coleman, McBurney and Turner weren't far behind her. They saw Baker being led out in handcuffs by Rena Ali and Kate Larkin. Diane called Kate over while they waited for Morris to hear Chloe and sign the warrant for execution.

"What's going on?" Sarah asked as she entered AJ's office.

"It seems that Chloe heard something Miss Baker didn't want heard," Diane said and then repeated what Chloe heard.

"Does she know Chloe overheard her?" Sarah asked fearfully for her daughter.

"No Rena and Larkin took her into custody in Jennifer's office. She never saw Chloe," Diane explained.

At that Faith, Mike & Sturgis arrived at the door. As the senior officer Sturgis knocked. AJ saw them and waved them in.

Turner was the first to speak as he asked, "Admiral how does the arrest of Miss Baker affect my client?"

"That's yet to be determined commander," Diane answered for AJ. She continued, "We still have to interview Miss Baker. What I can tell you is that Miss Baker wasn't as discreet as she thought she was. She didn't know that my niece understood Farsi when she spoke to someone on her cellphone as she was in the elevator with Chloe. Miss Baker so much as said she gave the SEALs' coordinates, which she obtained from Dunston's call to her, to someone who obviously passed them onto the Al
Qaeda operatives who ambushed them. Chloe is now typing her deposition. You can use it as you see fit," Diane finished pointing to AJ's desk where Chloe was also working with Jennifer watching over her shoulder.

Sarah went to stand behind Chloe. She bent over and kissed the top of her daughter's head and asked, "How're you doing Chloe?"

"Oh just great mom," Chloe said as she paused typing and looked back at her mother. She then had a thought, "Hey mom look at me. I'm in the big chair."

Sarah barely restrained from laughing. AJ said, "Maybe she'll be relieving Loren as the next female JAG."

Everyone else joined in the chuckles as Chloe finished her work and printed copies for Diane as well as the defense and the prosecution.

"If Chloe is done, we're going to my chambers and then we're going home," Sarah announced to everyone, practically daring anyone to contradict her.

AJ recognized Sarah going into mother mode and said, "Have a good evening colonel."

Sarah, Chloe and everyone else cleared the office.

1915 Hours

Rabb Residence

Fairfax, VA

Dressed in her usual home wear of blue jeans, yellow three-button short sleeve shirt and ballet slippers, Diane had Natalie on her hip as she went to answer the doorbell. She opened the door to greet, "Ms. Montes and you must be Hanna."

"Mrs. Rabb it's very nice to meet you and yes this is Hanna," Alicia said motioning toward the young blonde girl coming in with her. Indicating Natalie she asked, "And which one is this?"

"Please call me Diane. Every time I hear Mrs. Rabb I start looking for Harm's mother or one of the kids' teachers. This is our youngest Natalie. Les, Samantha and Trey are somewhere in the house with Mattie, our oldest. Natalie seems to be a bit clingier to me just now. I think she's overtired."

With that Diane turned and called, "Mattie, Les, Samantha and Trey we have guests."

There was the sound of little feet running and then the appearance of Sarah, Samantha and Harm III followed more sedately by Mattie.

The Rabb children stood and shook hands with Alicia and then Hanna. Then they all, including Natalie now on Mattie's hip, disappeared toward the four corners of the house. Diane escorted her husband's guests to Harm and Cathy who were already working in the study.

"Alicia, Hanna, welcome to our home. Hanna this is Lt. Cathy McMahon. We'll all be working together to get your dad out of jail," Harm said.

"I'm pleased to meet you Mr. Rabb," Hanna said shyly.

Harm was going to instruct Hanna to call him by his first name, but the house phone ringing interrupted him. Diane spotted the caller ID and said, "I'll take that. It's Sarah." She walked quickly
into the kitchen and lifted the cordless phone there.

"Hey Sarah, how're you doing?"

"I'm great. I just want to let you know that after Turner conferred with his client, he called to tell me that based on the evidence that came from Chloe and your interview with Baker, Stuart decided to plead guilty of all the charges. I'll hear his allocution on Monday. I know you'd like to be there," Sarah explained.

"Thanks for that," Diane replied.

"Sturgis didn't tell me why Baker did what she did though. Only that he, McBurney and Coleman heard that the examination of her cellphone records showed that she made a call to her cousin in Islamabad after Dunston made his satellite call to her. That confirmed that she passed on the coordinates from the screen of Dunston's satellite call. That's all they needed to end the case and cut a deal," Sarah said.

"Well we found out that Ginny Baker was born in London to a Persian mother and American father. Her parents divorced and her mother moved back to Iran with Ginny. The mother and rest of her family were killed by the American backed Shah. Soon after that the Ayatollah Khomeni took over. She joined Iranian Intelligence which supplied her with a forged British passport with her father's name of Baker. Based on that she'll be handed over to the US Attorney's office to be charged with espionage," Diane explained.

"Wow talk about a motive," Sarah exclaimed.

"Yeah I don't think she'll see the outside of a prison anytime soon," Diane surmised.

"On another note how's Harm's new case. Do you think the President will grant a new trial?"

"AJ seems to think so, since you and he defended Sheffield so well. He submitted the brief Cathy and Harm prepared to President Bush today. We'll find out Monday."

Tuesday, April 6, 2004

1000 hours

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Exactly as AJ surmised, the President was grateful that Harm & Sarah did a good job on clearing Sheffield. It also helped that Harm had a more than passing relationship with the President due to Harm's liaison work on identifying the Russian POWs. President Bush was also convinced by AJ's brief that he, Harm and Cathy prepared. He signed off authorizing a new trial early on Monday and passed the handling of the case back to Sheffield.

Sheffield spent practically the rest of Monday trying to smooth the situation over. Knowing a trial would certainly look like payback, he immediately talked to Bolton. Bolton admitted knowing the information on the trial and railed against bringing up his blunder, claiming payback.

Sheffield gave avoiding controversy another try. He suggested to the defense team that Wainwright take a pardon. When Harm brought it to Wainwright Monday evening, he refused saying, "I want a whole new trial. I want the truth out there."
The trial was set to begin today. As he had completed his obligation to Dunston upon his guilty plea and allocution, Turner was assigned a prosecutor.

Right off the bat Harm called Bolton to testify. Harm made him look like a fool by showing he only wanted a win and not justice. After the examination, Bolton threatened Harm on the way out of the court room with, "Your career is over!"

Harm replied, "So is yours."

As the trial continued Turner tried to discredit Hannah saying she switched shirts while they were in her possession in order to free her father. After his examination of Hannah on the stand, Turner cracked wise as he muttered to Harm, "You should have done your homework."

At the cross-examination Harm countered that by showing that in the first trial, Wainwright's shirt was shown to have two types of blood, his, from the cut, and Tamaray's. Waldo Sapphire's shirt that Hannah subpoenaed from Sapphire's prosecutor Henry Kale had DNA that showed only one type of blood– Tamaray's.

After the judge declared a recess, Harm muttered back to Turner, "You should have done YOUR homework, counselor."

Shortly after, there were the closing arguments. When the jury panel came back, Wainwright was exonerated for murder.

To celebrate Alicia and Harm sprung for the victory dinner at Benzingers.

Tuesday, May 11, 2004
1500 hours Local Time

Rabb Apartment
North of Union Station

Petty Officer Jennifer Rabb was getting bored out of her skull. Her plan to be out of JAG when the baby came worked well. She thought to herself, 'A little too well' as she was five days past her due date of May 6.

While she'd been on maternity leave she still attended psychology classes at George Washington University. She only had two more semesters before she attained her Bachelor's degree in May 2005. Then like her husband, she would attend OCS, but for the Navy, then she would go on to attain her Masters and then her doctorate in psychology. She had goals at being a Navy psychologist.

Right now though, Jen's career goals were taking a back seat to her maternity goals. She woke up that morning to kiss Sergei goodbye as he went off to work at the JAG-HQ Security Detail. Then after that she'd been feeling kind of strange all the rest of the day. She had nagging pain in her back. She passed the mucus plug the day before and so she knew that the baby was coming any time soon. She tried sitting on the couch and study her psych books, but that was proving to be a fruitless activity as her back pain just would not let her get comfortable. So she decided to take a warm shower in an attempt to loosen the cramping muscles.

As Jennifer stood under the hot enough to stand water she felt a release at her groin. Just as she turned the water off, she felt another liquid flow from her and down her legs. She finally got the clue that the pain in her back was the beginning pangs of labor pain.
"Well it's about time junior," Jennifer said as she turned the water back on to rinse herself off. She managed to dry herself and get into the set of sweats she was wearing before she took her shower. She wisely decided that going commando was the best course of action.

She called Sergei at JAG. When he answered she told him, "Honey come and pick me up. My water broke and I'm having labor pains."

Sergei hung up so quickly that she didn't have a chance to tell him to be careful. She then called Dr. Baldwin at Bethesda to let her know that she was coming in to have the baby. She went to the door of the apartment and pulled the wheeled suitcase which was her maternity go bag. She took the elevator down to the lobby. She thanked her lucky stars that Harm, her landlord, had the elevator modernized the previous year after one of the tenants got stuck in it one afternoon for two hours.

Once outside she didn't wait very long. She was surprised to see that Harm was driving his Lexus with Sergei riding shotgun.

"Harm what are you doing here?" Jennifer asked as Sergei opened the back door, helped her in and then got back in the front seat.

"Sergei here ran out of the Security Detail office in such a panic that Gunny Walters stopped him and called me. He was afraid that your husband would get into an accident. After I told Admiral Chegwidden you were in labor, he told me to go with him and let him know what the outcome was," Harm explained as he pulled back into traffic.

Soon the trio arrived at Bethesda. While Jennifer was taken upstairs to maternity, Harm helped Sergei navigate the admissions process. Soon they went to meet Jennifer.

While Harm waited outside, Sergei went into the delivery. He saw a flurry of activity around Jennifer's bed. He heard Eve Baldwin, now a Captain, instruct, "Don't push yet Jennifer. Prep the delivery room now. This baby is crowning!"

Sergei didn't have chance to go in when a nurse pushed him out. Eve recognized him and said, "Sergei go with Carrie here and get gowned up. Jennifer is ready to deliver now."

Then Jennifer was whisked away on the bed and into the delivery room. Carrie took hold of Sergei and directed him into the father's prep room and instructed him, "Wash your hands and then put these on". She got a gown from its sterile pack and helped him into it. He gave him a hair cap and a pair of gloves. Sergei did as he was instructed and Carrie led him into the delivery room.

Jennifer was panting as a contraction hit her. Sergei spoke his first words since arriving as he said, "Muy lubiyana, how are you doing?"

"I'm fine. Everything is going so fast though," Jennifer panted out.

At that Eve looked up and said, "There you are dad, just in time. Now Jennifer when the next contraction hits, I want you to push. Dad you count down from ten"

Right at the next contraction Jennifer let out a yell and pushed. She felt the baby slide a bit and then the contraction passed.

"Okay that's good the head is half way out. Alright Jennifer on the next contraction I want you to push with all your might and the head will come out."

Right at that the next contraction hit and Jennifer let out a yell as she felt the whole head pass. She was very surprised at the cessation of pain.
"Alright suction!" Eve ordered as she looked down at the upturned head.

After the syringe was applied Jennifer and Sergei heard the first sounds from their baby as it gave first a bleat and then a wail.

"Okay Jennifer, on more push for the shoulders and we'll find out if it's a boy or girl,' Eve said.

Eve performed the procedure of easing the shoulders out as Jennifer gave one last push. As the rest of the body slid out Eve announced, "We have a girl!"

"Jennifer we have a daughter," Sergei said as he kissed his wife's head.

"Well dad come over here and cut the cord," Eve said.

Sergei went over and cut in between where Eve clamped.

Now all you have to do is name her," Eve said.

Sergei and Jennifer looked at each other before they replied…. (#)

To be continued

A/N 1: (&) Yes I know "First Casualty was in Season 7. But I couldn't fit it in to have Mac/Sarah uncover Ms. Baker's treachery in the position I put her in the story. So I put it here and had Chloe uncover the truth. Hope you liked it.
Timing Is Everything

Chapter 123

AN1: The name of Jennifer's and Sergei's baby is inspired by Saissa

AN2: In this story the episode of "One Big Boat" happens before AJ retires.

Friday, May 21, 2004

1130 Hours Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Tamara Alexandra Rabb slept contently in the combination car carrier/ stroller that her mother Jennifer Rabb, Ne. Coates was pushing out of the elevator. Jennifer was a very happy woman. She was dressed in a dark civilian pants suit. She just left the Marine Security Detail ready room where all of the company of Marines oohed and aahhed at her daughter while her husband Sergei stood proudly at her side.

Now she was ready to have the same experience in the third floor JAG OPS Bullpen. She used the stroller to gently nudge one of the double doors open and walked into the bullpen. She had almost made it to AJ's office when Lt. Loren Singer-Austen spotted her and said, "Well good morning Mrs. Rabb here to show off the newest member to the JAG Family?"

At that all the personnel that were present in the bullpen picked up their heads to look. Seeing that Jennifer was pushing the stroller with Tamara inside, they descended upon her like a pack of hens. It was Loren, who was feeling guilty about alerting everyone that a baby was present on the deck, who helped Jennifer keep the tribe at bay. Jennifer indulgently lifted the blanket enough for everyone to get a look, at least from a respectful distance of Tammy.

Tammy just slept through the whole ordeal. It was AJ who rescued the new mother with, "Alright people, we've done this before. Let my yeoman have some room."

"Thank you sir," Jennifer said in complete gratitude. While she was a very proud mother, she was getting a bit overwhelmed at the attention.

As they entered AJ's office he asked, "How is little Tammy doing?"

"Oh she's gained another pound. She's now at 11 pounds. She just sucks down the milk whether from the bottle or I give her the breast."

"That's great, pretty soon she'll be ready for a play date with Michael over there," AJ said pointing to where his 10 month old son was sitting, playing contently with an activity board in the portable playpen that was set up in the corner near the fireplace.

Michael seemed to know he was being spoken about as he looked at his daddy, smiled and let out a loveable giggle.

Jen glanced over to the corner in surprise. AJ explained, "Sydney is at a conference and Michael was
feeling a bit under the weather this morning. I had to be here for a conference call with the SECNAV. So seeing that we didn't want to contaminate the Daycare Center, I brought him here. He seems to like it here."

"Must be the atmosphere sir, you have facilitated two births in here," Jennifer said cheekily.

AJ snorted a laugh at that saying, "Yeah I guess you're right there." He asked, "So other than the traditional presentation of Tammy to JAG HQ, what else brings you here?"

"Well sir Sergei and I discussed it and we'd like you to be Tammy's godfather," Jennifer said.

AJ was startled at that as he asked, "Well what about Harm or even John Marshall?"

"Well they're family and they'll be her uncles. That implies that they'll indulge her accordingly. But the reason I'm asking you to be her godfather is because while Harm and John helped me when I initially needed it, you have done nothing but encouraged and urged me to be not only a better sailor, but a better person. I couldn't think of anyone else outside the family to have my daughter look up to."

AJ was truly touched by that. He had to cough to get his emotions under control as he said, "Well then Jennifer, it would be my honor. When is the baptism?"

"It will be on Sunday, June 6th at St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church. Sergei and I started going there shortly after we got married. We only got married in the Navy Yard Chapel because I wasn't initiated into the church yet. Since we've been married we both attended the RCIA (Right of Christian Initiation for Adults) classes and went through the ceremony last Easter Vigil," Jennifer explained.

"That's wonderful to hear Jennifer and I will be honored to be Tammy's godfather, uhmm who is the godmother?"

I asked Loren Austen to be the godmother. She was my matron of honor after all," Jen explained.

"That's very nice. It's nice to know that the people in this office are very close to each other. It's going to be rough when we all get orders of our new PCS as our careers progress," AJ said rhetorically.

"You know something I don't sir?" Jennifer asked a bit fearfully.

"No I'm just expressing the natural order of things in the military. Let's face it. You're going to be a psychologist. Harm needs to move away from this office if he wants to get promoted. Sarah Marshall did the right thing staying in the judiciary. That's what got her promoted to colonel," AJ explained.

"What about you admiral?" Jennifer asked.

"I think that what I'm going to is discuss that with Sydney," AJ said with a smile as he gently deflected Jennifer's speculation.

Understood sir," Jennifer replied with a grin of her own. She finished with, "So I'll see you at the baptism mass?"

"Sydney and I will be looking forward to it," AJ said.

At that Tammy started to fuss a bit.
"That's my cue to get going. It's just about time for her midday feeding and I know I'm going to have to change her," Jennifer said as she got ready to go.

"Relax just stay here. It's lunch time anyway and Michael and I will go for a walk," AJ said as he got up, went over to the playpen and picked Michael up in one arm and slung the baby bag over the other shoulder. On the way out he picked up his cover and walked out of the office.

"Mrs. Ryerson, Mrs. Rabb will be attending to Tammy while I'm out to lunch. Make sure no one disturbs her," AJ instructed L/M1 Janine Ryerson who was also six months pregnant and filling in for Jennifer as AJ's yeoman.

"Aye, aye sir, enjoy your lunch," Janine replied automatically.

Jennifer was grateful for that as she did what she needed to tend to her daughter. When she left JAG-HQ she went to the Navy Yard Daycare Center to register Tammy.

Tuesday, May 25, 2004

1130 Hours Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Courtroom #1

Sarah was presiding over a high profile case. Cmdr. Carolyn Paget (Ne. Imes) & Lt. Eileen Nestor were prosecuting while Cmdr. Sturgis Turner was defending a Cmdr. Lunt, for dereliction of duty and negligent homicide. Lunt was the Annapolis sailing instructor of the Naval Academy Sailing Team. The previous week the team was out on the Chesapeake Bay when Midshipman Emma Green was lost overboard in a storm. The prosecution was contending that the team should have gone around the storm. Emma's body was found two days after the storm. She had drowned.

Green's parents were of no help stating at Emma's funeral that the speed record for the course through the Chesapeake Bay that Lunt was after was an irrelevancy.

Complicating factors Bud Roberts' brother Mikey Roberts was also on the ship. During the trial he was making a nuisance of himself in and out of the courtroom. He was challenging everyone who seemed against Lunt, including his friend Dupree. He was practically trying to influence testimony in favor of Lunt. After his outburst in the courtroom "oh come on!" when an objection went against Lunt, Sarah had enough.

"I'm am declaring a recess. All parties will be back by 1300 hours," Sarah exclaimed rather loudly.

Everyone knew she was angry by the way she banged her gavel and stalked out from behind the bench. She went straight to Bud's office.

She was glad to see that Bud was inside. She knocked respectfully on the door. Bud looked up and stood at attention as Sarah opened the door and walked in.

"As you were Bud," Sarah said as she sat down in the guest chair.

As he sat back down Bud asked the usual, "What can I do for you ma'am?"

"I need you to get your brother Midshipman Roberts under control. He seems to think that Commander Lunt is infallible. He's put him up as some kind of father figure. Mikey doesn't believe that he should have been court martialed at all. I hear that he is trying to influence testimony from the
team members. Also he seems to think that the courtroom is a place for cheering or booing. He didn't refrain from expressing his displeasure when an objection went against Lunt. I can't have it Bud. He is coming very close to having me charge him with contempt of court as well as obstruction of justice and witness tampering."

Sensing correctly that Bud should not even try to defend his brother Bud simply said, "I'll take care of it ma'am."

"See that you do lieutenant," Sarah said as she got up to leave.

After Sarah left, Bud went into hunter/killer mode as he sought out Mikey. He found him in the hallway outside the courtroom still trying to sway the other midshipmen on the team to testifying to his liking.

Bud went right up to the group. They all popped to attention at the senior officer, except Mikey.

Bud ordered, "Midshipman Roberts, come with me."

"But Bud I'm talking here…" Mikey began.

He instantly knew he made a mistake when the other midshipmen winced and Bud got right into his face and said, "Lock it up midshipman!"

Mikey popped instantly to attention.

"First of all did you forget one of the first things they taught you in basic training that you have to stand at attention when an officer approaches you?"

"Ah no Bud I didn't…" Again Mikey knew he made another major error.

"Secondly despite our family ties, when we are in uniform, in public, you will address me and every other officer as sir or ma'am. Don't even think that because you are very familiar with many officers here that you can get away with disrespecting any of them."

"That thought never crossed my mind sir," Mikey said.

"Uh huh," Bud grunted. He continued with, "Third, when I turn around you are to follow me. Do not walk beside me and do not engage in conversation with me or anyone else. Just come with me to my office. Is that clear?"


At that Bud turned and walked away with Mikey following obediently with his cover tucked correctly under his left arm. They went straight to Bud's office.

Bud stood at the open door and directed his brother to stand in front of his desk. Then he slammed the door. He made a show of closing the blinds to the office. Then he got back into Mikey's face.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? Who do you think you are? Did you think that because I'm friends with just about everyone in this office, hell this headquarters, that you can go around doing what you like? Where do you get off thinking that?"

Rightly thinking that he was in big trouble Mikey wisely replied, "I didn't think…"

"Damn right you didn't think! Stay right here at attention I'll be right back," Bud said threateningly.
Bud turned and left his office in search of Paget, Nestor and Turner. He found them in the hallway outside the courtroom.

He approached them and asked, "Commanders, lieutenant, I beg your pardon, but do you have any further need of Midshipman Roberts for Commander Lunt's trial?"

Carolyn Paget answered, "The prosecution doesn't need him, he already gave his testimony and been cross examined by the defense. Do you agree Sturgis?"

"I do Carolyn," Sturgis replied. Turning to Bud he said, "He's no longer needed for the defense either, lieutenant."

"Thank you sir ma'am, if you'll please excuse me I need to continue with Midshipman Roberts."

"Carry on Lieutenant," Carolyn said for her and Sturgis. Believe it or not, Carolyn was the senior officer over Sturgis in time in rank.

Bud turned and walked back to his office. He went by way of the Marine Security Desk in the Lobby. When he re-entered his office he found Mikey just as he left him, at attention. He went to behind his desk and leaned over on his fists.

He said, "You no longer need to be here for Commander Lunt's trial. You are to go downstairs and report to Gunnery Sergeant Walters. He will ensure that you get on the next shuttle bus that will return you to Annapolis. When you get off the bus you will report to the Academy's Midshipmen Disciplinary Board. There you will receive the duties you are to follow as punishment for your blatant and irresponsible breaches in protocol during your time here at JAG Headquarters. When you leave here, I will fax the officer in charge of that board my report listing your infractions. Be glad that Colonel Marshall is not adding to that list by charging you with contempt of court, witness tampering and obstruction of justice."

Bud was satisfied when he saw his brother gulp.

While he waited at attention for Bud to return, Mikey thought about how he acted. He realized the major faux pas he committed by being too familiar with the officers at JAG HQ and attempting to take advantage of that familiarity.

Bud continued, "Also your actions reflected badly on me, Harriet, Colonel Marshall and every other officer that you know here at JAG. On your ride back to the academy, I want you to think about those actions. There is a line between familiarity and protocol. You not only crossed it, but jumped way over it and landed in a pile of shit of your own making. You need to understand, for example, that even though Commander Rabb is also Colonel Marshall's brother-in-law, even he doesn't cross that line while at the office. Am I being clear?"

"Yes sir," Mikey barked still at attention.

Bud finished with, "That is all, dismissed."


Bud went around the desk and held the door open for his brother to leave. Mikey strode right across the bullpen to the stairs, correctly shunning the elevator. Everyone in the bullpen wisely did not acknowledge him as the word got quickly around that Mikey was in big trouble with his big brother as well as with Colonel Marshall.

After that the trial went along smoothly. It came out in the trial that one of the cadet crew, Seaman
Huskins fell overboard first. She also testified against Lunt despite the fact that she had actually voted to go through the storm with the rest of the team. In his cross of Huskins, Turner was able to get her to admit that she unhooked herself from the safety line in order to check below deck and had negligently left the hatch to below deck open. She re-hooked, so that, when she fell overboard, it put the entire crew into rescue mode.

In his defense Turner used the information gleaned from the forensics obtained from Emma's autopsy and the examination of the hatch and the frame. The autopsy showed that three fingers in Emma's right hand were broken. There was also an indentation of the academy class ring in the frame of the hatch. It was deduced that during the rescue, Green saw that the hatch was left open. She then had to unhook herself in order to go close it. She slammed her fingers in the hatch door when she closed it. With her hands in pain she was unable to properly hook herself to the safety line. Subsequently she was washed overboard before she could reattach to her hook.

Lunt was found not guilty. He chose to resign citing that even though he wasn't guilty, he was responsible for Emma's death in his poor decision making.

Friday, May 28 2004

1430 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

The JAG Headquarters' company was gathered in the bullpen.

"Attention to orders! Lieutenant Sims, front and center," AJ intoned from in front of his office door.

Harriet went and stood in front of AJ.

AJ read from the framed commendation, "You have been awarded a certificate of commendation from the Secretary of Navy for services rendered in the coordination of the Christmas USO Tour 2003. By upholding the highest traditions of the naval service, you have not only brought honor upon yourself, but the unit in which you serve. This commendation will become part of your permanent service record."

When AJ finished reading he ordered, "At ease. Congratulations, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, sir," Harriet said as she shook AJ's hand.

"As you were, people," AJ Ordered.

The company present gave a brief applause.

When the clapping stopped, Harriet announced, "Actually, sir? I have a quick announcement to make. Um, I was going to wait a week, just to be sure, but now is as good a time as any. I'm pregnant. Twice. I'm going to have twins; making it five children to take care of."

There was more applause. Under cover of that AJ bent to Bud and asked, "You guys ever sleep?"

"Apparently not, sir." Bud replied straight faced.

"And as a consequence of this, I'm going to request a transfer to an inactive reserve billet, which means that I will be leaving JAG on a full-time basis. My last day active will be the end of the fiscal year, June 30. It doesn't mean that you won't ever see me. I will come to visit as much as I possibly can. Um it's just a mixed blessing, leaving one family for another," Harriet finished.
"Well, Lieutenant, you will be missed," AJ said.

"Hear, hear," from Harm.

"Thank you, sir," Harriet replied shyly.

At that the company came up to wish Harriet well.

While Harriet went through that, AJ motioned Bud to follow him as they walked to AJ's office.

When they entered AJ said, "Have a seat. You're glowing, Lieutenant.

"I'm just proud of my wife, sir," Bud said without false modesty.

"Don't blame you."

"If she weren't going inactive, she'd be a lock for lieutenant commander," Bud said.

"Mm," was the only sound AJ made.

"That's pretty gracious, considering my terminal rank, sir. I've kind of come to terms with that. You know what they say I don't have a leg to stand on," Bud went on.

"The lieutenant commander board is up next, right?" AJ asked rhetorically.

"I know, sir" Bud said glumly.

"This will be the second time?" AJ asked.

"Yeah, two strikes, yes, sir," Bud replied glumly.

"You're a good officer, Lieutenant," AJ said trying to cheer him up.

"I appreciate that, Admiral," Bud replied.

Switching subject rapidly AJ said, "You like eagles?"

"Sure," Bud replied befuddled at the change.

Here then," AJ said giving him one of the bookends from his shelf.

"You don't want this, sir?" Bud asked astonished.

"I'm thinning out my possessions," AJ replied then grabbed the other bookend saying, "Hell take two, they go together anyway. May they bring you luck."

"This is very generous of you, sir."

"Anything else catch your eye?" AJ asked.

"Giving away the baseball, sir?" Bud asked half knowing that he wouldn't get it.

"No!" AJ replied indulgently.

Bud asked, "Is that all sir?"

Yes lieutenant, carry on," AJ replied dismissing Bud.
After Bud left, AJ got on the phone. After he finished his call he set to typing out a letter to the OIC of the current Lt. Commander's promotion board.

Tuesday, June 1, 2004

1000 hours.

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy yard, NE

AJ walked into his office. He had a spring to his step.

When she brought her baby to JAG to ask him to be Tammy's godfather then, Jennifer asked if he knew something about anyone's being P.C.S. He avoided telling her that earlier that morning he put in his papers to retire. He was also glad that he got one more thing done.

After AJ put his briefcase down on his desk, he went to the break room to get his first cup of coffee. He was glad to see that Harriet was there getting her own green tea. It was a quiet understanding that "locking up" to attention was not needed in the break room.

"Lieutenant, good morning," AJ said.

"Good morning sir. How was your weekend?" Harriet asked.

"Relaxing, Sydney and I spent a lot of time just laying around the house watching Michael do his things. He's just about conquered pulling himself up at the coffee table. He's still afraid to let go and walk around it yet," AJ said making small talk.

"Yes AJ, Sarah and Jimmy were the same way. It's not too far from when they start walking to running. Then we're just running to keep up," Harriet said.

By that time she and AJ had finished preparing their morning beverages. AJ said, "Bring your tea with you lieutenant. I need to speak with you about something."

"Aye sir," Harriet said as AJ let her out of the room before him.

When they got to his office AJ had her sit at the setting in front of the fireplace.

When they were settled AJ began, "I need a favor Harriet. I reserved the Annapolis Officers Club for Friday, June 11th for a formal Dining Out party."

"Oh really sir, what's the occasion?" Harriet said bemused just before she took a sip of her tea.

"I'm retiring," AJ said.

Harriet almost did a spit take at that. AJ handed her a napkin from the table to help her out.

"Well that's some news to lay on me," Harriet said. After she finished wiping her lips, she asked, "If I may ask what brought that on?"

AJ sobered up a bit as he replied, "Sydney and I are moving to Italy. Francesca's mother, Marcella is not well. She just found out she had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Sydney, being an internist, insisted that we go there to not only be with Francesca, but also try and treat Marcella. We will all be leaving the Monday after the dining out."
"Well I have to give it to Sydney to want to help out her husband's ex-wife," Harriet said with admiration.

"Yeah I do to. Also the fact that Marcella's sick and that I'm going to Italy is not for publication,' Harriet," AJ almost pleaded.

"Aye sir not a word from me," Harriet reassured him.

"On a more pleasant note, I've decided on my Madam Vice.

"Don't you mean "Mr. Vice," sir?" Harriet asked.

"Not unless you want to cut your hair and lower your voice," AJ replied mischievously.

"You really want me to do it, Admiral?"

"I thought you'd appreciate the opportunity to outrank everyone before you left."

"Then I'll do it, sir," Harriet said confidently.

"Good, now I assume you're okay with corporal punishment."

"I'm sorry?"

"Well, you know, paddling, that sort of thing."

"Actually, no, sir," Harriet answered with a bit of embarrassment.

"So you'd prefer to be on the other end?" AJ asked with a twinkle.

"Neither, sir," Harriet replied indignantly and amused where the conversation was going.

"Relax Harriet, that was a joke," AJ said with a grin

"Good sir, because Bud and I don't need to use outside stimulation; I mean he's made me pregnant four times," Harriet said giving it back to the admiral in the same vein.

AJ chuckled at her repost, "That was a good one Harriet. You got me," AJ said.

Thank you sir," Harriet said taking a sip of her tea in a way reminiscent of George Burns puffing his cigar after delivering a punch line.

"There is one more special something in mind I could use your help with," AJ asked.

"Does it involve whoopee cushions and hand buzzers, sir?" Harriet asked.

"That's another good one Harriet, but no it involves this,' AJ said as he got up and went to his desk to retrieve a large manila envelope from his briefcase.

When he gave the envelope to Harriet and she perused the contents and the attached documentation, she opened her mouth in astonishment that turned to utter joy.

"Do you think you can hold onto that surprise until the dining out?" AJ asked almost rhetorically confident of the answer.

"Oh you bet I can sir," Harriet replied giddily.
"Alright then Harriet, carry on," AJ said ending the meeting.

Thursday, June 3, 2004

0745 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

After that Harriet set about sending out the invitations. Once they were received she had to observe the inevitable speculations from just one member of the senior staff.

It started in the break room with Sturgis as he asked Harm, "Did he tell Harriet why?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask her. I received the same invitation as you that his retirement party is at the Academy on the 11th." Harm replied. He thought to himself, 'Leave it to Sturgis to try and ferret out the information he isn't entitled to.'

It was at that instant that Harriet stepped in and cheerily greeted the two with, "Morning, sirs."

"Good morning Harriet," Harm and Sturgis said together.

"Pondering the news?" Harriet asked as she made her green tea. Also she heard a snippet of their conversation on her way in.

"Sadly, the Admiral must have already turned in his retirement papers," Sturgis asked. Harriet recognized his tactic as she said, "I'm sure he did sir, otherwise what's the point of the retirement party, sir."

Sturgis grimaced at her as she correctly pointed out that he stated the obvious.

"Maybe it's because he reached his ceiling." Sturgis said.

"He did that when he took the job," Harm reminded him.

"I just think he's burnt out. The Admiral's already served twice as long as his predecessor, a lot of dogs are barking at the gate," Sturgis said.

"And how would you know that sir?" Harriet scolded.

Harm came to Sturgis rescue just a bit as he said, "The selection board for the Judge Advocate General met last week."

As if he didn't hear Harm, Sturgis stammered, "I uhm wouldn't know at all lieutenant." He did ask, "Do you know something we don't."

"I'm not at liberty to say sir. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some work to do," Harriet said leaving them in the break room.

After Harriet left, Sturgis wouldn't let it go. He asked Harm, "Have you asked your sister-in-law? Before she went on maternity leave, she was the person closest to the action."

"No I haven't asked her and besides with her taking care of Tammy and her college studies, she has more to think about in the last four weeks than the admiral's retirement," Harm reminded his nosey friend.
Still Turner would not let up, "No, I think it has to do with his daughter. He hardly sees her. I know he's not happy about that."

Now Harm was annoyed if not downright angry with Turner and his incorrect assumptions and endless speculation, "How can you say that without knowing otherwise? I happen to know that Francesca has been in DC to visit the Chegwiddens more often since Michael was born. She just dotes on him."

"How do you know that?" Sturgis asked.

Harm rolled his eyes as he replied, "Diane and I as well as the Marshalls and Roberts have been out to their house on different play dates with our kids and Michael. Sarah and Diane call him Little Mac. Francesca has been there most of those times. So just end the speculation, huh Sturgis. The admiral will tell us in his own good time."

At that Harm picked up his mug of coffee and walked out.

When Harm got to his office, he saw Janine Ryerson waiting for him.

"Mrs. Ryerson come on in, what can I do for you?" Harm asked pleasantly as he opened his door and let her walk in.

"Sir I have a request from the admiral. He requests yours and Colonel Marshall's company for lunch in his office at 1200 today." Janine said.

Harm was a bit startled but he was professional enough to hide his surprise as he replied, "Please tell the admiral I'll be there."

"Aye sir, now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to find Colonel Marshall before she gets into court." Janine said.

"Carry on legalman," Harm replied excusing her.

Janine waddled out in search of Sarah.

1200 Local Time

AJ's Office

On her way into AJ's luncheon Sarah met Harm in his office. He saw her coming and met her at his office door with, "Good afternoon ninja girl." That only she could hear.

"Hey flyboy, do you have any idea why the admiral invited us for a private lunch?" Sarah asked as they walked in step to AJ's office.

"None whatsoever," Harm began. They paused at the entrance to the admiral's outer office when they saw Bud and Harriet sitting waiting in the chairs in front of the yeoman's desk.

"You too?" Harm asked them. He added, "As you were." as the lieutenants respectfully rose to lock up at attention.

As per office custom because she was very pregnant, Janine didn't rise to meet the officers. She picked up the phone and keyed the intercom to announce, "Admiral, they're all here."

She hung up to announce, "Go right in."
As the ranking officer, Sarah knocked and led the way in when AJ called, "Enter!"

As they walked in they were surprised to see Sydney, John and Diane were also waiting for them. AJ came from behind his desk. He approached them and indicating a covered round table set for eight that was in the place of the fireplace seating set said, "At ease and find your seats. After you've filled your plates, we'll have a lot to speak about."

After everyone was settled and finished serving themselves from the selections in the middle of the table AJ started with, "Harriet already knows that besides my topping out, one of the reasons I'm retiring is to go to Italy to help Francesca care for Marcella."

"Mrs. Parretti is sick sir?" Diane asked.

"Marcella has non-Hodgkin's lymphoma," Sydney replied.

AJ and Sydney endured the usual utterances of sympathy from their friends before he continued, "Sydney and I will leave the Monday after my retirement dining out. To move on from that the SECNAV has informed me that the selection board has still not chosen my replacement; and will not do so until after the fourth of July."

"So who's going to be the interim JAG until they do sir?" Harm dared to ask.

"You are Captain," AJ said to him.
Chapter 124

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 124

Thursday, June 3, 2004

1220 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

AJ's Office

It was a good thing that Harm wasn't chewing or drinking anything as he would have either choked or done a spit take. As it was his jaw was practically on the table. Diane reached over with her index finger, pushed it up and said, "Careful dear you're catching flies."

Diane was extremely happy for her husband. He was so looking forward to the promotion. Now it came true.

It was John who stepped into the verbal gap with, "Don't be so surprised Ace. You came into the 'captains' promotion zone' early in the 3rd quarter of last year. Also you have the Silver Star for leading the dirty nuke away from the fleet in the Arabian Sea. Not to mention the four Distinguished Flying Crosses."

Harm interrupted him with, "Four!? I only know of two."

"Oh that's right you don't know about the other two. Diane and I nominated you for your flight in the Aurora," John replied.

"And I nominated you for your landing of the C-130 on the Seahawk. That one we'll formerly present to you at the dining out. We'll present the DFC for the Aurora to you in the SECNAV's office before the dining out, since that flight is classified" AJ finished giving a pointed, but still cheery look to Bud and Harriet.

"Wow," was all Harm could say.

John took up the explanation, "Also when I chaired the Captain's Promotion Board that met last week, all I needed to do was present your record detailing those awards and AJ's evaluations of the leadership of your team here at headquarters. Your team has the highest winning percentage and FITREP marks in JAG the last two fiscal years. Based on that they all came to the same conclusion. It's about time."

"But what about Sturgis?" Harm asked.

"What about him?" John replied with a raised eyebrow.

"Well he's Chief Of Staff. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for him to be the interim JAG?" Harm asked.

AJ picked up the explanation with, "He was promoted to commander just before he was PCS-ed to JAG Headquarters back in 2001. So he's not in the zone yet."
John continued with, "Also, Turner's very bad performance last November in dealing with the North Korean submariners, which included my N.I. officer Lt. Ye charging him with racism, put him way down on the promotions list. We're still dealing with the fallout of that. Remember Bud defended Sturgis in that trial. Sturgis was lucky that he was acquitted."

Bud nodded in confirmation.

Sarah added, "Also there's the way he tries his cases. He's very zealous, as he should be, on whatever side of the case he's on, but he is very averse to taking a plea bargain, even when the circumstances scream for one. I don't believe that he understands the meaning of compromise. His moral courage leaves a bit to be desired."

"How's that?" Harm asked.

"He's afraid to take a stand that for what is right, right for justice, because it goes against the book. Take the Ambrose case that I presided over last October. He was prosecuting while McBurney was defending. Sturgis wanted to find Ambrose guilty of dereliction because he didn't kill a child before he ran off to warn the Iraqi force Ambrose' platoon was after. He's so afraid to go away from the book. He's doesn't leave room for improvisation or adaptation. After I adjourned with my decision to not hold the case over to court martial I just happened to run into him in the commissary and we had words."

Flashback:

October 17, 2003

1215 Local Time

JAG Headquarters Commissary

After Sarah paid for her tray of a "loaded-up" hamburger, potato salad, coleslaw and soft drink, she was looking for a table to sit. She spotted Sturgis sitting alone at a table in the corner. So she went over and asked, "Want some company?"

Sturgis looked up a bit surprised and stammered, "Uh sure colonel, make yourself comfortable."

After Sarah got herself settled she cut into and ate some of her meal before she said, "You put up a good argument in court this morning."

"Thank you Mac, but you ruled against me," Sturgis said.

"Well I had to. Even though you really wanted to put the screws to Ambrose for not killing that boy when Major Spain ordered him to, it was against the rules of engagement," Sarah explained patiently.

"Well he had to do it. It's because of that inaction that the platoon was captured and two Marines died," Turner said.

"Yes I remember. Tell me Sturgis, have you ever had to kill someone after you've looked at them face-to-face?"

"I can't say I have Mac. What about you?" Sturgis asked a bit derisively.

He didn't know Sarah's record and he didn't look at the "fruit salad" of medals on Sarah's tunic.
Sarah made him look when she pointed out her Bonze Star ribbon and her third marksmanship badge; a Scout Sniper badge, she earned for her sniper training saying, "I didn't get these for nothing Sturgis."

Sturgis eyes opened wide in embarrassment as she continued in a low threatening tone, "The Bronze Star was for action in Kosovo. Serbian Militia men were trying to lob grenades into our camp. I took them out. Then there was the time when a terrorist was threatening my family. I had to face him twice; once when he had Clayton Webb killed in Paraguay and once when I finally shot him for going after my family here in DC. That ended when that guy was cremated and his ashes were scattered at sea. I mean really Sturgis what did you think Harm was doing last summer, why he was shot and why our children were staying with their grandparents? Oh yeah I almost forgot. I put two bullets into the maniac who stalked me right after he shot my fiancé. I managed to get John's gun and shoot him before he managed to get away."

Turner stammered on from that with, "Still it doesn't excuse Ambrose for not following orders to eliminate the threat that the boy posed. Ambrose was a coward."

Sarah rolled her eyes and speared the last piece of her burger and ate it before she commented, "You know Sturgis it must be nice."

"What's that?"

"To be above it all, I wouldn't do it, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done." Sarah replied.

"Mac," was all Turner could say.

"Now that's cowardly," Sarah finished speaking.

She gathered her meal detritus onto her tray and got up.

End of Flashback

Sarah explained further, "Also there's the Duncan case, the Navy computer expert who fudged the data on a weapons system he was responsible for so that he could take it with him and go work at the video game company Psycoustics. During that trial I saw from the bench that Sturgis was just mailing it in, doing such a bad job. He had no right to hold a grudge against Bud for not having a good enough argument to help him during the appeal. There's nothing he could have done but tell the truth about the facts of the case. Sturgis has no one else to blame for Duncan winning his appeal."

After Sarah finished her story AJ was continuing, "Also even though he has the title, you've been more THE chief of staff than he has. You've brought forth increases every time you've submitted the yearly budget. That has enabled this office to justify our costs. All the members on your team have FITREPs well above average. I haven't had to change any of them when they come across my desk. I don't believe Sturgis has submitted any FITREPs that were above average. Those I've had to upgrade."

"Maybe he's a tougher marker sir," Harm furnished.

"Maybe, but seeming to be too severe in your staff's fitness reports would indicate that his standards aren't within the norm for the Navy or that he is failing to lead by not setting forth what the standards are to allow his team to achieve higher ratings. Being a leader is more than just being in charge. It's more than just expecting your orders to be followed just because of your higher rank. Your team needs to have trust in your leadership. I don't see that trust in leadership coming from Sturgis' team. I do see it yours. And so do others," AJ explained.
John took up the explanation, "Also the SECNAV was very happy that you kept him out of international jail. Even former SECNAV Nelson added his voice to the Captain's Promotion Board. He was very grateful that you kept the confirmation of the American POWs in Russia very low key," John finished.

Harm just nodded at that being grateful to hear it before he asked, "So what happens now?"

"Well, while frocking is authorized, you'll be officially a captain on July 1. You'll start sitting in the big chair here after the dining out. In the time between then and now, you'll be busy setting up your command of the new LSO in Falls Church," AJ replied.

"There's a new LSO sir?" Harm asked.

"The building is in the final stages of construction inspection from the Virginia Buildings Department for getting the Certificate of Occupancy. By the time they pick a JAG after July 4th, the building will be ready for that occupation. The next JAG will have orders to give you full autonomy in selecting your staff. No rank qualified officer and NONCOM-Legalman/Yeoman staff will be off limits," AJ replied and nodded to Diane.

Diane continued, "Actually it is an MCRT/LSO headquarters. All the trials prosecuting cases from all of NCIS' Major Case Response Teams will be done through there; even those cases where civilians commit crimes against Navy/Marine personnel. In essence it will be another federal court branch. Also five of NCIS' new MCRTs will set up operations in that building. They will work hand-in-hand with all the JAG investigators that will also be assigned to that office. Those same JAG investigators will be ranked O4 and O5. They will only be assigned to prosecute the cases. The various defense attorneys, who will be O3 and above, will be called from other LSO's around the DC metro area, including JAG Headquarters here in the Navy Yard. The new combined LSO/MCRTs will take some of the load off the JAG & NCIS Navy Yard headquarters offices."

"So in effect I will be a federal prosecutor, but in the Navy," Harm said.

"Exactly, it's going to be a test scenario set up by SECNAV Sheffield. The SECDEF will examine how things are done there to determine whether to employ the same set-up for the other branches of service," AJ replied. He continued the explanation. "You will use the time you spend as interim JAG to assign the appropriate O4 and O5 attorneys to that LSO and get it started."

"I can't wait to get started sir," Harm practically gushed.

"Good and since we've all finished eating, let's go tell the rest of the staff," AJ said.

With that they all got up. When they left AJ's office Janine said, "As you requested admiral, the staff is mustered in the bullpen."

"Thank you Mrs. Ryerson," AJ replied.

When AJ stepped out he saw the staff standing and waiting respectfully. It was Sturgis as the ranking officer waiting who called, "Attention on deck!"

When the staff snapped to, AJ said, "Thank you commander," to Sturgis and he called out, "Stand at ease. I have an announcement to make."

When the staff relaxed AJ began with, "I have just told Mr. Rabb and his family that he has been promoted to Captain, effective officially this next July 1st. Until that date, frocking is authorized."

At the announcement the staff launched into a very vigorous and heartfelt applause with some
whistles thrown in.

Harm smiled in embarrassment while Diane, Sarah, John and the Roberts applauded and beamed appreciatively. AJ was amused to see that Sturgis was not as enthusiastically applauding as the rest of the staff.

AJ let the applause naturally end before he said, "And as of the Monday after my retirement dining out, Captain Rabb will be the interim JAG until the selection committee settles on my successor. Until that time Captain Rabb will be working at starting up JAG's new LSO in Falls Church. Those details will be forthcoming as the new LSO building passes inspection and is given its certificate of occupancy hopefully by the July 4th Holiday. Between now and then Captain Rabb will be filling his staff. As such, all staff here at JAG Headquarters should expect to be interviewed by him in the coming days. That is all. Commander Turner, follow me into my office."

As AJ turned to leave, Turner obediently followed. He gave Harm a curious look as he passed by him.

After the door closed, the people in the bullpen descending upon the Rabbs to offer Harm their congratulations.

After they went through that John said, "AJ's letting Sturgis know the new order of things."

"So it would seem. I'm sure Sturgis is not happy," Sarah said.

"I'm sure he's not. But let's forget about him. We have better things to do Captain," Diane said as they went into Harm's office.

"You're right about that and as I think about it, it is good timing," Harm said.

"Well other than being named interim JAG, how so?" Diane asked.

"Well now I'm really glad that we sent in my letter requesting to be taken out of the carrier-qualification-schedule," Harm explained.

Sarah was totally shocked at that as she asked, "You want to end your re-qualification flights?!" She saw that John was just as surprised as she was

"Well Diane and I discussed it when I passed my physiological test after my shoulder healed. I thought it would be better that I ended that part of my life on my own terms. The first time I had to leave because of my eyes and the crash. The second time was because of my career. This time it's for me and our family. I made the decision to no longer stay current on my own, without the interference of anybody else," Harm began to explain.

"But why go out when you're still physically able to qualify, even after the shooting?" John asked.

"Well the reason is this. Look at what I had to do at Fallon a few years back. I personally saw to it, that a mentor of mine, Captain Hockhausen, got his wings yanked. He was responsible for the death of two people. Just because he couldn't accept the fact, that the day to quit comes for all of us sooner or later. That's a fact of military aviation. I always swore to myself that if I quit for good, it would to be on my terms, while I'm still on top physically and competitively. Not on the Navy's or anybody else's," Harm explained.

"Makes sense," John added.

"Thanks John. Besides, it's not like I've got anything left to prove up there. I mean I have the Silver
Star, two or now four DFCs. They make the point for me that I did well in that part of my life. Now there's one more reason to not have to qualify. I have a command to take care of and new responsibilities there. I just won't have the time. I mean, I can still fly 'Sarah', and that will be for the pleasure of flying, not trying to prove my worth as a pilot," Harm finished.

"And we will be looking forward to that," Sarah said.

Everyone shared a chuckle at that.

Back in AJ's office, he was explaining to Sturgis what was going on.

"Now that now Captain Rabb will be moving on, you will have to shoulder the burden of Chief of Staff alone," AJ began.

"Alone sir, haven't I been doing just that?" Sturgis responded almost indignantly.

"No commander, you haven't. Being chief of staff means taking on all the aspects that the job entails. I've noticed that you delegated many your COS duties to Commander Rabb. When Colonel Marshall had the job, she did it all. The only thing she ever delegated was the budget. Even then she reviewed it and made her contributions and signed off on it. You never signed off any budget proposals that were submitted," AJ explained.

"Weren't those entire budgets approved sir?" Turner asked.

"Yes they were, but as I said, your name never appeared on those proposals. Also your FITREP reports on your team of attorneys you indicated that they never met your expectations. I had to change every one of them. That showed that your leadership left something to be desired. I interviewed many of them and asked why you marked them low or never above average. Those with whom I spoke all said the same thing."

"What was that sir?" Turner asked.

"You never communicated what your goals or standards were. A leader needs to set the standards and designate achievable goals. All you ever told them was that they were naval officers and law school graduates and they should know what to do. You just left them out there to find their own way. Hell if it wasn't for Marshall, Rabb, Roberts and even Singer-Austen's mentoring and their endorsements, your team would never had any chance to show what they were capable off. You never endorsed any of your team for promotion to the next rank when they entered their promotion zones. What did you think that the Navy would just take care of that for you?"

"I had a track of what they were capable of sir," Sturgis said half-heartedly.

"That's not what I saw. I saw in the friendly fire trial before Commander Rabb where Lt. Nestor went against you and asked the questions you should have asked. As I also recall I told you about that, right then and there. Add onto that the Duncan case. What did you decide that your clients were guilty and should be punished?"

"No sir. I always give my clients all my best effort and defended them to the best of my ability," Sturgis said in his defense.

"Is that why Lt. Roberts couldn't exonerate you in the appeal of Duncan's case? You blamed him for losing that appeal, when it was your own damn fault," AJ said.

"That wasn't my best hour sir," Turner admitted.
"To say the least and either was the checking up on Lieutenant Singer- Austen's religious status," AJ reminded him.

Sturgis eyes popped open at that but he had the good sense to keep his mouth shut.

AJ saw that and went on, "Yes I found out about that. All enquiries that are made to any officer's record are routinely logged on either the computer or at the file storage. All those logs are copied and sent to me. You did that enquiry on the computer. When I asked Colonel Marshall why, she told me the reason. That's another thing your command style showed, a lack of trust."

Sturgis sighed at that as he said, "How can I mitigate that sir?"

"I'm still keeping you on as chief of staff until my last day. After that it will be up to Captain Rabb or either the next JAG to decide what he needs you to do. In the coming months there will be a total rotation of the officers and other enlisted staff from headquarters. When you find yourself with a new team, take the time to counsel them. Maybe the next JAG will find it favorable to promote you when you finally come into the zone," AJ suggested.

"I'll keep that in mind sir. Will there be anything else?" Sturgis asked, so wanting to get out of there.

"No, that is all Commander, dismissed," AJ said.

Turner got up and braced to attention to say, "Aye, aye sir!" Then he turned and marched from the office.

After AJ watched his officer leave, he said to himself, "Maybe that will wake him up."

Sunday, June 6, 2004
1430 Local Time
St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church
727 5th St NW,
Washington, DC

Loren Austen held a peacefully sleeping Tammy Rabb. AJ stood proudly on her right with both of Tammy's parents on either side of the godparents. Jennifer dressed Tammy in the same christening gown that Harm's family used. It would be passed onto the next Rabb child that would be baptized; be it Jen & Sergei's or Diane & Harm's.

The entire Rabb/Marshall clan was well represented by Sarah and John's brood with Deanne and Uncle Matt. Most of the rest of the audience was some of Jen's and Sergei's friends from JAG Headquarters. The subsequent party would be at Olivia and Juliette's.

Tammy made the usual noises when Fr. Sevillo anointed her head and poured the water and the ceremonial garment was put on her. After the lighting of the baptismal candle from the Easter candle the final blessing was given as the service was concluded.

It was an open buffet at the restaurant. Most of those who came to the church came to the party. After a time Jennifer was sitting with her daughter on her shoulder.

John approached, gave her a kiss on her cheek and sat down beside her. He asked, "So you taking the summer off from classes?"
"Yeah I'm just going to concentrate on work and getting Tammy acclimated to the daily schedule of daycare and so forth. I only have two more semesters. I didn't miss my finals as they were after Tammy was born and the professors were rather indulgent in giving me an extra week to study," Jennifer replied.

"Good for you. Any thought on where you'll want to be when the new JAG is appointed?" John asked.

"I figure I'll stay at the Navy Yard Headquarters until I graduate. Then I'll attend OCS that summer and move onto getting my master's degree and doctorate in a full time class schedule starting the following September. GWU offers free daycare for their master and doctorate candidates so I can take advantage of that while I attend classes," Jennifer replied.

"Nice plan," Harm said as he sat down on the other side of Jennifer.

"Thanks Harm," Jennifer replied.

"Think you'll be interested in helping me choose who to bring with me to Falls Church?" Harm asked.

"You know I think I'd be better suited to getting the new JAG acclimated. I was thinking that Janine Ryerson would be better suited for what you need. She has a good grasp of the staff's good and bad points. Also after she has her baby, she'd be ready to move on. She's only at headquarters until she gives birth. Then she'd like to have a posting on the Virginia side of the Potomac. She lives in West Springfield and she'd like nothing better than to not cross the Potomac in her daily commute," Jen suggested.

"I'll keep that in mind," Harm said.

Diane spoke up at that point with, "Enough shop talk. Let's talk about the summer." Everyone nodded as Diane went on. "The Saturday after the admiral's dining out, we, (she also indicated the Marshalls), are going to our bungalow in Rehoboth. Your family can sleep over at our house Friday night so that we can get an early start. Then since July 4th is on a Sunday this year, Gram would like it if you could bring Tammy up to the farm in Belleville. Mom and Frank will there as well," Diane said.

"Won't she be a bit over whelmed having all of us up there?" Jennifer asked.

Diane replied, "No it's just going to be us Rabbs. Sarah and John's family are going to visit his mom and dad at their beach club in Atlantic Beach that whole weekend. Also Gram let Harm install a swimming pool this spring. It's got a shaded patio that goes into the house. That way when we all visit on some weekends and vacations, we all can cool down."

"How can we say no?" Sergei said.

"You can't. Just go with it," John suggested with a chuckle.

Everyone laughed along as they discussed other summer plans.

"This summer Chloe is going to train at a weeklong day camp that starts July 12 at Rock Creek Park Horse Center. We moved her horse Aberdeen to there. It's much closer to home and Chloe's school than the Gardiners' farm in Reston. Even the Gardiners recommended that center as they'll still be her sponsors. After that she's going to ride in two junior shows; one during the last weekend of July and the other the weekend after Labor Day," Sarah said.
"The center also offers a riding school Patrick and Caroline can go to. It's called Ponies & Friends Camp. They offer daily riding and theory lessons, hands-on safety lessons and fun horse games. It's a week-long afternoon camp that begins at 1530 and ends at 1730. The sessions' instructions are age-appropriate for Caroline and Patrick’s age. They can gain confidence as they have fun with horses, while emphasizing barn and horse safety. The end of the week has a Friday afternoon showcase for parents, followed by a picnic. Caroline and Patrick are really looking forward to it," John added.

"Sarah Cate is going to join the local Little League and play baseball after the 4th of July. Trey and Samantha are still too young for any organized activities. Still they're going to learn to swim competitively for time at the Navy Yard Fitness Center. We already brought them through an infants’ swimming class; so this next step will be natural for them," Harm explained.

On top of all that Chloe and Mattie are going to a Civil Air Patrol Encampment at Langley AFB in Hampton for the two weeks before Labor Day. So we have a pretty full summer planned," Sarah added.

Jennifer and Sergei were totally amazed at the level of activity their daughter’s cousins were involved in. Sergei exclaimed, "Boishe Moi, this is what we have to look forward to when Tammashka grows up?"

"You have time Sergei. Just sit back and spend the nights and weekends watching her roll over. When they start to run, then the fun really starts," Diane said.

Everyone shared a laugh with that. It was a bit after that the party wound down and the Rabbs and Marshalls and their guests left for home.

Friday, June 11, 2004

2030 Local Time

Naval Academy

Annapolis Officers Club

Diane and Harm got out of their car the same time as Sarah and John got out of theirs. They all looked splendid in their mess dress uniforms as they crossed the small parking lot. They met Sergei and Jennifer and joined them as they and others queued at the entrance to the club.

"Where're Harriet & Bud," Jennifer asked.

"They're with the Chegwiddens. As Madame Vice, Harriet and Bud will walk in ahead of AJ as Sydney escorts him in when the CPO Master of Ceremonies starts the evening," John explained.

They took their turns getting their table cards. Just then Ann Marie and Peter came up to them.

"Hey guys how's it going?" Ann Marie asked everyone as she searched for her and Peter's cards.

"Good kiddo, how about yourself?" John replied for the rest without looking up. When he did finally look up he did a double take as he realized that his parents were right behind Ann Marie.

"Uh hi mom, dad, I'm surprised that AJ invited you two." John asked.

"We thought so to when we received the invitation. We thought we would surprise everyone." Maureen answered in between receiving greetings from Sarah, Diane & Harm as well as Jen & Sergei. When she hugged Harm she said, "Congratulations on your promotion Harm. I was so happy
for you when Diane called to tell me the news. What did Trish and Frank say about that?"

"Oh they were just as thrilled as you were," Harm replied.

"I'll call them and invite them to New York when you bring your family up this summer," Maureen said.

"They'd like that Harm said.

Right after that everyone found their tables. Maureen & Jim were at the same table with both the Rabb couples, the younger Marshalls and Matthews. Loren & Bobby Austen, Meg & Bob Pike, Faith Coleman & Mike McBurney, Carolyn Paget & her date a Marine Lt. Colonel named Mike Ramsey and Traci Mannetti and Commander David (Tuna) Medwick occupied another table. Sturgis Turner & his date, Varese Chestnut, were at the table with his parents Chaplain Turner & his wife Marie; along with Admiral Stiles Morris & his wife and Captain Amy Helfman & her husband with Captain Sebring & his wife filling out the rest of the table.

Varese sang in Iraq, during "Harriet's" USO Christmas show and had met Sturgis when she came through JAG Headquarters when she was getting her travel arrangements from Harriet. Mike was the commanding officer of the Camp Lejeune Marine MP Battalion. He met Carolyn when she and Loren were down there investigating a rape case earlier in the Spring.

Traci and Tuna met when the Patrick Henry made port in Hawaii while Traci was TAD there in 1998. After that they began to correspond. When Tuna's squadron came home to Oceana, they began dating. Traci introduced David to her parents two Easters ago. In fact David had something in mind for when AJ & Sydney left.

The rest of the tables were filled with various friends of the Chegwiddens along with various Naval and Department Of the Navy figures including SECNAV Sheffield and his wife and former SECNAV Nelson and his wife and former President & Mrs. Bartlett.

It wasn't long before there came an introductory beating of drums and the squeal of bagpipes outside the entrance to the room. Everyone stood as the doors were open and the Naval Academy Pipes & Drums Band marched in playing "Anchors Aweigh". They were followed by Harriet and Bud leading Dr. Lt. Commander Sydney and Admiral AJ Chegwidden. The band ranks stopped and split to allow the Roberts and Chegwiddens to go between them to their places at the four seat dais. The band then marched out of the dining room.

When the doors were closed the club's master of ceremonies, a tall African-American Sergeant Major named Earnest Basset intoned, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Madam Vice!"

Harriet stood up at her place. She intoned, "Would you all please raise your glasses as we salute our leaders."

When everyone had their hands filled with glasses and raised in salute, Harriet continued, "To the President of the United States."

"To the President of the United States!" the rest of the company repeated.

There were brief sips as the company still held their glasses up awaiting the next toast.

Harriet didn't keep them waiting long as she continued, "To our guest of honor Rear Admiral Upper Half Albert Jethro Chegwidden and Mrs. Dr. Lt. Commander Sydney Chegwidden. Today we honor AJ on the occasion of his retirement. We salute his and Mrs. Chegwidden's service. May we always remember that serving one's country is the ultimate expression of love for family, friends and
neighbors."

"HERE, HERE," The Company intoned.

After that the party settled down. The Naval Academy Officers Club band provided dinner music.

After dinner was served Sturgis stood up and asked, "Madam Vice, Mr. Turner requests permission to address the President in regard to an infraction."

"What is the infraction in question, Mr. Turner?" Harriet asked in the same spirit.

"Mr. Michael Roberts sits before an uncharged wine glass," Sturgis replied.

Mikey dipped his head in embarrassment.

"I consider that transgression to be of appropriate consequence to recommend the judgment of the President," Harriet agreed as she also continued, "Mr. Roberts, you will stand and step forward."

After Mikey stepped up AJ intoned, "Well, it's clear to me that you have, uh, violated the laws of formal behavior, if not that of all civilized peoples everywhere. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Mr. President, I'm not experienced in this kind of thing," Mikey stammered.

Well, this kind of thing, Mr. Roberts, is referred to as a "Dining Out" AJ reminded him.

"Sorry, Mr. President, may I request uh, defense counsel, sir?" Mikey said thinking quickly.

"Name the counsel?" Harriet instructed.

"My big brother, Mr. Bud Roberts."

"Allowed," Harriet replied.

Bud stepped out from his place at the dais to stand next to Mikey saying, "Madam Vice, may I address the President?"

"You may."

"Mr. President, I would like for you to take this into consideration. Mr. Michael Roberts is the most junior officer in the room. He does not normally drink wine, and when we were children, I used to randomly beat him about the head with a badminton racquet" Bud said.

Everyone chuckled at the comedy.

AJ smirked as he said, "Five dollars. We'll send it to the Mental Health Association," AJ said. Then he intoned, "Good time for a break. Smoking lamp is lit."

The guests got up to walk around and started to mingle. President Bartlett and Mrs. Bartlett went up to Ann Marie and Pete. After he gave her a brief hug and a light kiss on her cheek, Bartlett asked his former Press Secretary, "How have you been? Has it been four years already?"

"Yes it has. Andrew just turned 6 and Diane is 5. They're growing like weeds. That's how I keep thin. I'm running after them. I'm really enjoying being a full time mother," Ann Marie replied with pride.
At that John and Sarah joined them. The Bartletts greeted them with hugs and kisses.

Bartlett said to John, "When I heard you became an admiral, I felt so happy for you. You deserve it. Secretary Sheffield tells me that you run a tight ship at ONI."

"We've got our share bad guys out of the way sir," John said modestly.

"I'm sure," Bartlett said with a twinkle in his eye. He knew better. Sheffield already told him how really well John was doing, without revealing the classified details.

Soon it was time for the festivities to resume as coffee and dessert were being served.

After the dessert was consumed Harm stood up and requested, "Madam Vice, to our Guest of Honor." When everyone got a glass in hand Harm continued, "Ladies and gentlemen, The President of the Mess."

Everyone replied as one, "The President of the Mess!"

"May his departure take him to a place of peace, contentment and natural fabrics," Harm said.

There were the chuckles from everyone before they drank the toast.

AJ stood up to speak, "Much appreciated. I'm aware of all the speculation regarding my retirement; many theories, all of them very interesting; all of them correct."

Everyone chuckled before he continued, "I guess it was, uh, a confluence of many things that led to my decision. But let me be clear. I'm not leaving anything. I'm completing one experience and starting another. Specifically, this Monday, Sydney, Michael and I will leave DC and spend the summer in Italy with my daughter Francesca. And everything after that is pretty much up in the air. But know this. I will take each and every one of you with me wherever I go. And trust me when I say, that I'm a better man for having done my service in your company."

Everyone stood up and applauded.

After the applause died down, AJ continued, "I know I am leaving the Navy JAG Corps in excellent hands. I'd like to say best wishes to Captain Harmon Rabb as he succeeds me as Interim JAG until a permanent replacement is picked after the 4th of July. After that he will be in command of the new JAG LSO/NCIS MCRT Office in Falls Church; so again good luck there, Captain. No one deserves it better than you. On that note could you please step forward with Mrs. Captain Rabb? I have one more thing to give you."

Diane and Harm came up and stood at attention as AJ began the presentation. "For the extraordinary feat of landing a C-130 on the deck of the carrier Seahawk, Captain Rabb is receiving his 4th Distinguished Flying Cross. I think we can all agree that Mr. Rabb has succeeded in following in his father's footsteps as a supreme Naval Aviator."

As all the company present applauded, AJ pinned the latest medal on Harm's lapel.

As he stepped back AJ said to Diane, "This next part is yours Mrs. Rabb."

"Yes sir," Diane said as she stepped forward and wrapping her arms around her husband's neck laid a deep kiss on him. This time the whole company of guests coughed loudly after the requisite 20 seconds.

After they broke apart AJ shook Harm's hand saying, "For my last time, you are dismissed"
Captains."

Diane and Harm stepped back, braced to attention and said in unison, "Aye, aye sir!"

When the Rabbs left the floor, AJ intoned, "One more thing, Madam Vice, I believe Mr. Bud Roberts is out of uniform. Mr. Roberts, please approach."

As a bewildered Bud made his way to stand in front of AJ, Harriet came up and handed AJ a black velvet box saying, "You're rig, Mr. President."

AJ took the box and said, "Mr. Roberts' shoulder boards are incorrect."

"Uh, Madam Vice, my shoulder boards are..." Bud stammered before he was interrupted by AJ.

"Attention to orders. Consider this my last act as Judge Advocate General," AJ said as he opened the box to reveal Lt. Commander shoulder boards.

Sydney stepped forward to assist Harriet in switching Bud's shoulder boards.

After it was done AJ said, "Lieutenant Commander, repeat after me." Then they went into the Officers Oath.

"I, Bud J. Roberts, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of Lt. Commander. So help me God."

"Congratulations Lt. Commander Roberts," AJ said using both his hands to clasp Bud's hand.

"Thank you sir," Bud replied.

AJ said, "Now let's get to some dancing."

With that the band struck up a romantic dance. All the couples proceeded to the dance floor.

As Bud and Harriet danced Bud said, "I can't believe that I passed the promotion board."

"Well the Admiral showed me the letter he wrote to the promotion board. It was amazing, six pages. He listed every officer that was promoted that was handicapped in the last 50 years. And then he went on and on about your T-A-D aboard the Bennington. And how you talked that sailor out of suicide," Harriet explained.

Bud shook his head in disbelief as he said, "I can't believe they bought it."

"Read the letter," Harriet said.

Elsewhere on the dance floor Traci and Tuna were holding each other very closely as they danced. Tuna whispered to her, "You know I spoke to your dad last weekend."

"Oh what about?" Traci asked.

"Just that you should go find a white dress," Tuna said in a teasing way.

Traci leaned back a little to look in David's eyes as she asked, "White dress, what for?"

At that David released her and reached into his hip pocket and pulled out a small velvet box and
opened it. As Traci gasped at the contents David took hold of her hand and not caring that they were in the middle of the dance floor knelt in front of her as he began his plea. "Traci we've been dating and writing each other for few years now. I've been in love with you for most of that time. Traci, would you do me the highest honor and marry me?"

Traci was too shocked to be embarrassed. Her total attention was on the man kneeling before, the man she loved. With tears rolling down her cheeks she nodded and shouted, "YES!"

At that David slid the platinum ring with a 1.5 caret square cut diamond with two .5 caret round diamonds on each side onto her left ring finger.

The whole company and even the band stopped to watch the show. At Traci's proclamation they all started applauding as the band went into the traditional bridal recession tune.

AJ was the first to reach the happy couple saying with a twinkle, "Trying to steal my thunder commander?"

Embarrassed David replied, "Well I didn't want to wait any longer after I asked her dad's permission."

"Well thanks for sharing," AJ said.

He was the first to take Traci's hands and give her a congratulatory kiss on her cheek. Others followed his example in quick succession.

During this AJ and Sydney took their cue to leave quietly. They both went to the table just outside the dining room and retrieved their covers. They both took one last look at the people who meant so much to each of them. They remembered them all as friends and family. After they put their covers on, Sydney hooked her hand into her husband's elbow and proudly walked out of the hall with him.

Soon the music resumed as the Rabbs and Marshalls switched partners. As Sarah and Harm shared a dance Sarah said, "Harm let's take a break. I need to sit a bit. I'm getting tired."

"Okay Sarah, let's go out to the garden," Harm replied, a bit concerned.

As they sat down Sarah began, "I know what you're thinking, I never get tired."

"The thought did cross my mind," Harm replied.

"Well there's a reason for my exhaustion," Sarah began.

Harm was immediately fearful. He carefully schooled his features into one of concern and not fright. He said, "Go on."

Sarah began her explanation, "Well John knows as he was at the doctor's with me when Sydney gave me the diagnosis."

"Diagnosis of what?" Harm asked now not even trying to hide his fear.

Sarah sighed as she said, "Harm I have cancer."
AN: I am going to attempt to realistically depict how a family, even one as wide spread as the one depicted in this story, acts when one of its own has cancer. I will do my damndest to ensure that I do not trivialize or minimize the suffering one goes through while being treated for cancer. Nor will I write that a miracle cure occurs. Furthermore I would like to thank 1NinjaGirl for her input, inspiration and understanding. It has been invaluable. Also I am inspired by the number of famous people, actors and sportsman I found in my research that had cancer. Most notably ESPN Sports Anchor Stuart Scott. His speech at the ESPYS was inspiring and powerful. Look it up on your favorite video website.

Friday, June 11, 2004

2300 Local Time

Naval Academy

Annapolis Officers Club

Harm was in a state of total shock. His sister-in-law Sarah just told him that she had cancer.

"What kind of cancer?" Harm asked fearfully.

"Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Sydney confirmed it this Tuesday past," Sarah replied.

"When did you think you had a problem?"

"In the last month and a half I was starting to feel fatigued, itching all over my body that I couldn't explain. What really scared me and scared John, was that I was losing my appetite and my weight was going down. I went to see Sydney at Bethesda two weeks ago. Sydney put me through a thorough examination starting with the lymph nodes in my neck. They were swollen. She had me go for minor surgery to remove the lymph node that afternoon. As I said, she confirmed it Tuesday."

"Is it treatable," Harm asked fearing that it was terminal.

"From what Sydney told me and from what I read, yes it is. The only thing is the treatment will make me feel sicker," Sarah said fearfully.

"How so?"

"Well with the chemo therapy she described, my immune system will be affected and I'll be susceptible to infections, my hair may fall out. I'll be nauseous and may have diarrhea, so I'll lose even more weight. Before all that happens I have to see what stage the cancer is."

"What stage, what do you mean?" Harm asked.

Well Hodgkin's has a few stages, each one worse than the one before. I have to undergo a series of tests and procedures that will determine what areas of my body are affected. The staging will help guide my treatment and follow-up," Sarah explained.
"How long will that take and when will you have it?" Harm asked. He was still very afraid for his sister-in-law.

"Well I'm going to Bethesda on Tuesday. Since Sydney is going to Italy Monday she handed my care over to the oncology department. She introduced me to Dr. Ethan Morrison, the head of the Oncology Department at Bethesda. When he started as a Navy doctor he worked with the oncologists at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and Sloan Kettering in New York," Sarah explained.

"So what do you need Diane and me to do for you and John," Harm asked.

Sarah smiled at that as she said, "It's almost going to be like when I went away on my duty cruise. I need you to be as supportive of him now as you were then. I know my husband. He's not going to ask for help. He's going to want to do all the things that need to be done for me all by himself. He's going to need your help caring for the kids as he tries to take care of me. So I need you to be the other man to tell him that he can ask for the help and that he doesn't have to do everything alone. He'll listen to you. Don't let his rank intimidate you. Put your foot down if you have to. Call in his sister or his mother. They're certainly not intimidated by him," Sarah instructed.

"I'll keep that in mind. Uh, have you told Diane yet?" Harm asked.

"Yeah I called her that night. I asked her not to tell you because I wanted you to enjoy yourself tonight. She told me that she was going to get tested to see if she was a match for me if she needed to donate anything such as bone marrow, blood or platelets. God I love her," Sarah said with a sob.

Harm moved immediately to sit beside Sarah. As he gathered her into his long arms, he said, "Hey it's okay to cry. Don't worry we'll all be there for you."

Sarah had a few sniffles before she withdrew. She said, "Oh damn I got mascara on your tunic." She went looking for a wet wipe that she had in her purse, but Harm stopped her.

"Don't worry, it's not a problem. That's what dry cleaners are for."

Sarah grasped his hand lovingly and then went on to repair her face. As she sat there John and Diane walked over.

"You okay honey? The new captain hasn't been bothering you has he?" John asked facetiously, though he was still worried for his Sarah.

"No he's been a perfect brother-in-law," Sarah said as she and Harm got up. She gave Harm a fiercely tight hug. She looked up and said, "Lower altitude."

Harm bent obligingly as Sarah cupped his check and kissed the other. At that the Rabbs and Marshalls started the rounds of goodbyes on their way to leave for home.

Tuesday, June 15, 2004

1500 Hours

National Naval Medical Center

Bethesda, MD

Sarah was sitting in the waiting room of the office of the Department Head of the oncology department of the hospital. She had just been through a series of tests that included drawing enough blood so that blood chemistry tests including protein levels, liver function tests, kidney function tests,
and uric acid level along with a complete blood count (CBC) to check for anemia and white blood count could be determined.

Then there were the chest X-ray, backed up by CT scans of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis, finished off by the PET (Positron emission tomography) scan of her whole body. All that finished about forty five minutes ago. Now she and John were waiting for the results.

Sarah was tired still she asked, "How are the kids?"

"Chloe called me when you were in the PET Scan room. She said David is doing fine as he has no clue of what is going on yet. Caroline and Patrick are good. Diane is coming to pick them up from the day camp and have them sleep over. They both know that you're sick and they say the doctors better get to work to make you better," John finished.

Sarah had to smile at the naiveté of little children.

It wasn't long after that when the office receptionist, a Petty Officer named Christine answered her intercom. After she hung up she said, "Dr. Morrison will see you now."

As Sarah and John walked in Dr. Ethan Morrison came around from behind his desk. He shook hands with them and said, "Welcome, sorry to keep you waiting for so long. I wanted to read all the test reports of your condition."

Morrison directed the Marshalls to sit at a four seat round conference table at one side of his office in. He held the rank of O-6-Captain, was medium height man with wavy gray hair. He had a pleasant air about him that belied the seriousness of the field of medicine he was in.

After they sat and got comfortable he greeted John, "Admiral Marshall." before he turned to Sarah and asked her, "Colonel Marshall how are you feeling?"

"Tired and anxious," Sarah replied.

"Well that's to be expected after the day you had. I do have some news that will relieve some anxiety," Morrison said.

John went to grasp Sarah's hand as she sat straighter in the chair.

"Your Hodgkin's Lymphoma is Stage IIA favorable," Morrison began.

He saw the questioning but hopeful looks at the word "favorable" as he continued.

"That means that besides the lymph node site in your neck, there is involvement of one other lymph node region on the same side of the diaphragm; in your case on the upper right quadrant of your the chest cavity. What makes it favorable (he held up finger quotes) is that it doesn't appear to be bulky, it's concentrated in that one lymph node area there and in your neck, and you haven't had intermittent high fevers or night sweats. You may have caught the disease early. That works highly in your favor," Morrison finished hopefully.

"So when do we start treatment?" Sarah asked.

"Your chemotherapy will start this Monday. It will be given through a central line. Tomorrow morning we'll insert a tube that goes into your chest. It will be tunneled under the skin up towards the collarbone and then into a large vein in your chest. This is a short procedure and you'll have it done in the outpatient clinic. You usually have an injection of local anesthetic to numb the area where the tube is to go in. Or you can option to be put to sleep for a short time with a general anesthetic."
Inserting the central line tomorrow will give you into the weekend to get used to having it. The like I said on Monday, we'll begin the six ABVD cycles." Morrison started.

Sarah politely raised her hand when she heard the letters. Morrison smiled anticipating the question and replied, "ABVD is what we use here in the US. It's what we oncologists call the "gold standard of chemotherapy. The letters stand for the four chemicals that are used Adriamycin, Bleomycin, Vinblastine and Dacarbazine. We call it the gold standard because unlike the combination of chemicals we used before 1985, ABVD is not as toxic and has a minimal potential for inducing second neoplasias or tumors and/or patient sterility. They will be given to you through your central line port on first and fifteenth days in their prescribed doses of each cycle.

"How effective is that treatment doctor?" John asked.

"The studies done on the patients who had Sarah's type of cancer who received the treatment since 1985 show an overall survival and progression-free survival rates at 7 years at 96%." Morrison explained.

"What side effects are there to chemotherapy?" Sarah asked.

"With ABVD which as I said is not a particularly toxic regimen, the acute or short term side effects can be hair loss; though the hair that is lost, returns in the months after the completion of chemotherapy. Also there may be mouth sores, weight loss and depression. Nausea and vomiting with diarrhea may also occur. The effect we have to monitor closely is low blood counts or myelosuppression. This occurs about 50% of the time with ABVD. They're also be fatigue from the anemia, or low red blood cell count. Sarah will bruise and bleed easily because of the thrombocytopenia, or low platelet count. We will prescribe certain drugs before you begin treatment to combat nausea or prevent infection. We'll also do routine blood tests to monitor your blood cell counts. If your counts are low, we may use certain drugs or provide a transfusion to restore your counts to a normal level," Morrison explained.

"Yes my sister Diane was tested. We have the same blood type and she can donate platelets and or blood when she needs to," Sarah explained.

"Good, good, we'll make a note in your chart for that. In conjunction with your chemotherapy we'll also put you on an immunotherapy regimen. That will help your body to learn to fight or become immune to the cancer as well as help you fight infections,' Morrison said nodding.

Sarah and John nodded as he continued, "There is also neuropathy which is induced by the chemotherapy. It's a progressive and enduring tingling numbness with intense pain and hypersensitivity to cold. It could begin in the hands and feet and sometimes involves the arms and legs. All those side effects should all subside once you're finished with the chemo regimen."

"Good that we're doing this in the summer, but I have a feeling we'll reduce the air conditioning at home," John observed.

"Make sure you do that. Also allergic reactions to the bleomycin can occur. We'll give a small test dose of bleomycin to you to see if you may be allergic," Morrison explained.

"Any long term effects doctor" John asked.

"Again, but not probable with ABVD, there may be fertility problems, lung problems such as shortness of breath and cardio-toxicity or heart damage. We also have to watch out for bone marrow
diseases such as leukemia and other cancers, thyroid problems as well as liver and kidney damage. Again we will monitor for all those effects to mitigate them as best we can. Still you will need to have regular exams and imaging tests for years after your treatment," Morrison replied.

"What about radiation therapy? Sarah asked.

"We hope we don't have to do that. If you respond quickly to chemotherapy we can do without any radiation. We like to do that because second malignancies such as acute leukemias, lymphomas and solid tumors may occur within the radiation therapy field," Morrison explained to Sarah.

"What about my bone marrow? As I said Diane is a match in case a transplant is needed," Sarah asked.

"Like I said earlier, we caught this thing early. It hadn't progressed into you spleen, liver or bone marrow. Still we will monitor that as well," Morrison explained patiently.

Dr. Morrison liked the Marshalls. They did their reading and they were asking the right questions.

He continued his instructions, "So we'll see you here tomorrow at 0700 so that we can insert the line. So only have a liquid diet tonight. Once the line is in, you will have to forego wearing your uniform tunic. It will to tight. A loose top is good; perhaps one of your husband's tee shirts, or an extra-large sized surgical scrubs shirt. They make them in Marine green," Morrison finished with a smile.

Sarah and John smiled along with him.

At that Morrison ended the session. "Go home relax, liquid diet tonight and eat early on Sunday, in case you get nauseous on Monday. Christine will give you the chemo schedule on your way out. I'll see you tomorrow," Morrison said as they got up to leave.

When they left the office Sarah said, "I want to see Dr. McCool."

"Her office is the next floor up. Let's go up and see if she can see you now. If not we'll make an appointment," John suggested.

They were in luck Vera was free to see them.

Vera got up from her desk and went to embrace the Marshalls. As they all sat in the sofa and chair set Vera asked, "What brings you two here?"

Sarah was a little subdued as she answered, "I found out last week that I have cancer."

John felt her grip on his hand tighten. He placed his other on top and let her get through her moment.

Being the professional she was Vera understood as she asked, "What type is it and did you catch it early?"

"It's Hodgkin's Lymphoma and yes my oncologist, Dr. Morrison says we did catch it early. Tomorrow I'm going to get a port put in. Then on Monday they're going to start me with six cycles of high dose chemo and evaluate me. Dr. Morrison hopes that I won't need radiation," Sarah explained.

Vera sat back and took a breath before she replied on that, "I won't lie to you it's going to be tough. What do the kids think?"

"Chloe knows everything. Caroline and Patrick just think that Sarah is going to have the doctor get
her better. David is too small to have a clue," John explained.

"Well that's good. It's not a good thing to keep the children in the dark," Vera said in agreement.

Vera could also see that Sarah was holding something back. She asked, "Sarah do you want to speak with me alone?"

Sarah just looked at John and asked, "Would you mind?" She was heartened to see the love he had for her shining in his eyes. She could also see that there were unshed tears in his eyes that he was trying to hold back.

John said, "I'll be right outside waiting."

Sarah leaned in and gave him a chaste kiss on his lips.

When the door closed behind John, Sarah almost sobbed as she said, "Vera I'm so scared."

"Don't you think John knows that or should know that?" Vera asked.

"Yes and no, I don't want to project that I'm weak because then he'll think I'm giving up and he will give up to. I need him to be strong because I know I won't be," Sarah said.

Vera went to sit on the sofa beside Sarah. As she took hold of both her hands she said in the strongest terms, "Listen to me Sarah. I watched my maternal grandmother fight breast cancer with a double mastectomy, chemo and radiation. After her initial diagnosis she survived thirty years until she passed away last year at 89 years. It got to a point where after her third round of chemo that she said 'Oh my God I'm just so tired of fighting.' My dad told her, "then rest and let the nurses and doctors fight for you". Sarah you will get to that point. Don't be afraid to let your husband, your family and your doctors and nurses fight for you. Let them help you get better. They won't think you're weak and ready to give up, especially John. They're all going to rally around you with so much love that it will surprise you. You just have to be honest with them."

"You think that's what I need to do?" Sarah asks, half knowing the answer.

"Well I don't know your extended family very well, but I do know your husband. Remember we went to college together. One day I saw how loyal he was to his friends, ready to help whenever they needed it. Like I told you, my grandmother, we called her Gammy, had breast cancer. Well she took a shine to John when he visited my home one holiday with his girlfriend then. Well that night Gammy's chemo port became loose and she was in danger of becoming infected and she needed to go to the hospital. The driveway was full of cars and John's was the last one near the street. He just told my mother, Kendall and me to get her in the car and we rushed from Jamaica, Queens to Sloan Kettering Hospital on the upper east side of Manhattan. My dad, who was a police Captain followed in his unmarked police car. He got a highway patrol car to escort us. So you see John will be ready to step in and help when the need arises. Just let he and the others in your friends and family do the same. Believe me; you won't be seen as weak," Vera explained.

"Well when you put it that way, I can bear it," Sarah said as she wiped her nose.

Vera called John in and Sarah and John went home.
Harm was looking over a list of new lieutenants that were going to be assigned to JAG Headquarters. The list of 20 names included Lt. Tali Mayfield, Lt. Catherine Graves and Lt. Gregory Vukovic.

'I remember Vukovic. He was the JG starting a pool betting on Bud to lose the Jag-A-Thon a few years back. Sarah sent him to Afghanistan. I wonder if his attitude has improved,' Harm thought to himself.

He also had a list of potential O5 ranked officers to be his XO/Chief of Staff over in Falls Church. Carolyn Paget, (ne Imes) was at the top of the list. Ever since she came back to the Navy her record was nothing but exemplary. She was winning well above 80% of her cases.

Harm was perusing the list as he waited for California to wake up with the rest of the continent and his mom to arrive at her gallery. He had an urgent need to speak with his mother and stepfather.

Finally looking at the clock and accurately judging that the time was right, he put his work down and dialed the number for Trish's Art Gallery in La Jolla. Trish picked up on the second ring, "Hello?"

"Good morning Mom," Harm replied.

"Harm darling how are you? How are you handling your new promotion?" Trish asked breezily.

"It's just great mom. I'm looking to add new people to headquarters in the Navy Yard while I'm looking to staff my new command in Falls Church. I've a feeling I'll be using some of the staff here to help command Falls Church. But that's not why I called," Harm said getting to his reason.

"Really is everything alright in DC Harm?" Trish asked getting to the point.

"Ah for the most part..." Harm started before Trish interrupted with.

"Harm what's wrong?"

"It's Sarah Marshall mom. She has cancer, Hodgkin's Lymphoma."

"Oh dear what stage is it? Is it treatable?"

"She told me that it's Stage IIA favorable. Her doctors think she caught it early. She has to go through six rounds of chemo therapy though. Mom, Sarah asked for my help in helping John."

"Doing what?"
"Picking up some slack as he cares for Sarah, help with the kids, give him a break when he needs it; you know that sort of thing."

"What about caring for Sarah?"

"Well that's one of the reasons I called you. Even though Deanne is in DC, you know as well as I do that even though she's fine now, she's not in the best of health. So Maureen Marshall is going to be staying in DC in the guest room a lot. But she can't stay all the time. She can only take off so much time as she has a nursing home to run as the administrator back home in New York. Maureen also reached out to me and asked if I could call you to stay during those times she can't be here. Between the two of you, you can split time staying with Sarah."

"Yes I think that would be a good idea. I'd be happy to help. Let me call Maureen to make arrangements. Don't worry we'll come up with a plan to help."

"Thanks mom I'm sure John and Sarah will appreciate it. Let me know when you're coming in. I'll also set our guest room for you," Harm said before he and Trish signed off.

He reset the phone and dialed the outer office. "Mrs. Ryerson, pass the word for Commander Turner and Lt. Singer-Austen to come in."

"Aye sir," Janine replied over the phone.

When Loren and Sturgis came in Harm said, "At ease, have a seat and read these." Harm handed over a folder to each of them.

After they read them Sturgis asked, "When do we leave for Baghdad?"

"Tonight, your flight leaves Andrews at 2200. That will give you time lieutenant to get your personal arrangements in order," Harm said.

"Thank you sir," Loren replied with a smile.

Harm continued, "Before you two go, take a ride over to ONI. You'll need to speak with your sister-in-law lieutenant. She has some firsthand knowledge of the person running the corporation involved."

"We'll do that sir," Loren replied for her and Sturgis. Sturgis just nodded his head in agreement.

"Also remember we don't need a rushed conclusion on this. We need the right conclusion. If someone has to go to jail, then so be it. I won't have our cases decided for the need of political expediency. Am I clear?" Harm said.

Aye, aye sir," both Loren and Sturgis chorused.

"That's all carry on," Harm said just before the other two officers turned and marched out.

Monday, June 21, 2004

0730 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Jennifer came into Headquarters with an air of anticipation. She was anxious to start after being away
for six weeks maternity leave. She just came in from the Navy Yard Daycare Center where she had left Tammy. She knew she'd do well there as her cousins Natalie and David were still going there.

Janine Ryerson had e-mailed a list of what was going on while Jennifer was away. She was perusing the list for about ten minutes before she heard "Attention on deck!" and then Harm's laconic drawl of "As you were!" before he come through the door from the bullpen reading a document as he walked. Jennifer jumped up to stand at attention. Harm smiled as he saw her get up.

"As you were as well and all though we've seen each other many time these last few weeks, welcome back Jennifer," Harm said as he opened his arms. Jennifer moved around the desk and gratefully allowed herself to be enveloped in a familial hug.

As Jennifer withdrew she said, for expediency's sake, "It's nice to be back, Captain. Janine e-mailed me a list of the activities going on. After you've had your coffee, we can go over them so that I am up to speed."

"Good I'm glad she's on maternity leave herself. She was getting anxious and almost ornery with anticipation," Harm voiced his observation.

"Oh yeah I know the feeling. I hope her baby comes on time not like mine, a week late," Jennifer said ruefully.

"Amen to that. Okay if you can, let's get our coffee," Harm said as he let her precede him out through the bullpen.

"Oh I can sir. I can have coffee early in the day. I expressed breast milk the night before. If I have it this early, it's already gone from my system by the time I get home. Do you still take your coffee Colonel Mackenzie strong?"

"Yes I do. Sarah got me used to that."

"How is Sarah, Harm? She didn't tell me much detail except that she has Hodgkin's Lymphoma," Jennifer asked softly as they reached the relative privacy of an empty canteen.

"She's just begun her first round of chemotherapy today. She asked Diane to be there with her and John. Diane got tested and she can donate blood and platelets and bone marrow if she needs to. She asked that no one come and visit her right away. Even though they'll give her the drugs to try and counteract that, she is likely to go through a lot of nausea and vomiting not to mention diarrhea. So she will not be good company," Harm replied.

"Still I like to do something for her. Besides being family, she has done so much for me that I think I owe her."

"Knowing you Jennifer you'll come up with something she'll appreciate. In the meantime, now that we have our coffee, let's get ready for Staff Call," Harm commanded

As they walked through the bullpen, Jennifer asked, "Any word on when they'll pick the next permanent JAG sir? I haven't kept my ear to the ground since Tammy was born. I've been too busy learning how to be a mom."

Harm sighed as he said, "No the selection board won't be meeting until right after the 4th of July; which this year is on a Sunday. So that means, they won't meet until Tuesday, the 6th. I'd be surprised if they decide before the end of July. We may not know until August or heaven forbid, September."
"Any word on who is on top of the list?"

"I hear they're looking at a Marine. A Colonel named Gordon Creswell. He saved Gen Bixby from a helicopter crash in Iraq. After that he was made counsel to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He became the president's candidate for JAG. We'll see how that goes. Sarah and John know him. He was the SJA at Okinawa when Sarah was there and he recommended her for law school. He also helped John in his rehab when he got back from Plattsburgh. So he's not a total unknown," Harm explained.

"Well that's good to know," Jennifer said as they reached the JAG's outer office.

It wasn't too long before the both of them went to Staff Call. Harm let Jennifer precede him through the door. As she held it open she called out, "Attention on Deck!"

There was the usual scraping of chairs on the floor as the officers present stood to attention.

Harm and Jennifer proceeded to the head of the table. Harm went to stand at the chair at the head and Jennifer stood at the chair to his right. Only after they reached those spots did Harm announce, "As you were."

He waited until the noises of settling in died down before he began. "Alright, first case, a Navy frigate, the Hennessey, has had an altercation with a vessel of another nation."

"Friend or foe?" Lt. Colonel Mike McBurney asked. He'd just been promoted. Harm gave him his oath of office the previous Friday. The wet down was at McMurphy's. Harm and the other JAG staff that attended was amused that all three of his older sisters showed up. Harm was further amused that McBurney and Faith Coleman never left each other's sides that night.

"Your call- it's Canada," Harm replied with a smile to which everyone at the table chuckled. He continued after the laughter ended, "One of our sailors shot and injured one of their fishermen. He's First Nation, and his father sits on the local Tribal Council. Before this becomes an international debacle, I want to find out what happened. McBurney since you're itching to show off your new silver oak leafs, take Lt. Commander Nestor with you.

Eileen had also been recently promoted to Lt. Commander, but the week before. She had the usual wet down at McMurphy's that her husband Jack, an F-14 fighter pilot, himself a Lt. Commander. His squadron was the "Flying Aces. Usually aboard the Nimitz when deployed, but they were now at Oceana for ground training

Harm was continuing, "Normally I'd send Lt. Singer-Austen with you, but she's in Iraq with Commander Turner investigating that friendly fire incident."

Both officers opened the folders as Harm passed them across to each officer.

"Keep in mind our neighbors to the north haven't exactly been in our corner lately," Harm cautioned them.

"This isn't gonna help them get there, sir," Eileen Nestor observed dryly as she read the incident report.

"Which is why I'm sending you both; there's been enough conflict between Washington and Ottawa lately, so good luck," Harm concluded.

"Thank you sir," McBurney said for him and Eileen.

"Okay onto our next case..." Harm said as he went on. The Staff Call went along smoothly enough
before its conclusion.

Saturday, July 17, 2004

1330 Local Time

Marshall Home

Florida Ave., NW

Harm's request of his parents to help the Marshalls as Sarah went through her chemo worked out well. Trish worked out a schedule so that she, Maureen, Deanne and Uncle Matt are with Sarah Mondays through Fridays while John was at work.

Eleven days ago on the 6th, Sarah completed her first round of chemotherapy. All the digestive side effects including the diarrhea and vomiting happened. On top of that chemo drugs that she was given to fight the cancer, she was on a regimen of daily immunotherapy medication to prop up her immune system, painkillers, anti-nausea medication even the occasional laxative as one of the ABVD drugs caused some constipation.

Because of the blow to her immune system it was better that Sarah also avoid large crowds or crowded places like restaurants. She had to refrain from sharing utensils or glasses with other people. Everyone in the family or anyone else who came to visit constantly washed their hands. All the house plants were removed as they could contain mold. Sarah didn't eat any raw fruits or vegetables. All her meals had to be thoroughly cooked.

Diane donated blood and platelets between her first and second chemo appointments. The doctors decided that would be the procedure between all the chemo appointments. Diane didn't complain at all as she went through the three hours sessions it took to extract the platelets. Diane's blood donation would be once a month though. Some of the staff at JAG who had the same blood type as Sarah had also donated blood to keep the anemia caused by the chemo at bay. Sarah wrote "thank you" notes to each of the staff that donated.

Now Sarah was sitting on her couch with a book. She had on her favorite pair of sweats and she had a blanket around her legs. Also under her sweats, she had on another long sleeve tee shirt and a pair of flannel pajama pants and two pairs of thermal socks. The side of effect of neuropathy had also occurred which brought on the tingling numbness with intense pain to her arms and legs as well as the hypersensitivity to cold. Even though it was 85 degrees outside, Sarah was feeling cold. She finally found a comfortable position on the couch that also helped alleviate the pain. She was taking Tylenol as well to help with the rest of it.

When John came into the room he was dressed in the total opposite of Sarah in a golf shirt, shorts and sneakers with no socks. He was carrying a mug of chicken soup.

"Here you go sweetie. Loren's homemade Jewish penicillin, just what the doctor ordered to ward off the chill," John said as he put it down on the wooden folding table that was set up next to Sarah's elbow.

When Sarah looked up to say, "Thank you" John bent and managed to kiss the spot of Sarah's forehead that was between her glasses and the pink wool cap she wore covering her bald head.

Just as the doctor and the cancer literature predicted one side effect to the chemo was the loss of not only the long hair on her head but also the total loss of all her body hair including the loss of her pubic hair, arm and leg hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes.
Being forewarned about this, Sarah went to her favorite hairdresser and asked that it be all taken off and be made into a wig. The hairdresser, a woman named Clarisse, was very understanding as she was also a breast cancer survivor. She already had a service for fellow cancer patients who lost their hair to chemo. She had Sarah's hair made into a wig. The stubble that was left fell out in the shower about a week after her first ABVD treatment. The rest fell off during the course of her treatment.

Sarah put her book down and reached for the soup cup. Just as she took her first sip, the doorbell rang which John went to answer. What he saw surprised him and brought a rush of joy for the kindness that the sight brought.

Ann Marie Matthews, Jennifer Rabb, Harriet Roberts, Loren Singer-Austen and her sister-in-law Meg Pike along with Cathy McMahon all hugged and kissed John before they trooped through the door into the living room.

All the women had on their regular civilian Saturday wear, as well JAG Headquarters ball caps on. John could see that their hair was not tucked under the caps, but was cut close to the scalp. Sarah put her soup down on the table to greet her visitors. They all went to her and gently hugged her as she sat on the couch.

Sarah was bewildered as after giving their greetings, they all lined up in front of her. Meg, as the ranking officer, said, "On three, one, two three."

With that count all the women took their ball caps off to reveal that all their hair was cut down to very close crew-cuts. They almost looked bald.

As she looked on in astonishment Sarah's jaw just about dropped onto her chest and she brought her hands to her face as she exclaimed, "Oh my God! You guys are crazy. You didn't have to do that!"

"Yes we did. We donated our hair in your name to the wig makers at Bethesda so that they can make more wigs for other cancer patients. We wanted to show you solidarity. Besides it was Jennifer's idea," Ann Marie explained.

"Oh that is just the greatest thing anyone has ever done for me," Sarah said with great emotion. There were tears streaming down her cheeks. She got up and each woman enveloped her in a hug. She saved Jennifer for last. She sniffled some as she whispered in her ear, "Thank you so much Jenny. I love you." It was Sarah's pet name for her sister-in-law.

"You're welcome Mac. I love you to," Jennifer whispered back with equal emotion.

All the ladies dried their eyes before they sat down.

John said, "Now that the ladies are here, Chloe and I will take the kids to the Navy Yard pool. We'll see you in a couple of hours."

"Okay sweetie. Have a good time," Sarah said before she lifted her head to receive his kiss.

After John and the kids left, the girls settled in to visit.

As Sarah and the other ladies sat down, she picked her mug of soup. As she started to eat again she asked, "So what's going on in the Navy while I've been sick?" She so wanted to hear of her work. She missed it so much.

Loren answered, "Commander Turner, and I just wrapped up a case. We were investigating an alleged friendly fire incident involving Marines and men from a company called Battlefield Solutions. They're a consultant advisor to an Iraqi Civil Defense. The case also involves Naval
"Battlefield Solutions' CEO is Commander John Merrick," Meg said.

"Why does he sound familiar?" Sarah asked

"He's the captain Harm and I previously court-martialed for the collision of his destroyer into a Greek ship in the Med'. It happened while you were on the Guadalcanal, Sarah.

"Oh yeah I remember Harm telling me about that and then reading the reports when I came back. So what happened?" Sarah asked.

Loren stepped in to reply, "A marine unit was acting as shadow advisors to the bodyguards of a Kurdish leader named Mohammed Aziz. A retired Marine Sgt. Maj. named Thomas Elgart whose unit was working for Battlefield Solutions, were tracking a terrorist. They mistakenly engaged in a gunfight with the Marine bodyguards. During the firefight a marine named Cpl. Paul Sheehy was killed by Elgart."

"So you have to prosecute Elgart," Sarah said.

"We were going to but Turner was all too happy to call it a friendly-fire incident. But after what was brought forth, John had me step in," Meg replied.

"What was brought forth," Sarah asked.

Cathy picked up the story with, "Sheehy's widow, Ann brought forth e-mails her husband sent before his death. They implicated Battlefield Solutions as trigger-happy mercenaries. So Uncle Harm assigned me to do the background check on the e-mails. So I called Navy Intelligence and had Uncle John begin an investigation of Battlefield Solutions. He assigned it to Meg and she took it from there."

Meg picked it up when Sarah looked at her. "That's when we found that Merrick was now the CEO of Battlefield Solutions. Loren and I brought our complaints to him. He promised that he 'would take care of it.' Well he then called a general and asked for a court-martial of his own employee. So by order of the SECNAV Elgart was brought back to active duty and court martialed."

"Harm assigned Cathy and me to defend and Commander Turner to prosecute," Loren added.

"So far so good," Sarah said.

Loren shook her head no as she continued, "It was until Merrick told Elgart that he didn't think he was getting good defense from the navy. Merrick offered him $2 million to plead guilty to the court-martial, even though he asked to have Elgart court martialed in the first place."

"So what happened?" Sarah asked.

Loren replied, "I managed to convince Elgart into not to taking it, saying: 2 million is a hell of a severance package. In the meantime ONI was investigating Battlefield Solutions."

Meg picked it up with, "We found that Battlefield Solutions had recently merged with Henson-LeRoux, a company who had oil interests in the Kurdish area. Also Merrick received 200,000 shares of its stock. If the Kurdish area became independent, Aziz would become oil minister. Because Aziz was openly antagonistic to Henson-LeRoux, Battlefield Solutions would suffer financial loss. We also discovered that Aziz was previously targeted to be quote ~ taken out by mistake ~ unquote on five separate occasions. Unbelievably, those five failed attempts were based upon false information
from a confidential "informant." Then, the informant also turned out to be under contract to Battlefield Solutions. We wondered if the information wasn't coming directly from Battlefield Solutions' board room for their own corporate agenda."

"So what was the final outcome?" Sarah asked.

Loren picked it up saying, "Elgart was found not-guilty, and Sheehy's widow filed a civil suit for, as we told Merrick, a lot more than his $2 million."

"I think she'll win to," Meg said.

At that Sarah had finished her soup and seeing this Ann Marie spoke up and said, "Enough shop talk. Let's talk something else. What are you going to do about the kids' activities? Harriet and I can help out a lot as we're both now stay-at-home moms that is until she has the twins."

"Well Chloe is going away for her CAP encampment next month with Mattie. Before that Chloe needs rides to Rock Creek Park for her equestrian lessons. Also Caroline and Patrick are going to that horse day camp. I can't go to the stables because of the chance of infection. Then there's..."

Sarah said along with the other activities of what was going on.

The ladies spoke of family plans and other pleasant things. It wasn't long before Sarah was wilting and the ladies knew it was time to go. They all got up to say their goodbyes.

Ann Marie said, "Okay Cathy you and I will stay and wait for John to come home with the kids. Pete's got our kids and he's cooking dinner. So I'm not in a rush to get home. So come on colonel, up to bed."

Sarah gave everyone a hug before she trudged up to bed.

Ann Marie and Cathy saw the other ladies out. They all vowed to keep coming to future visits so that Sarah didn't feel isolated by her disease.

Friday, July 23, 2004

0700 Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Jennifer breezed into work as usual. She was a bit early today as the traffic wasn't bad from her apartment. Tammy was ensconced at daycare and she was ready to work. She thought she was the only one in the office. She didn't notice any cars in the JAG Officers' Section of the massive JAG/NCIS Headquarters Parking Lot.

Jennifer was working at her desk doing the usual things to start her day, waiting for Harm to come in to start his day. She was so engrossed in her work she didn't hear the door to the JAG's office open behind her.

When the gentle call of "Good morning petty officer." was said, Jennifer was so frightened that she just about jumped out of her chair without help from her legs.

As she turned she exclaimed, "Jesus, Mary & Joseph, don't do that!"

"What, you need all three of them?" Major General Gordon Creswell asked with a grin. Inward he
was sorry that he startled the yeoman.

"No sir. Ah, good morning sir. Are you the new JAG General…?" Jennifer asked seeing the two stars on each shoulder epaulet. She was so flustered that she forgot that she had to stand at attention.

"It's Creswell, Gordon Creswell. My friends call me Biff. You can call me 'Sir' or 'General Creswell'," Creswell said with a touch of humor.

"Pleased to meet you sir," Jennifer putting her hand forward.

As Creswell grasped her hand he continued, "And yes I am the new JAG. I just got confirmed last night. I've been here since 0600. Though I don't know where my parking space is. I believe that the grounds people haven't stenciled my name on it yet. And you are?"

Jennifer calmed down and snapped to attention as she replied, "Petty Officer Jennifer Rabb, sir. I'm to be your yeoman for the foreseeable future."

"Foreseeable, are you anticipating being deployed?" Creswell asked.

"Not right away sir. I have been accepted into OCS. I need to complete my bachelor's degree in psychology first. I'm graduating George Washington University next May sir," Jennifer explained.

Just then Harm walked in. He stopped in his tracks and snapped to attention when he saw the general and said, "Captain Harmon Rabb reporting for duty sir."

"Ah Captain Rabb, good morning and as you were," Creswell said as he approached with is hand out. As he grasped Harm's he asked, "You wouldn't happen to know where my parking spot is?"

Harm took the hand and shook it. He explained, "Yes sir it's right next to mine. I've been leaving it empty in anticipation of the next JAG being appointed. I'll give word to have the Grounds People stencil you particulars on it."

"Excellent oh are you two married?" Creswell asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No sir Jennifer is married to my brother Sergei. He's one of the marines in the guard detail," Harm explained.

"Okay, any more family members I need to meet?"

"Just Colonel Sarah Marshall and I believe you already know her and her husband John, she's my sister-in-law, my wife's sister and assigned to the judiciary. Right now she is on medical leave," Harm explained.

"Oh what's wrong?" Creswell asked genuinely concerned. He hadn't gotten to the judiciary SRBs yet.

"Ah medical privacy laws prohibit me from saying sir. I will call her and let her know you're the new JAG and are asking after her. I'm sure she'd like to see you again sir," Harm explained.

"Very well captain, see that you do that. In the meantime what say we get some coffee? I have a pot already made from when I got here. I hope you like it strong," Creswell said.

"Sir, I live and work with the Mackenzie sisters. They like their coffee strong. So I grew to like that way as well," Harm said to Creswell's great amusement.

Creswell had a feeling that working with the captain would be very pleasant.
"If you sirs don't mind I'll go with you so that I can make the first pot for the rest of the office," Jennifer suggested.

Harm and Creswell stopped at the door with Creswell saying, "Ladies first."

"Thank you sir," Jennifer said.

After they had their morning beverages, Harm went in with Creswell to let him know what was going on at JAG and to remove whatever little personal items he had in the office.

While they worked at the round table setting, Creswell asked, "I noticed that P/O Rabb has her hair styled extremely short. Is there a reason for that?"

Harm was about to answer when the buzz of the intercom stopped him. Creswell got up and went to his desk saying to Harm, "Excuse me." and then said, "Yes petty officer?"

"Sir Admiral John Marshall to see you," Jennifer answered.

Creswell noticed Harm smile. He replied to Jennifer, "Send him in."

With that the door opened and John walked in and across the room and met Creswell midway between the door and his desk.

As they shook hands John said "Good morning general."

Good morning admiral. It's nice to see you again. I believe you know Captain Rabb," Creswell replied.

"Yeah I've seen him around. How're you doing Harm?" John said with a grin as he shook Harm's hand.

Harm grinned along with him and said, "Good morning John. I was briefing General Creswell on our ongoing cases."

"Good that's one of the reasons I came over besides wanting to congratulate the general on his appointment," John said.

"Why don't we sit down Admiral," Creswell said. Turning to Harm he said, "Captain I'll see you at Staff Call."

"As a matter of fact general I need Captain Rabb to stay," John said.

As they all sat back down John began. "Just about two hours ago ONI was notified that yesterday afternoon Dwight Kanin, a civilian chairman of the Military Affairs Policy Board and an advisor to President Bush, was killed in Baghdad during a ride along with a squad of Marines. I'm going to need Captain Rabb and another O5 officer, of your choosing, to go to Iraq, along with my deputy Captain Pike and an agent from NCIS, to investigate. The SECNAV wants to know who was responsible and to have that person or persons prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Normally I wouldn't ask Captain Rabb as he is going to have his own command, but Secretary Sheffield asked for him specifically."

Creswell didn't waste any time as he said to Harm, "Well since the SECNAV asked for you, you need to go. As for the O-5 officer that is to accompany you, do you have anyone in mind Captain?"

Without hesitation, Harm replied, "I recommend Lt. Colonel McBurney sir. He is a very aggressive
investigator. This seems right up his alley."

"Excellent get him and come back here so that Admiral Marshall can brief you," Creswell began.

John politely interrupted with, "Instead of coming back here go down the street to NCIS with Mike. Meg is there briefing Diane. She has all the requisite information and your itinerary that Chief Pierce made. The four of you will fly out of Andrews tonight at 2200."

Creswell said, "You have your orders Captain. Keep me briefed please."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm said as he got up.

John and Creswell rose with him. John reached out his hand and said, "After you get done at Diane's stop in and see Sarah. Your mom is there this week. And stay safe shipmate."

"No problem John," Harm said. They shared the man hug before Harm walked out the door.

After Harm left Creswell asked, "John if you don't mind my asking Captain Rabb told me that Sarah is sick. Is it anything serious?"

John sighed as he said, "Yeah, it's Hodgkin's Lymphoma. We were lucky that she caught it early. She's undergoing six cycles of chemotherapy. Each cycle is 28 days long. She received the first dose of her second cycle this past Monday."

"Ah I see. Tell me is that why my yeoman has a very short haircut?"

"Yeah, she, my sister Ann Marie, Lt. Commander Roberts' wife Harriet, Lt. Loren Singer-Austen and Lt Cathy McMahon, who is also my niece, as well as Captain Pike, who I mentioned before, had their hair cut off and made into wigs for other cancer patients in Sarah's name."

"Ah that explains that. Well then, please let my wife Dora and I know what we can do for you and your wife. I know she's a fighter. If you recall, I taught her how to box or at least sharpen her fighting skills before I recommended her for law school when we served together in Okinawa."

"Yes I recall and I appreciate the offer. If you and Mrs. Creswell want to stop over to the house to see Sarah, I'll let her know you're coming. She'd appreciate the visit. She's starting to feel a little isolated. Because the chemo weakens her immune system, Sarah doesn't go out into crowds or restaurants. Instead our extended family and our friends come to visit our house."

"Dora and/or I will call and arrange what day and time will be suitable."

"Thank you and on that note I need to get to work myself," John said getting up. He reached for Creswell's hand and said, "Again congratulations general."

"Thank you Admiral," Creswell replied before John turned and walked out the door.

Friday, August 20, 2004

1900 Local Time

Marshall Home

Florida Ave., NW

It was a week after Diane and Sarah's 36th birthday. Sarah was four days past the start of her third round of chemo. The Rabbs and Marshalls were celebrating a week late because Harm had returned
home from Iraq two days before, from the trial that settled the incident where the president's military advisor was killed there.

The two Rabb families, the Marshall and Matthews families as well as the Burnetts and elder Marshalls were having a dinner celebration at the Marshalls. Sarah didn't want anyone to throw her a big party. And as much as the families wanted to go out away from the house, Sarah had to be very careful on managing her Infection Control protocols. The family dinner at home was about all she could stand.

Diane and Sarah's children made combination birthday/get well cards for her. Chloe and Mattie teamed up to make a cake for each of their moms. Now after a whole lot of preparation, the birthday dinner was being enjoyed by all. Sarah was wearing a nice pair of slacks, a dark green silk blouse and ballet flats. She had a scarf matching the blouse tied on her head.

As they ate, Sarah was telling everyone of the wonderful things her family, friends and colleagues/bosses were doing to help the Marshalls out.

"It was nice of Sheffield to drop off dinner when he had you come into work during my chemo appointment and kept you late dealing with the fallout of Harm's trial in Iraq," Sarah was saying.

"Yes it was nice of him. I'm also glad his secretary Mrs. Baker, whose brother was a Hodgkin's patient a few years back, was familiar with the dietary protocols," John said.

"Admiral Morris brought some of his wife's home cooked fried chicken the day after. He stayed and let me in on what was going on at the office. It felt so good to sit a talk about work for all the time he was here. He left after I fell asleep while we were talking. I'm glad you were here then mom to tell him that the chemo takes a lot of my energy away. He was so embarrassed he thought that there was something wrong with me," Sarah said to Maureen Marshall.

"He said that he understood completely, "Maureen reassured her daughter-in-law.

"It was also very nice when President and Dr. Bartlett came over last Friday. Her advice for me was invaluable," Sarah added.

"Which was?" Jennifer asked.

"Follow my doctors' orders. And that I'm not alone in this thing. Let the nurses and the hospital staff do your fighting for you. That's what they're there for. And I can't thank you guys enough for that. You and my friends at work and your other agencies, Diane and John, have been so special in donating blood and platelets and getting their hair cut. And Jennifer you have been great getting all the JAG personnel to pitch in to help by scheduling the staff to come here and sit with me and bring meals," Sarah finished.

"It was my pleasure Sarah," Jennifer said modestly.

Diane added, "Well you know you're very popular at NCIS. Gibbs is totally in awe of what you're going through. He said to tell you that you're a 'Marine's Marine'."

Sarah blushed at that. So was so happy for the love that her extended family and her colleagues were showing her in her medical crisis.

John added, "Also speaking of Gibbs, good job on getting the assassin on Air Force One. I hear that the Secret Service Agent that helped is joining NCIS," John said.

"Yeah her name is Caitlin Todd. She quit the Secret Service because she had an affair with the
second officer that was killed by the snake venom in his uniform. Al Qaeda operatives worked at the
dry cleaners he and the first officer used. They laced the uniforms with the snake venom. I'm glad we
use the dry cleaners in Fairfax Harm," Diane said wryly.

"Oh my God the lengths Al Qaeda will go through," Maureen commented in fear.

"Yeah, but enough of that; let's talk of nicer things. Are you two teenagers looking forward to going
to another CAP encampment?" Trish asked Chloe and Mattie.

The next morning the two teenagers would leave for their Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Encampment at
Langley AFB in Hampton, VA.

"Yeah we'll be cadet staff this year. Mattie's going to a 1st Lieutenant and Flight Commander and I'm
going to be a major and Group Commander," Chloe said with enthusiasm.

"See they have command presence already. Just like their moms," Jim Marshall said with tongue in
his cheek.

"Hey, what about me?" John said indignantly.

"And me?" Harm joined in.

"You haven't got the Marine Glare dear. I've seen her demonstrate it on the young ones," Sarah said
proudly to her husband as she looked proudly at her eldest daughter.

"Or the mother's glare," Diane added to her husband and looking on Mattie with as much pride.

John and Harm could only surrender the higher ground after that.

The dinner went well after that. Soon it came time for the two birthday cakes and candles, Diane and
Sarah stood together as Maureen and Trish lit the candles. The whole family chorused the traditional,
"…Happy Birthday Sarah and Diane, Happy Birthday to you."

Sarah and Diane each blew out their candles with gusto.

It wasn't long after the cake and coffee was served until it was time to break up the party and the rest
of the family to go home.

Harm and Diane's family were the last to leave. As they said goodbye at the door Harm said to John
and Sarah, "Remember Mattie and I will be by here at 1100 to get Chloe to take her to Langley for
the encampment."

"You're going to stay there overnight right?" Sarah asked making sure her brother-in-law took the
correct precautions.

"Yes I have everything set up at their VOQ. I'll drive back Sunday morning," Harm replied. With
that he gave Sarah a crushing hug. He whispered into her ear, "Hang in there Ninja Girl. You're
almost half way through. By Thanksgiving we'll celebrate you getting well."

"I know Harm. Love you," Sarah replied as she kissed his cheek.

At that the Rabbs trooped out of the house to their car.

Same evening

0030 hours
Chloe was coming out of a deep sleep. She was having a dream of being pushed around. That's why she was wondering what the constant nudging on the back of her shoulder was all about. She finally came to full consciousness and turned over to face the source. She wasn't surprised to see that Caroline and Patrick were standing there holding hands.

"What's up guys," Chloe asked in a drowsy voice.

"We're scared," Caroline said. Patrick nodded his head vigorously in agreement.

"Scared of what?" Chloe asked.

"Of Mommy!" This time it was Patrick who answered.

"What do you have to be scared of Mommy for?" Chloe asked.

"Of her being sick," Caroline replied.

"Is she gonna die?" Patrick asked with quivering lips.

Chloe sighed as she moved over on her double bed and held the covers open. "C'mon up here.

Caroline and Patrick willingly scrambled up and snuggled into their big sister as Chloe began to explain.

"Now look, mom is not going to die. Yeah mom is very sick, but the doctors and nurses are giving her the best medicine and the best care so that she can get well. It isn't just a cold and it takes a little longer for the medicine to work. You heard Uncle Harm, mommy will be better by Thanksgiving, watch," Chloe reassured her brother and sister.

'But how come you're going away? We don't want you to go away. Who's going to help daddy take care of mommy when you're gone?" Patrick asked.

"Well Nana (Maureen) and Tee-Ta (Trish) have been here all summer. Also Nana Dee (Deanne) and Uncle Matt have helped and they'll keep doing that while I'm gone. So there'll be nothing to worry about. You just have to be a good boy and good girl and do what daddy and mommy tells you to do, okay?" Chloe said.

"Okay!" Caroline and Patrick said together.

Showing his 3½ year old attention span Patrick asked, "Why do you have to go on a 'campment? You're gonna miss Caroline's 5th birthday party next week."

"Well it's something that the CAP cadets get to do every summer. Mattie and I will learn a lot of stuff. Just like the one I went on two summers ago. And don't worry, I have a present hidden for you," Chloe said as she gently poke Caroline's nose.

Caroline giggled at that.

At that Chloe said, "Okay you two snuggle down. You can sleep her tonight and no kicking!"

"Okay!" Caroline and Patrick replied together as they snuggled in with their big sister.

Little did they know that Sarah was standing in the hall and heard the whole thing through the cracked open door. She heard the two children as first Patrick opened the door to his bedroom which
he shared with David and then Caroline's to get her out of bed. She would have chastised them for being out of bed, but she stopped when she heard Chloe's answers to their fearful questions. She had to stifle a few tears of joy at the big heart Chloe had. She went back to bed with her own lighter heart.
Chapter 127

Timing Is Everything

Chapter 127

Tuesday, September 7, 2004

1320 Hours

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Harm went to the Marine Guard Desk and signed himself in. He proceeded to the 3rd floor. He was warmly and politely greeted by a few staff that knew him. He was carrying the orders for the transfer of his selected group of officers and NCOs to staff his new command in Falls Church.

Harm went into the anteroom to Creswell's office and smiled as Jennifer got up to greet him.

"Good afternoon Petty Officer," Harm said. He was being facetious as well as keeping up appearances.

"Captain, it's always good to see you," Jennifer reposted. She added, "Come to finally raid our humble abode?"

"Yes I have. I'm getting tired of walking through an empty bullpen every day. Besides Diane is giving me a hard time about being behind; she has her five teams already set-up."

"Well we better get you caught up then," Jennifer replied as she buzzed into the general's office.

Creswell replied over the speaker, "Yes Yeoman Rabb?"

"Sir Captain Rabb is here for your 1330 meeting," Jennifer replied.

"Send him in."

Harm went over and knocked and walked in at the usual reply of, "Enter."

Harm met Creswell in front of his desk. Before Harm could snap to Creswell said, "At ease Captain, let's have a seat at the table."

As they sat, the general asked, Okay who is going to Falls Church?"

"Well to start, Commander Carolyn Paget will be my XO, Lt. Col. Mike McBurney, along with Lt. Commanders Eileen Nestor and Loren Singer-Austen..."

"You mean Lt. Singer-Austen, don't you?" Creswell interrupted.

"No sir, here are her new promotion orders. The rank took effect today," Harm said as he handed over the relevant document. He continued, "I was informed of the promotion yesterday afternoon. I sent her husband out today to have the new stripes sewn onto her extra coat. If you like, he's waiting in the lobby with his sister, Captain Pike. We can do the ceremony in the conference room when we summon her and everyone else to give them their new orders sir," Harm requested.
"Certainly, let's see the others on the list," Creswell acquiesced. After perusing them he said," Good people, though there seems to be one omission."

"Who's that sir," Harm asked.

"Lt. Commander Roberts. I thought you two were close."

Harm sighed as he replied, "Yes sir we are. He and his family have spent so much time with us and the Marshalls one could say that we're practically related. The reason he's not on the list for Falls Church is because before you came on as JAG I asked his monitor to look into overseas SJA/FJA postings such as London, Naples and even Japan. Sir, Bud is an excellent attorney and officer. But he has been professionally attached to Colonel Marshall and me since he's been here. It's time to break that attachment. If it were not for his injury, he would have been a Lt. Commander long before he eventually was promoted and he would have been assigned elsewhere to advance his career. If he comes to Falls Church, he would just be one of many other attorneys working there. Others would not be able to see his leadership potential as I always have."

"I see your point. I read his record. He excelled as the FJA on the Seahawk before his injury. Another overseas billet would do his career wonders. I'll say this; he showed great restraint by only grabbing the wrist and not punching that loud mouth that was shaking a shoe in his and his brother's faces. I just happened to be there with my wife Dora shopping for my own pair of civilian dress shoes," Creswell agreed.

"Yes sir he did. He is very slow to anger. I've only seen him get angry once," Harm said.

"When was that?" Creswell asked intrigued.

"At his brother Mike who is a midshipman at Annapolis. During a trial in which one of Mike's mentors was charged with dereliction of duty, Mike was trying to influence testimony. He was taking advantage of Bud's relationships with the staff here at headquarters. Sarah Marshall was the judge for the case and she requested that Bud handle his brother after an outburst in her courtroom. I heard Bud went into "hunter-killer" mode looking for Mike. After he found him I happened to pass by his office and heard him rip Mike a new one. I tell you it was a side I'd never seen from him."

Creswell smiled as he said, "That's a very entertaining tale. What say we get all our particulars into the conference room and have that ceremony? I think we kept Mr. Austin and his sister waiting long enough."

"Aye sir, after you," Harm said as they got up to leave the office.

It wasn't long before the conference room table was filled with the Sailors and Marines that were going to be transferred to the Falls Church LSO. They waited anxiously for Harm and Creswell to come in. They all got up when Harm opened that door and held it open. He bellowed, "Attention on Deck!"

Creswell came in and stood at the head chair and said, "At ease and have a seat. I believe you all know why you're here as Captain Rabb has been interviewing you all for the past month and a half."

All the officers and NCOs nodded in happy agreement.

Creswell continued, "We'll start with the lowest rank. When I call your name please come up to receive your orders. That means you go first PO1 Ryerson or I should say Chief Ryerson."

Janine was totally astounded as Harm took up the explanation, "Yes Chief. Your promotion to E7-Chief Petty Officer came through last week. Here are your new orders to begin your position as
Office Manager of the LSO Operations."

Janine went up to take her orders from the general. As she happily shook Creswell's hand, he said, "Congratulations Chief on that and your new baby boy."

"Thank you sir," Janine replied. She braced to attention as Harm and the general switched the ranks on her collar.

"Next we have PO1..." Creswell said as the distribution continued through the enlisted gathered.

Finally it came to the officers. Loren was first. She was wondering why as an O3 she was being transferred. She believed that she would be running the administration part of the LSO, not prosecute any cases. Last June she was a little disappointed that when Bud had received his promotion, she wasn't included.

As Loren approached Creswell he said, "You're out of uniform Lt. Commander. Lock it up."

Right then Loren knew what was coming as she braced to attention.

Creswell turned to Harm and instructed, "Captain bring our guests in."

Harm turned to open the door and let in Bobby Austin and his sister Meg Austen-Pike. Bobby was carrying a garment bag and a bible. He draped the garment bag over the back of a chair and went to stand beside Loren as they faced Creswell.

"Shall we begin? Lt. Commander repeat after me.

Putting her left hand on the Bible and raising her right hand she repeated after Creswell, "I, Loren Singer-Austin, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of Lt. Commander in the United States Navy on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

"Mr. Austin, would you please assist Captain Rabb in getting the new Lt. Commander into her proper uniform," Creswell instructed.

"Yes sir, gladly," Bobby replied getting and opening the garment bag. Carolyn Paget came up to take Loren's lieutenant's coat. While Bobby held the coat now with the Lt. Commander's stripes on the sleeve cuff, Loren shrugged into her new rank.

After she finished buttoning up Harm said, "I believe the next part is yours Bobby."

"Yes sir," Bobby said with enthusiasm as he went to stand in front of Loren.

Bobby placed his hands gently on Loren's shoulders and leaned in to give her just a peck on the lips. As their lips met though, Loren had other ideas as she suddenly wrapped her arms around her husband and deepened the kiss. There were brief whistles and catcalls. After the requisite 20 seconds, Creswell coughed extravagantly.

The couple broke apart and stood at attention before the general. Creswell first shook Loren's hand and then Bobby's. "Congratulations Lt. Commander." He offered them tissues from the ubiquitous box on the conference table for them to remove the smeared lipstick. The two went to sit down at the conference table.
After that, the other the officers were called to receive their orders until it came to Carolyn Paget.

"Commander Paget front and center," Creswell ordered.

When Carolyn went to stand at attention, Harm gave her the new orders saying, "Congratulations XO."

Carolyn was completely surprised at being appointed to the position. She blushed furiously and smiled brightly as Harm shook her hand. After she shook Creswell's hand, she took her seat.

Creswell said in conclusion, "Now that we got the festivities out of the way, you all will see in your orders that you have until this next Monday the 13th to report to your new offices. Until then you have the rest of the week to get your personal arrangements straightened out. That is all."

"Attention on deck," Harm called.

Creswell said, "Dismissed!" Then he and Harm turned and walked out of the room.

As they walked down the hall they heard the excited murmurings of the happy group of sailors and marines.

Creswell asked Harm, "How is Colonel Marshall?"

"Sarah's doing well sir. This last weekend was good for her. She is usually her best the weekend and the subsequent week between chemo sessions."

"Good, when I get back to my office I'll give her a call and see if it's alright for Dora and me to visit this afternoon. I'll let Turner hold the fort down."

"Sarah would like that very much sir," Harm replied.

"What about bringing something to eat?"

"That would be fine but it has to be cooked. She can't have raw fruits or vegetables. Believe it or not there's too much risk for infection with that," Harm reminded Creswell.

"I'll keep that in mind," Creswell said.

By that time they reached the general's office where Creswell bid Harm, "Well good to see you Captain. Enjoy your new staff."

"Thank you sir," Harm said as he retrieved his cover. They shook hands and Harm briefly locked it up as Creswell said, "Dismissed captain."

"Aye, aye sir," Harm said as he did a perfect about face and walked out the door.

After Harm left Creswell made a phone call. After he heard what he needed to hear, he keyed the intercom. "Yeoman Rabb, please pass the word for Cmdr. Turner."


Sturgis came in two minutes later and stopped in front of Creswell's desk, braced to attention and said, "Cmdr. Turner reporting as ordered sir."

"Stand at ease Commander. I'm leaving early today on a personal matter. I need you to mind the store until secure today."
Aye sir, are there any special instructions?

"Yes don't pull a fire drill. Commander Ridgeway wouldn't like that. I'll be in tomorrow morning," Creswell replied.

"Aye sir." was all Sturgis got out before Creswell got his hat then walked out the door.

1600 hours

Marshall Residence

Florida Ave., NW

Sarah was sitting on the couch watching 1&½ year old David play. David had all his stuffed animals spread out on the living room floor. He would pick one up and bring it over to his mother. Sarah would tell him what the animal was and make the appropriate sound that fit the animal. David would giggle and run back to his menagerie and get another to present to his mother.

Sarah was dressed in her usual two layers of clothing, sweats with flannel pajamas underneath. She had on sweat socks and a white wool cap.

Deanne and Maureen were there helping care for their daughter. David was presenting his next animal to his mother when the doorbell rang.

"Whoa big fella," Sarah said as she was just able to grab David by the shoulder straps of his overalls. David was always ready to run to the door when the bell rang.

Maureen came into the living room and went through to answer the door. When she opened it up she said, "Good afternoon General Creswell and Mrs. Creswell."

"Good afternoon Mrs. Marshal and please call be Gordon."

"And call me Nora as well please," Nora Creswell asked as she shook Maureen's hand.

"Okay and it's Maureen, please." As the Creswells came into the living room, Sarah went to stand, but Creswell waved his hand and said, "Relax colonel, we're not in uniform. This is only a social call. Your husband and Captain Rabb said you liked visitors."

He went over to the couch and shook Sarah's hand. After Dora did the same thing Sarah curled her legs up under her and bade them to "Please sit."

Indicating her son who was now sitting nestled into her on the couch, Sarah said, "This is David. He's 1&½. He's our St. Patrick's baby. David, go over and say hi to the Creswells."

David slid off the couch and went over and shook first Gordon's hand and then Dora's. Dora was amused that he went to climb onto her lap. When Dora looked over to Sarah, she just nodded her approval. David stood up on her knees and gave her a kiss or almost one. For the baby it was just his lips touching her cheek and him saying "mm-maa". Then he slid off Dora's lap and went over to his toys.

"David is not shy. He'll go to anyone to show his affection. He knows when John and I like and trust someone," Sarah explained.

As Gordon and Dora sat together on the loveseat, Maureen asked them, "Can I get you anything to drink. We have cola, ginger ale, and black cherry seltzer."
"Ginger ale is fine for me," Gordon said.

"And the seltzer is good for me as well," Dora replied.

I'll be right back," Maureen said.

As she left Deanne came in with a bottle for David.

Sarah made the introductions. "General, Mrs. Creswell, this is my mother Deanne Mackenzie."

Deanne shook hands all around. She said, "I'll take David upstairs so he won't disturb you."

Before Deanne could get David though, he brought over a stuffed lion to Gordon. He said in his baby way, "What dat?"

"Well that looks like a lion there," Gordon replied as he made a show of examining the toy.

"What tound?"

"He roars," Gordon replied.

"Nooo! What tooound?" David said slapping Gordon's knees insisting that he make the right sound.

Gordon got the idea as he took a breath and let out what he thought was a passable imitation of a, "Roooor!"

David started giggling hysterically. He took the lion back to his group of animals to get another one.

This went on for a few more minutes as David brought over one toy animal after another and repeated the process with Gordon.

Dora, Sarah and the two grandmothers were enjoying the show. The funniest was when David brought over a stuffed chimpanzee. Gordon did the whole ape thing with the grimaces, the hands under the armpits and the "hoo, hoo" sounds, very much to David's delight.

Finally David exhausted his selections. He went over to stand in front of Gordon and raised his hands saying, "Up!"

Gordon looked over to Sarah who again nodded in approval. Gordon picked the boy up and sat him on his lap. However David didn't just want to sit. He stood on the general's knees, raised his hands up and hugged Gordon who could only hug him back.

All the women joined together to say "Aahh."

When David released him, he went to snuggle into Gordon's lap. Gordon adjusted the boy so David felt secured. He asked David, "So little man what do you want to be when you grow up, a sailor or a marine?"

Sarah answered with, "Oh I think we have him set, listen. David?"

When David turned to his mother, Sarah called, "Semper Fi!"

David pumped his fist in the air and said very emphatically, "Ooh rah!"

Gordon said in admiration, "I see you're raising this child right. Don't you have others?"
"Yes we do. Besides David, there's Chloe who's 17, Caroline who turned 5 on August 28th and Patrick who is going to be 4 on November 3rd. They should be home from high school, kindergarten and pre-k with their father any minute now," Sarah proudly replied.

As Sarah said that, she heard the front gate to the driveway open and then their Trailblazer pull into the driveway. This was followed shortly by the "bang" of the backdoor opening and running feet through the kitchen and dining room. David slid off Gordon's lap and went around meeting his brother Patrick.

"Packey!" David exclaimed.

"Hiya Davey," Patrick said as he hugged his brother.

Patrick was followed into the room more sedately by Caroline and Chloe.

After they properly greeted their mother, Sarah made the introductions, "Kids we have company. This is General Creswell and Mrs. Creswell."

After the older children greeted the Creswells, John came into the living room. As the Creswells stood he shook Gordon's hand and gave a nice kiss on Dora's cheek.

"Gordon, Dora nice to see you again," John said to Mrs. Creswell.

John sat down on the couch next to Sarah and gave her a kiss on her forehead. She moved to snuggle into him.

The Creswells saw this and smiled. To them Sarah looked like she couldn't wait for John to be home from work.

All through this Chloe put David on her hip and herded the children upstairs. David made a very cute and comical picture as he let his bottle dangle from his lips and waved "bye-bye" as he was carried up the stairs.

Sarah said, "Chloe will get Caroline and Patrick changed out of their school uniforms."

"Where do the children go to school?" Dora asked.

"Caroline and Patrick go to our parish school, St. Thomas Apostle, that's where Sarah and I got married. Chloe is a senior at Gonzaga College High School. She's going to apply for admission to the Naval Academy. She is maintaining a 3.8 GPA. She is also doing well in the Civil Air Patrol and other extracurricular activities for that," John said.

"Also Chloe's got a lot of people in her corner in former President Bartlett and former SECNAV Nelson wanting to write recommendations for her. I think John's dad also knows a congressman who will write a recommendation for her," Sarah replied. John nodded in agreement.

"Our daughter Camilla just started the Naval Academy this past summer," Gordon replied.

Dora continued, "For a while there, Cammie was lonely. But after a few phone calls home, she adjusted."

"Maybe Cammie will be Chloe's plebe commander when she gets there," John said.

"That would be amusing," Gordon said.

Dora asked the question everyone knew was coming, "So Sarah what is your prognosis?"
Sarah replied, "My doctors tell me that I am responding well to the chemotherapy. Each post chemo dose scan shows that there is no cancer. Because of that, I don't need radiation treatment or a bone marrow transplant. My last chemo session is right before Thanksgiving. The reason I'm responding so well to the treatment is because we caught this thing early."

"Depending on what the doctors say, Sarah may be able to resume her duties right after the New Year," John added.

"Hopefully by then my hair will start growing back," Sarah said self-consciously.

"Will you go through a physical review after the New Year?" Gordon asked.

"Yes but it will be modified, both for my medical prognosis and my age. Because of being sick with the Hodgkin's I'm beyond having to be qualified for combat or other such duties. My doctors say that after they see that I have regained my strength, they'll set me up for my review for modified duty, which will include legal work. It will be along the same lines of being pregnant," Sarah replied.

"Will that include firearms training?" Gordon asked.

"Yes it will," Sarah replied simply.

"Well what do you say we have a competition?" Gordon requested.

John chortled before he said, "Be careful what you're asking for. Besides qualifying as an expert in pistol and rifle, Sarah is also a sniper. She beat Harm and I last time she qualified."

"What would the stakes be?" Sarah asked getting into the spirit of the wager, welcoming the challenge.

"How about loser buys a steak dinner for the four of us? What's a good restaurant for that in DC?" Gordon asked.

"John and I have gone to Bobby Van's or Ruth Christ's and they are excellent. So since you're buying general, I like mine medium rare," Sarah said smugly.

"Pretty confident of your win there colonel," Gordon said just as smugly.

"We'll see in January won't we general," Sarah said sweetly.

"Yes we will," Gordon replied.

More pleasant conversation followed before the Creswells left, promising to keep in touch. When Sarah and John saw them to the door, Dora said, "Sarah I hope it all turns out well for you. If you ever need someone else to speak with about this, please call me. I helped my sister through her bout with breast cancer. So I know exactly what you're going through."

"Thank you Dora I'll keep that in mind," Sarah said as they shook hands.

John and Sarah watched the Creswells go down the walk before they closed the door.

Thursday, November 25, 2004

Thanksgiving Day

1630 Local Time
It was two days past Sarah's final chemo dose. Even though she wasn't at her best, she insisted that they go to the Rabbs to celebrate Thanksgiving. John and Harm's parents would be there along with Cathy McMahon, Ann Marie & Peter's family, Jennifer & Sergei's family, Gram, Deanne and Uncle Matt.

As they went to sit for dinner, Diane took the seat at Harm's right hand at one end of the table and sat Sarah at the other end with John at her right hand. The rest of the large group of family, including Chloe & Mattie sat around the table. After Harm said grace he turned the traditional holiday toast over to Sarah, who looked splendid in her orange silk dress and a matching head scarf.

"As you all know I completed the last dose of chemo this past Tuesday. Thanks to the medication they gave me, I'll be able to keep down whatever I eat of this wonderful feast. The doctors tell me that I am, so far, cancer free. The final PET scan is scheduled for just after the New Year. That way all the chemo medication will have passed out of my system. Throughout this ordeal I have had the most wonderful support from not only my husband, who I love more than anything in this world, but also my truly wonderful sister, who donated the platelets and blood at every chemo session. Diane I love you so much for that."

Everyone cheered for Diane who did a shy turtledove tuck, embarrassed by the attention over something that any loving sister could have, would have done.

After the cheers stilled, Sarah continued, "As for my other sisters Jennifer and Ann Marie and our niece Cathy. It really warmed my heart when you and our other friends shaved your heads in solidarity for me. Thank you so much for that."

Cathy, Jennifer and Ann Marie bowed their heads to acknowledge that as Sarah went on.

"I also appreciated that Uncle Matt and 'all my Mothers' in Deane, Maureen and Trish were here. They have been invaluable in helping pick up the slack in caring for me as well as the rest of my family. Thank you so very, very much for that."

Uncle Matt and the three moms raised their own fluted glasses in acknowledgment.

Sarah went on, "I would be remiss in not mentioning that it was Harm who was the biggest help. Back in June on the night of AJ's dining out, I asked him to be the other man for John. He didn't flinch as he helped my husband at those times when he was at his most tired, showing him that he was allowed to take a break in caring for the children and me. I've said it before and I'll say it again, Harm you're the best brother-in-law that a girl can have and I am eternally grateful for it."

Everyone clapped at that. Harm smiled as he raised his glass and bowed his head in acknowledgement.

Sarah continued as she picked up her champagne flute filled with sparkling cider, "So in the spirit of the holiday, I want to acknowledge that as one big family, we are ready to support each other and I give thanks for that. May we all have many more years to come."

The family cheered in agreement as they enjoyed the holiday dinner.
Chapter 128

Timing Is Everything

Saturday, January 8, 2005

1900 Hours

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Concert Hall

1818 N St NW

Washington, DC

Waiting in the wings of the theater, Colonel Sarah Marshall was nervous. She was looking out to the drum set that she set up the earlier that afternoon. She was wearing the bright red tunic and her floor length Marine Blue skirt which was the uniform of the President's Own United States Marine Band. The band's director, Colonel Michael J. Coburn was about to go out and begin the show with the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. Sarah would wait for her turn to go out and play the drums for the number which she was practicing for the last two months.

Colonel Coburn knew of Sarah's drumming skills. One time in August 2003, he saw her play at the band's headquarters at the Marine Barracks at 8th & I. Sarah went there with her family to see the Friday Evening Parades. After the concert she and her family were able to chat with Colonel Coburn.

After they exchanged pleasantries Sarah told Col. Coburn, "I have some musical training."

"Really what do you play?" Coburn asked.

"The drums, I learned how to play as a teenager and just picked it up again this past year," Sarah said.

"Well let's see what you can do, say after tomorrow afternoon's practice," Coburn offered.

"Ah sure. What time is good?" Sarah asked a bit embarrassed at the request.

"Make it 1500," Coburn replied.

So Sarah took him up on the offer. As they played the rock and jazz numbers that she knew, Coburn saw that Sarah was a kick-ass drummer. During her time at home dealing with her illness, John would come home a lot of days to hear Sarah on her drums.

What got her to perform on the Kennedy Center stage was the phone call she received from Col. Coburn last fall.

Flashback:

Friday, October 22, 2004
Sarah was sitting on the living room couch reading a story to David, who was getting drowsy. It was eleven days after her latest chemo dose and it was one of her good days. The day after receiving each chemo dose was a good day. It was the three days after that day that Sarah felt the after effects of the chemo followed by the exhaustion that lasted about three more days.

Maureen Marshall was staying that week. She would be going home the next morning. Now she brought in a bowl of Chicken soup and a peanut butter & jelly sandwich and placed it on the serving table Sarah pulled up in front of her. Sarah loved that Loren just kept supplying her with her soup.

"Thanks mom," Sarah gratefully as she starting sipping the soup. Maureen went to gather up a now sleeping David and put him in the playpen in front of the couch.

As Sarah was eating the living room phone rang. Sarah heard Maureen's side of the call as she answered, "Hello Marshall residence? Oh good afternoon Colonel Coburn. This is Maureen Marshall. Yes John's mother. Yes Sarah can take a call."

Sarah looked up and nodded.

Maureen handed over the phone. Sarah spoke, "Hello Colonel Coburn."

"Sarah let's drop the titles please. Otherwise we'll sound like John Wayne and Lawrence Harvey in "The Alamo" "coloneling" each other to death," Coburn said pleasantly.

Sarah chuckled as she replied, "Okay Michael how are you doing?"

"Oh I'm fine Sarah. I'm just calling to see how you're doing. I called the JAG Judiciary Offices asking after you and they told me that you were on medical leave. Because of the HIPAA laws, no one was at liberty to tell me what was wrong. Is it serious?"

"Well serious enough. It's Hodgkin's. It's very treatable and the prognosis is good. I'm into my fifth month of chemo therapy, which I take every fifteen days. The chemo dose knocks me out for a few days. Today is one of my good days. So far I'm doing well"

"Well I'm glad to hear that. The reason I first called your office Sarah was to make a request of you. Though now I think it's more like I'm also giving you an incentive to get well."

"Oh, what do you have in mind Michael?"

"Well I hope you've been practicing on your drums."

"Really, why?"

"Next January 8th, the combined Marine Band and Chamber Orchestra are performing a benefit concert for the USO at the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall. Along with the traditional music we play, we'll be doing some big band, jazz and classic rock numbers. We are also asking around the Navy & Marine service people living in and around DC who also are musically inclined if they wanted to participate. After seeing your performance a couple of summers ago, I thought to call you first."

Sarah was a bit surprised as well as honored at the request. She managed to hold her emotions in check as she asked, "Ah well my chemo therapy will be completed by Thanksgiving. After that I'm going to need some time to practice with the band members."
"Well as long as you're up for it, we can make a schedule for that after the Thanksgiving holiday."

"Well then all I can say is that I can't wait to get started. If you want, you can e-mail me the sheet music of songs at, (Sarah gave her e-mail address), that you need me to practice and I can get started while I'm at home."

"Good to hear. Now that I have your e-mail address, I can shoot them out by the end of the day."

"Very good, I'll look forward to getting them. Will that be all Michael?"

"No Sarah that's fine. I look forward to practicing with you. I mean this in the sincerest way, be well."

"Thank you Michael. I'm looking forward to playing with the band as well. Goodbye for now."

"Goodbye Sarah." Coburn said as the call ended.

End of Flashback

To start of the show, Col. Coburn went out and took his place at the conductor's stand. The combined orchestra rose to greet him. After the members sat back down, Coburn raised his baton to begin, the playing of the National Anthem. The rendition was very stirring.

At the conclusion of the anthem, Coburn turned to address the audience.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our concert to benefit the USO. In addition to our regular band and orchestra members, we have the privilege to host some of our service members as guest performers. All of these performers have been rehearsing with us for the past two months. I think you will be happy with their performances."

There was a brief round of applause. After it died down, Coburn went on, "Our first guest performer is a judge in the Navy's JAG Corps. She joined the Marines through ROTC at the University of Minnesota where she graduated in 1989. She was awarded the Bronze Star in 1995 for action in Kosovo, the Legion of Merit in 1997, for helping to retrieve the Declaration of Independence and the Meritorious service Medal in 2001 for safely getting US Embassy personnel away from a riot in Aceh, Malaysia. In all that time she has also flourished as a "kickass drummer". Here now to perform the drum solo of Benny Goodman's big band rendition of Louis Prima's classic "Sing-Sing-Sing" is Colonel Sarah Marshall."

Sarah walked out from stage left, drinking in the warm applause. She met Coburn at her drum set and shook his hand. She smoothed her long skirt under her as Coburn kept the stool steady for her to sit at her drum set. As she sat she glanced very briefly at her family sitting in the first two rows. She gave them a smile to reassure them. Then she looked up at Coburn who once again stood at the conductor's stand to signal to him that she was ready.

At the downbeat of the baton Sarah was off. She went through the first part of the solo then the band joined in at the expected time. Through the whole performance Sarah had the biggest smile on her face as she went through the number as if she was doing it all her life. She showed herself to be a drumming artist rather than a drumming technician. Her innate sense of timing helped her to keep up with the band as the two months of practice paid off.

Throughout the whole selection, John was sitting leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped in front of him. He had his head down and his eyes closed as he listened to the music trying to concentrate on his Sarah's drumming. Chloe, Carolyn, Patrick and David were watching their mother's performance in awe. David was cute as he stood in front of Chloe's seat at
the rail in front of the front row staring up at his mom.

Soon the number came to its crescendo. As the music ended at the last downbeat, the Marshall family was just a hair faster than the rest of the audience as they leapt to their feet to start the applause. As the applause went on, Chloe let out a whistle cheer.

Sarah stood, and took her bows. She wore the biggest smile as she waved to her family and friends.

She sat back down as Coburn introduced the next artist. "For our next selection we'll stay at Navy JAG as our next guest performer plays the guitar. He graduated the Naval Academy in 1989. He is a Silver Star recipient as well as a four time recipient of the Navy's Distinguished Flying Cross. Here to play the guitar solo for the Surfaris’ classic Wipeout along with Colonel Marshall again on the drums is Captain Harmon Rabb."

Harm came out from stage right, dressed in his Mess Dress uniform. He shook Coburn's hand and picked up the electric guitar that was waiting on the stand next to the leader's platform. He strummed it a bit to ensure it was plugged in. Then he signaled to Coburn that he was ready.

The classic intro to Wipeout was played and then Sarah launched into the drum solo. Harm followed right along with the guitar solo. As the song went along many of the children in the audience got up and started to dance at their seats "sixties' style. It was a joyous site to behold.

As the song came to the end, there was thunderous applause.

Sarah got up and took her bows. She made her exit to stage left and walked down the steps to the audience. A stage hand met her at the bottom of the steps and escorted Sarah to her seat next to John.

"You were great," John whispered in her ear, before he kissed her cheek.

"Thanks sweetie," Sarah acknowledged. As she got comfortable she saw Harm go and replace the electric guitar and take up a plugged in acoustic guitar and sit on the stool at the center of the stage. He strummed it to test the sound and then he signaled Coburn that he was ready.

Coburn went on with, "Our next number is both classical and rock. Captain Rabb will now perform Mason Williams' beautiful Classical Gas.

Harm started the slow strumming that began the song and just like before, he and the orchestra were off.

It was about another forty minutes until the performance ended. The audience, which consisted mostly of the families of the guest artists and dignitaries from government, went down to the reception hall. The Rabbs and Marshalls were standing together as they mingled. Sarah held tightly onto John's hand. Other than the one time with Col. Coburn, she didn't want to shake hands as she was still a bit susceptible to getting infected, even almost seven weeks after her last chemo dose. The rest of her family and friends helped form a sort of barrier around her, watching that no one got too close.

They saw SECNAV and Mrs. Sheffield come toward them. John smiled as he saw that Mrs. Sheffield whispered to her husband just before they reached the Marshalls.

"Captain Rabb, Colonel Marshall, your performances were terrific," Sheffield said with his hands clasped behind his back, as his wife instructed him.

Harm replied first with , "Thank you Mr. Secretary. It was almost like our family jam sessions."
Everyone shared a chuckle at that before Sarah replied with, "Thank you as well Mr. Secretary. I was honored that Col. Coburn asked me to perform."

"And how are you doing otherwise Colonel?" Sheffield asked Sarah.

"All in all I'm doing fine Mr. Secretary. I finished the chemotherapy just before last Thanksgiving. The farther away I get from that, the stronger I get. The band rehearsals the last two months helped a lot in that. I'm still wearing a wig as my hair hasn't grown back enough to be presentable yet; though my eyebrows have grown back. I don't have to use as much liner as before. I'm having my final post chemo PET scan this coming Monday. That will tell me if the chemo worked or if I need more treatment; so John and I are saying our prayers hoping for a good outcome."

"Well I hope your prayers are answered. I look forward to hear that you've resumed your full duties," Sheffield said as he dipped his head in respect before he and Mrs. Sheffield moved on.

Eventually General and Dora Creswell made it to the Marshalls.

"Colonel, are you ready for your physiological review next week?" Gordon asked.

"Yes sir I am. As I just told Secretary Sheffield, the farther I get from my chemotherapy, the stronger I get. I've built myself up from speed walking to running a bit. I'll be able to pass the review. Is our bet on the range qualifications still on, General?" Sarah asked cheekily.

"Yes it is. Still either way it comes out, win or lose, we'll get a steak dinner out of it," Creswell replied with a smile.

John and Sarah also smiled at that.

It wasn't long after that that the party ended and the families gathered their children and went home.

Monday, January 10, 2005
1400 Hours Local
NNMC
Bethesda, MD

John and Sarah were waiting in Dr. Morrison's reception area. Sarah had just completed the blood work and other tests that went along with the PET scan in evaluating the efficacy of her six cycles of chemotherapy. They took the blood from the "port" that was still embedded in her chest.

Soon Dr. Morrison opened his office door and looking at the Marshalls with a smile he said, "Come on in. We have some good news to discuss."

Sarah practically skipped into the office. She went to sit at the round conference table at the chair Dr. Morrison was holding for her.

As he sat down he sorted the notes on the table before he began. "Okay your tests and PET scan confirm what we've been seeing throughout the course of your treatment. As you know we dropped using the Bleomycin from the ABVD after treatment 3b due to risk of lung toxicity. That omission didn't allow for any of the metastasis in the lymph nodes where we first found the cancer to reoccur. In fact the latest PET scan shows that there are no more affected lymph nodes. Judging by that, I would say that you Sarah are one of the 77% of patients that show no new metastasis after ABVD Treatment. I am confident to tell you that you are cancer free."
Sarah was wearing her watery smile as the emotion of the news hit her. It was John's very enthusiastic hug and long kiss on her cheek that brought about her equilibrium. She found her voice as she said, "Oh thank you Dr. Morrison. That's the best news that I've heard since last spring."

Morrison continued smiling as he replied, "You're welcome colonel. I've already scheduled the surgery that will remove your chemo port for tomorrow here at 0800 hours. That will give you the week to rest up while the incision heals."

That's great doctor," Sarah replied.

You still need to come back for yearly check-ups to ensure that there is no reoccurrence and to check your heart and lung function. I fact instead of the usual running out on an obstacle course, you are going to go through a cardiac stress test on an inclining elliptical treadmill. That way we can monitor your heart and lung function more closely. When you leave, speak with my receptionist to schedule a day in the Rehabilitation Department for say for a week from tomorrow if you like. As a matter of fact Admiral I checked your medical record. You're due for a stress test yourself."

John laughed as he replied, "The couple that stress tests together, stays together."

Sarah and Morrison laughed along with him. They all got up shook hands and left.

Saturday, January 22, 2005
0900 Hours Local Time

Marine Corps Base Quantico
Quantico, VA

The day dawned dry and unseasonably warm with the temperatures in the mid to upper forties. Sarah and John got out of their brand new Jeep Grand Cherokee. They were dressed in the Navy and Marine BDUs with the quilted field jackets to hold out the slight cold. They were each carrying a rifle case and tote bag with their small weapons inside.

They paused from walking away from their car when they saw that General Creswell was pulling up along the opposite side.

As they grew abreast of each other, Creswell commented, "Beautiful day to win a competition."

Sarah replied, "Yes it is, sort of Goldilocks kind of day, not too cold or too warm, just right."

They entered the range office and registered for their qualification session. Then they entered the armory and had the range safety officer check their weapons to verify that they were in correct working order.

After the check was completed, they gathered their weapons up and walked through the backdoor on their way to the outdoor range.

As they walked Creswell asked, "So colonel how was your physiological test?"

"Oh it was fine as we passed. John and I did it together at the hospital. What with all the crap I had to deal with from the cancer, doing it as a medical stress test on the inclining elliptical treadmill was best. As a result of that we don't need to go through the regular running of an obstacle course. The treadmill is very advanced. It is attached to a video that simulates terrain. It lowers and raises itself to match the terrain that is chosen."
"What terrain did you choose?" Creswell asked.

"Why Quantico's running trail, of course" Sarah said with a smile.

John chortled at his wife's gotcha moment as Creswell shook his head in defeat.

They reached the range house and registered for the qualification process. After they readied their weapons, the range safety officers brought over the targets they would use.

They started with the M16A2 rifle. They were given a total of 70 rounds. They were to fire the rifle from the standing position, the kneeling position and the prone position. The maximum point value that could be scored was 250 points. A score of 190 to 205 is awarded a Marksman Badge, 206 to 219 is awarded Sharpshooter Badge and 220 to 250 is awarded the highly prized Expert Marksman Badge.

Sarah already had an Expert Marksman Badge. Each year she strived to keep it.

The rifle firing range sequence would be:

- **50 meters** - Semi-slow fire, standing- 2 rounds at a 5 second exposure, kneeling- 2 rounds at a 5 second exposure and rapid fire-kneeling-6 rounds at a 15 seconds exposure; 10 rounds total

- **100 meters** –Semi-slow fire, standing- 2 rounds at a 5 second exposure, kneeling- 2 rounds at a 5 second exposure, prone-2 rounds at 2 exposures -10 seconds each, Rapid fire, kneeling-4 rounds at a 60 second exposure; 10 rounds total.

- **200 meters** – Semi-slow fire, standing- 3 rounds at a 5 second exposure, kneeling- 3 rounds at a 5 second exposure, prone-4 rounds at 4 exposures -10 seconds each, Rapid fire, kneeling-10 rounds at a 60 second exposure; 20 rounds total.

- **300 meters** – Semi-slow fire, standing- 3 rounds at a 10 second exposure, kneeling- 3 rounds at a 10 second exposure, prone-4 rounds at 4 exposures -10 seconds each, Rapid fire, kneeling-10 rounds at a 60 second exposure; 20 rounds total.

- **500 meters** – Semi-slow fire, kneeling-5 rounds at 5 exposures-10 seconds each, prone-5 rounds at 5 exposures-10 seconds each; 10 rounds total

After they completed the rifle exercise, they moved onto the pistol qualifications. All three used the 9mm Berettas. Out of a possible 50 points the breakdown was: 25-34 Marksman, 35-39 Sharp Shooter and 40-50 Expert Marksman.

Again Sarah had the Expert Badge.

The pistol qualification drill using a standard NRA 50-yd pistol target went as:

- **25 yards** - 15 rounds slow fire (10 min.)

- **7 yards** - quick reaction drills (1 round in 3 seconds, pistol is pointed down at 45 degree angle, not in holster) 5 of these, each shot is double action – 5 total rounds.

- **7 yards** - quick reaction drills (2 rounds in 5 seconds, pistol is not holstered, pointed down at 45 degrees) 4 of these - 8 total rounds

- **15 yards** - magazine change/sustained fire (3 rounds from first mag, 3 rounds from second mag, all in 20 seconds) two of these - 12 total rounds.
Total of 40 rounds.

All three finished on the pistol range at about the same time. As they walked off the range John said, "While we wait for them to calculate our scores, Biff come with us. There is one more thing we want you to try today."

Creswell looked intrigued as he replied, "Lead on Admiral."

When they got to the range house they saw Harm waiting for them, dressed in his BDUs. He snapped to and saluted Creswell and John as they approached.

John waved his hand in the area of his head in return while Creswell crisply returned the salute. He greeted Harm, "Good morning Captain. Here for your own qualifications?"

"Yes sir I am," Harm replied.

"Where are your weapons?" Creswell asked as he did not see any of the same cases John and Sarah were carrying.

"I have my weapon set up this way sir," Harm said as he turned to lead the way as to another part of the weapons range.

They reached a gate which was guarded by a huge African American Chief Petty Officer, with his own M151A slung over his shoulder in the prescribed manner. He saluted the officers as they approached. As the senior officer, John returned the salute.

The chief recognized Harm, Sarah and John as they produced their personalized SEAL Identifications.

John announced for Creswell's sake, "Chief, General Creswell is with us."

"Aye, aye sir," the Chief bellowed as he saluted again.

Again John casually waved his hand at the top of his head as they entered the gated area.

They entered another range house and signed in the log at the reception desk. Sitting behind the desk was a Gunnery Sgt. whose name tape on his BDU uniform coat said, "Crockett. He stood up to attention and saluted the officers as they entered.

John greeted Crockett with "Good morning Gunny. We brought General Creswell with us. General, this Gunnery Sergeant Ray Crockett, the best sniper the Corps has ever produced."

Creswell knew of Crockett as he went forward and shook his hand in a firm grip, "It's an honor Gunny."

"Thank you sir," Crockett replied, somewhat embarrassed.

John eased that a bit as he asked, "Do you have everything set up for us?"

"Yes sir admiral. Your, Colonel Marshall and Captain Rabb's weapons are all set. General Creswell would you please step this way and I'll assist you in setting your weapon up."

"Setting my weapon up?" Creswell asked as they all followed Crockett out the door.

They came upon the range slots that had four 7.62x51mm NATO Standard sniper rifles set up on their tripods, ready to be used in the prone position. Two were Marine M40A1 Sniper Rifles and two
were Navy SEAL M14 Sniper Rifles. Sarah got down behind her Marine rifle which had a small red "X" painted on the stock. Harm and John followed suit behind the Navy rifles. They started to prepare their rifles for firing.

Crockett told the foursome, "Admiral, you are target four, Colonel, target three, Captain target two and General target one."

Creswell got down at the rifle where Crockett stopped and asked him, "General have you ever fired an M40A1?"

"No I haven't had the pleasure," Creswell replied.

"Okay general, we'll get you adjusted here. You need to set your scope to 1,000 yards. The wind is blowing left to right about five mph and the target is about 2 feet elevated from this position." (Crockett bent to show Creswell where to make those adjustments on his weapon.) "Then get yourself adjusted to the rifle. Learn where the bolt is and the trigger without looking. Set it against your shoulder and cheek like you would a regular rifle."

Creswell did as he was instructed as Crockett went on, "You only get one shot to hit the target. It is the size of a half-dollar. You may fire when ready. Good luck."

John was first to fire a second before Sarah and Harm fired. Creswell wasn't too far behind to fire last. They kept looking through their scopes to see down the range. They were surprised as they saw that a red flag showing a miss was being waved in front of the targets.

It was Sarah who exclaimed, "Oh boy, Maggie's Drawers!"

With the targets 1,000 yards away you could not see if your shot was true. So it made sense that the range had a video system set up with cameras embedded in the ground just in front of the target coming through to the computer screens set up on the bench against the back wall.

Crockett had the targets on the computer screen in a quad view. He turned to view the screen as he explained, "Okay let's see what we got."

He zoomed in on target 4 and said, "Admiral Marshall you hit your shot." He zoomed in on Sarah's, "You're good as well Colonel Marshall, dead center." Zooming on Harm's he also said, "You're also good Captain Rabb, just like I taught ya."

Sarah, Harm & John grinned at that. They turned their attention to Creswell's camera view. Crockett centered the cursor to the bullet hole shown on the target. "Ah General, you were off target by about four inches to the right."

"How can I be to the right? My cross hairs were on the target," Creswell said.

Crockett explained, "Well general not only do you have to get the crosshairs on the target, you have to take in consideration the direction and strength of the wind and correctly compensate for the bullet drop, gravity and rotation of Earth. To calculate the last three, you would need to be in my school for about a month like these other three officers were. To fix for the wind you needed to adjust your scope back to the left. Let's see what your adjustment was."

Crockett took Creswell's rifle and put it on the bench in front of the computer console. After ensuring that it was safely unloaded, he grunted in disapproval at what he found. "Your scope was set dead center. You should have adjusted it about three degrees to the left. I told you the wind was blowing left to right. That's why your round was wide right, the wind took it."
Creswell nodded his head in understanding. He turned to Sarah and said, "Well let's see what our other range scores were to see who's paying for dinner tonight."

After cleaning their rifles and giving them over to Crockett to store, the four went back to the main range. They met the Range officer who gave Sarah, John and Creswell's score in individually sealed envelopes. They didn't open them until they got to the cars.

Sarah opened her first. She smiled in delight as she announced her scores, "242 Rifle and 45 Pistol. General what was yours?"

Creswell opened his envelope and sighed as he announced out, "238 Rifle and 42 Pistol. It seems that I'm buying tonight."

"You're both rated as experts," John reminded them.

"There is that John. By the way, even though it didn't figure into the competition, what were your scores?"

John opened his envelope and announced, "241 Rifle and 43 Pistol."

"Geez I even got beat by a squid. I'll get you next time Colonel," Creswell said in gracious defeat.

Sarah smiled as she said, "With all respect General, like hell you will."

Creswell smiled at that saying, "I like a confident officer. By the way, what was the red "X" for?"

Sarah replied seriously, "For the one kill I had. I took out the terrorist that was threatening my family sir."

Creswell nodded in understanding. He would read about it in her SRB. Little did he know that that incident was classified and it would not be in the SRB.

He was blissfully unaware of this as he got into his car and drove away.

Monday, January 24, 2005

1000 Hours Local Time

JAG Headquarters

Washington Navy Yard, SE

Creswell had Mike McBurney and Faith Coleman in his office as he told them their next assignment. "You two are going to Gitmo. Three MPs beat and choked a Guantanamo detention camp prisoner into a coma. The injured man was actually Marine Corporal Gino Hatanian who was posing as a detainee in a training exercise about uncooperative prisoners. He finally awoke from his coma, but refused to testify against the MPs."

"So what do you need us to do with that sir?" Faith dared to ask.

"Get him or someone else to tell us the truth Commander," Creswell replied.


"Your flight leaves Andrews this afternoon at 1400. Get to the bottom of this mess without getting any media involved. It's bad enough the bleeding hearts want us to close Gitmo's prison. We don't
need to add fuel to that fire, am I clear?" Creswell asked.

"Yes, sir, crystal clear," Mike answered for he and Faith.

"Good, dismissed," Creswell said.

McBurney and Coleman got up at that and bellowed in unison, "Aye, aye sir!" Then they marched from the office.

When they left Creswell looked at his watch, "I can just make it."

As he walked out past Jennifer's desk he told her, "Let's go Mrs. Rabb, we can't keep her waiting."

They walked up the stairs to the 4th floor ensuring that they would not be caught by her in the elevator. They entered the Judiciary Ops Center. It wasn't as busy as the Main JAG Ops center as it only consisted of each judge's yeoman at their desks which were situated outside each judge's office or chambers. Creswell and Jennifer saw that the staff was standing in the middle of the open space waiting.

Chief Emma Gardner saw Creswell and Jennifer first and beckoned them over to stand next to her. She didn't give the call of attention on deck as Admiral Morris agreed that it was not needed.

As Creswell sidled up to Emma he asked her, "Good I didn't miss her?"

"No sir. The parking lot CP called to say she's just parking her car," Emma replied.

The person in question had just got out of her cherry red Corvette and walked into the JAG Headquarters building. She usually liked to arrive at work at 0800 hours. But today she first had to deliver documentation to BUPERS that stated that she was fit for work after her health crisis.

She was warmly greeted by Gunny Walters and received her personal building pass. As she got into the elevator, she was wondering where all the other people that usually populated JAG HQ were. It wasn't long before she arrived on the 4th floor herself.

Colonel Sarah Marshall walked into the Judicial Bullpen to the sound of "ATTENTION ON DECK!"

Sarah snapped quickly to attention at that. But then she realized that the call was for her. She smiled a somewhat watery smile and softly said, "As you were."

At that the entire company launched into a spirited round of applause. When Sarah reached Jennifer they both enfolded each other in a tight hug. Soon all the Judiciary Staff got their hugs in.

Emma brought a sheet cake forwards on a rolling table. The cake was devil's food chocolate with vanilla frosting that was decorated with the US Flag and the Marine Corps flag. Written under the flags were.

Welcome Back
Colonel Sarah Marshall
We missed you.

Emma gave Sarah the cake server spatula. Sarah made the first cake cut at the corner. After that Emma and Jennifer took over the serving.
After the Judicial staff took turns welcoming Sarah back, Admiral Morris and Creswell began to speak with her.

"Colonel, it's good to have you back," Morris began.

"It's good to be back. I can't wait to hear my first case," Sarah replied.

"That will be soon enough colonel. I have some for you to review before they go to trial. Take the day to get acclimated to the routine again. I would appreciate it if you and General Creswell joined me for lunch today, away from the commissary."

"I look forward to it, sir," Sarah replied as Creswell nodded in agreement.

So began Sarah's first day back at work, at full "judicial" duty, since before AJ Chegwidden's dining out.

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