# Still Here

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## Summary

Caskett; sequel to NOT GOING ANYWHERE; With an unplanned pregnancy, Beckett and Castle start a new chapter in their lives. Together navigating the ups and downs of a new relationship and expectant parenthood.

## Notes

Takes place one month after the events of NOT GOING ANYWHERE
Chapter 1

There it was, that annoying alarm buzzer going off, disturbing her from the pleasant dream she had been having. But now that the infernal device had woke her, Kate Beckett could no longer remember why the dream had been so pleasant or, for that matter, why she was wishing she was back there instead of here in the real world. So, to calm her irritated mind, she glared with malice at the glowing letters that blinked mercilessly, taunting her. Growling softly, she swung an arm out, whacking the top of the offending machine, silencing it.

Letting out a soft groan of frustration, not wanting to leave the warm cocoon created by the bundle of blankets, Beckett slid out of the covers and swung her long legs over the side of the bed. She sat there for a moment, perched on the edge, and rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she straightened her back and raised her arms above her head, stretching. Despite her chosen profession, Beckett really did not like the long hours, or the early mornings. In fact, Beckett hated mornings. That was part of the reason she had become addicted to caffeine, especially when it came in the form of a hot cup of delicious coffee.

However, due to recent developments, and on the advice of her doctor, Beckett had given up coffee—just for the duration. Instead, her new morning pick-me-up had become a warm shower. Normally she showered in the evening before bed, but with all the changes happening in her life, she had been forced to shift her routine, no matter how irritating or frustrating that was. It was not something that came easy to Detective Kate Beckett. She had liked things the way they were, yet she had no complaints about the turn in the tide, so to speak. Especially when it provided her with the opportunity to finally be with whom she really wanted to be with.

Bringing her arms down, Beckett smiled softly and ran her hands in slow circles over her tummy. She was only two months along. The first month had gone by without her really noticing, much of it had been filled with her fretting over how to tell Castle and just how to react herself. But once she had found out, she had set herself to doing what had to be done. Her cheeks still went red with embarrassment from the memory of her breakroom confession. Had she really told him that she was his number one fan? And now another month had passed since that faithful day when Rick Castle found out the truth, about both her pregnancy and her highly guarded feelings.

Admitting those feelings had not been easy for Beckett (in fact, it was probably one of the most difficult things she had ever done), neither had the changes that had happened over the month since those confessions were made. Being only two months along, not many people would be able to tell she was expecting. Even so, she could tell the difference… could feel the changes in her body. It was not just the morning sickness, but she could swear that there were the hints of the eventual bump that would form around her middle. It was not visible to the naked eye, but when she ran her fingers down her stomach, she could feel it.

Letting out a contented sigh, Beckett made a move to stand. However, before she could, two arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her back down to the mattress. She let out a startled cry, barely audible. Blinking past the last foggy remnants of the dreamland, Beckett's eyes went wide as she remembered the events of the previous day. A small smile crept onto her face as the memories came flooding back to her, focusing primarily on the activities that had occurred later that evening, rather than on the day itself, which it had been dull and boring.

"Mmm, where do you think your going?" he hummed as his lips began to play softly across her neck as he nuzzled her hair. "Come back to bed… I'll reward you if you do. I promise."

Beckett squirmed, more from delight than irritation, and let out a low husky breath as his arms...
continued to tangle around her middle, pulling her even further back into bed. She loved it how he kissed her, and her pulse always increased when he touched her. And despite what her prenatal doctor had told her, her sex drive had only seemed to quadruple, which, of course, her bedmate was going to start taking full advantage of, now that they had entered the physical phase of their budding relationship.

She let out a soft giggle as his hands began to work their way up her body, tickling her ribs and teasing the bottom edge of her bare breasts. Closing her eyes, she let out a sigh, knowing she needed to get up, and reluctantly pulled his hands away, forcing herself to stand up off the bed.

"Not now, Castle!" she grumbled, annoyed, yet her tone was playful. In all honesty, she was more irritated that she could not stay in bed than with him for enticing her.

Turning around, placing her hands on her hips to ensure he knew she meant business, Beckett glared down at the ruggedly handsome bestselling mystery author who was currently the other occupant of her bed. He sat up and made a pouting face, looking adorable.

"Castle?" he groaned. "Last night it was Rick! Except for that one time… you remember, don't you? It's kind of a blur, but I remember at one point I had you pinned to the floor… or were we still on the mattress—well, I digress—the point being at one point in the evening's frivolity I—Richard Castle—had you screaming Ricky at the top of your strong and powerful lungs." He smirked smugly at her and wiggled his eyebrows. "God do you have powerful lungs! You know what? I might have temporarily gone deaf last night." He paused and narrowed his brow. "Do you think we woke the neighbors?"

Ignoring his question, Beckett rolled her eyes and gave him a hard glare. "Well, Ricky," she pointedly said, raising an eyebrow, loving how he reacted to her calling him that. "Some of us actually have to work for a living."

"Hey, I work!" he protested, sitting fully up and shaking his head as he cleared it of the cobwebs that no doubt inhabited it's interior.

"Uh-huh," Beckett gave a nod of her head. "Not all of us can afford to wile away the time as ruggedly handsome mystery writers."

"Ruggedly handsome, eh?" Castle grinned triumphantly. "Well, it appears you really are my number one fan!" He shifted, scooting over to sit on her side of the bed.

"A moment of weakness, Castle," Beckett objected with a wave of her hand, still slightly horrified she had actually said that. She knitted her eyebrows together and blamed the hormones. Looking back at his boyish smirk, she placed a finger on his chest, putting some emphasis on her words. "Do… not… get used to it."

Castle nodded. "Whatever," he said in his best imitation of a teenage girl, which was actually quite hilarious, but Beckett was determined not to give him the satisfaction of seeing her laugh. He grinned and stretched. "Anyways, I'll have you know that I've been consulting with the NYPD on homicide cases for almost three years now."

"And are you paid for your consulting work, Mr. Castle?" she smiled playfully as she turned her back to him and began walking towards the bathroom, swaying her hips, knowing the sight of her bare backside would distract him.

"Uh… um…," he stuttered, his mouth hanging open as he stared, transfixed on her rear. "Hey!" Castle shook his head. "Don't try and distract me, you temptress, you!" He jabbed his finger into
the air in mocked outrage. Secretly she found him adorable when he acted like a child, though she knew he was nothing like a child… well, sometimes, yes, but not all the time. "I'll have you know, the lead detective thinks very highly of me," he grinned, jumping up off the bed to follow her.

"Oh? And how do you know that, Castle?" Beckett questioned, looking over her shoulder as she paused at the doorway, drinking in the sight of Castle in all his glory.

He gave her a knowing wink. "Well, where should I begin? Oh yes!" Castle turned back to the bed and made a grand display of gesturing to the tousled sheets.

Beckett bit her lower lip and blushed slightly, remembering last night again. It had been her first time with sober-Castle as opposed to the drunk-Castle she had been with two months ago, which had resulted in her current condition. To tell the truth, this time had not been as wild or crazy. It had been gradual, with a lot more foreplay, severe heavy petting that had very nearly brought her over the edge before they had even connected. And when they did finally connect, Beckett nearly wept with how right it felt.

The passion was there, but they went slow, relishing every moment of it as their bodies mingled and molded together, ceasing to be separate and fusing into one single entity. It was a different kind of lovemaking, a kind that Beckett had never experienced before. Because that's what it truly was, lovemaking… not just sex, but true lovemaking—two souls connecting on both an emotional and an obvious physical level, as well.

The most surprising thing about it all was the fact that he had made her scream like she had never screamed before whilst in the heights of ecstatic. The pace had never really gone beyond the slow steady rhythm with which they had begun, despite the fact they had tumbled off the bed and collided on the floor. Remembering that, she laughed slightly. That startling drop off the bed had not even created a pause in their slow yet still heated lovemaking, and had only intensified the passion of it, if not the speed. Even though their first time together had been hot and wild, last night had been more memorable, because of what it signified. Last night had not been a wild fling or a one-night stand, but a culmination of a month of simply getting to know each other outside of the precinct.

The day after she had made her confession to him about being pregnant with his child, not to mention admitting her true feelings towards him, and the fierce and passionate kiss that had followed, Beckett had laid out the ground rules for their relationship. One of those rules had been no sex, at least not until they dated for a while. She felt silly for making it a rule, especially since they had already rocked the world together, so to speak, but Beckett wanted to build something more upon their new relationship that had nothing to do with the physical side of things.

She had been completely thrown when Castle had agreed, especially considering he had no real recollection of their night together. So, just to clarify things, she repeated herself, adding that she first wanted to build a more solid foundation. Not to mention she had still, technically, just broken up with Josh, and emotionally (and physiologically) speaking, she did not want to feel that jumping straight into a relationship with Castle was a rebound thing, because, in all honest, that was what Josh had really been. She had been heartbroken when she had broken up with Demming to go to the Hamptons with Castle only to have him then leave with Gina. Now that she was going to dive into with Castle, she wanted it to be more than just that… more than what she had had with Josh or any other man. She wanted it to last.

So instead of getting her into bed as quickly as possible, Richard Castle was a perfect gentleman—well, one who would occasionally take license to touch her in certain places she had long since denied him access. Their make out sessions were legendary, and more than made up for the lack of
any other physical activities. Castle was an expert with his hands. Oh, the things he could do with just a finger.

Beside the occasional make out sessions, which were rather frequent, Castle courted her like she was some royal princess that needed to be wined and dined (minus the wine). He was always there for her, going to her prenatal appointments with her, where Beckett was silently thrilled about being able to show off the father of her child, especially when he behaved more like an adult at the doctor's office. And he was so good with the other couples, much better than Beckett was herself. Then again, she had to remind herself, he had gone through this before… when Meredith (the deep-fried Twinkie, as Castle called her) had been pregnant with Alexis. He would chat comfortably with the other couples, then look up at her and give her his boyish smirk, already scheming to set up play dates for their child.

Then yesterday, after four long weeks, which was how the month had seemed to Beckett, because she could hardly stop herself from fantasizing about being with him again, Castle finally made his move. They had been enjoying themselves doing the normal dating things: Going out to dinner, movies, walks in the park, that sort of stuff… avoiding any situation or activity that might lead to sex (except their make out sessions, which were desperately need to make up for the lack of any sex). And to be honest, Beckett had started to become anxious. She desperately wanted to feel him between her legs again, and she was rapidly running out of patience, not to mention excuses for not jumping up to the next stage, especially considering he had already knocked her up, so to speak.

The precinct had been quiet all day yesterday, not that that was a bad thing, it was good that people weren't killing each other, but it did lead to a frightfully dull day. Castle was there, of course, and tried entertaining everyone with his antics. And whenever Beckett and Castle would get up to go somewhere, Ryan and Esposito would make snickering comments about the two going off to "shag" somewhere. Castle would laugh back at them, and oh so nonchalantly imply that they just might be correct. Part of her was annoyed by it all, but secretly she actually liked teasing the boys.

On that note, one day they had gone to the breakroom to get some coffee. Castle whispered into her ear a wickedly hilarious idea, just to get at Ryan and Esposito. So, they shut and locked the door, closed the all blinds, and then proceeded to rattle the table around, making it sound like they were going at it like rabid dogs.

When they opened the door with tousled hair and disheveled appearances, the two wisecrackers seemed stunned and at a loss of words. Neither Ryan or Esposito had expected such a thing, they had only been joking. Beckett straightened her hair and winked at Castle before going back to her desk. The two boys sat there with slack jaws unable to speak. Esposito looked like he wanted to whip out his phone and call Lanie. Then Castle meandered over to them and jumped at them, calling them such easy marks. The two laughed it off, but looked slightly annoyed at having been fooled. As Castle sauntered back to his chair, Beckett had a feeling the two partners were going to try and come up with a way to get back at them.

Well, to make a long story short—TOO LATE—Beckett had decided that it was finally time to bump their relationship up to the next level, but she was unsure how to broach the subject with Castle. For three years they had sexually baited one another with loaded comments and innuendoes, that now that she wanted the real thing, Beckett had no idea how to proceed. Not for the first time, Beckett felt fortunate that Castle could read her so well.

After finishing up the last bit of paperwork she had, Beckett stood up and grabbed her jacket. Castle obediently closed his notepad, placed it in the drawer she had allowed him to use on her desk and stood as well. He gave a smile and a wave to the boys, and then helped her into her jacket. Beckett was still a little uncomfortable with his public displays of affection, especially at
work, but she was getting used to him placing his arm over her shoulder when they left the precinct at the end of the day. He had been a good boy for the entire month, and somehow managed to keep his oh so talented hands off her on the job, but once she was off duty, he was always there with the touchy feely stuff.

Leading her to the elevator, they got in and she subconsciously eased into his hold. She let out a sigh, trying to think of a way to broach the subject with Castle without getting caught up in one of their playful banter when he surprised her with making the first move.

Castle leaned over and brought his lips close to her ear. "Why don't we skip dinner and go straight back to your place?" he suggested.

Beckett shivered, feeling his warm breath on the nape of her neck. She slowly arched her neck and looked up at him, smiling coyly. "Yes… I… I'd like that."

Castle had smiled and then kissed her cheek, giving her a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows. His hand slipped down from her shoulder and maneuvered itself to the small of her back.

And then they were at her place, slowly tearing off each other's clothes, exploring each other with an ease and calmness that made it seem like they had always been together. However, she could tell that this was a big deal to Castle, because for him—memory wise—this was their first time together, since he did not remember that steamy night two months ago due to his alcoholic induced haze. And as Castle's talented hands explored all her nooks and crannies, Beckett's heart went racing like it had never raced before. As they connected, for what felt like the first time, she was positive that this was it, this was her one and done. Beckett had been waiting her whole life for Mister Right, and never, in her wildest dreams, had she imagined it would be Rick Castle. It was almost like some supreme being had crafted them to be perfect for one another.

XXX

"Becks… Kate?" his voice called her back from her pleasant reverie of last night's delights.

Shaking her head, she blinked and stared back at him. "Rick?"

"Whatcha thinking about?" he asked, inching closer to her, his arms snaking around her middle as he pulled her body flush up against his.

Her cheeks blushed bright pink. "Last night," she confessed.

"Oh," he grinned mischievously. "It was pretty great, wasn't it?"

"Great?" she scoffed, giving him a playful glare. "It was better than great, Rick… it… it was perfect."

"Perfect?" he raised an eyebrow. "You know, Detective, you're setting the bar pretty high for me. How can I top perfect next time?"

Beckett smirked, amazed at how well they slipped back and forth between serious talk and their playful banter, it was one of things she was glad had not changed when their relationship had turned more romantic. "Who says there's going to be a next time?" she retorted, wiggling out of his hold and completing her last few steps past the threshold of the door and into the bathroom.

Castle followed her and leaned against the frame of the door, watching as she turned the shower on and ran her fingers under the water, testing to see if it was warm enough yet. She looked over her shoulder at him and raised her eyebrows.
"What?" he inquired, trying to look innocent.

"Are you coming?" she asked.

"In the shower with you? You bet!" he grinned.

"Yes, that, but later?" Beckett bit her lower lip nervously. Parts of this relationship were still new to her and it was still taking her some time to get used to having him around all the time.

"Oh, for the appointment," he gave a nod of his head. "Yes, of course." Castle stepped over and wrapped his arms around her middle, hugging her from behind. "I will always be there for you, Kate. Always."

She sighed and eased into his touch, moaning slightly as he brushed her hair away from her shoulder to kiss her slender neck.

"Now," he purred into her neck, "why don't I show you how fun a shower with Rick Castle can be."

"Yes… please do," Beckett murmured out in a breathy voice.
Chapter 2

Beckett closed her eyes and backed up into the spray of hot water, soaking her hair and relishing the feel of the relaxing fluidic warmth running down her body. However, the water jetting from the faucet was not the only heat in the shower. Standing in front of her, with his hands firmly placed on her hips, was Richard Castle, a mischievous smile plastered on his face. Part of her could not believe what she was doing. Was it really her that was doing this? Her... Kate Beckett? Yes... apparently it was. Cracking a tiny grin, she leaned her head back, exposing her neck to him as he descended upon her, devouring the supple flesh there with a skill and expertise that had her toes curling.

As the water tumbled down on her, soaking her hair and other parts of her body, Beckett brought her right leg up and slinked it around Castle's, bringing him closer to her. He grinned against her neck and continued to playfully nibble at her wet flesh. His lips danced up her slender neck and over her jaw until he found her lips. She parted them and allowed his tongue in, savoring the flavor that was Castle.

One of his hands moved up to hold her back, pressing her closer to him, as his other hooked around and grabbed a generous helping of her bottom. She moaned into his mouth and grinded her hips against his middle, making him groan in want. She could already tell that he was ready... Hell, she was ready! His hand came back around from her back and he ran it down the middle of her chest, through the valley of her breasts, teasing her as his lips followed, but unlike his hand, did not avoid the soft flesh to be found there.

Beckett involuntarily gasped when he took one of her breasts into his mouth, wrapping his lips around one of her nipples and teasing her with his tongue. She clenched her jaw tight and gripped his hair, keeping him close. A shiver ran up her spine as the hand that was gripping her rear moved, starting to seek out another place. She moaned nervously as his fingers journeyed down her. Beckett had had a wild phase when she was younger, yes, but she had never had sex in the shower. Not with Will. Not with Tom. And certainly never with Josh.

The shower had always been her solitary place to reflect and relax after a long day. Just like her baths, it was a ritual unto itself. It was highly unusual for her to share that time with someone else. No man before Castle had managed to work his way into what had always been her alone time, her sanctuary away from the trouble of the world. And because of that, he was different than all the other men she had been with.

She had told Lanie that the sex with Castle had been beyond amazing, that it was something extraordinary and out of this world, when in all truth and honesty, Beckett could never actually find the words to describe it. But it was more than just the amazing sex; it was the feelings that stirred in her chest with his mere presence.

He would invade her personal space and her breath would hitch. He would barely touch her and her heart would start to race. His lips would press ever so slightly against hers, and her whole world would burst into rapturous bliss. No man had ever caused such an intense reaction in her before. So whenever she would connect with Castle in that most special of ways, that feeling —whatever it was—only magnified, intensifying to a place that made everything wonderful. With him, she could lose herself and be free of all barriers and restraints. She could embrace life and all that that encompassed.

With him, she was whole. Without him, she was incomplete.
His lips moved back up her chest, his teeth grazing past her collarbone, as he worked his way up to her neck to find her pulse point. Beckett's eyes rolled into the back of her head as he kissed her there. She clutched at him, snaking her right leg tighter around him.

"Oh God, Rick," she breathed out, grabbing at him.

Castle chuckled softly into her neck. "I just thought of a title for a Nikki Heat novel."

"Oh yeah, and what's that?" Beckett questioned, moaning slightly as his hand gripped her rear again.

"Wet Heat," his voice was deep and breathy.

"I think that's a little too implicit, Castle, even for you," she said rolling her eyes.

"But it does set a stage and give the reader something to look forward to," Castle murmured into her hair as he playfully nip at her earlobe.

Beckett laughed lightly. "God, please don't tell me you're going to have Nikki and Rook make love in the shower?" she asked in a pleading voice.

"Not to worry, my dear detective," Castle replied with a devilish grin. "I have no intention of sharing our most intimate moments with the world. Those are all for me... you know, for when your unavailable and all I have is my right hand."

For a moment she forgot to breathe. Did he just say what she thought he said? Beckett did not know why, but hearing him refer to pleasuring himself while thinking of her just made her all the more hot and wet for him. She blinked, and heaved in a deep breath. Reaching up, she gripped his face in her hands and looked him directly in the eye.

"Stop talking, you big fool, and explore my wet heat," Beckett raised her eyebrows in disbelief as the words came tumbling out of her mouth in a lower sultry whisper. She could not believe she had just said that. Castle seemed to bring out the worse in her.

A smile touched her lips as his mouth descended upon hers. His free hand moving down to grip her hip, holding her steady as she shivered under the hot water with anticipation of their connection. His fingers gripped her thigh and he hitched her leg up a bit. Breaking the kiss, he rested his forehead against hers and they stared at one another, drinking in the sight of the love and desire reflecting in each other's eyes. Then, with one single upward thrust, he was in her.

Beckett's lower lip quivered and her mouth dropped open as a gasp of undeniable pleasure escaped her lips. Castle sucked her lower lip and his arms wrapped around her, holding her to him, as he directed their movements. She closed her eyes and moaned out loud, feeling the fullness of him inside her core. The moan was louder than she had expected it to be, and her cheeks flushed with concern that the neighbors could hear her cries of pleasure.

Castle shushed her worries away, stealing her focus as he kissed her deeply, pulling her mind away from the fears and concerns of the world, allowing her to concentrate on the here and now. The heat of the shower only seemed to intensify the passion that was burning between. Beckett looped her arms around his neck, helping him to hold her closer, as he continued to guide their movements with his hands on her hips, his fingers digging into the flesh of her backside. She ground her hips against his, rocking and swaying with his movements.

Something about him always made her frantic to have him, and desperate to feel their mutual releases. So, she poured her heart into it, allowing herself to be completely free to concentrate on
the moment, forgetting about everything else. As far as she was concerned the entire world consisted of just the two of them: Her and Castle.

They melded together under the hot jet of water that continued to soak their bodies from above. Castle kissed her deeply, stealing away her breath and silencing the moan that was working its way out. She clutched onto his shoulders, her fingers digging into his skin, as the euphoria clouded everything. She was vaguely aware of the heat from the water as it ran down her back, but only faintly, as if she was only half there.

Beckett clenched her muscles tight and released a breathy moan when he brought her over the edge. God, never had she been so rapidly taken to the rapturous bliss of release. She groaned and breathed in deeply, amazed at the heat of her own cheeks. Her entire body seemed alive with tingling sensations that left her overwhelmed and lightheaded. Castle grinned into her chest as he kissed her breasts. Not knowing what else to do, Beckett gripped his hair, holding him to her, slowly catching her breath as she came back from the orgasmic high he had shown her.

"Castle… Rick… Oh… God…," she muttered incoherently, still too overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of her release.

"Mmm," he hummed against her neck. "Yes, I am godly, aren't I?"

She blinked and smiled, giving his chest a playful slap. "Well, at least I didn't say you were holy or anything."

"Oh Lord, forgive me for I have sinned!" Castle shouted with a smirk, arching his head back and laughing. "Wicked are my ways, and I shall seeketh forgiveness in His righteousness!"

"How about you just help me wash my hair?" she batted her eyelashes at him, holding back the grin that was tugging at the corners of her mouth, as she tried to hide her amusement.

"That I can do," Castle said with a bob of his head, leaning over to pick up the shampoo bottle as she turned her back to him. He popped the cap and poured the soapy residue into his hand. "Now let's get you cleaned up, you naughty girl, you," he teased playfully as he ran his fingers into her hair, working in the shampoo.

With her back safely to him, Beckett bit her lower lip and blushed, still stunned she had allowed him to share a shower with her, not to mention the added intimacy that they had just performed. She had allowed it to happen. Hell, she had even encouraged it. Parting her lips, she moaned softly at the feel of his hands massaging the shampoo into her scalp. No matter how out of the ordinary it was for her to allow something like this, Beckett could not help but enjoy it.

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The elevator doors pinged open and Beckett walked out into her domain: The 12th Precinct. After their shower, she dropped Castle off at his place so he could change and hopefully get some work done on Heat Rises, before he came in and joined them after lunch. As she pulled up to the curb, he had turned to her and winked, claiming that their morning activities had given him some inspiration for Nikki and Rook. He received a playful slap on the chest for the comment, but he still got the reward of a quick kiss before she pushed him out of her car.

"Don't forget," she called out, her heart hammering in her chest as she thought about the appointment.

He turned back to her and placed a hand over his heart and mouthed, "Always." With another wink,
and a blowing kiss, he spun back around and trotted up to his building, the doorman opening the door for him.

A small smile worked its way onto her lips as she walked into the squad room, realizing how that one word had started to mean so much more than just what Webster's dictionary said it meant. The vast number of connotations she had begun to associate with that word, and the images it evoked, were staggering. And it all formed around a central figure: Richard Castle. Her world, which had always been about the job and finding her mother's killer, had started to change, incorporating him into its sphere of influence, quantifying him as important, priceless and irreplaceable.

As she glanced up, she found Esposito deposited behind his desk, his cell attached to his ear. He was leaning back in his chair, speaking softly into the receiver, completely unaware to the audience he now had. Pursing her lips in a tight smile, Beckett silently made her way over to her desk, removing her coat and draping it over the back of her chair before sitting down. She narrowed her eyes and perked her ears up, trying to eavesdrop on Esposito's conversation. From the hushed voice he was using, Beckett was fairly positive he was talking to a certain medical examiner, to whom Beckett had divulged most of her juicy details of the majority of her activities with a certain writer, and had yet to have that generosity reciprocated. Though part of her felt hearing the details of Lanie's time with Esposito a little disturbing. The Hispanic detective was almost like a brother to her.

"You're here early."

Beckett nearly jumped out of her seat at the sudden voice. Turning, she saw Kevin Ryan standing bye the side of her desk, a coffee mug—with a picture of him and Jenny worked into the ceramic—in his hand.

"A bit jumpy, are we?" he asked with a smile before furrowing his brow in worry. "Is everything all right?"

Placing her hand over her heart, she gave him a tentative nod. "You just startled me is all," Beckett replied as Ryan chuckled softly and shook his head before moving on with the conversation.

"So, where's your shadow?" he inclined his head towards the empty chair next her desk. His chair.

Beckett smirked, finding it slightly amusing how the boys had started referring to Castle as her shadow again (as they had for the first two and half years), now that they were officially a couple. Even though the two detectives were official members of the Beckett-Castle fan club, they were still protective of her… just like overly protective brothers.

"At home… Why?" she replied, looking up at him suspiciously.

"Oh… nothing important," Ryan said, shrugging nonchalantly. "Javier and I were just thinking that now that it’s been over a month since you two officially started seeing one another that you’d be showing up together… you know… hand in hand."

"Hand in hand, eh?" Beckett raised an eyebrow, a bemused expression working its way onto her face. She could not believe them. They knew how uptight she was, especially at the work place. The others did not know it, but retaining the professionalism had been one of the ground rules she had laid out to Castle when he took her on their first official date. "All right, how much did you lose?"

"Twenty bucks," Ryan replied with an easygoing smile.
Beckett rolled her eyes and waved a chastising finger at the Irish detective. "Come on, Kevin, you've got to stop letting Esposito win these little bets of yours."

Ryan raised his eyebrows. "Esposito's not the winner."

"Oh," Beckett blinked, startled. "Then… who gets the jackpot?"

"That would be me!" chirped a cheery voice.

Looking over her shoulder and smiling, Beckett saw her best friend enter the precinct. Lanie snapped her cell shut and placed it in her handbag before shooing Ryan away. The detective took the hint and quickly crossed the bullpen to join his partner. Esposito spun around in his chair and saw Lanie. He gave her a wink and then turned to chat with Ryan, giving him a "what's up, dude" nod.

"So," Lanie's voice called her back, as the M.E. sat down in Castle's chair. "Tell me about it."

"Tell you about what?" Beckett's cheeks blushed bright pink as she attempted to play dumb.

"Oh, come on, girl," Lanie chuckled softly, her eyes sparkling with mirth. "You know what! I'm not stupid, like those two over there," she bobbed her head toward Esposito and Ryan, "I can tell that you spent the night with Castle, and I'm not just talking about snuggling in bed."

"We did that, too," her cheeks warmed, not denying what Lanie had implied she had been doing with Castle last night.

Lanie practically bounced in the chair with excitement. "It's about damn time, Kate," she almost squealed. If there were ever a real Beckett-Castle Fan Club, Lanie would be its president.

Beckett smiled and lowered her head to whisper more details. Lanie obliged and mimicked her, lowering her head conspiratorially. "It was better than the first time," she informed Lanie, hoping that would sate her friend's curiosity and hunger for juicy gossip.

"And?" Lanie always had a sixth sense.

Beckett groaned and lowered her eyebrows in defeat, knowing it was futile to resist. She found herself rolling her eyes, imagining Castle—if he was here—saying, "Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated!" Quirking a strand of hair behind an ear, she glanced over at the two detectives, both of whom thankfully appeared engrossed in their own conversation.

"All right," she relented with a huff. "I wasn't planning it, but… well, it was sort of unexpected… and… um, well, this morning he followed me into the bathroom and we… er… we had sex in the shower."

Lanie's eyes grew wide. "Really?" she hissed in an excited voice. "I mean, really really?" She was practically bouncing with excitement.

"Yes," Beckett gave a nod of her head, unable to keep the smile from her lips that came from the memories of that steamy shower. "God, Lanie, I… I've never done anything like that before. It… it was so hot."

"Boy, girl, you need to start living more," her friend smirked and gave a wink. "Javi and I do it all the time. But, now that you've got writer boy firmly attached, I'm sure you'll be jumping bones in all sorts of places you've never imagined."
Now it was Beckett's turn to raise her eyebrows and blink. She bit her lower lip and risked a glance over her computer monitor at said detective. She blanched a bit, almost picturing it in her head. God, she did not need that image in her head. Closing her eyes, she quickly pulled up the memory of Castle burying his head in her breasts as he pushed up into her. Her lips parted and a soft moan escaped her lips as she felt the phantom sensations of his touch.

"Uh… Kate?" Lanie's voice sounded uncomfortable.

Blinking, Beckett opened her eyes wide and went red with embarrassment. "Did I just… out loud?"

"Uh-huh," her friend nodded. Lanie smiled and winked. "It was that good, was it?"

Beckett placed a hand over her mouth and blushed even more as she nodded in affirmation. Lanie smiled and reached over and gave her arm a pat.

"Well, I gotta go and relieve the second string down stairs before they start cutting into any bodies," she said, sighing. "Thankfully Perlmutter will be back from his vacation shortly. Honestly, I can't believe the guy took a vacation, it's just not like him."

"All right, see you later," Beckett gave a nod as Lanie stood up and started to walk away. "Lanie… hey, wait?" she called after her friend, spinning around in her chair.

Lanie turned and glanced back. "Yes?"

"You… you haven't told anyone, have you?" Beckett asked, lowering her voice, referring to her pregnancy. "Not even Esposito?" Even though she considered most of her colleagues around the precinct as part of her extended family, she wasn't quite ready to share the news with everyone. In part, it was for Castle's sake. She didn't want anyone thinking she was just going out with him because he had got her knocked-up.

Lanie gave her a smile and a wink. "Hey, girl, you can trust me to keep a secret like that," she said, coming back just enough so that her voice didn't carry. "You can tell everyone when you're ready."

Taking in a relieved breath, Beckett nodded and promised they'd talk some more after she and Castle went to her two-month check-up appointment later that afternoon. They'd worked it into her lunch schedule so that no one around the office, save for the Captain and Lanie, would know what was really going on.

Sighing with relief, Beckett spun back to her desk, turned on her computer and logged in. She was still a little anxious about the appointment (she had heard of a twelve week prenatal appointment, but never an eight week appointment, so she was understandably nervous). Heaving in a deep breath, Beckett cleared her mind and turned her attention to her computer.
Typing in her password, Kate Beckett opened her e-mail account and scanned through her inbox, spotting one from her dad. Knitting her eyebrows together, she wondered when he started to use e-mail and, for that matter, how he had managed to get a hold of her address. Her eyes flicked down to the stack of business cards sitting just below her monitor. She didn't remember giving one to her dad, but at some point, she guessed she must have. Clicking the link to open up the message, Beckett quickly read through it. When she had finished, she groaned inwardly, realizing that she had yet to inform her dad about recent events. From his e-mail, it was obvious he still thought she was seeing Josh, as he was inquiring upon whether or not she was ever "planning on introducing this doctor fellow you're seeing to me."

Usually she was good about keeping in touch with him, but with all the changes happening in her life, Beckett had become, well, for the lack of a better word, distracted. She closed her eyes and made a mental note that she was going to have to meet up with her dad sometime to get him up to date, and to tell him the news that he was going to be a grandfather. Probably not the way he was expecting, Beckett admonished herself.

Dragging her lower lip through her teeth, Beckett wrote back a response, apologizing for the delay and promising to make up for it with dinner, which she tentatively scheduled for Wednesday (that would give her two days to prepare Castle—not to mention herself). After re-reading the message to make sure there was nothing in it that hinted at anything too shocking, she clicked the send button, then leaned back and let out a long frustrated sigh. The nausea that came from her morning sickness was rising up and for a moment she thought she was going to need to rush to the bathroom to throw-up.

So far, she had managed to convince those not in-the-know that she had just caught a bug that was particularly virulent and was refusing to leave. However, that particular cover story would be useless once she started showing. As the wave of nausea passed, she sighed with relief and her eyes glanced longingly over at the empty chair sitting by the side of her desk. Beckett was utterly stunned by this. She had dropped Castle off at his place just under two hours ago and she was already missing him, wishing he was here, smiling up at her with his charming boyish grin and his twinkling eyes, always full of mischief and merriment. Castle was a man who knew how to enjoy life.

As if on cue, her phone buzzed, signaling a new text message. She picked it up and looked down to see it was from Castle. For a bestselling author, Beckett thought it was amusing that his texts were always so incoherent and confusing. He was obviously trying to use the slang and abbreviations that were so popular amongst today’s youth, but sometimes he failed miserably. Beckett wondered if Alexis had to put up with his cryptic and baffling texts as well. Probably, she huffed, blowing a strand of hair out of her eyes.

Beckett stopped short and gasped. Alexis! Oh God, they hadn't even told Alexis about what had happened. Beckett had not wanted to make it widely known, so not that many people knew about her pregnancy. There was her, of course, and Castle. Then there was Lanie—whom she had sworn to secrecy, because of her close ties with a certain Hispanic detective. She had been force to tell Josh; her condition being one of the reasons for their break-up, but it had been a long time coming, she had just needed something to give her a good kick to acknowledge it. Captain Montgomery knew, because she had to clear time with him so she could see her OB-GYN to confirm it all, since she didn't trust home pregnancy tests because of a scare a couple of years ago.
She felt kind of bad that out of all those people, Castle had been the last to find out, especially considering he was the father of the bun that was currently baking in her oven. Beckett was fairly certain that Castle hadn't told anyone yet, mostly out of respect for her wishes. Though she knew he was just bursting at the seams with the need to tell his family. And everyone else, except those in-the-know, were oblivious to what had happened two months ago.

So as far as the boys and the rest of the precinct were concerned, Castle and her had just started dating a month ago. Her confession in the break room had been public, more public than she would have liked, but thankfully the door had been closed, and though the blinds had been opened, their voices had not carried (even when they had been heated). So no one had actually heard what had been said, only seeing the reactions.

Turning back to her cell, Beckett sent a quick text message back to Castle. Barely ten seconds had passed after she had pressed the send button before her phone started ringing. She glanced down at the screen and saw a picture of Castle's smiling face. Beckett immediately pressed the answer button and brought it up to her ear.

"Castle, we have an emergency!" Beckett hissed into the phone, trying to keep her voice quiet. She kept her eyes peeled for any eavesdroppers.

"Whoa! Hold you're horses, Beckett," came his slightly amused voice from the other end. "What's the problem?"

"Problem? No… not problem, rather problems, as in the plural, as in multiple!" Beckett spoke in a rapid breath, her eyes darting around terrified she was going to be overheard. She had never really been good at keeping her emotions a secret (well, except from the one person who was most important—i.e., Castle). All her other close friends seemed capable of reading her like a book. Lanie for one, not to mention Esposito, who had been one of the firsts to flat out tell her that Castle wasn't just following her around to get material for a book.

"All right," Castle replied in a calm voice. "Talk to me."

"My dad," was all Beckett had to say.

The other end went silent. She could hear his breath hitch up a bit, as he no doubt realized the gravity of the situation. "You… you haven't told him yet, have you?" Castle finally answered, his voice raising just a pitch.

"No," Beckett lowered her voice. Out of the corner of her eyes, she spotted Esposito arching his neck to look over at her. Dammit! She hunched down a bit, trying to hide behind her computer monitor, quite literally feeling the curious eyes coming from across the room.

There was no doubt in her mind that Esposito and Ryan had started to become suspicious when she had not immediately jumped up after having a brisk and efficient conversation with the caller. The two must have assumed that it was dispatch, calling to inform her of a homicide that needed investigating. But now that she had remained on the phone for a longer period of time, the two detectives were intrigued, their interests peaked.

"Castle?" she spoke softly, concerned over his lack of a response.

"I… uh… um…," he was stammering, starting to sound nervous. "I… do… Yes, I… um… I can… er… see how that might be a problem."

Just by how terrified and anxious he sounded over the phone, Beckett imagined Castle ducking
down for cover as if concerned her father would come at him with a shotgun for besmirching his
daughter's honor. The image alone was amusing, because she could never picture Jim Beckett
doing something like that. He was protective of her, yes—like any father—but he respected and
trusted her judgment, aware that she had grown up a long time ago. However, whatever amusement
she found at the idea of it, Beckett was too entrenched in panic mode to really take notice.

"Castle?" she questioned, having heard the other end of the line go silent again.

"I'm still here... I think?" came his response. "A little terrified, but yes, I'm here."

"Well, we've also need to tell Martha and Alexis at some point," she said.

"Yes, I know," he agreed in a deep sigh.

Beckett peeked over the edge of her monitor and saw the boys craning their necks to get a better
view of her, their brows furrowed with curiosity. Esposito was in the process of flipping his cell
open, and Beckett just knew he was probably texting Lanie for some info on what might be going
on.

Ducking back down, Beckett turned her back to them. "I've got to go," she whispered into her cell.
"The boys are starting to get curious."

"You want me to come in?" Castle inquired, very sincere, with a touch of hope mixed in. She
smiled slightly, thinking he probably missed her just as much as she missed him.

"No, that's all right," she replied quickly. "I think I can handle them. I get off for lunch at 11:30. I'll
swing by and pick you up. We'll discuss it then."

"Okay," Castle sighed, sounding disappointed.

Suddenly a wicked thought struck her. For a moment, she blushed. She had never had such
thoughts until Castle had come into her life. Yep, there was no doubt in her mind... he was
definitely a bad influence on her. But it wasn't a bad kind of bad. It was more of a good kind of bad.

Beckett grinned mischievously. "We don't have to be at the doctor's until 12:30, so... maybe we
can have a quickie in your office," she lowered her voice and then tried to speak as seductively as
she could. "I've always had this fantasy of you bending me over your desk and taking me from
behind. You know... feeling that heated passion that practically screams in agonizing pleasure off
the pages of those brilliant sex scenes you write oh so well."

Castle groaned on the other end. "Oh... you are such a tease!"

She smiled wickedly, pleased with herself, and a little shocked she had just revealed to him one of
her secret fantasies. "Is that a yes, then?" she asked into the phone, trying to conceptualize the
realization that one of her longest running sexual fantasies might indeed soon become a reality.
Beckett involuntarily shivered from the anticipation.

"Oh, most certainly, my dear detective," Castle purred on the other end.

Beckett caught her breath for a moment, already starting to visualize it. "I... I've got to go."

"Okay," he sighed. "Kate?"

"Rick?" she knitted her eyebrows together, worried over the change in his tone.
"I… I feel stupid for asking this, but I can't really tell over the phone," Castle spoke, sounding almost embarrassed. "Were you just teasing, or did you mean that stuff… about that fantasy… in my office?"

"Oh," Beckett involuntarily blushed. She hadn't realized he was unsure of her intentions. Usually he was so good at telling when she was teasing him, but she guessed that with the change in their relationship it was going to become more difficult for him to tell when she was teasing, and when she was being serious.

"Well?" he inquired when she was silent for a little too long.

Sighing, Beckett ran her fingers through her hair. "No… I wasn't teasing, Castle," she informed him. "I wouldn't have teased you like that, not now that we're together, and especially if I had no intention of delivering on my end, so… are we good?"

"If that's the case, then absolutely, we're better than good, we're great," she could literally hear the beaming smile on his face, no doubt as happy as a clam that he was going to get lucky once again this morning, and in just under four hours, no less.

"Castle... I—"

"Me, too," he cut her off before she could finish.

Swallowing back the words she had almost said, even though they were the truth and they both knew it, Beckett was silently grateful for his interruption. "Thanks," she said instead.

"Always," Castle replied, the emotion behind the word oh so clear in his voice. It was more than just a word; it was a promise.

As she hung up, Beckett's cheeks flushed a bright pink. Oh God, I almost said it… I almost said, “I love you” over the phone. She leaned back, stunned. There was really no reason for it, she had already declared her love, but they had yet to whisper those three tremendous words to one another, instead settling comfortably with "Always." But Beckett knew that for Castle it meant the same thing. The emotion behind his voice whenever he had said it, both now and before, was the same as when someone would say, "I love you" and truly mean it.

Blushing even more, Beckett chewed on her lower lip and turned back to her computer monitor, unconsciously twirling a strand of hair in her fingers.

XXX

"OH GOD… RICK… YES!" Beckett screamed at the top of her lungs. "YES!"

Immediately her cheeks flushed with embarrassment at having yelled so loud, but her concern was soon pushed aside, as Castle leaned over her and nuzzled the back of her neck, kissing and nibbling at her ear. His hands were roaming up her sides, pulling her up off the desk, pressing her back to his chest. She grinned and clenched him, causing him to let out a moan as his hands hooked around her and grabbed her breasts, his fingers softly kneading them through her blouse.

Beckett had let herself into the loft with the key he had given her half a year ago (in case of an emergency, he had said). Quietly closing the door, she locked it, and then slipped out of her high heels. Slowly dropping her bag, she listened to the soft typing coming from his office. Grinning, Beckett pulled off her jacket and placed it on the coat hanger, before padding across the living room and across the spacious loft to the door that led to his office.
When she poked her head in, Beckett smiled to herself, seeing Castle leaning back in his chair with his laptop in his lap as he typed away furiously. Running her lower lip through her teeth, she slipped through and knocked on the door.

Castle immediately looked up from the screen and grinned. Closing his laptop, he placed it down on the small table behind his desk. Beckett grinned like she had never grinned before and immediately begin unbuttoning her pants. Castle did the same. There was no need for foreplay; they were both always ready for each other. They collided in a fierce frenzy of kissing, each attempting to shove their tongue into the others mouth.

Grabbing her around the waist, Castle roughly tugged her slacks and panties down, as she did likewise with his jeans and boxers down. She grabbed a hold of him in fingers and started to stroke him as he sprawled his hands over her covered breasts, all the while they kissed and explored each other's mouths with their tongues. When he was nice and hard in her hand, she backed up—pulling him with her—until the backs of her thighs hit the edge of his desk. Raising her eyebrows at him, she encouraged him to do what she wanted him to do. Smiling, Castle spun her around in his arms and bent her over his desk.

She planted her palms on the mahogany surface, shivering in delight as she heard him spit on his fingers before touching her down their, spreading her legs and then pushing up into her. She clenched with her inner muscles as he filled her, coaxing a groan from his lips as he leaned over her and grunted into the back of her hair as he began moving back and forth. Beckett's eyes rolled into the back of her head as she reveled in the reality of one of her fantasies coming to life.

Feeling him nuzzle his nose against her ear and hearing him breathe in deeply of her scent, Beckett was pulled back to the present. She blushed slightly, embarrassed that she had let her mind wander, having lost herself in the overwhelming moment of bliss Castle always seemed to bring her too.

"Mmm, cherries," he mumbled, sounding very much pleased. He kissed her neck, and then, pulling a disappointed groan from her throat, slipped out of her.

Heaving in big gulps of air, Beckett turned around and reached down to pull up her panties and slacks. Glancing up at him from under her eyebrows, she grinned. "Told you I wasn't teasing," she said, feeling very satisfied.

Castle sucked in a deep breath, cooling his flush cheeks from his own release as he worked at zipping up his jeans. "Next time, I'll believe you, then," he winked, his lips curling up into a smile. His eyes sparkled and she saw the mutual desire she had for him reflecting back at her.

Chewing on her lower lip, Beckett reached up and placed a hand on his chest, resting it just above his heart. "Castle…," she murmured softly, wondering if now was the right time.

He placed his hand over hers. A boyish smirk touched his lips. "Just like Han Solo… I know," Castle spoke softly. Though he was joking, she could tell he was sincere.

Sighing contently, Beckett leaned forward as they kissed slowly. She let out a soft moan as his arm hooked around her waist and pulled her closer. She could feel the grin on his lips as he pulled back.

"We should get a quick bite before we drive out to the doctor's office," he said, leading her out of his office and into the kitchen. "After all, Miss Beckett, you are eating for two."
Chapter 4

Why did they always play elevator music in waiting rooms? Beckett gave a shrug and lowered her brow, leaning back down into the slightly uncomfortable chair as she flipped through the magazine *Fit Pregnancy*. She thought she was pretty damn fit, but she wouldn't mind keeping it that way… especially with her new physical relationship with a certain ruggedly handsome author. And besides having tips of keeping fit during pregnancy, the magazine also had some articles for expectant mothers, which was actually of interest to the detective.

Despite their hot rendezvous in his office, and the quick bite that they had had afterwards at a local deli near his loft, they had actually arrived early at the doctor's office. So, Beckett was passing the time trying to concentrate on a magazine article, but she was finding it difficult to focus on it, even though she found it very interesting. To tell the truth, she was actually a little worried and nervous. After all, she had never heard of an eight week prenatal appointment—twelve, yes—but not eight.

She would have been more worried if it had not been for Castle. His presence in the chair next to hers was comforting, and she quietly relished the smell of his cologne as it drifted through the air-conditioned room. He was currently trying to distract himself as well, absently looking through a *GQ* magazine. Apparently, according to him, he had done an interview with them and it was supposed to be in this month's issue.

"We had a photo shoot and everything," he informed her, leaning over slightly, his shoulder briefly brushing against her, as his eyes still scanning through the pages. "It was awesome! I was very dapper… as always, looking very ruggedly handsome in this nice blue suit I had bought specifically for the shoot." Castle gave one of his signature smug smiles and winked. "Wait till you see it… You're going to just love it!"

Beckett gave a soft smile. She had actually already seen the article. She was, after all, his number one fan (rolling her eyes, she'd never admit it, even under torture). Pursing her lips together, she contemplated telling him that the photo they had put in with the article really wasn't that great. In fact, it really wasn't even that big. The interview itself had been squeezed in next another article about a much younger and—according to some—hotter author. Though, in Beckett's opinion, Castle was the better looking of the two. However, she had to admit, she was probably bias, especially considering the things Richard Castle could do to her body that left her numb and aching for more.

"WHAT!" Castle nearly jumped out of his seat, causing some of the other expectant couples to glance their way, not to mention the receptionist. The author immediately reddened, and slunk back down in the chair, embarrassed. He glanced over at Beckett. "Can you believe this?" he held up the magazine, showing her the article she had read last week.

"I know," she nodded. "He's so hot!"

"What!" he fumed, his eyebrows coming together in the most adorable little point. "He's just a kid… I mean, come one, Justin Bieber's cuter."

Beckett laughed lightly and shook her head. She moved her hand and serendipitously placed it on his cheek, bringing his attention to her. "Well, if it's any consolation," she spoke slow, lowering her voice. "I'd rather be here with you than on some tropical beach surrounded by oiled-up hunks with big muscles and washboard abs."

He raised his eyebrows, and before he could respond, Beckett leaned forward and planted a kiss on
his lips. It was quick and chaste, but she still blushed. She had never actually kissed him in public, except for their first real kiss in the breakroom a month ago. Taking a quick breath, Castle smiled lazily, his eyes looking at her in that way that made her heart skip. Dropping her hand, Beckett tried to cover up her blush by hiding behind the pages of the magazine. She bit her lower lip and smiled to herself, feeling as giddy as a schoolgirl. Yep. She was in love, there was no doubt about that. The question was... when were they actually going to say those words to each other.

Castle stared at her, like he always did, but now it was different, because she could really imagine what was going on in that head of his. Blushing even more, Beckett gave his shoulder a playful punch and inclined her head over to the other expectant parents.

"What?" Castle asked, pouting as he rubbed his shoulder.

"We're not alone, Castle," she spoke under her breath.

"Hey, you're the one who kissed me!" he objected with a smirk. He wiggled his eyebrows and shifted in his chair so he was half facing her. "About the article…"

"Yes?" she asked, trying to ignore him, but that was impossible. Always was with him.

"I think the spread would have been bigger if you had come," he said, nodding slightly. "Just saying."

She knitted her eyebrows together and her mouth to responded, but couldn't find the words. "What... what are you talking about?" she finally managed.

"Well," he gave her a lopsided grin and leaned over, slowly slipping a hand onto her thigh. She glowered at him. He quickly removed his hand. "Okay," he coughed. "Um... well, that photo and the entire article would have been bigger... not to mention much better, if you had come with me to the interview."

"Uh huh," she doubted that. She was just a detective, not some flashy model. Yeah, she knew she was good looking, but come on... a magazine. She'd done that one interview, and to be honest, she had not enjoyed it. Beckett preferred to remain out of the public eye.

"No, really, it would have," insisted Castle. "Imagine this, if you will..."

"I'll try," she bit her lower lip, secretly loving how excited he was getting with his own little world.

"Alright," he grinned. "So, as is customary, they have this white background. Place a stool in front of it. Yours truly sits on it..."

"Dressed in that very dapper blue suit, no doubt," she interjected, playing along.

"Of course," he wiggled his eyebrows. "But I'm not alone!"

"Your not?"

"No," he leaned close, invading her personal space. Her eyes flicked down to his lips, and she prayed to God that he hadn't noticed. "On my lap, is a certain very hot and sexy detective."

"Let me guess, Nikki Heat," she smirked.

"Wrong," Castle murmured softly, his breath moist and warm against her cheek. "Sitting on my lap, showing off gorgeous legs and a breathtaking body, is none other than NYPD's finest homicide
"Kevin Ryan," Beckett laughed, watching as Castle grimaced at the mental image she had just put in his head.

"Oh god, no…," Castle groaned.

Beckett sighed and fiddled with his tie. "All right, who's this sitting on your lap?"

"You," he wiggled his eyebrows. "Of course, that might not be a good idea."

"Why not?"

"I might start getting ideas," he replied.

She let go of his tie and gave him her famous glare, always secretly enjoying the playful banter they had. "In your dreams, Castle," she said, shaking her head and rolling her eyes as she turned back to her magazine.

"Oh, but why dream when I can have the real thing?" he inquired, sliding his hand back onto her thigh. She frowned, but let him have this round. Truth be told, she secretly loved the feel of his hand on her, and it was actually helping to distract her from why they were there.

The door opened and another couple arrived. By the size of the woman's swollen belly, Beckett guessed she was about five months along. She waddled over to one of the chairs and sat down as the husband went over to the receptionist to check in. Castle gave her leg a pat and inclined his head towards the couple as the husband rejoined the wife.

"The Thompsons," he said. "Nice couple. The wife's a fan." Castle tilted his head and looked at her from under his eyebrows in that adorable way he always does. "You know what? You should get to know the other parents as well."

"Let me guess," Beckett said, peering over the magazine cover at the couple. "You've already arranged for play dates between our kids."

Castle grinned. "Not yet. Though I'm working on it." He arched his neck and hollered across the room. "Hey Anita, Bill! How's it going?"

The husband, Bill, seemed to groan internally as his wife chirped up and smiled back, waving. "Mr. Castle… oh, it's so good to see you again! We're doing great! Just coming in for our five month appointment."

"Well, you're looking radiant, Anita," Castle smiled. Beckett could feel his fingers beginning to rub a pattern over her thigh. "Kate and I—"

"Kate!" Anita's eyes went wide as she took in the detective for the first time. "Kate Beckett… as in Detective Kate Beckett… as in the inspiration for Nikki Heat! Oh my god… are… are you two expecting?"

Oh god, no, Beckett paled. She pursed her lips and forced a smile out at the pair, before slowly turning her head on Castle. Lowering her brow and narrowing her eyes, she gave him one of her patented Beckett-glares. "Castle," she spoke, her voice soft with the hint of a warning.

He gulped, but luckily maintained his outwardly appearance of a man at ease, even though she knew he suspected he had most likely gotten himself in trouble and would be sleeping alone in his
own bed tonight. Nah, she wouldn't punish herself because he was being… well, being Castle. However, it was his fault that Nikki Heat was somewhat inspired by her. Only somewhat, mind you. Unlike her fictional doppelganger, Beckett did not have a fuck buddy. When she slept with a man, it meant something to her. Opening herself like that was not done on a whim, with any man. That kind of intimacy was sacred to her. Which was why Beckett was still amazed she had taken advantage of an intoxicated Castle two months ago. In retrospect, she guessed it proved just how much she had wanted him, both physically and emotionally.

Suddenly, Castle shifted, his hand moving off her leg and slinking over her shoulder. On reflex, Beckett tensed, not used to public displays of affection. Even though during their first month of dating, Castle had taken her out, they had always gone to places where no one knew them… well, except for those fancy upscale restaurants he had been treating her to, but the staffs were always discreet.

They had also gone out to movies, where it was easy to hide in the dark theaters, snuggling up next to Castle and enjoying one of Hollywood's latest cliché romantic comedies. They had also gone to their usual haunts, where it was not strange for people to see the two of them together, but Beckett had paid close attention not to be too touchy feely with Castle in those places. All in all, most of their time together was probably spent in private, the latest private place—as of last night—being her bed… and now—as of this morning—his office.

As Beckett observed the change in Castle's manner, she bit her bottom lip, a slight blush manifesting across her cheeks. He tilted his head ever so slightly, so he was gazing sidelong at her. Then, he turned towards Anita. "As a matter of fact, yes."

Whatever suppression or coping mechanism Beckett had had in place immediately disappeared. Her cheeks flushed bright pink with discomfort, and she instinctively tried to shrink back as she heard Anita squeal like a fangirl. The pregnant woman practically bounded up out of her chair, crossed the room in a flash, and surprising Beckett with an unexpected hug. The woman immediately came to her sense, and let go, her own cheeks blushing with embarrassment.

"Oh my, I'm so… so sorry," she squeaked out. "I didn't—"

"No… it's… um… it's all right," Beckett forced out, heaving in a deep breath, actually grateful for Castle's arm around her shoulder.

Anita eased down into a cushioned chair across from them, watching as her husband reluctantly got up and seated himself besides her. "See, I told you they were a couple," she whispered to him as he sat down. He gave a gruff nod and turned back to the sports magazine he was reading. Anita rolled her eyes and turned back to them.

"So… when did this happen?" she asked gesturing with her hands at the two of them, her eyes taking in the fact that Castle had his arm draped over her shoulder.

"Two months," Castle answered before Beckett could even open her mouth. She shot him a glare, but he ignored her. She sighed and bit the inside of her cheek, resigning herself to the fact that eventually they wouldn't be able to hide this. Especially when she gave birth. The hospital would probably make some big announcement to the media about how the famous author Richard Castle and his muse/girlfriend just welcomed a healthy baby.

"Look, Anita," he said softly. "We're trying to keep it on the QT."

"Oh, yes, I understand," she nodded. "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."
Beckett did an internal sigh of relief. "Thank you," she spoke softly, giving the woman a grateful nod. Unconsciously she found herself easing into Castle hold. As he started chatting away with the woman, her mind began to wonder.

For the first time, Beckett realized that she was in this... she was there. Sure, when she had been with Josh, she was with him, but she was never really there, never really invested. She had liked having a boyfriend, having someone who would hold her and make love to her, but with Josh it never did really move beyond the physical (at least for her). At one point she had thought it would, but the inconsistent meetings, the jumbled up appointments, never lent itself to the development of a stronger relationship. And to be honest, they never really had time for anything else besides sex. Sure it was great sex, but there was nothing in it besides that need for physical release, that need to just be with someone.

So when she glanced up and saw Castle still chatting idly away with the other expectant mother, Beckett knew it was more than about their physical compatibility. Sex with Castle was amazing, to be sure, and she would always be amazed at how great it was, even when it was just a rough quickie or something slow and tender. When she was with Castle, in the biblical sense, she was with him in everyway—mind, body, and heart. Beckett could not forget her heart. It was probably one of the most guarded parts of her entire being. Only two men had ever managed to break down her defenses and capture her heart, and both had broken it in one fashion or another.

Will Sorenson had been the first. She had fallen in love with the FBI agent, but—as Castle had observed—they were too much alike for it to work. They were both dedicated to their jobs, and, for them, the job always came first. Will had asked her to move with him when he got a promotion, but Beckett couldn't leave New York. New York was her home; it was where she grew up. And it where she would eventually find her mother's killer. So, she had broke up with Sorenson, breaking her heart and devastating her to the point where her love life basically went the way of the dodo.

Then Richard freaking Castle suddenly landed at her doorstep. At first, she was speechless and a little unnerved by the whole prospect, most of which stemmed from the fact that he was her favorite author, though she was determined he'd never find that out. Slowly, somehow, almost miraculously, he worked his way into her life and she began to develop genuine feelings for him. He had put down $100,000 of his own money (without batting an eye) to help her flush out Rathborne, the alias of the contract hitman who had killed her mother. And with Castle's help, she discovered that Dick Coonan had been Rathborne all along.

And when Coonan had taken Castle hostage, her heart had jumped in her throat. She was terrified she was going to lose Castle, just like she had lost her mother to murder, her father to alcoholism, and Will to the job. Her own desires to unravel the mystery of who was behind the murder of her mother took a sideline when Castle had been placed in harm's way. So, Beckett had taken the shot. And as much as it grieved her, she killed Dick Coonan. She cried over his body afterwards, not for him, but for the lead she had just lost in her mother's case. And Castle was there to comfort her.

Yes, Richard Castle, that nine-year-old on a sugar rush, stood by her side through it all.

But he had broken her heart, just like Will Sorenson, though he never knew it. She had ended her budding relationship with Tom Demming because, thanks to some prodding from her friends, she was ready to see if she and Castle could be more than just friends. And then Gina had walked in and Castle left for the summer with her, unknowingly tearing Beckett's heart out of her chest.

And even when she first started dating Josh, that hole in her chest remained empty. She liked Josh, maybe even cared a little about him, but she never invested much in the relationship. It was just that, a relationship for a relationship sakes. Beckett had grown sick and tired of being single, so she
had thrown her hat in and had given up. She never expected anything much out of Josh. No love was going to come from that relationship; it was purely a one-way thing. And she liked it that way.

Then everything changed. Somehow, someway, Castle had managed to work his way back into her heart, and that empty place was becoming whole again. The more time she spent with Castle, the more it became obvious that she loved him. At first, when she realized it, she felt guilty. She was seeing Josh, but in love with another man. Hell, near the end, she had even started to fantasize about Castle when she slept with Josh. The guilt only permeated her more when that happened.

That's when that crazy unexpected night happened and, in a dark place emotionally, Beckett got Castle drunk and took advantage of the situation and slept with him. And once the consequences of that action became apparent, it was almost like the fates had finally stepped in, guiding her towards the man she was destined to be with. In a lot of ways, it made it easier to break up with Josh, and the break up was a lot more amicable than she had expected, seeing how Josh had always known she was never fully invested in their relationship, and had always suspected she was in love with Castle, just unwilling to admit it.

"Beckett!" came a voice, calling her out of her thoughts.

Blinking, she looked up to see a nurse with a clipboard. Castle turned to Anita and winked. "That's us," he smiled broadly, standing up and offering her a hand. Beckett could not help but smile up at him as she accepted his offered hand. However, her smile quickly evaporated when she remembered where they were, and her worry and concerned seized control. God, she hoped nothing was wrong. Numbly, lost in her own worries, Beckett followed the nurse through the door.

"And you are?" the nurse asked as Castle made a move to follow.

Beckett turned, her heart jumping in her throat. She couldn't go in alone. She needed Castle. Hell, she had always needed him. It had just taken her this long to realize that. Beckett quickly pushed past the nurse and grabbed Castle's hand. "My boyfriend," she declared out loud. "He's my boyfriend."

"Alright," the nurse gave a nod and raised a judgmental eyebrow. "Follow me then."

Sighing as he put his arm around her shoulder, Beckett eased into his hold as the nurse led them to the check-up room. "I'll say one thing," Castle said under his breath. "That woman is definitely not a fan."
"Rick," she called his name softly, but he didn't respond. Beckett grumbled to herself and crossed her arms over her chest, glaring hard at the back of his head. Knitting her eyebrows together, she raised her voice slightly, adding just a hint of a warning to it, and called at him again. "Castle!"

"Ooh! Yes?" he jumped, obviously startled, dropping the jar of cotton balls on the floor. She gave him an irritated look. Thankfully, though, the jar had not broken. *Must be plastic, not glass,* she absently thought.

Damn. He was giving her that puppy dog look. As much as his childish behavior annoyed her at times, that look, the one he was giving her right now, always made her melt… always. She took a quick breath and blinked, softening her voice. "Just… please, don't act like a child right now," she paused and blew a strand of hair away from her eyes. "I don't know if I'll be able to handle two of you."

"Two?" he questioned, knitting his eyebrows together in confusion, before the light of realization dawned in his eyes. "Oh, yes. Two. Ha, ha…" he paused and his eyes went wide. "Hold on a second," he crossed the distance between them and leaned against the examination table she was sitting on. "Back there, in the hall," he nodded with his head towards the door. "You… my dear detective," he was leaning closer now, making her flush with his proximity, "called me… Richard Edgar Castle… your boyfriend." Castle wiggled his eyebrows for effect.

Beckett blushed, but just the same a grin still spread across her lips. "So?"

"So!" Castle echoed, raising his eyebrows. "Well, Miss Beckett… I think this step requires some sort of reward." He was inching closer to her, his lips barely brushing against hers. Beckett's heart was going wild in her heart with anticipation of the kiss.

"Yes?" she murmured, closing her eyes, preparing to ease into him when his lips met hers.

The sound of the door opening caused them to suddenly jump back from one another, blushing brightly with embarrassment as if they were teenagers who had just been caught necking by their parents. The doctor looked at them with a smirk.

"Good afternoon, you two," she said with a nod, stepping into the room and closing the door behind her.

"Doctor," Castle greeted, returning the nod. He gave a goofy grin, and shifted to the side, yet remained close to Beckett, knowing she was worried about this appointment.

Beckett gave him a grateful smile when she felt his hand come to rest supportively on the small of her back. She eased slightly into him as she inhaled deeply, stifling her flushed cheeks. After closing her eyes for a brief moment, Beckett turned her attention towards her OB-GYN.

"So, Julie, what do we have today?" she asked. She silently cursed the nervousness that manifested itself in her voice.

Beckett had been coming to see Dr. Julie Elam for a while, and she had always insisted that Beckett call her Julie. And out of all the people in the office, she was probably the more acquainted with her baby's daddy. Even though he had been informed that he could call her Julie as well, Castle still just called her doctor, or Dr. Elam.
"There was something I wanted to double check from your last appointment, nothing to worry about, just a minor discrepancy I want to clear up," Julie informed her.

"What kind of discrepancy?" Castle inquired, rubbing Beckett's back, obviously having sensed her rising panic attack at the word discrepancy. Again, she was grateful for his presence. Though he could be a pain in the ass at times, Castle was always there for her.

"To be honest, I'm not sure yet, Mr. Castle," Julie replied. "But I'd like to do an ultrasound."

Despite the comfort of Castle's hand on her back, Beckett was still heading towards panic mode. She didn't like all the terms she was hearing. The doctor reassured her that it was nothing major, just something that she'd like to clarify. Sighing, Beckett nodded and, upon instructions, laid down on the examination bed. Castle stood by her side and held her hand. She interlaced his fingers with his, and he squeezed her hand reassuringly, adding a soft kiss to her head as well.

Julie sat down on her chair and rolled over, bring the ultrasound machine with her. "Pull your shirt up, please," she asked.

Beckett complied, and watched as the doctor took out a gel.

"This will feel cold," Julie informed her before rubbing the gel against Beckett's stomach.

She shivered. The doctor hadn't been kidding. It was cold. Soon the ultrasound machine was on, and Julie was bringing the sensor over to her. Beckett squeezed Castle's hand tightly and closed her eyes, gritting her teeth. She was afraid. She didn't know why, but she was. The doctor put the sensor over her and moved it around, her head turned towards the monitor. Beckett arched her neck and looked at the screen. It was all just black and white to her, a jumble of images she did not understand.

Beckett turned her head back and gazed up at Castle, seeing that his eyes had been on the screen as well. He'd gone through this before, with Alexis, so she was hoping he could help. "Do you see anything, Rick?" she asked him, using his first name. When it was just them, they weren't teasing, and she wasn't annoyed or angry with him, she would always use his first name.

His eyes narrowed and he looked down at her. "No."

Beckett sighed and looked away, clenching her jaw tight. The worry was beginning to eat away at her. Julie moved the sensor again, and then stopped, a slight sound escaping her throat. She bobbed her head, then turned back removing the sensor and giving Beckett a washcloth to clean off her stomach. As Beckett did so, the doctor took off her latex gloves and punched some buttons on the machine, bringing up the images she had taken with the ultrasound.

She focused on washing her stomach, trying to ignore the worry. Castle moved a hand and placed it on her shoulder, trying to comfort and reassure her. She looked up into his eyes and saw a love reflecting back that told her that he was never going to leave her... that he would stand by her side no matter what. Beckett was truly touched by the emotion she saw emanating from him, she just wished she knew how to return it.

"Doctor?" Castle inquired, when it had been silent for a while.

Julie spun around, her face a mask.

"Well?" Beckett asked, shifting up, still keeping a hold of Castle's hand.

The doctor shifted and showed them the image on the monitor. She pointed at some white
speckled dots. "This was the discrepancy I was talking about," Julie said. "And these images confirm what I had suspected."

"And what's that?" Beckett asked, exchanging a look with Castle.

"Twins," Julie smiled. "You're going to have twins, Kate."

Beckett's jaw dropped and she stared blankly at the image, trying to see what the doctor saw. Beside her, Castle chuckled softly.

"I guess you're going to have to amend that statement you said earlier," he said. "From two to three."

She looked at him, giving him one of her patented glares. He flinched and looked away.

"Alright," Castle succumbed to her stare. "I guess I can grow up." He paused for a beat, and then added, "Just a little, though."

XXX

It was silent in the car ride back to Castle's loft. The original plan had been for Castle to come back to the 12th with her, and they would pretend they'd just come back from a lunch date, but now neither could really concentrate on that plan.

Beckett sat behind the wheel, staring numbly out at the New York City traffic, half there, her thoughts on the news they had just received. Twins. For some reason the thought scared her to death. She had spent two months just mentally getting accustomed to the fact that she was pregnant, and that Castle was the father. But now… now all that mental preparation seemed all for not.

She was not just pregnant anymore. She was carrying twins! Beckett suddenly recalled her encounter with her old school friend Madison Queller, who had suggested that Beckett wanted to have little Castle babies when she had interrupted her friend's date with him. God, how right the blonde had been! Two, not one but two baby Castles were currently growing inside her. Her… Kate Beckett!

Never in a million years, ever since the first moment she had met the famous author, had she suspected this to happen. Sure, she thought he was hot… in a juvenile sort of way, and had known that some day—in the distant future—she wanted to, as Lanie had so eloquently put it, jump his bones, but never had she thought she would find herself in this position.

However, Beckett had to concede that part of this was her own doing. She had been the one to take advantage of an intoxicated Castle, not vice versa. Though, she still did not know why she did it, it was totally out of character for her. But she had wanted him for so long, lusted for him, had fantasized about being with him—not just in the physical sense, but in the romantic relationship sense as well.

When it was all said and done, Beckett had no regrets about what had happened, even if she felt a tinge of guilt over having slept with Castle while she was still technically seeing Josh, though, in all truth, she had never really been committed to that relationship. It had just been a filler until she could gain the courage to open her heart and risk it with Castle. And that one night of unrestrained passion had had more unintended consequences than she had thought it would. And all she had done was finally cave in to her hidden desires and want.

"Kate?" his voice, so smooth and comforting, called her from her thoughts.
Biting her lower lip, she risked a glance over at him. "Yes, Castle?"

"Twins!" his eyebrows rose and the surprise was still evident in his eyes.

"Yes, Castle… I know. Twins," she replied under her breath as she returned her gaze to the car packed street ahead of them.

"I mean… twins… my god," he was still in shock, just like herself. "And I'm definitely the father?"

For a second Beckett wanted to punch him in the face for even suggesting that. She knew that his comment had most likely been in jest, but it hit too close to the vest for her. She had had sex with Josh two weeks after she had slept with Castle, but she was positive that the hunky doctor was not the father. Yet now, after Castle's slip of the tongue, a sudden small pinch of doubt and worry wormed its way into her mind.

Beckett glared over at Castle. Damn him, she thought. Damn him for even suggesting that!

Castle noticed her expression, a bizarre mixture of anger and worry, which for Beckett was actually a more common expression than in most other people. She heard him clear his throat and she hit the brake as the traffic came to a lurching halt, silently thankful that it had. Beckett did not know if she could completely focus on driving right now.

"Kate…," he began, but when she gave him a death glare, he shifted gears. "Beckett… I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. I… I'm just in shock, is all. I mean… come on, Kate… twins!"

Beckett could feel herself softening, but she fought it back, deciding she wanted to be angry at him for bringing up doubt in her mind over the paternity of her babies. Her mind was in turmoil, and she was already making a mental note to check, just to make sure. She knew the timetable matched with Castle instead of Josh, but now, after two months, she wanted to make sure, at least, just to ease her mind. Was it even possible to check paternity at this stage in development? She made a mental note to call Julie and find out.

"Beckett?" his nervous voice called her back.

She blinked and looked out to see the traffic moving again. Grumbling under her breath, still pissed at him, Beckett ignored his questioning voice and pushed down on the accelerator, driving through an intersection until the traffic came to another stop.

"What, Castle?" she nearly growled.

"Are we cool?" he asked.

"I don't know? Are we?" was her retort.

"Look, Beckett… Kate, I'm not questioning if I'm the father," he paused and actually bit his lower lip like he was trying to hold back something.

"What?" she snapped, this time definitely fixing him with her famous Beckett glare that made suspects crack.

Just like she expected, Castle folded. He opened his mouth and spoke in a soft voice. "I remember bits and pieces of that night…," he confessed, actually going a bit red with embarrassment. Her heart softened a bit, silently pleased that he had some memories of that glorious night. "It's still all kind of hazy and a blur, more like a dream than a memory," he continued. A smug smirk almost worked its way onto his lips. "But, I remember enough… enough to know that… that we did it
enough times that I'd be surprised if you hadn't been with child afterwards."

"With child?" Beckett quirked up an eyebrow, amused. "Did you actually just say with child?"

Castle's grin vanished in a flash. "Too much?"

She nodded, turning her attention back to driving, feeling more sure of herself. And his little interjections of humor were actually helping to put her at ease. Something Castle was always good at. She knew he was just trying to lighten the somber mood that had descended between them, but at the moment, she was more inclined towards making him squirm.

"A bit, yes," she grumbled.

"All right," he shifted slightly in his seat so that he was facing her more. She looked at him from the corner of her eye, but made sure to keep the majority of her focus on the street. "Let me just say this then… you were horny… I mean mind-bogglingly horny that night. Can you even count the number of times we… um…?"

"No," she freely admitted before he could fully ask, not even bothering to blush with embarrassment at the statement, like she normally would. She felt none. She had enjoyed every minute of that night, and would always treasure those memories. It had been one of the few times she had actually let herself go, and just enjoyed the moment, enjoying living, and did what she wanted, not thinking or worrying about the consequences.

"My theory is that you must have been in heat or something," he said, trying to sound humorously pedantic, but failing.

Beckett raised her eyebrows. Normally she would have found his choice of words… specifically in heat—which he had suggested once as a possible title for one of the Nikki Heat books—annoying and/or amusing. But now, remembering how turned on she had been, how in need and wanton, she figured he must be right. It would account for a great many things.

When she didn't immediately respond to him, Castle continued, and she almost nearly crashed into the car in front of them with the question he asked. "After you were with me—after that night; how many times were you with Josh… before you found out, that you were, you know… pregnant?"

She knew her reaction was not lost on him, and he immediately tried to backpedal and apologize, attempting to sweep the question under the rug, but she shook her head, and held back tears that wanted to come. Beckett knitted her eyebrows together and cursed her hormones for trying to make her so emotional.

"Once…," she muttered out, relieved that her voice was steady and calm, leaving no evidence of the turmoil going on inside. "Just once."

Her mind was racing. There might be just the slightest possibility… no, she shook her head. If Josh had thought that, he would not have let her go so easily. He was a doctor, for god's sake. He did the math, and he knew. He had known he was not the father. Why couldn't Castle be that positive… that sure? Why did he have to question it?

"Oh," was all he said, his voice quiet and difficult to read. He turned and leaned his head against the window, gazing blindly out at the towers and skyscrapers of the city.

An uncomfortable silence descended upon them as she drove on. It frustrated Beckett to no end that Castle had opened his dumb mouth and had pushed some doubt in her hormone-crazed mind. She had been so exuberant about everything before, though admittedly shocked and stunned by the
news that she was carrying twins. Hell, she had even told the nurse that Castle was her boyfriend. Sure, she'd been seeing him exclusively for a month, yet she had yet to actually think of him as such... really think of him like that. Now she found herself questioning all her decisions, something that displeased her greatly.

Twenty minutes later, after a drive of complete silence, Beckett pulled up to the curb in front of his apartment building, having decided she needed some time away from him to sort everything out in her mind. Castle looked a little crestfallen that she wasn't taking him back to the precinct with her, but he dutifully got out of the car. He hesitated, then leaned down as she rolled down the window, allowing him to say what he wanted to say.

"We... we need to talk about this," he said, his voice sincere and serious. "I don't want things feeling like this between us... I... God, Kate, I lo—"

Beckett considered telling him to shove it where the sun didn't shine, but she bit her tongue. "Later," was all she managed, cutting him off before he could say what she knew he had been about to say.

"You're place?" he questioned.

She inclined her head. "Seven," she replied tersely.

"Seven," he nodded. "I'll be there."

Castle stepped back, the expression on his face telling her that he was feeling terrible about being stupid, about making a comment in jest that had subtly implied that Josh might be the father. Beckett wanted to reach out to him, to tell him that she loved him; words she knew were the truth. Hell, she'd even told him that much when she confessed to him about being pregnant. But Castle had yet to tell her that. He'd told her he was crazy about her, and that it had stopped being about the books, but he had not yet said those three words.

Beckett gritted her teeth and turned to press the button to roll the passenger seat window up, when suddenly Castle was inserting himself through the window, leaning across the seat to reach out for her. She paused, gasping in surprise as he grabbed her face, turned her toward him, and captured her lips in a searing kiss that left her breathless.

"I love you, Kate Beckett," he murmured into her gaping mouth as they shared a breath. "Always."
Chapter 6

Stunned. That was the best word Beckett could think of to describe her current state. Four things had happened today that had either messed with or completely thrown off her psyche. The first had been when she had called Castle her boyfriend. She knew it was silly. She'd been dating him for a month and, well, had been in love with him for a lot longer than that, but it still seemed like such a big a step forward. The second was the revelation that she was carrying twins. The third had been when, in jest, Castle had questioned whether or not he was the father of said twins. But she could forgive him a little for that, after all, he was in shock as much as she was, though it had really messed with her mind.

And then came the fourth and final piece to the cornucopia that had been her Monday… Richard Castle, philandering novelist (at least that was what his public persona was), told her that he loved her. Her! Kate Beckett… not some bimbo model or famous actress. Just a cop. An average normal woman (though she knew he would disagree with that description, calling her extraordinary—his words not hers). Of course, Beckett had already known that he was in love with her; what man would date a pregnant woman if he did not love her? Granted Castle was the father… or was he? She shook her head. No. He was the father. Of that, Beckett had no doubt.

So yes, Richard Castle loved her. She knew it. He knew it. Everyone seemed to know it. It was just that he had yet to say it out loud. Saying you were crazy about someone and that it had "stopped being about the books a long time ago" was a step towards that, but it was not an "I love you." Even though she knew without a doubt, Beckett had still needed to hear him say it. And say it he did.

Castle had leaned down through the window, stretched across the passenger seat, grabbed her face in his hands, kissed her senseless, and then murmured those three little words. Hell, he'd even managed to slip in "Always." And it made her heart melt with the depth of emotion and love she would hear in his voice whenever he said that one particular word.

Everything had happened so fast that Beckett had forgotten to tell Castle that she had set up a dinner visit with her father for Wednesday night. It was not until she had arrived back at the precinct that she even remembered having planned on informing him. She sat down at her desk with a huff, thinking that she should call Castle and let him know, but then she decided that it could wait for tonight. She was still peeved at him, even if her irritation had been somewhat sated by him finally whispering those three words she had been longing to hear uttered from his lips as confirmation of his feelings, not to mention reinforcing her decision to finally allow herself to risk her fragile heart with him.

"Yo, Beckett!" came Esposito's voice as the detective sauntered into the bullpen from the direction of the break room. "How was you're lunch date with Castle?"

"Oh… um…," she fumbled to remember they're cover story. "Yes… it was good. We went to Remy's… had the usual."

"Funny," Esposito said, shaking his head, scratching it like he was trying to remember something. "My boy Ryan and I went to Remy's for lunch. We didn't see you two there."

"We… uh… we had it to go," Beckett shot out, and immediately bit her bottom lip, knowing she had answered too fast and that the wheels would begin to work in the detective's mind.

Esposito narrowed his eyes at her and opened his mouth, but whatever he was about to say was cut

Saved by the bell, so to speak, Beckett cautiously smiled in victory before getting up and walking to the captain's office. Stepping in, Montgomery told her to close the door and take a seat. Beckett did as she was told, though hesitantly. She never liked it when Montgomery told her to take a seat... it usually meant he was about to drop a bomb on her (usually involving her taking forced time off). Taking her seat, Beckett brushed a stray strand of hair out of her eyes and waited.

"So, Detective," Montgomery began. "How was your doctor's appointment?"

Beckett released a sigh of relief she had not known she had been holding in. She looked up at the captain and smiled slightly. "It was... um... interesting," she replied.

"Interesting?" echoed Montgomery, raising a curious eyebrow.

"Yes...," Beckett nodded, subconsciously placing a hand over her middle. "It... um... it appears I'm carrying twins."

A broad smile manifested on the captain's face. "Congratulations, Kate. I'm sure Castle's thrilled."

At the mention of Castle's name, Beckett unexpectedly went stiff. Even though what he had said was in jest, it still stung. Being her mentor and friend, the change in her posture was not lost on Montgomery. He narrowed his eyes and leaned forward in his chair.

"What's happened?" he questioned, looking concern.

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with, sir," Beckett replied all too quickly. She stood up cautiously, her eyes shifty. "If that's all..."

Montgomery looked like he wanted to ask more, but he inclined his head, letting the subject drop. She gave him a small smile and nod of thanks, before slipping out of his office and walking back over to her desk. Just as she sat down, her cell phone rang. Biting her lower lip as she glanced at the caller I.D., Beckett picked the phone up off the desk and hit the answer button, holding it up to her hear.

"Beckett," she answered as she always did.

There was a brief pause on the other end, but she could hear his breathing. "It's me," he said.

"I know," she said.

"How?"

"Caller I.D."

"Oh, yes... duh, silly me," he chuckled softly then paused again. "Um... look... Kate... about earlier..."

"Later," she said, inwardly groaning. Beckett did not want to have this conversation in the middle of the squad room where prying ears might overhear. She could already feel the intrigue gazes of two certain detectives. Turning her back to them and lowered her voice. "Focus on finishing Heat Rises. I am not going to be the reason why you don't get it to Black Pawn on time. We'll discuss it later... okay? My place. Seven. Remember?"
"Always," he said, and Beckett had to remind herself where she was, least she melt right there. Despite herself a smile coaxed its way onto her lips.

"While you're at it, grab some Chinese," she said. "You know what to get… the usual."

"I'll be there," she could hear the grin on his face. "With the food."

"Right, see you then," Beckett replied tersely, trying to shift back into detective mode.

"Love you," he fired off quickly, and then disconnected before she had the chance to answer back.

Beckett stood there for a moment, shock working its away onto her face. God, he'd done it to her twice in one day, surprising her with those words. Swallowing, she opened her mouth. "I love you, too," she half-whispered into the empty airspace, wishing he had given her the opportunity to reply. Just another thing they were going to have to discuss later this evening.

Running her lower lip through her teeth, she blushed slightly as she dropped the cell from her ear and hung up. Turning back to her desk, she slid down into her chair. As she grumbled under her breath at how he made her insides tingle and warm, Beckett put her phone down and then reached out, pulling her keyboard over. The computer monitor came to life and she squinted at the seemingly endless reports that required filling out.

Narrowing her eyes, and glaring at the work ahead of her as she thought about what other things lay ahead. Shaking her head slightly, Beckett grounded her teeth and moved the mouse to open up the first file. "Later Kate," she spoke to herself under her breath. "Later… right now, it's time to get some paperwork done."

XXX

Beckett stood in the break room eyeballing the coffee machine. God, how she wanted some coffee! Minutes ago she had watched, almost enviously, as Ryan had made himself a cup. The Irish detective had noticed her unrelenting stare and asked if she'd like one. She politely declined, flushing a bit and how close she had come to revealing the truth to him. She bit her lower lip and glared hard at the offending machine, wishing there was something else that could satisfy her fix for a caffeine loaded drink.

Her eyes flirted over to the buzzing vending machine and she cursed. Soda. In truth, she really wasn't that big of a soda drinker, sure, she'd have some now and then, but what she really wanted was some coffee. The rich lush aroma from the cupful that Ryan had just made had lingered and had her now salivating. Grounding her teeth, she surrendered to her better judgment and turned to the accursed vending machine, pushing the quarters in and pushing the white plastic button for a can of Coke.

Popping the cap she let out a loud curse as the carbonated liquid came fizzing out. Scowling, she held the can away from her body as she rushed to the sink. Beckett held the can over the sink until the overflow stopped, then she put it down on the counter and washed her hands, cleaning off the stickiness. Grumbling, she grabbed a couple of paper towels and knelt down to wipe up the mess on the floor. She eventually shifted to her knees and was bending over, running the paper towels over the surface of the floor when it suddenly occurred to her that she might very well be doing this same thing when the twins—and their father—caused a mess.

But who was their father? Was it Rick? Or was it Josh? God, she was so positive it was Castle. It just had to be. But she had had sex with Josh around the same time… two weeks after sleeping with Castle. Beckett again admonished herself for not telling Josh to put on a condom. What had been
with her two months ago? She had failed to use protection with both Castle and Josh. God… it was all just so frustrating!

Growing startled and anxious by these thoughts, Beckett sat up and pushed herself up off the floor, wanting to scream at the sheer vexation of it all. She tossed the paper towels in the wastebasket and stormed out of the break room, forgetting her can of Coke. She marched up to her desk grabbed her phone and turned around, biting her lower lip. Before she could second-guess what she was doing, Beckett darted into the woman's restroom and found a secluded stall in the back. She locked the stall door and sat on the toilet seat.

Flipping her phone up, she dialed Dr. Julie Elam. The office assistant answered on the third ring.

"Dr. Julie Elam's office, how can I help you?" spoke the friendly voice.

"I need to speak with Dr. Elam… immediately!" Beckett nearly hissed into the phone. "It… it's important."

"Dr. Elam is busy at the moment—"

"I'm Detective Beckett, put me through… NOW!" she startled herself with the ferocity of her determination. But the information she needed was of vital importance to her mental wellbeing and she didn't know if she could survive the rest of the day without some consoling from her trusted doctor and friend.

"Hold on," the woman's voice was no longer friendly. Polite, yes, but more irritated or annoyed than before. Soft jazz filled the speaker and Beckett closed her eyes and took a deep breath to calm her nerves as she was placed on hold.

After what seemed like twenty minutes when it was in reality only two, the soft jazz ended. "This is Dr. Elam," came Julie's reassuring and comforting voice. She sounded concerned and worried.

Beckett opened her eyes and stared blankly at the grey uniformed metal of the stall door, momentarily forgetting why she had called. "Julie… I… I need… um…?"

"Kate?" she sounded surprised now.

"Yes," Beckett nodded, even though the doctor couldn't see her. "It's me."

"What's the matter? You sound worried sick?" Julie inquired.

"Castle, he… um…," her voice trailed off as she raked her fingers through her hair, pushing it away from her face. She sucked in a deep breath and continued, needing to get this weight off her chest and shoulders. "We… we were just so both shocked about the news, and then… he didn't mean anything by it, but he made a crack about whether or not he was the father… and well…"

"Was there another men you slept with at the time?" Julie asked bluntly, her tone professional, yet friendly at the same time. Beckett remained silent. The doctor sighed on the other end of the phone. "Kate, if I'm to help you, you are going to need to tell me the truth. All of it."

Beckett swallowed hard past the guilt and shuddered. "Yes," she confessed. "Julie, to tell you the truth, this… this wasn't at all planned. My… my boyfriend was out of town… Hell, he was always out of town," she added with some bitterness, then continued, her voice changing, almost with a hint of something akin to nostalgia for the good old days when Castle would flirt with her through their banter (not that she didn't mind their new relationship, but she had secretly loved the banter). "And, well, Castle… he… he was always there, and he was not going anywhere… and…"
"And, one thing led to another, and before you knew it, you had slept with him," Julie finished. "Right?"

"Honestly, I don't know what I was thinking, Julie," Beckett whispered into the phone as if she was afraid someone would overhear their conversation. "I wasn't being really smart. He was drunk—which was my doing—and I... I, well, I just took advantage of him is what I did."

Julie laughed slightly on the other side. "You don't have to explain to me, Kate, I've seen Mr. Castle. He's very attractive."

Beckett blushed. "It's much more than that, Julie."

"I know, dear," Julie replied and Beckett could hear the smile on her friend's lips. "You love him."

"Yes... I do," Beckett admitted with a deeper blush, and felt better after doing so. God, how she needed to tell Castle this! "I have, for some time."

"So... you're wondering about which man is the father of your twins?" Julie questioned, turning back into the doctor.

"Yes."

There was a pause, and Beckett could hear Julie take a breath. "All right, you were with Castle... and then how long before you were with your then boyfriend?" she asked.

Beckett closed her eyes, still feeling terrible that she had cheated on Josh with Castle even though she had already known that the relationship was pretty much over with Josh in everything but name. But what was most odd—and puzzling at that—was that she had felt even worse having slept with Josh after having slept with Castle. Even though Castle had been drunk and had been unaware that it had been anything but a dream, until she informed him otherwise, it had felt to her like she was somehow, in a strange way, then cheating on Castle. Her mind was very confused at the time, conflicted and debating over what she wanted. And she had fantasized about Castle when she had been with Josh, which had been the clincher for her in having to finally give in and end that relationship.

"Two weeks," she eventually answered as she closed her eyes, relinquishing one single tear for her past guilt. She let out a breathy sigh and wiped the tear away, admitting to herself that she needed to move past this.

She waited for Dr. Elam to reply, and it seemed to take forever. Beckett tried to take calm relaxing breaths, hearing obvious sounds of her friendly doctor typing on a keyboard. There was a sound like Julie had come to a conclusion and then her voice returned. "From how far along you are with the twins, there is no doubt in my mind, or with the calculations I've just done on the computer, Richard Castle is the father. You were most likely already more than a week and a half along by the time you slept with your then boyfriend."

It was like a huge massive weight just lifted off her shoulders and the biggest grin she had ever had worked its way onto her lips. Beckett truly felt joy; joy unlike any she had felt before. To know for sure that Castle was, without a doubt, the father of her twins was truly a delight to behold. Letting out a sigh of relief, Beckett thanked Dr. Elam before she then hung up.

She then sat there for the longest moment, simply staring off at nothing, one finger idly twirling a loose strand of her long hair as she ran her lower lip underneath her teeth. Castle was the father. There was no doubt about that now. Her grin widened as she remembered that Castle would be at
her place when she got off work. Oh, she was going to do wicked things with him then.

Flipping her phone shut, Beckett got up and left the stall, feeling better. The rest of the day, however, seemed long, boring and dull, and not all of that was because it had been mainly paperwork. Beckett loathed to admit it, but she had grown accustomed to a certain author shadowing and, dare she say, staring at her all day. Her talk with her OB-GYN had help to calm her nerves and anxiety.

Beckett had hated pouring out her emotions and admitting to some truths to Dr. Elam. Julie was a friend, yes, and as a doctor whatever Beckett told her, she knew would be kept in confidence, but it had still been hard for her to do. But afterwards, having admitted much more than she had intended, Beckett felt more confident and sure of herself, and she certainly planning on doing more with Castle tonight than just talking.

She could tell that Esposito had noticed the smile that had been plastered on her face from the moment she had exited the restrooms and Beckett knew that the Hispanic detective was debating over whether or not to make a comment about it. Eventually she saw him slink away, surreptitiously bringing his cell up to his ear. Beckett shook her head, knowing he was calling Lanie. She knitted her eyebrows together and frowned, suddenly becoming worried that her friend would crack and spill the beans, as it were, to her detective boyfriend.

Biting her lower lip, Beckett tried to shake the worry away and turned back to her paperwork. She needed to finish, so she could get back to her apartment and prepare for a visit from a certain novelist. She smirked. Maybe she’d let him know just how much of a fangirl she really was.
Beckett couldn't get out of the precinct fast enough. As soon as it was six, she was turning off her computer, pulling on her jacket and practically bolting for the elevator. Ryan and Esposito had been giving her odd looks during the latter half of the day, obviously confused over why the shadow's seat had been vacant. It wasn't like this was the first time Castle hadn't shown up at the precinct, but ever since they had started officially dating, Castle had always showed up about a half-hour before Beckett got off and would simply sit in his chair, either creepily staring at her or doodling in his notepad.

And today his chair had remained strangely—longingly—empty. Even Beckett could feel the strangeness of it. She would deny it if questioned, but she actually missed him creepily staring at her whilst she finished her paperwork. For some odd reason having him stare at her had somehow become soothing. Almost reassuring. Hearing the elevator chime ding, Beckett let out a sigh, and quickly made her way inside, hitting the button for the ride down.

Once in her car, she wasted no time driving to her apartment. Beckett had an uncharacteristic desire to actually dress up for Castle. In the past, when he had taken her out to a fancy restaurant, she had worn one of the three nice dresses she had, one of them having been given to her by Castle when they went undercover at a charity ball during the first year of him working—shadowing—her. Beckett did not plan on dressing up that much, but she wanted to get out of her pantsuit and where something more feminine… more girly. She laughed inwardly as she turned right at the intersection. Castle was perhaps the only guy she'd even been with that actually made her want to do such a thing.

_Chalk up another win in Castle's column for that one_, Beckett mused as she hunted for a parking spot.

Finally finding a spot for her car, Beckett unconsciously growled under her breath. Why couldn't she find an apartment building that had an underground parking garage? Getting out of her car and slinging her bag over her shoulder, she locked the doors and then hustled across the street and to the building's front door. Buzzing herself in, Beckett hastily made her way up to her apartment.

Once inside, she absently dropped her keys and bag on the small credenza by the door, and rushed to the bathroom, wanting to make herself look good for Castle. It stunned her again that she was thinking that, but she shoved it from her mind and focused on the task she had charged herself with doing. She took a quick shower, scrubbing herself clean and she made sure to use the shampoo that gave her that "cherry" scent she knew he loved so much, and would drive him crazy.

Beckett also took the time to shave her long legs, wanting them nice and smooth for Castle's talented fingers. She contemplated shaving the hair between her legs, then decided against it. Castle wanted a woman, not a girl. Finished, she stepped out of the shower, wrapping herself up in a towel, having decided to air-dry her hair and allow it to fall down naturally around her face.

Slinking into her bedroom, she glanced at the clock. She had twenty minutes left. Stepping over to her dresser, she opened it up and rifled through her underwear, searching for a particular pair she had hardly ever used. Finding the black lacy bra and matching panties, Beckett grinned. Oh, she was going to entice Mr. Castle tonight. She smirked. Maybe they'd even reenact the night their twins were conceived. Finishing drying off, Beckett put on the sexy lingerie and judged how she looked in the mirror. Narrowing her eyes, she turned sideways and almost let out a loud gasp.

She had been mistaken. She was showing, more than she thought she would be. It wasn't much, but
it was there, clear as day. And despite her thoughts earlier in the day, it was actually quite visible to
the naked eye. It was just a slight bump, but it was clearly there. Suddenly she wondered if Castle
would still find her sexy and hot in this little black lacy number she was wearing.

Closing her eyes, Beckett shook her head and attempted to reassure herself. The sight of her small
baby bump would probably only further turn Castle on, especially when there was no doubt that he
had a hand in helping to create it, even if he couldn't entirely remember all that he had done that
night. Smiling to herself, she ran her hands over her tummy, loving how she could feel the
beginning swell.

Beckett blinked in sudden realization. She was carrying twins. God… she… she'd now start really
showing a lot sooner than she had thought or had been prepared for. Sighing deeply to calm her
anxiety, she told herself to just relax and take one day at a time. Turning to her closet, she pulled
out a small green sundress that matched her eyes, a light yellow ribbon wrapped around the waist.

She also liked the small skirt on it, which would allow her to show off more of her long legs than
she normally did. She laughed lightly as she shimmied into the dress, imagining Castle's eyes
immediately dropping to her legs and his hand unconsciously reaching out to touch when they sat
down on the couch. Chewing on her lower lip and adjusting the straps of the sundress to hide the
bra strings (wanting him to be surprised when the dress got removed), Beckett found herself
actually wanting him to touch her legs… very much.

Kate Beckett normally wasn't the sort of woman to wear such things. In fact this sundress was
probably the only one she owned. And for the life of her, she could not remember when or where
she got it. But, nonetheless, it was there, in her closet, waiting for a day (or night, for that matter) in
which she finally chose to wear it.

When she was done preparing herself for her "evening date" with Rick Castle (as she had started to
think of it), Beckett was pleased with how she looked. Having dried naturally, her hair was slightly
more wavy and curly than normal, and she liked the look of it as it bounced about her face as she
moved. Though, she felt a little silly at having dressed up for what was, in a sense, an evening at
home. And as she scrutinized her appearance even more, that is when the doorbell buzzed,
announcing his arrival.

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Taking in a deep breath, she did one last look-over of the light make-up she had just finished
applying before padding out of her bedroom (there was no reason to put on any heels, especially
since she wasn't planning on remaining clothed in her sundress for that long) and towards the door.
Closing her eyes and exhaling softly, she opened the door and smiled, seeing Rick Castle standing
there with a plastic bag of Chinese takeout from their favorite restaurant. His dark blue eyes went
wide and Beckett tried not to show her delight as his eyes dropped down to drink in the sight of her
long legs. His jaw hung open and he looked very much like he was in some sort of trance.

"I… um… I…," he stammered, forcing himself to look up and meet her eyes, an adorable lopsided
grin forming on his face. "I brought the food."

Beckett smirked and her happiness reached her eyes, something that happened more often now that
she had started dating Castle. He was still dressed in the same suit he had worn to the doctor's
office, so Beckett grabbed his tie and backed up, adding a suggestive wink to her eye and swaying
her hips in a way that only made Castle's jaw drop even more. She smiled up at him as he used his
foot to close the door, watching as he expertly moved one hand around his back to lock the
deadbolt.
"Just how long do you think you're staying here, Mr. Castle?" she questioned in a low breathy voice that caused Castle to shiver promisingly.

"As long as you let me, Detective," he teased back, though she could tell his breath was hitched up as his eyes greedily drank in the sight of her bare legs.

Stifling a blush, Beckett swung around and tugged him along into the kitchen, where he placed the Chinese takeout on the counter. She turned around, releasing his tie and decided that she'd be the one to invade his personal space this time. Before he could do anything, Beckett stepped forward, wrapping her arms around his neck as she pushed up on her toes—surprisingly the height difference without her high heels did not bother her as much as she had thought it would.

Castle took a sharp intake of breath and she smirked, watching as his nostrils flared as he caught scent of the cherry smell that permeated her being. His hands dropped to her sides, and for a moment they just flirted there before settling around her waist, clutching her tightly. As she pushed her tongue out to lick his bottom lip, asking for entrance, Castle complied, moaning as he opened his mouth to her. Beckett closed her eyes and tasted him, really tasted him. And she was surprised at just how delicious he was.

After what seemed like a blissful eternity, Beckett reluctantly pulled back for air. Castle seemed to sense her reluctance, because he allowed himself a tiny proud smile. She rolled her eyes at him and playfully slapped his chest before settling back down on her feet and wrapping her arms around him, clutching on to the man that was the father of her twins.

"You're the father," she whispered out as she buried her head in his chest.

He let out a breath, and she felt a hand run down the back of her head, his fingers tangling into her long brunette strands. "I know," he replied. "And... and I'm sorry for implying I thought otherwise."

Beckett shifted, pulling back a little to look up at him. She stared into his eyes, and sensed the truth of his words. Giving him a soft smile, she nodded her head. "Well, just in case either of us were mistaken, I checked with Dr. Elam," she said slowly, not sure how he'd react to the news that she had actually worried enough about the possibility to check.

"And?"

Oh? Had she stopped talking? She swallowed and blinked, looking back up at him, only seeing reassurance, respect, desire, and love—yes, love—in his eyes. "She... she said there is no doubt that you are the father, Rick," Beckett said, her fingers fiddling with the lapels of his jacket. "You... and no one else."

She tugged on the lapels and kissed him again, slow and sweetly, enjoying every minute of it. Beckett held him to her for longer than before and they both had to separate to breathe. A boyish smirk formed on his lips as his eyes gazed down to hers.

"So, are we just going to stand here kissing, or do you want to move things into the living room... or possibly the bedroom," he added, looking hopeful.

Beckett laughed softly and rolled her eyes, giving him a playful slap to the chest as she stepped back, glancing up in satisfaction as his nostrils flared again, taking in her cherry scent. His eyes even closed, if just for a second, and his lips parted.

"Mmm... cherries," the words slipped out before he knew what he was saying. He noticed
immediately and opened his eyes, flushing slightly in embarrassment, which only made Beckett laugh more.

"Come on, let's eat… I'm starving!" she exclaimed.

"I have no doubt," Castle replied with a smirk. "After all, you're eating for three!"

Beckett smiled at him as she walked around the island counter to the cupboards and grabbed two large plates. Normally she might have had a glass of white wine or even a beer with Chinese, but since she was pregnant, she decided to just go with some water. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Castle following her lead, pouring himself a glass of water as well. A soft smile touched her lips, grateful that neither of them would have alcohol in their systems. She wanted him to remember tonight's events.

Padding across to the living area, Beckett sat down on the couch, placing the plates and her glass on the coffee table. She looked up and watched Castle follow, sidestepping the ottoman, and bringing the food with him. As he kicked off his shoes when he sat down next to her, Beckett noticed that Castle took the time to quickly drink in the sight of her long legs. She could tell he wanted to touch, run his fingers along the smooth skin, but he was being a good boy and waiting for permission.

Castle reached into the plastic bag and produced the cartons, lining them up in-between them as he also fished out the chopsticks and fortune cookies. Breaking her sticks, she rubbed them together to remove any stray splinters before reaching over for the nearest carton. She had no idea what Castle had picked up, but they'd eaten Chinese takeout enough over the past three years that he knew what she liked.

Opening the top of the package, she smiled. He just so happened to put her favorite right in front of her. Using her chopsticks she piled it up on her plate before handing it over to him, watching as he put some on his plate and laughing as he carefully picked the mushrooms out. He looked up in a half-smirk.

"What?"

She shook her head. "I thought you liked mushrooms," she said.

"I do," he said, begrudgingly. "Just… just not in this sauce, is all."

Beckett snorted a laugh that was very un-lady like and she blushed brightly, hoping she hadn't embarrassed herself. Castle's bright eyes danced and she knew she was safe. She didn't have to worry about appearances or allowing her small quirky traits out around him, like she had to do with other men. With Castle she could just be herself. Hell, he was probably the only man she had ever been with where she could just be herself. With every other man she had hidden something or had kept something secret. But with Castle, everything was out in the open, so to speak. She was free to be her, and never had to pretend to be interested or like something that she neither found interesting nor liked.

"So… did you get any more work done in Heat Rises?" Beckett inquired as she added a generous amount of chow mein to her plate.

"Oh yes," Castle nodded, spilling out some fried rice onto his plate. "With all the inspiration I've been getting, I'll be surprised if I'm not done soon." He laughed lightly and shook his head. "Gina's gonna curse like hell when I don't ask for an extension. I can assure you, my dear detective, this one is going to be finished well before the deadline."
Beckett subconsciously fumbled at the mention of Gina, and she almost dumped all the sweet and sour chicken all over the floor. She bit her lower lip and admonished hers. Gina was never going to be completely out of their lives… she was still his publisher. Unless I convince him to accept a deal with Random House or Penguin/Putnam, she thought devilishly to herself. Beckett could swear remembering him say something about one of those publishing houses making an offer to lure him away from Black Pawn.

"Kate?" his voice called her out of her musings.

Blinking, she looked up at him and smiled. "So, Rook and Nikki close to finding the killer, are they?"

Castle narrowed his eyes, like he knew there was something more. But thankfully he stayed silent on it and answered her question. "Close, yes…," he smirked his boyish grin. "You can say that."

"Alright! what have you done?" she demanded, recognizing that look on his face and the glimmer in his eye.

"What?" Castle defended himself, trying to act all innocent.

"Oh god, don't tell me you've got Nikki and Rook in some hot shower scene?" she almost went red with mortification. Now that they were an official couple, Beckett did not want people thinking that the things Nikki Heat did with Castle's fiction persona Jameson Rook were based on what she, Kate Beckett, the real-life Nikki Heat, did with Richard Castle.

He laughed lightly and for a moment she thought he had.

"Castle?" she grounded her teeth, making her tone of voice clear that she was not joking.

"Don't worry, sweetie," Castle winked, leaning over and kissing her cheek. "As I said earlier today, our private moments are just that… private." He tapped the side of his head. "All that stuff is for up here. You know… for when you become so huge that doing certain things might prove a bit difficult. Though I'm sure we'll find a way around that."

Did he just 'sweetie' me? Beckett thought, her mind a little slow to catch up. Huge? What the hell? Just for that comment she gave him a punch in the shoulder.

"Ouch!" he whined like a little kid.

"Oh, shut up," she groaned, rolling her eyes. "You're an adult, Castle, start acting like one. Now be quiet and eat!"

"Yes, ma'am," Castle said with a bob of his head.

They dug into their food, and Beckett took sometime to collect her thoughts and cool down. Putting her chopsticks down, she suddenly realized she wasn't really that hungry. She knew she should eat more, but right now… staring at her half plateful, all she felt like was vomiting. Oh god, she suddenly thought, her eyes going wide.

She bolted up to her feet and went running out of the room, a hand covering her mouth. Shoving the bathroom door up and pulled the toilet seat up, Beckett dropped to her knees and retched out the contents of her stomach. It wasn't until the last shudder ran down her spine that she recognized the hands holding up her hair, causing her to almost go pale with humiliation. There goes my wild night of passion, she grumbled to herself.
His hand was rubbing up and down her back in a very soothing way, but just the same, she tensed with embarrassment. Castle chuckled. "You have no reason to be embar—" his words suddenly dropped off and she heard his breath hitch up a bit. "My, my, my… Detective Beckett, is that a lacy black bra I see?"

Her eyes went wide, but a smile touched her lips just the same. "Yes. Yes it is," she admitted, hearing him chuckle, as she sat back up and looked up at him.

Castle was grinning at her. After a moment, she noticed that one of his hands had dropped to touch her bare thigh. Beckett could do little to hide the blush that spread to her cheeks as his dark blue eyes locked with her emerald greens. "Why, Detective Beckett…," he feigned a stunned gasp as he wiggled his eyebrows. "I had no idea you were so… so devious."
Chapter 8

Kate Beckett froze, suddenly unsure how to act. She had intended for the lacy number she was wearing under the green sundress to be a surprise, but now—with her mad rush to the bathroom—her dress had shifted, revealing that which she had been intending to use to entice Castle into a night of wild passionate lovemaking. As she sat there, it slowly came back to her that he had spoken, not to mention that one of his hands had somehow managed to find its way to her bare thigh.

"Why, Detective Beckett…," he feigned a stunned gasp as he wiggled his eyebrows. "I had no idea you were so… so devious."

Quirking up an eyebrow, Beckett looked up at him with a mischievous glint in her eye. Perhaps her night of passion might not be gone. She was positive that seeing her purge the meal she had just eaten would have killed the mood for Castle, but with the way his fingers were slowly caressing her bare thigh, and the suggestive way he wiggled his eyebrows, Beckett felt more certain that her hopes for tonight had not floundered.

"I… it was supposed to be a surprise," she admitted, running her lower lip through her teeth as she tried, but failed, to suppress the blush growing across her cheeks. Her eyes glanced down for a moment and she swallowed, tasting the backwash of her retching. Grimacing slightly, she shifted, moving his hand away from her thigh. "Water?"

"Oh, yes, of course," Castle nodded, giving her a small smile, as he stood up from his kneeling position and rushed out of the room.

Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, Beckett leaned against the side of the sink for a moment, collecting her thoughts, before standing up and stepping out of the bathroom. Castle was on his way back, a glass of water in his hand. A slow gentle smile touched her lips as he handed it to her, his eyes watching with concern and care as she brought it to her mouth and downed it. She shivered and lowered the glass, sighing.

"Thanks," she said meekly, glancing up at Castle as she sidestepped around him and padded back over to the couch. Her nose crunched up and she shivered at the aroma of the Chinese food. Damn, she mumbled. And I really like Chinese food, especially all the stuff Rick picked up… Rick? Hey, when did I start thinking of Castle as Rick in my mind?

"Kate?"

"Uh, yes?" she inquired, looking over her shoulder at him as he followed.

"Um… how about I clean this stuff up and get you some saltine crackers?" he suggested.

"Sure, that would… uh… be nice, yes, thanks," she smiled softly as he winked and bent down to clear off the coffee table. Beckett let out a small sigh and sat down, placing a hand on her stomach as Castle moved into the kitchenette.

Watching him from the couch, she wondered when he'd learned where she kept everything. He stored the cartons into the refrigerator and rinsed off the plates before slipping them into the dishwasher. He washed his hands, then turned and opened a cupboard, finding the package of saltine crackers.

Beckett adjusted her sundress, trying to conceal the black lacy bra she was wearing as Castle
returned, breaking the plastic wrappings and handing her some crackers as he sat down beside her. Accepting them with a smile, Beckett nibbled slowly on the crackers, watching him as he settled himself on the couch beside her, one of his hands dropping to her knee. His fingers moved around a bit as if itching to go higher up her leg, but he managed to control himself.

"So, what did you have planned for the evening, Detective?" he asked with a smirk and a wiggle of his eyebrows, ending the silence that had descended upon them.

She swallowed and glanced over at him, a small smile touching her lips. "I think the lacy black bra says enough," Beckett said, eyeing him to judge his reaction.

Castle chuckled and gave a nod. "That it does, Kate," he said. "But before we get… um… out of control, shouldn't we discuss some things first?"

"Like what?" she asked, playing dumb as she took a bigger bite of one of the saltines.

He let out a soft sigh and tilted his head slightly. "Telling people," he said. "I mean, Lanie and the Captain know, but Mother and Alexis… and let us not forget your father. I mean… does he even know that we're… that, um… we're dating?"

Swallowing, Beckett reached over and picked up her glass of water, taking a long slow drink to give herself time to think of a response. Closing her eyes and inhaling softly, she placed the glass back down on the coffee table and looked up at him.

"No," she admitted, shamefaced. "I'm sorry. It's been… well, it's been busy and I've been distracted by… well, by all this," she gestured between them and then at her tummy. "And I… I haven't exactly told him anything. I… what I mean is… Castle, I'm sorry, but he doesn't even know I broke up with Josh."

"Oh," Castle's face fell and he looked crestfallen, as if she'd just told him that he had to stop coming to the precinct, that he was no longer allowed to shadow her or be a part of her life.

"Castle… Rick…" she began, wanting to explain, placing a hand on his arm.

"No, that's all right," he said with a sigh and nod, shifting slightly away from her, her hand dropping away. "I understand. I mean, come on, I'm Richard Castle… notorious in the tabloids as a womanizer and playboy, right?"

He eased back and his hand slipped off her knee. She hated the loss of his touch. "Rick? No… I…"

"No, it's all right," Castle said again, repeating himself. God, she could not get over how dejected he looked. "I get it. I… I understand." He swallowed hard and averted his eyes as he continued. "I mean, what do they say about me in the papers? That I screw anything with breasts and long legs? Yeah," he nodded. "What father would want his daughter associated with such a—"

"Stop!" she gave him a glare, effectively silencing him. Putting the saltines down on the coffee table, she placed a hand on his chin and tilted his head until he was looking at her, his eyes dark and forlorn. "Wednesday."

"What?" he coughed, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"Wednesday night," she explained. "We're going out to dinner with my dad. We tell him then. Everything."

"Then… then you're not ashamed to be dating me or…?"
Before he could finish his question, Beckett placed a finger on his lips and adjusted herself, sliding across the gap between them and crawling into his lap. She planted her legs on either side of his hips, effectively straddling him and pinning him to the couch beneath her. His breath hitched up as his eyes dropped down, watching as the hem of the small skirt of the sundress inched higher, exposing more of her slender legs. Smiling at him with a mischievous smirk, Beckett ran her hands down his chest.

"I'm not ashamed to be dating you, Rick," she said. "And… I don't care what the tabloids say. I know you… the real you. And, I'll admit, it took me a while to figure it out, but you are nothing like what they say you are." She paused and leaned her forehead against his, looking him directly in the eye. "You're a loving and caring man, Rick Castle, and I am lucky… truly lucky to have you."

His lips curved upwards as she kissed him slowly, running her hands along his chest, her fingers gently tugging on his tie. She thought it amusing that he had worn a tie today, considering she'd hardly ever seen him wear one. She ran her tongue over his top lip, asking for entrance, which he eagerly granted. They moaned into each other's mouths as she deepened the kiss. His hands moved up and gripped her sides, holding her to him.

Leaning back out of the kiss, Beckett loosened his tie and whipped it off his neck, casually tossing it over her shoulder. Grinning down at him, her eyes darkening with lust, Beckett reached for the hem of her sundress and pulled it up over her head, revealing the skimpy lacy black lingerie she had on underneath.

"Oh God, Kate," his eyes were wide as they freely roamed over her. "You… you're stunning… absolutely stunning."

She laughed softly and grabbed his hands, bringing them to her hips. "Touch me, Rick," she said a low and sultry voice. "Touch me, and make me feel like a woman."

"Yes ma'am," he smirked and his hands began to explore her body as if it was completely new to him. They'd only truly been together three times (her bed last night, in the shower this morning, and his office at the Loft this afternoon). She didn't count the night the twins had been conceived; since he was not entirely there, do to his drunken haze, which she had induced in him.

Beckett had no complaints though. She relished how he touched her like she was something fresh and new. No other man had touched her like that, making her feel unique and special. Closing her eyes, she moaned softly as his hands skidded up her sides and cupped her breasts through her bra. He leaned forward and kissed the top of her chest, skimming his hands along the lacy fabric. His hands moved to her back and his fingers found the clasp that held her bra together.

Gripping his hair, holding his head to her chest, Beckett panted and bobbed her head. "Yes… yes, Rick, yes," she encouraged him.

She felt him smirk against her right breast as his fingers unhooked her bra. She straightened her back and allowed him to pull it away, absentely letting fall down on the couch besides them. And then his lips were on her bare flesh, blazing hot trails of pleasure along her chest. She groaned, her head lulling forward as he took one of her nipples into his mouth. Her lips trembled and dropped as she gasped out in pleasure, her fingers gripping tighter at his hair.

It did not take long for his hands to join his lips and Beckett smiled, remembering him doing the very same thing when on that night two months ago when she had thrown inhibition to the wind and simply had her way with him. He cupped her breasts in his hands and continued to touch her as his thumbs teased her. She closed her eyes and held onto him.
Beckett felt her cheeks flush as her breath grew hot and heavy. Her whole body was coming alive under his ministrations and she knew that it would not take her long to be ready, if she wasn't ready already. The warmth was already beginning to coalesce between her legs. Suddenly, Castle's lips were moving up to her collarbone and to her neck. She let out a startled gasp and quaked over him when his mouth found her pulse point. He latched onto it and sucked hard, making her eyes roll back into her head. There was going to be a hickey, she knew, but she didn't care.

Shifting over him, she blinked and looked down at him, moving her hands to hold his face. His eyes locked with hers and she smiled softly.

"Why me?" she asked, her voice low and breathy.

He swallowed hard and looked up at her, his eyes almost hauntingly deep. "You're extraordinary," was his answer.

Pressing her lips together, Beckett smiled, running her lower lip under her teeth as she blushed at his assertion. His hands moved and flowed down her back coming to rest just above her bottom. She smirked down at him, her hands shifting to his shoulders as she began to move her hips, grinding over him. Castle rolled his head back against the back of the couch and groaned. Beckett grinned in triumph at feeling him grow even more aroused than he already was.

"God, Kate, you're killing me here," he objected in a breathy cough.

Running her hands along the collar of his shirt, she slipped her fingers down his chest, unbuttoning each button as she went, going nice and slow, wanting to remember every moment of it. Tugging the bottom of his shirt out from his pants, she parted it open and placed her palms on his bare chest.

Castle wasn't the most muscular or buff man she had ever been with; his abs weren't rock hard like someone else she knew. But she did not care. Castle was by far a better lover than any other man she'd ever been with. Running her hands along his chest, Beckett smiled at how he shuddered under her touch, a slow moan of want escaping his lips as her hands dropped before his waist.

Scooting back a bit, giving herself more room to work with, Beckett undid his belt and unbuckled his pants. She unzipped him and slipped her hands inside and underneath his boxers. Castle jumped and yelped when she slipped her fingers around him.

"What?"

"Ooh… your hand is cold," he shivered, with a wink.

"I can remove it if you like."

"Oh, no, that's fine…," he smirked back. "Just… just keep doing what you're doing, detective."

She shook her head and brought her free hand up to his lips, placing a finger on them to silence him. "When it's just us, like this, or in bed, I'm Kate…," Beckett murmured into his ear before taking it into her mouth.

Castle let out a pleasurable sigh and shuddered. "I… I can do that."

Beckett kissed her way across his jaw to his lips and his arms wrapped around her, his hands going up into her hair. He hummed into her lips.

"Mmm… cherries," he mumbled.
She closed her eyes and smiled, shifting her hips off his middle as she backed away and began kissing her way down his chest. Castle's head dropped back and landed against the backrest of the couch. His jaw flopped open and he let out a low groan as her lips went further south. Her hands followed her lips and she nuzzled her nose against his stomach as she dropped her knees down onto the floor, resting herself between his legs.

Tucking her fingers under the waistband of his pants, she tugged at them, pulling his boxers down at the same time. Her eyes lit up when she saw him, and how much he was ready for her. She blushed and bit her lower lip, knowing that she too was more than ready to connect with him once more. He lifted his feet and she slide his pants and boxers off, adding them to the pile of clothes that was starting to build on the floor beside the coffee table.

Running her hands along his thighs, and she looked up at him from under her eyebrows. He looked down at her and his eyes glazed over with desire as she teased him, rubbing her hands closer and closer to his center.

"Rick," she said softly.

"Kate?"

"I love you," she said, gripping his thighs as she stood up before him. His gaze followed her and he kept his eyes locked on hers. His mouth hung open and she saw the beginnings of a large smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Really?" he asked, almost in shock.

Beckett bit her lower lip and nodded sheepishly. "Yes, really," she said, running her hands down her sides and resting them on her belly. She suddenly froze, her eyes going wide. She could feel it, the shape of the small swell. Suddenly she was nervous, afraid that he'd notice and suddenly lose his desire.

She nearly jumped in surprise when she felt his hands join hers. "You're gorgeous, Kate," he said, shifting to kneel down in front of her. He gently moved her hands, interlacing his fingers with hers as he leaned his head against her middle. She looked down at him, confused. Slowly, he turned his head and nuzzled her stomach, kissing it lightly.

And then, before she could say a word, he was standing and lifting her up into his arms. Beckett let out a light giggle that made her feel foolish and stupid, but the grin that formed on Castle's lips when she did so only made her heart warm even more. He held her to him and carried her down the hall and towards the bedroom.

"I love you, too, Katherine Beckett," he murmured into her ear as he laid her down onto the bed, his hands running along her shoulders and sides.

She looked up at him, startled by the turn in the tide. He was now the one in control, and she felt like mush in his hands. God, she had it bad. Beckett had never known just how much she wanted or needed him until this moment. She loved him… and it was a deep love. A love that only came along once in a blue moon.

He leaned over her and kissed her softly. Her hands came up and tugged on the shirt that was still on his shoulders, pulling her closer. She moaned into his mouth as she felt his hand dance down her trembling body, finding the edge of the lacy panties she wore. He smirked against her mouth, and then slipped his fingers underneath the fabric and found her wet center.
"Oh God… RICK!" Beckett arched her back and let out a surprisingly loud moan when he touched her. She stared up at him, their eyes locked together and she smiled warmly, remembering how she had labeled him as having talented fingers, and oh god… were they ever talented; the things he was doing to her right now...

"Rick," she panted, her chest heaving as her entire body warmed and tingled with pleasure. "Take me."

It startled her to even hear herself saying that. She was never taken. She had never simply allowed a man to have her. She had always been in control. But here she was, telling Richard Castle to take her, to have control. Yes, she nodded and a teardrop slipped done her cheek. It was not a tear of sorrow or sadness, but one of joy. She trusted him above all others. Trusted him enough to give herself over to him completely. To submit to him… and him alone. He was it. And she knew it… was completely positive, with not a doubt in her mind. He was her one and done.

"Marry me," she blurted out.

"W… what?" Castle froze above her, his fingers stopping in mid-motion between her legs.

"You heard me, Richard Castle," Beckett squirmed under him, hoping and praying she had not just made a complete fool out of herself.

"Kate?" he blinked and looked down at her, his eyes slowly dawning with the realization of what she had said. "I… um… are you sure? I mean, I know you, Kate… you're a one and done kind of girl." He swallowed, like he was afraid. "And besides… we… we've only really been going out for a month."

She shook her head, and brought her arms up to loop them around his neck. "No… we've been going out a lot longer than that, Richard Castle," Beckett asserted. "By my calculations, you started courting me three years ago."

"Courting?" he furrowed his brow, his expression one of utter confusion. "Kate… no disrespect intended, but you… I mean… you… and I, we never…," he was rambling now. It was so adorable, but she had to stop him. Beckett moved one hand to caress the side of his face, effectively silencing him.

"I'm sure, Rick," she spoke slowly and in a firm voice so that he knew she was serious. "I haven't been this certain about anything in my entire life. You, Richard Alexander Rodgers, are my one and done."

He smirked and chuckled at her use of his birth name. "Is that who you want to become, Mrs. Kate Rodgers?" he asked, looking at her with a quizzical eye.

"Kate Castle would do just fine," she smirked. "Though at the precinct I'd still like to go by Detective Beckett… for my mom."

Castle nodded in understanding. She shifted under him, still waiting for him to answer. He hadn't really answered her question. Gazing up at him as he narrowed his eyes in thought, she recognized the look in his eyes. He was uncertain, worried.

"Talk to me?" she urged, ignoring for the moment that they were both practically naked and that his hand was still lying between her legs.

"It… its just kind of sudden, is all," he said, blinking and looking down at her. "I mean, are you sure? This isn't the hormones talking or anything else, is it?" He paused and frowned, as if he was
kicking himself for even suggesting that. "I mean… Beckett… Kate… I… I don't want you to feel like we have to get married because I… well… because you got knocked up."

Bringing her other hand around to join the first, Beckett cradled his face in her hands. "I don't feel any pressure or obligation, Rick," she reassured him. "I want you… now and forever. You. Are. My. One. And. Done." She punctuated every word to get it through his thick skull.

She watched as he took a deep breath and sighed. "Well, this is a first," he said with a light chuckle.

"What?" she asked, confused, knitting her eyebrows together.

"No one's ever proposed to me," he said with a smirk.

"Is that a yes, then?" she asked, batting her eyelashes at him.

Castle chuckled softly and he wiggled his fingers between her legs, making her gasp. "Oh absolutely it's a yes," he purred, winking and leaning down to kiss her.

Beckett squeezed her arms around his neck, holding him close. Her heart seemed to explode with happiness within her chest. She giggled softly, overwhelmed by the sheer delight and euphoria she was feeling at the future she had just created for herself. A future with Richard Castle… not just as the father of her children, but as her true partner in life… her husband.

"Alright, Ricky," she grinned, looking up at him with a mischievous sparkle in her eye as she wiggled out of her panties, one hand sliding down his chest to grip him in her fingers. "Why don't you give me a taste of the perks of being your future wife?"

Castle's face burst into a broad smile as he shifted over her, settling himself between her spread legs. His ran his hands up her thighs, and he kissed her slowly, whispering just how much he loved her long legs. Beckett laughed and playfully slapped him against his shoulder.

"Enough with the small talk, Writer Boy," she teased. "I want to see some action."

"Right you are, Mrs. Castle," he joked back.

Beckett gasped and trembled with delight, surprised at how much she enjoyed hearing that from his lips, directed at her. She grabbed his face and pulled him in for a deep kiss and he moved his hips forward. She moaned into his mouth, their tongues colliding in a fearsome display of desire as he connected with her, rendering her incoherent and mumbling for more.

As he moved over her, he kissed her and held her close to his body. This was by far the most intimate and loving way they had ever made love, and he was in control. This was not how she had expected Castle to take control. It was different than anything she would have imagined him doing. And though she liked it hard and rough sometimes, she found that she enjoyed this just as much, if not more.

They writhed together, her hips moving with his as he set the pace. Kate had never done this before, let the man set the pace. Josh had tried, but she wouldn't let him. And besides, it had always been quick and fast with him… mainly because that's really all they had time for. But with Castle… oh, he was so different. He was always here for her, and he made sure that she was pleased, so Beckett had no qualms about letting him be the dominate one… at least this time around. Later she'd make sure that he knew she could rock his world.

However, just for now, she was simply going to enjoy these precious moments. Beckett wanted to be his, to let him have her, to do with her as he pleased. Besides, everything he was doing felt so
good to her, she didn't want it to stop. He was like a drug. And she was always—*always*—going to need her Castle fix.

She was going to treasure each one of these moments, because tomorrow would be a new day, a day in which she was no longer just Kate Beckett, Homicide Detective, but Kate Beckett, the future Mrs. Castle. And God, how she loved the sound of that!

XXX

Later that evening, after they had both reached an extremely pleasing plateau of physical release, she laid fully satisfied and contented in his arms, resting her head against his shoulder, as his hand languidly danced up and down her spine. She played her fingers across his chest, musing on the future.

Castle made a sudden noise of realization and soon he was laughing, shaking with mirth.

"What?" she tilted her head up, quirking an eyebrow, and looked at him, completely bewildered by his sudden onset of amusement. But then again, this was Richard Castle she was talking about; it wasn't that hard for him to find amusement in something. "What's so funny?"

He chuckled and grabbed her hand and held it up, running his fingers along hers. Castle pulled her hand up to his lips and kissed her hand. "Tomorrow, I'm going to put a ring on it."
Chapter 9

She woke up with a yawn, feeling more refreshed and peaceful than she had ever felt before. It took her a moment before she realized that she was curled up against him, nestling close to his warm body. The majority of her own body was sprawled out over him. Blinking, as the fog of sleep slowly receded from her mind, she slowly became aware of his hand. Tilting her head over her shoulder, Beckett spied his hand, palm wide, fingers spread to the max, resting comfortably on one of her buttocks.

In the past, if she had awoken like this with the man she was currently in bed with, she might have panicked. But now, in the present, she found she rather enjoyed the warmth of his body and the feel of his hand resting on her bottom. She shifted closer to him, pressing her soft body up against his, smiling as his head moved slightly and his lips parted to mumble her name.

Beckett stared at his sleeping features for the longest moment, basking in the life she currently possessed. Then, in a sudden burst, she was rushed with memories of last night. Everything that was said and done came back. The way Castle had seized control and brought her from the living area to her bedroom had been unexpected. As was the slow and tender way he made love to her. Not to mention everything she had said. Had she really told him to *take her*? She supposed she had. However, it did not bother Beckett at all. She had meant it, and allowed him to have her in the manner in which he wished.

Her smile stretched wider as she gazed at him, watching as his head shifted and he pushed his face into the pillow. His mouth dropped open slightly as a snore pushed itself out. She rolled her eyes and held back a laugh at how silly he looked… well, not too silly, he was actually not that bad to look at, even with his tousled and wild morning hair.

A soft yelp escaped her throat as his fingers tightened a bit on her buttock as he shifted some more, her name tumbling out of his lips again. Blinking, she smiled up at him, and shifted, moving up over him. His hand slipped away and fell to the mattress. Maneuvering her mouth over his ear, she parted her lips and spoke in a low and sultry voice.

"Rick," she called softly, planting butterfly kisses on his ear. "Hey, Ricky… babe, time to wake up."

"Mmm?" Castle grumbled, hardly coherent. His eyes fluttered open and she smiled at seeing the dark blues recognizing her, causing his lips to curve upwards in a lopsided grin that she found absolutely adorable. "Morning, beautiful…"

"Morning, handsome," she replied, mimicking him, as she leaned forward and pressed a soft kiss to his lips.

Castle let out a soft sigh as she leaned away, turning her head slightly to rest her head against his shoulder, her hand running patterns along his chest. She chewed on her lower lip as she stared off into nothing, remembering more of what she had said. Had she really proposed to him? Had she, always confused and cautious Kate Beckett, asked him, playboy bestselling ruggedly handsome mystery author Richard Castle, to marry her? Swallowing hard, she risked a glance up at him, seeing him smiling down at her.

His smile faded and he frowned, his eyes reading her. He could always read her. Always. "Kate?" he started softly, turning to move his arm around her shoulder to hold her close. "God, Kate, please don't tell me you are having second thoughts about what you asked me last night?"
"I… er… Rick… I just…," she fumbled, looking for a way to explain. Unlike him, she was terrible with words. "Look… Rick, I love you… you know I do… but last night… it… it was just the moment."

Castle shifted, turning onto his side so that they were looking each other in the eyes, their noses inches apart. "Oh no you don't," he glowered.

"Rick… I…," Beckett stammered, averting her eyes. God, she did love him. Why was she trying to take it back now? Why? She closed her eyes and felt an unwelcome tear fall down her cheek. His hand was on her in a second, wiping it away. His thumb caressed her jaw and she hesitantly opened her eyes to look up at him.

"Talk to me, Kate," Castle spoke softly, so sincere and sensitive to her conflicting emotions. When she didn't respond, he hugged her tightly and repeated himself. "Kate, talk to me… please?"

She let out a sigh and inclined her head slightly, relenting. If this relationship was going to work like she wanted it to, then she needed to talk to him and try and put into words the thoughts in her head.

"I… it's all just happening so fast, I guess," Beckett tried to explain. Her thoughts were a jumble, and she was desperately trying to make sense of them. She chewed on her lower lip and looked up at him. "I do stand by what I said, that our relationship began three years ago with the Allison Tisdale case, and that I've been fighting it ever since then."

Castle nodded. "I think it just started as this instant attraction…"

She put a finger on her lips. "Just let me talk, Castle," she smirked. "Can't you just shut up for a moment?"

He smiled against her finger, pressing a kiss against it and nodding.

Taking a breath, Beckett continued with her explanation. "So… yes, I've been fighting this… fighting you… fighting us. But now… I don't. I want this… I want us. And yes… I do want to marry you, Richard Castle. I've known for a while, actually."

"Known what?" he smirked.

She frowned at him. He was going to make her say it, wasn't he? She huffed and gave him her famous glare, then cracked and laughed softly, running her hand along his chest. "You're it, Castle," she spoke slowly, turning her gaze to his eyes. "You are my one and done."

Her lips turned into a smile when she finished and she giggled softly in surprise as his lips met hers just as she finished with the last word. Castle shifted, pulling her into a tight hug. When they parted, he rested his forehead against hers and ran his fingers through her hair.

"God, I wish I could say the same, that you're my one and done, Kate," he whispered. "I truly do."

She smirked. "Yeah, but if that were so, we wouldn't have Alexis, now would we?"

Castle laughed softly, nodding. "I wouldn't trade anything away if it meant I couldn't have Alexis, yes." He paused and looked back at her. "And I wouldn't change a thing about us, Kate. Even how long, and the heartache, it took us to get to here. The journey makes the whole thing worthwhile." He leaned forward and pressed a soft tender kiss against her lips, his hands running down the length of her hair and towards the small of her back.
Beckett grinned against his mouth as she felt his hands move further south until he was cupping her bottom in his hands and spinning her up on top of him, their lips never breaking. His fingers squeezed her and Beckett giggled, running her hands down his chest as she shifted her legs, planting them on either side of his hips. Breaking from the kiss, she sighed and flattened herself on him, pressing her head into his shoulder, listening to the pulse of his heart through his veins.

"We're going to get married," she murmured, a soft smiled touching her lips.

Castle shook under her as he laughed. "That we are, my beautiful detective," he replied.

Beckett paused with a frown, then leaned back, pushing her hands into his chest until she was sitting fully up on him, her legs still straddling his hips. She looked down at him, his head propped up on the pillow as their gaze met.

"Kate?" he had noticed her furrowed brow and worried look.

"Rick… I… I didn't take anything away from you, did I?" she suddenly asked, needing to know.

"What?" he asked, looking slightly puzzled.

"I mean… being the one to propose?" she elaborated, averting her eyes, her hands still resting on his chest.

Castle chuckled and shook his head. "I don't care, Kate," he asserted, the honesty and sincerity in his eyes making her believe him. His hands moved up to her arms and he affectionately rubbed them to reassure her. "I'm just happy that you're willing to marry a broken man like me."

"Broken man?" she laughed, shaking her head at him. "Rick Castle, you are not a broken man."

He shrugged. "I've had two failed marriages, Kate," he said, running his hands down her arms until he met hers. He slowly interlaced his fingers with hers, keeping her hands over his heart. "And to be honest, I've hardly had any significant emotional relationship since Kyra…" he paused and swallowed hard, his eyes averting for a moment before coming back and meeting hers, "except for you, Kate." He smirked and his eyes twinkled in that adorable way they always did with him. "You had me at Detective Kate Beckett, NYPD. We need to talk to you about a murder that took place earlier tonight."

Beckett snorted, and turned her face as she laughed hard. "Oh my god, you did not just quote the very first words I ever said to you!" she laughed, as she shifted and collapsed on the bed beside him.

Castle shifted and propped himself up on his elbow, looking at her with a bemused expression. "It's hard not to forget the moment the most beautiful woman I've ever met came into my life," he said, his words and face completely serious.

She stopped laughing, her eyes going wide with what he had just said. A smile tugged at her lips as she scooted closer to him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Well, I seem to remember you spinning around asking where'd I like you to sign," she said.

"Oh yes, I never did get to give you my autograph, now did I?" he smirked back, shifting his arms around her waist, pulling her closer.

Beckett grinned and bit her lower lip, looking up at him with an enticing glare. "Well, why don't you whip out your pen and give me an autograph right now, Mr. Castle?" she batted her eyelashes suggestively, adding it to her provocative statement.
Castle grinned and his grip around her waist tightened as he flipped her over onto her back. He hovered over her, caressing her long legs as she parted them for him. Leaning forward, Castle brought one hand up to cup her jaw. "I like using quills," he said. "I'll need to dip it into the ink first."

Beckett laughed. "Really? That's your come back?"

"Hey, give me a break? It's like, what?" He looked over at the glowing red digits on the alarm clock. "5:27 AM!" he groaned. Castle's eyes spun back to her. "What got you up so early?" Then a smug smile spread across his face. "I thought I kept you up late last night."

Beckett wiggled under him, pressing herself up against his center, making him groan in want, and looked down at her with an oh-no-you-didn't expression. "What's the matter, Ricky?" she teased, giving him a come-hither look. "You're not up for some fun?" her eyes dropped down and she smirked. "Little Ricky certainly looks ready for some fun."

"Little!" he scoffed, feigning a hurt look. "I think Big Ricky is more apropos!"

Beckett laughed and winked up at him. "Just shut up and make love to me, Castle," she ordered. "That I can do, Detective," he winked back. Then, being completely him, he did this little fist pump mouthing, "Yes! Morning sex!" before turning back to her and descending down to capture her lips in a fierce passionate kiss.

XXX

They had been in the middle of enjoying each other's company when her cell's ringtone sounded across the room. Beckett had growled, annoyed at the interruption. Panting softly as he leaned up off of her to allow her the space to move over and grab the accursed thing off the nightstand, Beckett flipped it open and hit the answer button.

"Beckett!" she grumbled in the receiver, highly irritated and annoyed at having her intimate moment with Castle interrupted… they hadn't even—

"Hey, Beckett… It's Esposito," came the detective's voice; he paused, as if he was noticing the irritation in her voice, before continuing. "We've got a body. It's um…" she heard some noises in the background, sounded like Lanie and Ryan. "Well, let's just say it's interesting." There was another pause and Beckett knitted her eyebrows together, definitely hearing Lanie's voice in the background. "Yeah, yeah," Esposito replied to whatever it was the M.E. had said. His voice returned. "Look, Beckett, I know you were planning on taking the morning off… but this… I mean… you two have got to see this!"

"Weird one?" Castle questioned in her ear.

Beckett shrugged, but gave a nod; from the way Esposito was talking it was most likely a weird one. She listened as the Hispanic detective gave her the address, and then she hung up after telling him she'd be there shortly.

"Damn it," she huffed, chucking her phone down onto the bed. Beckett looked up at Castle with regretful eyes. "God, Rick, I'm sorry, but I… I gotta go."

"It's alright," Castle nodded. He smirked and winked, leaning forward to kiss her neck. "You can make it up to me later."

He moved off her and Beckett scooted across the mattress to the edge, swinging her long legs over
the side of the bed. "You good here? Or do you want to come?" she asked as she stood up, bending to snatch up the clothes that had been carelessly thrown on the floor last night.

Beckett looked over her shoulder as she tossed the used clothing into the hamper tucked away in the corner of the room, seeing that Castle was distracted, his eyes staring at her bottom.

"Huh?" he shook his head and looked up at her. He pushed himself up to a sitting position. "You said it sounded like it was a weird one, right?"

She nodded. "Yep." Beckett hesitated, and then went on. "Esposito did say you two have got to see this. So I guess, you can come too… if you want to."

Castle smirked. "You know me, Kate… I like the weird ones," he jumped off the bed to follow her to the bathroom. "Gosh, I'm hoping it's an alien abduction case… or maybe the New Jersey Devil has crossed the bridge to make a random attack on some unfortunate soul."

Beckett laughed and rolled her eyes. "Let's just take a quick shower, Castle, then we'll go and find out." She paused and looked over his shoulder at the pile of his clothes on the floor. "Do we need to stop by the loft, or are you fine with doing the walk of shame?"

"Walk of shame?" he harrumphed, feigning indignation. "Nothing shameful about spending the night with you, detective. Sinful, maybe… oh, that thing you did with you're tongue…"

"Not a word to the boys about that, Castle!" she warned, giving him her patented glare and jabbing a finger into his chest so that he knew she meant business. "Not. A. Word."

"My lips are sealed," he said, mimicking the gesture of zipping his lips shut.

"Good," she nodded, then spun around and turned the shower on. The water jetted out and she placed her hand under the spray to test the temperature. Castle came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. "Rick…," she protested as he started to suck on her neck. God, she really didn't want to have to explain a hickey.

He made a humming sound in a response.

"Castle… sorry, but no shower sex today," she tried again. "We're already running late as it is."

He sighed. "Alright, but again, you can make it up to me later," he purred, kissing her neck slowly as one of his hands rubbed the side of her right thigh, despite his statement that he agreed with her on no funny business.

Beckett moaned softly and closed her eyes as she leaned back into him. "Ah hell!" she huffed, turning around as she stepped into the shower pulling him with her. "Who am I kidding? I need you, Rick… NOW!"

She jumped him, pinning him against the wall of the shower and kissed her way down his chest. Castle rolled his head back and groaned.

XXX

"What have we got?" Beckett asked in her normal investigative voice, ignoring the curious looks they got from Ryan and Esposito.

Lanie, who was kneeling by the body, looked up at the pair of them and smiled softly. "You two are late," she stated, a knowing glint in her eyes.
Beckett knitted her eyebrows together and fought off the flustered response she wanted to give. Thankfully, Castle interrupted her friend's focus on the tardiness of their arrival by letting out a high pitched squeal.

"Oh. My. God!" he stammered, practically bouncing up and down, his eyes fixated on the body. Beckett raised her eyebrows and furrowed her brow, completely perplexed by his reaction. Esposito and Ryan exchanged amused looks as Castle looked over at them.

"We'd thought you'd get a kick out of this, Castle" Esposito said, nudging his partner, who reluctantly forked over a twenty.

Beckett frowned at the two of them. She was going to have to fix that. She didn't mind them making the occasional bet, but to do it so openly at a crime scene… well, that was going to have to stop. Setting her jaw, she turned back and looked down at the victim, truly looking at the body for the first time, and finally registering what it was that had made Castle so bouncy with excitement.

Her mouth dropped and her eyes went wide. "You have got to be kidding me?" she stammered.

"This ain't no joke, hon," Lanie said, shifting as she pushed in the needle to check the liver temperature, which would allow her to estimate an initial time of death.

"I know!" Castle pranced beside her. "Isn't it great!"

"He's a clown, Castle," she snapped, crouching down next to Lanie, trying to focus on the temperature gauge. "I don't see what's so funny about it."

Castle smirked and shook his head. "He's still in costume, Beckett!" he said, gesturing down to the body, which was still dressed in a rainbow-colored jumpsuit and big red clown shoes. She caught him reaching down to squeeze the toes of the shoes, no doubt wanting to see if they made squeaking noises. She rolled her eyes and swatted his hand away.

"No touching!" she scowled.

Castle pouted. "Come on, Becks? You've got to admit… it is kind of funny."

"A man's dead," Beckett said, turning away from him. "Nothing's funny about that."
Something was wrong, out of place, as Beckett stood over the body taking notes as Lanie finished up her examination. She paused, lifting her pen off her notepad and narrowed her eyes, using all the senses at her disposal to find out what it was that was nagging her in the back of her mind. Within moments it hit her in a sudden burst of realization.

Cocking her head over her shoulder, she looked back at Castle. He was just standing there, quietly watching them finish their examinations. It was odd, if not a little unnerving, really. Beckett had grown so used to him jabbering away about useless nonsense, or jumping up and down like a five-year-old on a sugar rush. Richard Castle was never this stoically silent at a crime scene.

His gaze drifted over her for a moment before returning to the crime scene. He looked almost lost in his own thoughts, like he was plotting his next novel. Knitting her eyebrows together, Beckett bit the inside of her cheek and turned back to finish her notes, hoping that that was the case, and that her early sharp retort hadn't made him all dark and brooding.

The next time she turned around he was gone, and for a split second she almost panicked that he had walked away, hailed a cab, and simply left without telling her, but then she saw him dashing across the street where there was located one of New York's many coffee shops. Sighing in relief, suspecting he was just doing his normal coffee pick up—except she'd be having a tea, since she'd forced herself to give up coffee until the twins were born, something that she had been struggling with almost daily. God, she was such a coffee addict.

On the way back to the precinct, Beckett scarfed down the bear claw that Castle had bought her. He sat quietly in the passenger seat holding her tea and slowly sipping his latte. She tried to ignore the awkward silence that had descended upon them. Beckett was used to the banter and the theorizing. Normally this now bizarrely quiet time would be filled with Castle's wild hypothesizing over the nature of the both the victim and the perp.

Beckett finished the pastry in record time, making her feel kind of sick to her stomach. Clenching her jaw, she lowered her brow and grimaced, finding a spot to pull over. Closing her eyes, she sucked in a deep breath to try and stifle the feeling in her stomach.

"You okay?" his voice came a minute or two after, almost like it was an afterthought and nothing more. And that hurt more than his silence had.

Heaving in a deep breath as the nausea faded away, Beckett sighed and gave a gruff nod of her head. "I'm fine," she replied, and put the car back into gear before merging back into traffic.

XXX

The bullpen was quiet, only the sounds of Karpowski typing away at her keyboard intruded on Beckett's thoughts as she leaned back against her desk, folding her arms as she stared out at the murder board they had just finished not too long ago.

As soon as she'd gotten the printout of their victim, a Mr. Vance Chance—yeah, that was his name… she'd expected some snickering remark from Castle, but he was oddly quiet on the matter, still holding that stoic look he had when they had been at the crime scene—and placed it on the board, her shadow had disappeared, vanished without so much as a kiss on the cheek or a word of goodbye, see you later. Granted, she had very early banned PDAs, but still, she had expected something other than nothing at all, which was what she had gotten.
Beckett had no idea where Castle had gone off to, and frankly, she was a little nervous that she had somehow upset him. She was worried that her bluntly open chastising of him at the crime scene had scared him off for the day. There was no reason why it should; she'd admonished him like that on numerous occasions before they had started even officially dating. And they had made a promise to one another that they would not let their personal life interfere with their professional relationship.

Frowning, and knitting her eyebrows together, Beckett tried to shrug off the feeling of guilt at having snapped at him at the crime scene, and focused on the case at hand. She would just have to worry about Castle later. Right now she had a job to do.

Besides being a clown, which in itself was a strange occupation for a 50-year-old, Mr. Chance was also a father of three and a grandfather to five. He was a widower, who, according to his eldest daughter, had started performing as a clown at birthday parties and whatnot three years ago, after his wife had died.

Beckett had not enjoyed telling the family, it was clear that the man had been well loved. The grandchildren were going to be heartbroken, the daughter's husband had said, who looked just as devastated as his wife at the loss of her father. Beckett was determined to give these people some closure, the closure she had yet to get from her own mother's murder. She was not going to tell this family that their beloved patriarch died from a case of random violence.

Letting out a heavy sigh, Beckett shifted on her desk and gazed at the board, willing leads to come. God, this was when she needed Castle the most. When nothing made sense, that was when his wonderful mind would come up with some bizarre insight that could help her with cooking up a theory as to what could have happened and why.

"Hey, girl, you alright?"

Beckett blinked, a little startled at the intrusion into her thoughts. She turned her eyes away from the murder board and gave a soft smile in response to seeing Lanie step over to stand besides her, a manila envelope in her hands.

"Is that the autopsy report?" Beckett asked, eyeing the envelope.

Lanie gave a nod. "Yeah," she ignored Beckett's proffered hand and tossed the manila envelope on the desk. "Now how about you answer my question, Detective?"

She groaned and rolled her head back. "I'm fine, Lanie, just give me the report."

"Fine," Lanie harrumphed, crossing her arms and shaking her head. "Girl, you ain't fine. Something is eating at you, and I can tell." Her friend put a hand on her arm. "You can talk to me… you know that, don't you, Kate?"

Beckett sighed, and cast a cautious glance around the bullpen, making sure that the other detectives were out of earshot. Esposito and Ryan were thankfully out canvassing the neighborhood the victim had been found in, so she did not have to worry about them. Karpowski was still at her desk, and was still focused on whatever case she was currently working on.

"You going to talk, or am I going to have to drag it out of you kicking and screaming?" Lanie questioned.

Sighing again, Beckett turned back to her friend. "Last night…," she began slowly, swallowing as she forced herself to confide in her best friend. Talking about her relationships was never
something that came easy to her. "Last night," she repeated, working up the courage to confess, "I… I sort of proposed to Castle."

"You did what?" Lanie gasped, her eyebrows rising in shock.

Beckett flushed, embarrassed. "I proposed," she repeated, softly, glancing around the bullpen again, subconsciously placing a hand on her stomach. Hell, she was nervous, but there was no reason to be this anxious.

"And?"

"And what?" she furrowed her brow, confused.

"Oh, come on, Kate, you can't just stop there," Lanie said, smiling a little. "What happened afterwards?"

"Huh?"

Lanie rolled her eyes. "Don't play dumb with me, girl! Are you and Mr. Writer Boy engaged or not?"

Beckett took a loud breath and tried to suppress the smile that was breaking out across her face. She brought a hand up and smoothed back some of her hair away from her face, her fingers playing with the ends of her long tresses. "Yes, I guess you could say that, we're engaged," she nodded.

Lanie gave a huge smile and looked like she wanted to give Beckett a great big hug, but thankfully she was capable of restraining herself. Beckett was not one for public displays of affection, even if they were warranted. Instead, Lanie gave her arm a tight squeeze with her hand.

"About time, girl," the M.E. said, smiling widely. "I'm just surprised you're the one that popped the question."

"Why?" Beckett asked.

"Nothing," Lanie said with a shrug. "It's just not like you, that's all."

"You mean to be the assertive one in the relationship?" Beckett inquired, narrowing her eyes.

"No, not that, just…." Lanie's voice trailed off as she thought. "Just, you know, actually knowing what you want and grabbing for it, not caring about the consequences. You're usually a bit more cautious and guarded when it comes to that sort of thing."

Beckett threw back her head and laughed, a little bit too loudly. "That sort of thinking is what got me into this mess to begin with," she said. When Lanie furrowed her brow, she clarified, "The not caring about the consequences part."

"Oh, yeah," Lanie nodded, understanding, nudging Beckett with her elbow as she smirked. "That night you got Writer Boy stone drunk and had your wicked way with him."

Beckett blushed brightly and tried to hush Lanie, who, from her point of view, was speaking much too loudly. Glancing over her shoulder, Beckett noticed that Karpowski had looked up from her paperwork and was gazing over at them, frowning in confusion. Turning her back to the other detective, Beckett motion for Lanie to follow. They retreated out of the bullpen and into the break room, giving them some privacy.
"So… back to my original question," Lanie said as Beckett closed the break room door. "You alright?"

Raking her fingers through her hair, Beckett let out a breath and paced before Lanie, frowning. "I think I might have been a bit too snappish with Castle at the crime scene," she confessed.

"Oh?" Lanie smirked. "I thought you were a little easy on him."

She froze mid-step and turned towards her friend. "Really?" Beckett asked, unsure.

"Oh please, girl, don't act all confused and such," Lanie rolled her eyes. "That man has stood at your side through a lot worse than you being snappish at the crime scene."

"Yeah, I guess so, but…," she bit her lower lip, her cheeks turning red. "But those times were not after we'd made love in the shower not more than twenty minutes prior."

Lanie's eyes grew wide, completely floored with this sort of confession coming from Kate Beckett. "Oh my god… you did it in the shower again… like yesterday!"

"Shh!" Beckett hushed Lanie, her eyes darting around as she arched her neck to look through the windows to make sure no one had walked past the break room to overhear the excited M.E.

"Sorry," Lanie smirked. "I mean, damn girl, when you two finally jumped into the sack… I mean… DAMN… you two really do jump into it."

Beckett blushed profusely. "Alright, Lanie, yes… Castle and I have sex now, you got that out of your system?"

"Oh girl, it's going to take me a while until I'm all fangirled out about this," Lanie chuckled, feigning fanning herself.

"Okay, just… um… try and control yourself," Beckett said with a quick nod. "And no mentioning this to Esposito." She grounded her teeth and lowered her brow. "I have enough trouble as it is with tweedle dee and tweedle dum."

Lanie choked back a laugh. "Did you just come up with that, or is that from Castle?"

Beckett frowned. "I… er… damn it, I've been spending too much time with that numbskull!"

"Kate, calm down," Lanie looked slightly bemused. "It's alright… It's good for you."

Sighing, she nodded, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "Yeah, I know, Lanie… it's just that… well, things are really complicated right now."

Lanie gave an understanding nod. "And I bet being engaged to Mr. Page Six isn't helping," she said.

"What? Oh god… I… I never thought of that," Beckett felt panic start to rise in her throat.

She had hated being interviewed for that magazine article after Heat Wave was released. Never one for being in the public eye, Beckett had wanted to keep their relationship a secret, but getting married to him, not to mention carrying his twins… God… it was opening a whole another can of worms Beckett was unsure she wanted to even open.

But she did love him. And—yes—she did want to marry him and become Katherine Castle. It was the whole press and Page Six stuff she didn't want to marry. Yet, marrying Castle meant not just
marrying the man, but the celebrity as well.

"Kate, sorry, I didn't mean anything by that," Lanie was saying, her face turned down in a sorrowful expression of regret, worried that she had caused an unwelcome panic to race into her friend's already anxious mind.

Letting out a frustrated breath, Beckett spun on her heels and plopped down in a chair. "No… it's alright, Lanie," she said, placing her hands in her lap. "I… I just had never thought of it, is all."

Lanie pulled a chair over and sat in front of Beckett. "Does it change how you feel?" she inquired.

Beckett narrowed her eyes and thought for a moment. She shook her head. "No," she affirmed. "It doesn't." She looked up at Lanie, her eyes slightly watery. "I love him, Lanie. I truly do. He means more to me than anything ever has… its all just… just so overwhelming."

Her friend gave a nod and reached over to place a hand on her knee. "So you're not going to run away or become distant and withdrawn?"

"Hell no, not with Rick, Lanie… not with him!" Beckett declared. "I can't breathe without him. But… what if I've already screwed things up?"

"How so?"

"At the crime scene, and on the ride back," she elaborated. "It… it was so silent. He's never been so silent before… so stoic."

"Maybe he's just taking it all in, finally realizing that his dreams are coming true," Lanie put forth. Beckett sighed. "I wish it was that, but… I… I'm not so sure," she admitted.

Suddenly there came a gentle rapping on the break room door. They both looked up to see the very man they'd been talking about stick his head through the opening.

"Am I interrupting something?" Castle asked, his eyebrows rising in concern.

"No, not at all," Lanie stood up, giving Beckett's knee a supportive squeeze. "I was just heading back to the morgue."

Castle stepped back and allowed her to pass, giving her an appreciative nod. He stepped in and closed the door, his eyes shifty and his manner fidgety.

Oh God, Beckett panicked. He's going to break up with me… I know it! He's going to break up with me. I knew this whole thing was too good to be true.

Closing the distance between them, Castle knelt before her and took one of her sweating hands in his. He smiled at her, that damned charming smile that melted her heart. Beckett watched with dread as he took a deep breath, as if he was preparing himself for something extremely difficult. His free hand disappeared inside his jacket. She clenched her jaw, and closed her eyes, awaiting the inevitable, it's not you, it's me line.

"Kate," his hand was on her cheek and she let out a sob, tears flowing down her cheeks. "Kate? What's the matter?" His voice was so confused and concerned.

Blinking past the tears, Beckett cursed her emotional state. Damn it, she was stronger than this. Stupid hormones! As her vision cleared, she noticed a small black box in Castle's hand. The tension in her jaw immediately released and her mouth dropped open. Castle caressed the side of
her face and wiped away the tears with the pad of his thumb. 

"I don't know what's got you so afraid, Kate," he said. "Whatever it is, I hope this makes you feel better." 

Castle popped the top open and held out the tiny velvet black box before her for her inspection. Nestled inside was a simple, yet elegant, silver engagement ring with three small diamonds. It wasn't flashy or gaudy. It was plain, uncomplicated, and sincere. It was her. And it was perfect. 

A smile broke out on her lips and her eyes lit up. "Rick… it… it's perfect," she declared, her heart thumping profoundly in her chest as her cheeks flushed with welcomed feelings of being loved and cared for. She felt so foolish for thinking what she had thought before. 

"You want to know a secret, Kate?" he asked as she removed the ring from the velvet box and took her hand in his. She nodded, her eyes locked on his. "I bought this ring a while ago. Hell, it might have been on a lark, but I saw it… and I thought of you and how absolutely extraordinary you are and how it was the perfect ring for you."

Her breath hitched up and she mentally chided herself for all her anxious worrying. "Did you go back to the Loft?" she questioned in a somewhat embarrassing stammering sort of way. "Is… is that where you went?"

He swallowed and nodded, finally seeming to understand what had been consuming her mind whilst he was away. "Oh god, I'm sorry, Kate, I wanted to surprise you," Castle said in way of an apology. "I should have said something, but I… I was just kind of all giddy and excited about finally putting this on your finger, I just sort of forgot myself."

"It… it's okay," she said in a shaky voice as she watched with wide and teary eyes of joy as he slid the ring onto her finger. Sucking in a breath, she stared at it in awe. "This… this is real? You… you're really going to marry me?"

"Always," Castle answered in his usual manner, leaning up to cup her face in his palms before kissing her deeply. 

She sighed and eased into him as he swept her up into his arm, practically lifting her out of the chair. Beckett wrapped her arms around his neck and let out a giddy laugh of delight as she closed her eyes, relishing the way her body melded with his as their kiss deepened. 

The sound of someone clearing their throat interrupted them, and they both backed away, both flushed and embarrassed. 

Esposito and Ryan were standing there, both with stunned and slacked jawed expressions. Beckett laughed lightly and ran her bottom lip under her teeth, leaning against Castle as he openly wrapped an arm around her waist. 

"What's up guys?" Castle ask so very nonchalantly with a jerk of his head, as if nothing was out of the ordinary. 

"Um…," Ryan stammered. 

Esposito blinked and came out of it first. "Something you two want to tell us?" 

Beckett bit the inside of her cheek and held up her hand, showing off the bling that now adorned her finger. "We're engaged!" she confirmed what the two detectives had no doubt suspected, but were in need of verification.
The two junior detectives grinned broadly. They both murmured congratulations, almost seeming more enthusiastic about it than Beckett and Castle were. After a moment of awkward silence, where all Esposito and Ryan did was stare at them with those goofy grins plastered over their faces, Beckett detached herself from Castle and crossed her arms, giving her two subordinates one of her patented glares.

"I don't want any snickering comments about this, okay," she ordered. "You got something funny to say… you keep it to yourself, understood?"

"Yes, ma'am," Ryan chirped up.

"Well do," Esposito bobbed his head.

Beckett gave a nod, satisfied and glanced over her shoulder to see Castle stopping halfway through mouthing something to the other two. She narrowed her eyes and gave him a glare as well, before turning back to Esposito and Ryan.

"And you're not to tell Mr. Smarty Pants either," she added, hooking a thumb over her shoulder to point at Castle. "Clear."

She grinned triumphantly at the immediate nods she got from the two partners. Esposito straighten his back and coughed, flicking his head towards Castle.

"Yo, Castle."

"Yeah?"

"You take care not to do wrong by our girl here," he said, looking to Beckett for approval of this "big brother" protective routine. She smirked, knowing he was obviously trying to gain some points to cover his behind in case she caught him making a crack about her and Castle behind her back. She obliged him with a nod. He'd get a free pass for maybe one or two snide comments.

Castle slinked an arm around her waist and pulled her close. "Oh, I have no intention of doing wrong by her," he declared, giving her a playful wink. She could not help it and blushed.

"Yeah," Ryan piped up. "No funny business, Castle. I may be small, but I'm Irish, and scrappy."

Both Castle and her chuckled, shaking their heads at the absurdity of it all. "Alright, boys, that's enough, back to work, okay," Beckett said, pulling herself out of Castle's embrace. She turned to face him and inclined her head towards the murder board as they followed the other two out of the break room. "Ready to bounce around some of your harebrained theories, Mr. Castle?"

"Oh, most definitely, Mrs. Castle," he said with a smirk and wink.
Chapter 11

"I don't know about this," Beckett mumbled as she leaned against Castle as he fumbled through his pocket looking for his key.

Castle glanced over at her with a bemused expression. "We've been dating for like a month, Kate," he said. "I highly doubt any eyebrows will be raised if you spent the night."

She closed her eyes and suppressed a yawn. Damn him and his reasonable logic. It was late and she was hungry and tired. They'd spent the better half of the day cooking up theories and running down leads that took them nowhere. "Fine," Beckett relented with a half nod as her head lulled down to rest against his shoulder.

He smiled and kissed the top of her head, which brought a smile to her lips. She let out a sigh and melded more into his side as he hooked his arm around her waist and led her inside the quiet Loft. Alexis and Martha were already asleep, so they wouldn't have to worry about being caught—not that they were doing anything wrong. They'd been officially dating for slightly over a month, and now they were also engaged, so there was nothing wrong about her spending the night at the Loft, especially when Castle had spent the two previous nights over at her place.

Beckett smiled and brought her hand up, wanting to gaze upon the simple, yet perfect, engagement ring he'd gotten her. Knitting her eyebrows, she straightened up and let out a sigh as he released her to shut the door, bolting the lock. He returned to her side and she dropped her arms and allowed him to take her jacket. She watched him with a small smile as he draped both their jackets on the coatrack, before returning to her.

"Shall we?" he asked, grinning mischievously and wiggling his eyebrows, hooking his arm out.

She smirked and laughed a little, slinging her arm through his as he led the way through the foyer and into the central living area of the Loft. They made a side trip into the kitchen where Castle detached himself to retrieve two cold bottles of Stewart's Orange 'n Cream soda from the refrigerator. Turning back around, he practically skipped over to her, wearing a goofy grin on his face. Beckett suppressed a laugh, yet still rolled her eyes at him.

Slinking his arm around her waist, they walked towards his office and through the side door that led to the master bedroom. Beckett had never actually seen his bedroom before and she was blown away by the size of the bed. Stopping at the threshold, her jaw dropped and she turned to look at him with wide eyes.

"My god, Rick, you can get lost in a bed that big!" she exclaimed, as he turned back around, grinning triumphantly as he reached up and grabbed a hold of her arm, pulling her the rest of the way into the room.

Castle closed the door with the back of his foot and switched on the lights. Curtains of a dark green covered half the room, and it was not until she stepped over to part them that she realized that they covered large floor to ceiling windows that gazed out onto the city. Turning back around, she shook her head at him.

"What?" he asked with a boyish smirk.

"It's just… just so you!" she declared smiling.

"Well," Castle began, leaning over to put the bottles of Orange n' Cream soda on the nightstand, "I
hope that it will become more us soon.”

Beckett brought her bottom lip under her teeth as she smiled at him and gave a soft nod, one of her hands unconsciously coming up to play with the loose strands of her hair. Turning her back to him, she poked her head between a gap in the curtains and looked out at the lights of the city. Her smile widened. Yes. She could get used to this view.

Stepping back, she let the curtains fall shut as she made her way over to join Castle on the edge of the bed. Reaching out with a hand, she ran her fingers over the satin sheets. Looking up at him, she gave him a quizzical expression.

"Do you always sleep with satin sheets?"

His cheeks turned red. "When I ran over from the precinct earlier, I changed the sheets," Castle admitted, looking caught.

"Planning something, were you?" she inquired, loving it how the sultry sound she had added to her voice made him shiver.

"It can wait," he said. "Right now, we need to get mommy fed, now don't we?"

He grinned and took the plastic bag from her, retrieved the soda bottles, and practically pranced over to a small side table in the corner, where the two windowed walls met in a right angle. No doubt the location held an excellent view when the curtains were open. But she was fine with having privacy right now. Beside the table were two black-leathered chairs, which both equally looked so comfortable. Raising a hand, he beckoned her over and she followed, smiling up at him as he held back one of the chairs for her.

Sitting down, she watched as Castle removed the burgers and fries. They had done a quick detour to Remy's after leaving the precinct and picked up a late dinner. Beckett was starving, having hardly eaten anything but the bear claw Castle had bought her in earlier that morning. Mentally, she was chiding herself. Being pregnant still seemed all new to her. Though she was getting a little tired of the mood swings and the damn morning sickness which manifested itself with a vengeance at the most inopportune times.

Castle laid out a double cheeseburger with extra cheese, extra bacon… almost extra everything. She frowned and looked up at him with a mock scowl.

"Are you trying to fatten me up, Mr. Castle," she teased, even though her mouth was actually salivating at taking a bite out of that heart attack burger.

"Just trying to make sure you get enough food down you for three," Castle smiled with a wink as he took a seat across from her and unwrapped his own double cheeseburger that matched hers in excessive extras.

"Well, you're not eating for three," she pointed out as he opened his mouth to take a big bite.

He frowned, looking displeased at being interrupted on the verge of sinking his teeth into the juicy double cheeseburger. He arched his eyebrows and looked over at her. "Sympathy cravings," was his excuse for indulging himself.

Beckett laughed as she took a plastic knife out of the bag and somehow, despite the behemoth size of the burger, managed to divide it into two halves. She didn't know if she could eat the whole thing, even if she was eating for two others besides herself.
"Oh, I'm betting that you'll be having a lot of sympathy cravings during this pregnancy," Beckett quipped back.

Castle smirked back at her with a mouth full of cheeseburger. "You know me so well."

Popping the cap on her soda, she took a sip of the chilled beverage and let out a sigh. "Maybe next time we could pick up a milkshake," she said as she tentatively picked up one half of the burger, narrowing her eyes as she tried to figure out how it could even fit in her mouth, it was that big!

"I could make one for you, if you like?" Castle offered, putting his burger down and standing halfway up.

She waved him back down. "No, that's okay," she assured him. "I'm fine right now." He looked a little disappointed as he sat back down. "But maybe another time."

He perked back up and beamed over at her. "Oh you're going to love it here at Casa de Castle," he said before taking another big bite out of his burger.

Beckett nearly choked on her food. She coughed and put the burger down, reaching over for the soda. After taking a long sip, she placed it back down and heaved in a massive breath.

"You okay?" he asked, blinking, looking worried and concerned.

"Just... you just caught me off guard, is all," Beckett said through quick breaths.

"How so?" Castle questioned, frowning in puzzlement. "I mean... I'm assuming you'd like to live together once we get married."

"Oh yes," Beckett nodded, blushing with embarrassment at her reaction to it all. "I'm... I guess I'm just still getting used to the whole idea."

"Well, I want you to feel like this is your home, Kate," he said, scooting his chair closer to hers, dragging his food along the table with him. "Right now, this room is just me... but I want it to be us," he went on. "It's lacking a woman's touch, so to speak."

"A woman's touch?" she echoed, arching her head to look around. "It looks fine to me, Rick. I honestly don't know what I'd change."

"Really?" he looked stunned.

She laughed and shrugged. "Alright," Beckett gave into his hopeful gaze. "You've seen my place. So maybe there might be piles of books littered all over the place when I move in..." she stopped herself. Good God, did she just say when I move in? When had she decided that? No... they hadn't even discussed it. She was just taking it as a given... as was he.

Castle smiled at her triumphantly. She narrowed her eyes, giving him a glare before she playfully punched his shoulder.

"Ouch! What was that for?" he asked.

"For being a smartass," she grinned and turned back to her meal, trying to at least get half of the massive burger down, if not for her, then for their twins growing inside her.

"Ha ha," Castle laughed, and then turned serious. He put one elbow on the table and leaned forward, bringing his face inches away from hers. The closeness of his lips made her breath hitch...
up a bit. "Now that we've got this out in the open, I think we should discuss it."

She opened her mouth to respond, but before she could, Castle planted a quick kiss on her lips. He leaned back and smiled at her, brushing a strand of her hair back behind her ear. His hand lingered for a moment, the pad of his thumb caressing the side of her jaw.

"You're moving in," he declared, his dark blues telling her that this was not up for debate. "And that's final."

"Rick…," Beckett tried to protest.

He lifted a hand and put a finger on her lips, silencing her. "The question is not whether or not your moving in, but rather when," he said, moving his hand and winking at her.

Beckett sighed and nodded. "You're right…," she conceded. "I mean... I knew you'd eventually ask me, but I just didn't expect it to happen like this."

"Not knowing is half the fun," he smiled in response.

"True, I guess," she shrugged. "But… you know me, I like to have things figured out."

He nodded and popped a fry in his mouth. "How about this," Castle put forth after chewing for a moment. "We deal with telling the family about the twins and our engagement, then we deal with the whole moving in together."

Beckett gave a soft smile and nodded. They ate for a while in a comfortable silence, sharing their fries and drinking their sodas. Castle amazingly managed to finish his whole burger before she was even halfway done with the half she was eating. She shook her head at him and laughed as he made a display of patting his belly, declaring himself stuffed.

As she worked on finishing, they chatted idly about random things. And since the topic had been opened, and despite saying they'd deal with it after they'd told their families the news about the pregnancy and the engagement, they found themselves discussing her moving into the Loft. They would deal with the actual move later, but they could still talk about it. Talking didn't hurt anything. It was just talk.

"So, any thoughts on a date for the wedding?" Castle suddenly asked after a brief lull in the conversation.

Beckett was startled for a moment, completely caught off guard for such a question. They had, after all, been discussing all the little things related to her moving into the Loft, which they had decided they'd do just as soon as everyone important to them knew, namely family. The lease on her apartment was still good until the end of the year, but that wasn't going to stop her from moving out. It just meant she didn't have to rush like mad in the move, that she could take her time and get things settled here before it was all done.

"Kate?"

She blinked and looked at him, trying to smile, but failing. "I… I don't know," Beckett frowned and leaned back in the chair, staring off into space, thinking.

"We don't have to pick a date right away," Castle reassured her, placing a hand on her knee. "I was just wondering."

"No… it's alright," she gave a nod of her head.
"We don't have to get married right away," he reassured her. "We can wait until after the twins are born and you've had enough time to recover—"

"And get my figure back?" she raised her eyebrow.

Castle smirked. "You know what I mean," he said as she nodded.

Sighing, she looked down at his hand on her knee and smiled. Grabbing his hand, she fiddled with his fingers and grinned. "Maybe we don't have to wait," she tentatively spoke up.

"Huh?"

"I'd would have preferred things to have worked out differently between us, Rick," she said. "You know?"

He gave a nod. "Like dating—"

"—before I got pregnant," she smiled, finishing his sentence. "And ideally, we'd already be married before we started having children." Beckett stopped playing with his hand and placed it on her stomach, spreading his fingers out as she rested her hand on top of his.

"So you want to get married before the twins are born, is that it?" he asked.

Running her lower lip under her teeth, she nodded. "Is that okay?"

"Kate, whatever you want is okay," Castle said, getting up out of his chair and kneeling before her. Taking his hand back, he placed both his hands on her legs and rubbed them gently. "I want nothing more than to make you happy, Kate."

She brought up her hand and placed it on the side of his face, smiling at him. "I don't need a fancy wedding, Rick," she declared looking down at him. "No fairy-princess thing for me. I'm a simple girl. All I need is a small gathering of family, friends… and you."

"Then that's what we'll do," Castle said, easing into her hand. He turned his face and lightly kissed her palm before standing up. "Whenever you're ready, we'll plan it all out."

Beckett nodded and accepted his offered hand as he help her up. "I just want to do it before I really start showing, so sometime this month would probably definitely be advisable… and if at all possible, could we keep it hush-hush and out of the papers?"

He nodded. "I'll talk with Paula about it," he said. "And we can have it here, just us, family, and a collection of selected friends."

She smiled and inclined her head. "That'll be perfect, yes."

Castle wrapped his arms around her waist and held her close, resting his forehead against hers. They stared into each other's eyes for the longest moment before they both started to giggle giddily.

"We're going to get married," Castle enthused.

"Yes, yes we are," she smiled back and kissed him slowly, relishing how he responded to her and his grip around her waist tightened. As they backed away to breathe, Beckett tried to suppress a yawn and failed completely.

His hand brushed back her hair and he smiled softly. "You're tired, we should get some sleep. I'm sure there are going to be some questions tomorrow by a certain two headed dragon."
"Did you just call your mother and daughter a 'two headed dragon'?” Beckett question, giving him an amused expression.

"What?” he defended himself. "You have no idea how those two can tag-team against me."

Beckett snorted in a laugh and backed away from him, detaching herself as she pulled her shirt off and threw it casually on the floor. His eyes immediately started to darken with desire. She looked over her shoulder at him and bit her lower lip, blushing slightly, still getting used to him seeing more of her skin that he used too. The physical portion of their relation was still new and fresh, though she hoped he'd never tire of seeing all of her.

"Well, if you're not careful, it might become three against one when I move in," she teased him, unclasping the back of her bra and letting it fall off her.

"Oh, you are such a cruel temptress," Castle shook his head. "But I love you just the same."

Beckett grinned back at him, pleased with herself. Looking around, she spotted a wardrobe and stepped over to it. "Can I borrow one of your shirts?"

"You wanna sleep in one of my shirts!” he exclaimed following after her.

"Yeah… why? Is that a problem?” she asked, lowering her eyebrows, a little worried.

"Not at all!” Castle seemed a little too enthusiastic.

She gave him a frown, then turned around to rummage through his wardrobe. "Stop me if I'm going to find anything… um… bad?” she furrowed her brow, not sure if she made sense.

"Oh don't you worry, Kate," Castle called out from the table, cleaning up their mess. "The porn is hidden safely away… where no one will find it."

Arching her neck to look over her shoulder at him, she raised her eyebrows, appraising his expression. "Just what sort of porn is this?” she asked, then paused, shaking her head. "No, wait… I don't want to know."

Castle laughed. "It doesn't matter, really. Since I don't think I'd be needing it anymore," he said causally, like stating a given fact.

"Oh, and why's that?” she asked, wanting to hear his answer.

"Well, I have you to help with my needs in that department, now don't I?" he grinned wickedly at her and winked.

Beckett blushed, but nodded all the same. "Yeah, you do," she paused, coming up with a wicked joke to play on him. "So… I guess I'll have to finally say goodbye to Derrick, then."

"Derrick?” Castle froze and looked at her, his eyes growing wide. "Oh god, Kate, please don't tell me that you have a fuck buddy on the side. I was just making that up for Nikki… you know… to make her kind of slutty. I… I never thought of you like that, Kate… never. I was just… just…"

She let him squirm a little longer before shaking her head. "No, but you're close."

Castle stood there for a moment, the leftovers temporarily forgotten as he mulled her comment over in his thoughts. Then a sly grin touched his face and he shook a disapproving finger at her. "You're trying to pull a fast one on me! There is no Derrick."
"Yes there is!" she shot back, suppressing the most enormous belly laugh that wanted to come out. As a result, her cheeks flushed all the more, making her entire face an embarrassing shade of pink.

He narrowed his eyes at her, then dropped the plastic bag he was holding onto the table. And then he was bolting for her in a rush, covering the distance between them in a split second, practically tackling her from behind. They fell onto the floor and she let out a fit of giggles as his fingers assaulted her in all her ticklish places. *Oh God, when had he learned where those were?*

"There is no Derrick, and do you know how I know?" he murmured as his hands roamed over her torso, stopping in his tickling tormenting of her to touch places that brought sensations that made her moan instead.

"No. How?" she inquired between pauses in her giggle fits, her chest heaving and her breath coming in pants. She was only vaguely aware that she had no top on and had already unclasped her bra, but it didn't matter, she liked how despite his attempt to focus on her, his eyes would slowly meander over her flesh.

"Because I made him up," he declared with a smirk.

"Alright, I'll give you that," she inclined her head and nodded. "But I *loved* Derrick Storm so much that I just had to name my vibrator after him."

"Ha, yeah right," he scoffed, shaking his head at her. "You do not have a vibrator."

"I do too!" she chuckled back at him as he ran one of his hands up her neck and jaw to tangle his fingers in her long brunette hair. "Anyways, how would you know, unless you've been snooping around my apartment while I'm sleeping after you've thoroughly sated me with your maddening awesome skills in bed?"

Beckett smiled to herself for that ego booster she'd tossed him. He ate it all up and rewarded her by capturing her lips in a searing kiss that left her breathless and her insides tingling with warmth. His wet kisses blazed down her jaw and neck and she had to remind herself to breathe when his mouth found her pulse point.

"Castle…," she panted, nudging with her hand. "The floor is not the most comfortable place for this sort of thing."

"Oh yes, sorry," he said in gasping breaths as he pulled away and leaned back, giggling softly like the little boy he was. "Sorry. I sort of got carried away there."

She looped her arms around his neck. "You think?" Beckett grinned at him. "Just… next time, don't tackle me like a linebacker, okay? And if you can't control yourself, which I have no doubt you won't, then at least make sure I'm standing near the bed or the couch… somewhere more comfortable than the floor."

"Yes, ma'am," he nodded, giving her a boyish smirk and a wiggle of his eyebrows. "I'll… um… I'll try and remember that."

"You do that," Beckett smirked back at him.

*Dear God… what have I gotten myself into? Is it always going to be like this with him?* Kate thought as Castle maneuvered himself up onto his knees then helped her back up to her feet. She shivered and hugged herself, finally taking in the fact that she was topless. Turning around she finished riffling through his drawers until she found a large comfy t-shirt.
Castle went back to cleaning up the food. When he left the bedroom to put the leftovers in the refrigerator, Beckett pulled the t-shirt over her head and sniffed the fabric, smiling as she smelled his scent. Kicking off her heels and shimmying out of her pants, she smiled as she noticed that his large t-shirt came down just far enough to barely cover her center, the hem resting on the top of her thighs.

Beckett padded over to the bathroom room door, cautiously pushing it open as she peered inside. She hadn't seen the master bedroom's bathroom during her stay when her old apartment had been blown up, and the guest bathroom had been amazing. But this one… this one made that one pale in comparison.

"How in the hell is all this just for him?" she gaped and pondered out loud.

It was like a palace unto itself, this bathroom. Beckett looked around in awe at the luxuriousness of it all. Staring at the tub, she almost salivated with envy until she realized that very soon it would be her tub. Oh, she was going to enjoy living here. She could not wait to give the tub a test run.

"I see you've found the bathroom," came his voice.

Beckett spun around and smiled, biting her lower lip and bringing her hand up to try and hide the fact that she was so squealing over this bathroom.

"Like what you see?" Castle asked, arching an eyebrow as he leaned against the doorframe, a self-confident smug smile forming on his lips. He must have re-entered the bedroom while she had been awestruck by the bathroom and all it's amenities, because he had changed into a very flattering black t-shirt and some equally complimentary flannel black shorts that showed off his muscular legs. She'd never realized how toned his legs were.

She nodded slightly, her grin widening. "Oh, most definitely… yes."

Castle pushed himself off from the door and slinked his arms around her waist, tugging her closer to him. He captured her lips in a soft tender kiss the spoke so much more than words ever could. Beckett allowed herself to ease into him, placing one hand on his chest, while the other trailed down his arm from his shoulder to his hand.

"I love you," he whispered into her mouth as they backed away to breathe, resting their foreheads together.

"I love you, too," she whispered back and nipped at his nose, slightly amazed at herself. "Now, do you have a toothbrush I can use, so I can brush my teeth, then slide under those satin sheets and curl up besides you?"

He winked at her and wiggled his eyebrows. "Anymore than cuddling?"

She yawned and frowned, more because she was angry at herself for being tired, than at his question. "I wish I wasn't so tired so that I could say yes," she replied, looking up at him, feeling guilty for denying him.

"It's alright, Kate," he soothed her, running a hand along the side of her face.

Beckett closed her eyes and eased into his touch, simply allowing herself to be in the moment, letting down all of her walls and just being Kate Beckett the woman. She would only do this here, with him. Only him, and him alone, would she bare all of what she was. It was scary to realize that she'd come to this realization, that she trusted him with both her life and her heart. But the rewards of taking this leap far outweighed the risks. Being with him, fully being with him in every sense of
the word—mentally, emotionally, and physically—did so much for her that she could never fully express it in words.

So instead, she reached up and clasped his head in her hands and kissed him so deeply that his whole body went slack and numb against her. Backing away to breathe, Beckett heaved in a deep gasp of air and rested her forehead against his.

"What was that for?" he asked, his lips curling up in a grin as they shared a breath.

"For being you," she replied. "And for loving me."
Chapter 12

When she opened her eyes it was still dark, but there was a haze of light coming through the bottom of the curtains. Beckett felt wonderful. She didn't know when was the last time she had slept so peacefully. This bed… god… this bed was so comfortable, she didn't know if she even wanted to leave it. Yes, she nodded her head against the soft pillow, I could definitely get used to this bed.

Letting out a sigh at having to wake up, she swung her arm over onto the other side of the bed, expecting to feel her bed companion, but instead her searching hand was met by nothing. Her hair tumbled down over her face as she sat up. Brushing her long locks away from her eyes she glanced over to the other side of the bed to confirm what her hand had already known… it was empty.

"Castle?" she called out to no response. Swallowing, for some reason feeling nervous and worried, Beckett slipped out of the covers and called his name again.

That's when she heard it, the faint sounds of his voice, added with another one. Beckett tiptoed over to the bedroom door, which was slightly ajar. Gently, she pushed it open a little more and narrowed her eyes, trying to hear some of the conversation that was going on. By the pitch and inclinations of the other voice, Beckett immediately knew whom Castle was talking with. Suddenly—and quite unexpectedly—her heart was pounding and her chest was heaving as her breaths came in quick gasps, unwelcome panic rising up inside her.

Closing her eyes, she stepped back from the doorframe, quietly pulling the door shut behind her. She staggered back, her eyes wide. Why are you panicking? She questioned herself in a chiding inner voice. She had to have known that this was going to happen if she spent the night. There was no way around this... it was bound to happen. She had known! Then why was she acting this way?

As her mind whirled around with these questions, she froze, catching scent of the enticing aroma. Bacon. He was making bacon and eggs for breakfast. Her stomach growled and the two little ones inside her demanded sustenance. Biting the inside of her cheek, Beckett opened his closet and found a robe. She was not going to go out there in nothing but one of his large t-shirts and her panties. Pulling the sleeves over her shoulders, she wrapped the robe around her and tied the waist sash, which, along with his large t-shirt, hid the small bump forming in her middle.

Popping quickly into the bathroom, she did a quick check of her appearance, smoothing out her hair and such. But as she caught her reflection, she paused. Was she actually glowing? Furrowing her brow and wrinkling her nose, she shook her head. Kate Beckett did not glow. Yes, she was pregnant, and some people said pregnant women had a glow about them… but she… she did not glow. And that was final!

Letting out a sigh, admitting that the aroma of the bacon, and the soft sizzling noise it made as it cooked, were overpowering her normal safeguards, Beckett tugged the robe tighter around her body and ducked out of the bathroom and through his bedroom, leaving the big comfortable bed behind and heading towards what would most likely be a somewhat awkward morning.

XXX

"No joke, Alexis… I'm being serious," she heard Castle say.

Peeking her head around the doorframe, Beckett snuck through his office door and peered down the hallway, seeing him standing behind the island countertop, gesturing with a spatula as he talked. Sunlight danced through the Loft's windows, casting the entire kitchen and open lounge
area in a warm glow.

She turned her attention to Castle and smiled softly. He looked good, dressed in the same black t-shirt he had worn to bed. Though, unlike last night (when he had worn those very flattering black shorts), he had pulled on a pair of dark blue flannel pajama bottoms. His hair was still wild and tousled from the pillow, but it only added to his charm and adorableness. As she appraised his appearance, she decided he looked good in anything… or nothing, for that matter.

Looking away from the ruggedly handsome mystery author—and father of her twins—Beckett spotted Alexis sitting on one of the barstools, leaning forward on one elbow as her father spoke, continuing to brazenly wield his kitchen utensil around in the air.

"Really? A clown? Are you sure, Dad? You're not just making it up, are you?" the adorable redhead questioned, giving her father a dubious look.

"Yes. Yes. And no!" Castle asserted, very vehemently, his face turning into the most adorable expression like he was hurt his own flesh and blood did not believe him. "How could you even think I, your very loving father, would make up such a thing, Alexis dear?" He made a faux pouting face, feigning hurt feelings, and turned to flip the sizzling bacon.

Beckett smiled lightly, watching father and daughter banter as Castle roamed about the kitchen making breakfast. She bit her lower lip and watched as Martha appeared from the top of the stairs, and made a typical dramatic entrance. Scooting back, Beckett tried to remain out of sight as the diva strolled across the open space between the kitchen and lounge to give her granddaughter a hug.

"Morning, Grams!" Alexis chirped, always happy and upbeat.

There is something seriously wrong with that girl, Beckett found herself thinking. I mean, yeah, she's perfect… I wouldn't change a thing about her. But no one is that cheery in the morning… Wait? Weren't you just as happy as a clam a while ago when you woke up in Rick's bed… Happy as a clam? Who the hell says that anymore! And why are you calling him Rick and not Castle? Frowning, she stopped her internal conversation. Seriously, she might need to see a therapist if she kept having these little chats with herself.

"Bacon, eggs, and pancakes," Martha listed off as she gave a droll smile towards her son. "My, my, my… someone's in a good mood this morning." She turned sideways on her barstool and gave her granddaughter a knowing wink. Alexis knitted her eyebrows together, obviously confused at what her grandmother was trying to hint at.

Castle gave a tight smile, his eyes lighting up a bit as he no doubt remembered some of last night. Beckett bit her lower lip, remembering the intense make out session that they had had as they cuddled up in bed before going to sleep. His hands had touched her in ways that were so sensual and erotic that she had nearly gone over the edge of the threshold. And he had never once, during the entire course of that passionate and heated make out session, touched her flesh. No man had ever had that kind of affect on her. It was mind-boggling, really.

Shaking her head, Beckett returned to the present and watched as Castle tried with all his might to contain the inner child within that wanted to simply scream out the fabulous news he so desperately wanted to tell his family.

Martha leaned forward, her eyes watching her son move about the kitchen. "To be honest, Richard, I hadn't expected you this morning."
"Really? Why is that, mother?" Castle questioned, trying to act innocent, batting his eyelashes and adding a charming smile.

The diva snorted a laugh and rolled her eyes, informing her son that that act would not work on her. "Oh, I just thought you might be spending the night at a certain detective's apartment," Martha elaborated. "As you have been doing for the past two nights this week."

Alexis shifted uncomfortably, finally fully understanding what was being implied by all this. She pulled her glass of orange juice up to her lips, looking like she was desperately trying to control an embarrassed blush. Beckett sympathized with the girl, no child wanted to hear about their parent's bedroom antics, but with a father like Castle, Alexis probably had been exposed to that sort of stuff long before Beckett had even come into their lives.

Castle straightened his back and then suddenly his eyes were on her. Beckett froze, her chest tightening as she realized he had known she had been standing there all along.

"Care to field that question, Kate?" he asked. He said her name with a large smile, tilting his head slightly as he gazed at her, taking in the fact that she was wearing one of his robes. He seemed far too pleased by that for Beckett's liking.

Martha and Alexis both turned with stunned expressions as Beckett hesitantly stepped out from behind her hiding place, hugging the robe tighter around her body, suddenly feeling very naked and exposed. She gave them a cautious smile as she made her way around the island countertop to stand by Castle, who gave her a quick chaste kiss on the cheek—which was okay, really. After all Martha and Alexis knew they were dating.

"Good morning," he softly whispered into her ear as she heard him take a whiff of her scent.

She ran her bottom lip under her teeth and eased into him, smiling slightly, enjoying the feel of his lips on her skin, as he also reached up and brushed her hair back a bit, tucking it behind an ear. It was an incredibly intimate gesture, one she was slightly in awe at. Had they really come that far in just one month of officially dating?

Letting out a light breath, Beckett reached up and fisted his shirt in her hand, pulling him back to kiss him softly on the lips. "Morning," she murmured, as she slipped back, blushing brightly as she remembered the audience they had.

Castle gave her a wink and a wiggling of his eyebrows, before then turned back to the stove, busying himself with scrambling the eggs and flipping the pancakes.

Beckett swallowed hard and breathed in deeply as she leaned back against the island counter to turn and greet the other two. "Morning, Alexis… Martha," she inclined her head, trying her best to stifle the blush at having been caught coming out of Castle's bedroom… in one of his robes, no less.

"Morning, Kate darling," Martha smiled, looking very pleased, her eyes surreptitiously shifting between Beckett and Castle.

"Did you sleep well, Detective?" Alexis beamed warmly, her smile almost infectious, breaking the awkward silence.

"Very, yes," Beckett nodded, trying to contain her anxious breathing. "And it's Kate, Alexis. You can call me Kate."

Martha seemed to notice her apprehension, because she reached across the countertop and grabbed her hand, giving it a slight squeeze. "No reason to be nervous, dear," she smiled reassuringly. "We
"Yeah," Castle chimed in, startling her as he came up behind. "Especially me!" He gave her a quick kiss on the side of her head, and then went back to finishing up cooking breakfast.

Beckett bit her lower lip and nodded, smiling lightly. "Thanks, Martha… that… that means a lot." God, she felt like such a teenager right now, like her dad had caught her on the couch, making out with a boy.

Martha gave her a warm smile and squeezed her hand again. Suddenly, the older woman paused and frowned. Ever so slowly, she lifted Beckett's hand up and gazed down, her eyes going wide as a delightful soft smile formed on her lips.

"What's this?"

"Huh?" Castle was looking over his shoulder at them.

"Oh… that…," Beckett stuttered, not having thought of this. She had anticipated some awkwardness over the fact that she had spent the night, but she had not mentally prepared herself for this.

"Oh my god!" Alexis nearly squealed, her large sparkling eyes gazing down at the engagement ring on Beckett's finger. The young teen looked up, turning back and forth between her dad and Beckett. "Are… are you two… engaged?"

Fighting to control the urge to run from the room, Beckett put a big smile on her face—to be honest, it wasn't really that hard to fake; she was genuinely happy and thrilled to be marrying Richard Castle. But it was all still a bit overwhelming, especially with the other bit of news that the two other women in Castle's life had yet to hear. As for Castle, he remained silent, but his smiling eyes were watching Beckett, as he let her field the excited question.

Beckett gave a slight nod. "Yes."

Alexis burst out in the loudest scream of joy Beckett had ever heard. She literally jumped off her stool and darted around the island counter to give Beckett the biggest hug she had ever had. Beckett's calm broke and she smiled brightly, laughing as Alexis squeezed her tight, then backed away so Martha could get in on the fun. As Beckett was engulfed in an embrace by the older woman, she smiled more and her moist eyes flickered over to Castle as she thought, *This was the so-called 'two head dragon' Rick was so afraid of?*

As Martha retreated back to the other side of the counter, Alexis came back up, practically bouncing with joy. Her enthusiasm was so infectious that Beckett nearly wanted to bounce along with the teen. "This is so exciting… are… are we the first to know?"

Beckett exchanged a look with Castle.

"Well, Ryan and Esposito kind of caught us in the act… so to speak," he stopped talking and quickly looked away.

"In the act?" Alexis echoed, looking somewhat unsure how to respond to that.

"I think he means the proposal, Alexis dear," Martha called out from her barstool.

"Oh," mumbled the teen.
Beckett blushed at the other image Castle's choice of words had formed in her mind, and at the fact that his teenager daughter had thought he was referring to the very same thing she had.

"So... how was it?" Alexis beamed, bouncy again with delight. "Was it all romantic?"

"Romantic... would you call it romantic, Rick?" Beckett asked looking over her shoulder at him as he furrowed his brow, trying to act like he was busy cooking.

He frowned. "I would have preferred it to have happened differently," he eventually said, using the spatula to dish out the hot pancakes onto a plate.

"Well, how was it, then? Don't leave us in suspense!" Martha asked, gesturing for her son to hurry up and serve breakfast.

"In a hurry, mother?" Castle chuckled as he divided up the pancakes, eggs and bacon amongst the four of them.

Beckett did not miss the fact that he was giving her the lion's share. She hoped the others didn't notice; one big announcement was enough. However, as she sat down next to Alexis, Beckett noticed Martha giving her a knowing look.

"I just want to hear this story while I'm still young, dear," Martha replied, picking up her fork.

"Oh mother, I could do so much with that statement," Castle replied, grinning like a Cheshire cat. "But I won't spoil the happy moment with silly jokes."

"Thanks," Martha rolled her eyes at her son.

"Let's see," Castle positioned himself across from Beckett, watching as she put butter and added generous amount of syrup on top of her pancakes. She really did like his pancakes. "Kate was sitting in the break room, talking with Lanie... I arrived... looking all dapper and debonair, I must say."

"Dad...," Alexis whined, rolling her eyes. Beckett could not help but notice how similar that eye roll was to her own.

"He was very pleasant on the eyes, though," Beckett helped him out, smiling widely.

"Thanks, Kate, lots of help there," Castle chuckled and winked at her. He leaned against the countertop and picked up a piece of bacon, taking a bite out of it. "Right, continuing with the story." He paused, staring at her for a moment. "Well, after I arrived, Lanie made a hasty retreat. I knelt down before this gorgeous detective," he inclined his head toward her, smiling. "And then reached inside my coat and brought out the small black box."

"I was speechless," she added. She was grateful that he'd left out the part about her proposing while they were making love the night before.

"Can I see it again?" Alexis inquired.

Beckett gave a smile, thrilled to be able to show off an engagement ring, especially when the man who gave it to her was so special and near and dear to her heart. Putting her fork down, she held up her hand for Alexis to see the ring again. Martha leaned around her granddaughter to cast another look at it too.

"Richard... I'm impressed," Martha said, smiling over at her son.
"Huh?" Castle had half a pancake stuffed into his mouth.

"Simple, yet elegant," Martha elaborated.

"I know… it's perfect," Beckett felt bubbly and happy. She sighed contently as she stared at the silver band with the three small sparkling diamonds.

"It is," Alexis agreed and looked up. "Well done, Dad! Much better than you did with Gina."

Castle made a face and swallowed. "Well, I had to get it right this time, now didn't I?"

"Well, you did at that, darling," Martha nodded.

They all turned back to enjoying their breakfast. Beckett found that she was ravenous and she nearly devoured her whole meal before anyone else was finished. Castle slipped her a couple more strips of bacon, which she gave him a quick chaste kiss in thanks. Alexis smiled and Martha grinned knowingly.

"Is there anything else you two would like to share with the group?" Martha inquired, giving them both a look that said 'I know you're hiding something, and I think I know what it is'.

Beckett swallowed hard and looked over at Castle nervously. He moved around the island countertop and slid in beside her, wrapping an arm around her waist. She leaned against him and closed her eyes, relishing the feel of his proximity. He brushed a kiss against her temple.

"Should we tell them?" he whispered.

"We might as well," she murmured back. "Could… could you?"

"Always."

He pressed a kiss against her cheek and she turned her head to kiss his lips. Castle gave a small smile and turned to face his mother and daughter.

"So… Alexis," he started off. "How would you like to have some siblings?"

Beckett felt like cringing. Not the way she would have done it, but hey, this was Castle. He was not much for being subtle. Taking a deep breath and running her lower lip under her teeth, the detective looked at the teen, awaiting her response. The room was suddenly very quiet.

"Siblings… as… as in more than one?" Alexis asked, honestly, she looked shell-shocked.

Beckett and Castle nodded in unison. Now Martha looked stunned as well. The diva had probably suspected Beckett was pregnant, but not with twins.

"Wait? Backup a second," Alexis said, holding up her hands and trying to get a hold of her breathing. "Are… are you getting married because you got knocked up?"

Castle feigned a gasp of indignation, not to mention he looked quite horrified that his daughter actually had a grasp on the situation. Beckett blushed and eased into Castle, helping to take away some of the tension.

"I may have gotten pregnant first, but it was always leading towards this," she calmly replied with a smile, taking his hand and intertwining her fingers with his.

He smiled down at her and nodded. "I bought the ring almost two years ago," he confided aloud.
Beckett noticed that both Alexis and Martha looked genuinely surprised by this. "I've kept it hidden, locked away, in the safe in my office. I was just waiting for the day until I could use it."

"So you're not getting married because of the babies?" Alexis asked, obviously needing clarification and reinforcment on this matter.

"We're getting married because we love one another, Alexis," Beckett answered, blushing slightly at so freely and openly admitting her feelings. She was so closed and guarded normally. Something about Castle, and the whole Castle clan, for that matter, just seemed to bring her out of her shell. "He… Rick… Rick's my one and done."

They smiled at each other, and then she reached up with her ringed hand and caressed the side of his face as he leaned down, planting a soft kiss on her lips. She giggled softly as he backed away, blushing even more at their public displays of affection. She'll have to get used to it, Castle was rather fond of touching.

"So it's twins?" Martha questioned, still looking like she was recovering from that added news.

"Yes, mother, twins," Castle confirmed with a warm smile, squeezing his arm tighter around Beckett.

"We're going to tell my Dad tonight," Beckett said. Her eyes went wide as she started to panic. "Oh god, I still need to make reservations at the restaurant… not to mention, actually pick a restaurant."

"Shh, it's alright," Castle soothed her, running a hand up and down her back. "I'll take care of it. Just tell me what type of food you want."

"Italian… I think," she frowned, knitting her eyebrows together, and then looked up at him, placing a hand on her stomach. "I'm not sure… these two don't necessarily let me know in advance, you know."

He gave a serious nod. "I bet they'll be voracious eaters, with cute little chubby legs and arms. Oh, and they'll have your eyes, Kate. Yes, I think I'll like that."

Martha laughed lightly, and Alexis giggled. Castle turned to look at them, his eyebrows raised and his face the picture of confusion. "What's so funny?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, dear," Martha assured him, waving a hand dramatically and taking a sip of her morning coffee.

"It… it's just so cute," Alexis beamed.

The couple stared at the teen in equal puzzlement.

"How you two talk about the babies," Alexis elaborated, rolling her eyes at the thickheaded adults she had to put up with.

"Oh," Beckett blushed, averting her eyes, and biting her lower lip.

"Hey, cool," Castle said, grinning besides her. She looked up at him and rolled her eyes as he wiggled his eyebrows. "You hear that, Becks, we're cute!"
Chapter 13

Finishing up breakfast with the Castles was easier once the news was out in the open. Beckett let herself relax, and she truly allowed herself to enjoy the rest of the morning, simply being the woman Kate and not the detective.

As expected, the question about her living situation came up, much to her chagrin and surprise. She had expected it to come from Martha, but it had come from Alexis instead. Before she could answer, Castle spoke up and informed his daughter and mother that they still needed to tell Beckett's father, and that then, after that, they would deal with the whole process of Beckett moving in. It was a fact; she was going to move in, and most likely before the wedding, and most likely sometime this month, probably in a week or two.

At 7:30, Alexis gave her a big hug before merrily bouncing off to go to school. Beckett was stunned at how happy the girl looked with having to go to school. Beckett remembered how she'd kicked and groaned, until her mother had to practically drag her out the door. She smiled at the memory and wondered if she'd have to do the same with the two little ones growing inside her. Martha smiled at them, and bid them adieu, as she had some meetings with an architect over the designs for the acting school she was setting up with the money she had inherited from Chet.

This left her and Castle alone.

Beckett looked up at him, smiling slightly as she ran her lower lip through her teeth. "Is every morning like this here?" she asked, watching as he took the plates and rinsed them off.

Looking over his shoulder at her, he gave her the biggest goofy smile and nodded. "Most of the time, yes," he replied, a twinkle in his eyes. "Though, I normally don't go so overboard with breakfast. Though, I think I'll make an exception for the next… say… seven months."

Beckett laughed and felt her cheeks flush a bit as he winked at her. "If you keep feeding me like this, I'm going to be huge!"

"Kate, you're carrying twins… you are going to get huge," he chuckled, and then stopped, eyeing her to see if he had overstepped in his joking. "That… that didn't come out the way I thought it would."

She gave a shrug. After all, she'd opened that door, so to speak, with her comment. "Well, just as long as I still have you by my side... then I'll be fine."

Castle opened the dishwasher and deposited the dishes, along with the utensils, glasses, and coffee mugs. Closing it, he sauntered around the counter and looped his arms around her middle, hugging her close to his chest. She smiled, closed her eyes, and eased into him as he let out a soft breath.

"I'll be by your side, Kate… always," he murmured into her hair. "Nothing is going to make me leave… not now, not ever. I'm in this for the long haul."

Beckett swallowed hard past the lump in her throat, surprised, touched and moved by his words. She knew he loved her, and that he would always be by her side, but it was nice to hear him say it, to reinforce it with his words and his presence. Beckett would never admit it out loud, but underneath the hard cold exterior she'd built up as a homicide detective, beat the heart of a fragile and vulnerable woman, who was afraid, not just of loving, but of being loved and then losing it. But with Castle, there was a permanence to his words... a finality, one that spoke of forever and
He wasn’t going to leave her, abandon her, or toss her aside when his interest waned. If he were like that, he’d have left a long time ago. Beckett had to admit, though, that last summer she’d come close to losing him forever. She had gotten scared, and was so very confused about her feelings, that she had panicked and quickly tried to cover her rambling when she saw Gina arrive.

She had been angry with him, but was angrier with herself. And she had then thrown herself into a relationship with Josh, just because she didn’t want to be open to getting hurt like that again if Castle ever came back and showed an interest in her again. She didn’t want to open herself up to feeling for him again. But nothing could pull him from her mind. He was the only man she had ever fallen for, yet had never slept with, that she could never get out of her mind.

And it was that, almost above everything else, which made her realize how much she wanted and needed him. And that was why she allowed him back, when he returned in the fall, despite his lack of calling her when he had gotten back from the Hamptons, like he had said he would. Even now, when they were together, she ached for his presence when they are not in the same room. It was a feeling she hoped never to lose.

Castle let out a breath again her hair, pulling her back out of her thoughts. He leaned into her and a soft warm smile touched her lips as he kissed the side of her head, the sounds of him breathing in her scent all too obvious.

"Mmm," he hummed. "Cherries."

Tilting her head, Beckett kissed him lightly on the lips, closing her eyes as she savored this private and intimate moment when it was just the two of them. Letting out a small contented breath as they drew back, she placed her hand on his chest and looked up at him.

"Time to get ready for work," she half whispered. "Care to join me in the shower?"

"Do you really need to ask?" he chuckled as he offered her his hand.

She grinned widely as she took it, laughing softly as she slipped off the barstool. "No, I guess not," she answered as his fingers interlaced with hers as he led her back through his office and too the bedroom. "However, you do know, that if you're going to be taking showers with me all the time, you're going to start smelling like cherries too?"

He smirked back at her and wiggled his eyebrows. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

XXX

"I'm liking the son-in-law," Castle declared as he rejoined her, offering a refilled cup of tea.

Beckett could not help it and let out a frustrated huff as she took the warm cup in her hands. *God, I miss coffee!* But she was determined to avoid the strong enticing brew for the duration. And besides, Castle made a mean cup of mint tea. His talents seemed boundless. Glancing up as she took a sip, she noticed that he had the exact same beverage as she did.

"No coffee?" she questioned, ignoring his previous comment for a moment.

"Huh?" Castle looked over at her and smiled. "Oh, well, I thought it seemed cruel of me to be drinking coffee when you couldn't. So… I've given it up until we can both enjoy a cup together."

Beckett was stunned and touched. It was a small gesture, but it meant so much to her that she could
not put it into words. So instead, she gave him a special smile that had become his, one that spoke
more than words ever could, and with hidden meanings that only he could ever decipher.

He leaned back against her desk and winked before surreptitiously glancing about the bullpen. She
knitted her eyebrows together, and took a look around, noticing that, for the moment, they were
alone. Castle leaned back and put his cup down on her desk before putting a hand on the small of
her back and inching close enough that she could feel the heat of his body. His lips lightly brushed
against her cheek and she shivered at the feeling, fighting to control her smile.

Straightening his back, Castle stood up off the edge of her desk and stepped casually over to the
murder board, cocking his head slightly as he took in all their notes. Beckett smiled softly and
brought the cup of tea up to her nose and inhaled the aroma before taking another sip, and allowing
her eyes to drink in the sight of her man. She'd let the kiss slide, since he'd been wise enough to
check to see if anyone had been watching. He respected her no PDAs at work policy.

"So… you said you're liking the son-in-law," she spoke up, turning back to the case of Mr.
Chance's murder.

Castle nodded and looked up at the picture of Mr. Vance Chance, sans clown make-up and wig. "I
was looking over Chance's financials…"

"When did you do that?" Beckett asked, frowning. She'd hardly seen him out of her sight since they
arrived at the precinct at 8:30.

He looked over at her and batted his eyelashes innocently. "When you and Lanie went out for
a girl's only lunch date."

"Please don't tell me you skipped lunch," she said, giving him one of her glares, which she knew he
secretly loved. It worked and she could see his eyes darken with desire.

Castle coughed, his face reddening as he looked about the bullpen, noticing how some uniforms
were walking by to put some reports on desks. "I got a sandwich from that vending machine in the
hallway."

"Ugh… you didn't?" she questioned, looking both repulsed and horrified.

He gave an equally terrified expression, looking like he was seriously questioning his own
judgment. "Yeah… I did," he swallowed hard and, for a moment, looked like he might need to
sprint to the restrooms to regurgitate his last meal. "I… I think they might have expired. The… the
sandwich was kind of… of crunchy."

Beckett had to take a sip of her tea again to wash done the sympathetic tastes manifesting in her
mouth. She swallowed hard and shook her head at him as she placed the cup down on her desk next
to his.

"If it was so disgusting, why the hell did you eat the whole thing?" she asked, furrowing her brow
in confusion.

"I paid for it," he said with a shrug, as if that was reason enough. "And besides… I've had worse." He
 gave one of his big goofy grins. "Remember, before I hit it big, I used to be a struggling
author."

She shook her head at him and suppressed a laugh at his silliness. "Alright, just… just don't make a
habit out of it, okay?" Beckett relented with a slight nod, giving him a smile. "I need you healthy
and alert for when these two come," she added, glancing about the bullpen before patting her
stomach.

He laughed softly and winked at her. "Don't worry, Kate," he assured her. "I have no problem being the stay-at-home dad. I did it once with Alexis… and I'm more than happy to do it again with our children."

"Oh, yeah… right," she frowned. She hadn't really thought of it like that. She was thinking more along the lines of needing his help when they were newborns, since he'd have some experience with that. And she suspected she'd have trouble just adjusting to one, let alone two newborns.

"Now don't you worry," he said, coming closer to her and lowering his voice as he placed a hand on her arm, having noticed her change in mood. "You're going to be a great mother, Kate, and our children are going to simply adore you, just as much as I do."

And before Beckett could say anything else, he kissed her on the forehead and hugged her. She sighed and relaxed into his embrace until they were startled by someone clearing their throat. They both blushed fiercely as they backed away from each other to see Ryan and Esposito grinning widely at them.

"Are we interrupting something?" Esposito questioned, his eyes skirting back and forth between the writer and the detective.

"No… nothing at all," Beckett snapped with a glower.

Castle laughed and stepped back to the murder board, gazing up at the pictures and notes. Beckett turned her attention to the other two detectives.

"What you got?" she asked, her manner and voice professional and back to her normal way of conducting business.

Ryan dug his notepad out of his jacket pocket and flipped it open. "Per Castle's request, we've checked the son-in-law's financials…"

"Ooh, did you see anything?" the writer's eyes lit up.

Ryan and Esposito exchanged a look. "Yeah… we think you're on to something, Castle."

Beckett noticed a smug smile form on Castle's lips as he turned to her and gave a wiggle of his eyebrows. The two other detectives noticed the exchanged and snickered. She cast them a glare, cutting them off, as they tried to cover their amusement.

"So… let's here it," Beckett said, gesturing as she spoke. "Does Castle's hunch have merit?"

Esposito nodded and held up a manila folder. "Got his bank statements here," he said. "The dude's on the verge of bankruptcy."

Castle almost did a little celebratory dance, but managed to stop himself before he got out of hand. Beckett held back a smile and rolled her eyes before snatching the file from Esposito's hand and giving the contents a cursory look. Castle hovered over her shoulder as she examined the records, seeing that they were correct. Henry Linson, the son-in-law, was very much in some financial hardships.

"Alright…," she turned her head to speak with Castle and they nearly bumped foreheads, he was that close. He backed away slightly and smiled. Always with the invasion of my personal space! But now, it didn't bother her as much, especially considering that in recent days he'd done a
lot more to her than just invade her personal space.

Taking a breath, she gave him a little glare, letting him know that now that they weren't alone he had to contain and control himself a little better. Watching as he eased back, Beckett turned her attention back to the file in her hands.

"Okay, so this shows me that Linson has financial problems," she continued, trying to block out the lingering scent of Castle's enticing aftershave and cologne. God, if they were not bogged down in the middle of an investigation and standing in the bullpen, she'd drag him off to someplace to have her wicked way with him.

Castle smiled knowingly, and she was tempted to smack him on the back of the head, but she suppressed that, knowing that she could take out her aggression in more pleasurable ways later. Strangely, she found she liked that, knowing that after a long day of investigating homicides, she could go back home with Rick and snuggle up with him... and do some other things, as well.

Shaking her head, and giving him a little glare, Beckett continued on with her assessment. "However... I'm not seeing much motive here."

"Money," Castle said. "Plain and simple."

"Care to elaborate?"

"The old man, Mr. Chance," Castle said, skipping over to the murder board and pointing at the victim's picture. "He was a widower and a beloved grandfather. I'm betting he's set up a nice trust fund for his grandchildren."

"So what would Linson's motive be, Castle?" Beckett asked, turning back around to grab her cup of tea. She took a quick sip as she watched him thinking it over.

"I... I hadn't thought of that," he said. "Linson wouldn't be able to get at the money."

"Next time, think your wild theories through, writer boy," she smirked.

He nodded. "I still like him for it though," he said.

Beckett nodded. "Could be, yes. But first we need to do some more digging." She shifted, turning towards the other two detectives.

"Right," Ryan said.

"On it, boss," Esposito added.

Her jaw dropped and she smiled, watching as the two rushed off to do their assignments before she had even given them out, leaving her and Castle alone. He stood there for a moment, gazing at her adoringly, before he sighed.

"I should probably be going," he said, after a pause, stepping over to her desk to pick up his things.

"What? It's only three!" Beckett tried to suppress the pouting sound in her voice, but she failed.

He gave her a small smile. "I... I just want to get ready for our dinner with your dad," Castle said softly, reaching up to run a hand along her arm. "I want everything to go perfect tonight."

"So do I," Beckett murmured. She was truly hoping that everything went well with her father. He was going to have a lot dumped on him, and she hoped that eating out in a public restaurant would
make things a little easier for both her and Castle. She knew her dad wasn't the shotgun wielding kind of dad, but he was still rather protective of her. And she didn't want him to get the wrong impression of Castle.

"Still want Italian?" Castle asked, straightening up and pulling on his overcoat.

"Yes," she nodded, giving him a soft grin and reaching over to smooth out the lapels of his coat. "I think that will be just fine. I'm feeling in the mood for some pasta, yes."

He smiled back at her, no doubt squealing inside with how she was smoothing out his lapels. No one was watching, so she was safe. Though she knew that once they got married, some of this might have to change. He wouldn't be able to come along with her in the field. She'd miss that, but she'd rather have him some of the time than none at all. Letting out a quick breath, she shoved those thoughts away for another time.

Slowly, Castle reached up and grabbed her hand, holding it against his chest. "I wish I could stay and help out," he said softly.

"You've already been a lot of help, Castle," she assured him. "Checking the financials of the son-in-law was a smart move. I wouldn't have thought of that after I had met with him the other day, seeing how distraught he looked."

"I'm just an extra pair of eyes," Castle shrugged it off as if it was nothing. "Besides, Ryan and Esposito did all the legwork. I just pointed them in the direction, is all."

Beckett shook her head at him and fiddled with his lapel, even though she'd already smoothed it several times already. "Stop selling yourself short, Rick," she murmured, using his first name. "Just your presence helps me think. You are my partner, in more than just the job, but in all things."

He gave her a warm smile that melted her heart. Glancing around they noticed that they were relatively alone; so she inched closer and gave him a quick chaste kiss, blushing slightly as she backed away, suppressing a giggle.

"I'll see you later, then?" he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Always," she replied, using their word.

His lips curved upwards and Beckett forgot herself for a moment and fist ed her hand in his shirt, pulling him forward for another kiss, this time, much longer and deeper than the first. Breaking away, Castle let out a hot breath and a lopsided grin formed on his face.

"I'm liking the new you," he murmured, before giving her wink, and she shushed him away.

"I'll be by an hour after I get off," she called after him. "Oh… and Castle?"

He paused and turned around. "Yes?"

"Better call me with the name of the restaurant after you make the reservations," she instructed. "I'll then phone my dad and let him know, and then he can meet us there."

While she had given her instructions, he had slowly made his way back over to her until he was standing so close that she could feel his body heat. She flushed a bit, feeling highly aroused at his intoxicating aroma. Castle grinned wolfishly, and wrapped his arm around her, giving her a half hug.
Beckett was amazed when she did not tense, considering the fact that there were a couple of uniforms and junior detectives walking past, their eyes watching them.

"I'll call you in less than thirty with the name and address," Castle whispered in her ear, his breath moist against her neck. "Love you." He gave her head a light kiss, and then he moved back.

"Rick?"

He turned back, still very close to her.

"I love you, too," she said, biting her lower lip, before she pulled him back for another quick kiss. This new her was something different. She was breaking her own rules about no PDAs at work.

His smile lit up her world and it made everything seem so much brighter than the gritty dark alleys that they often found the poor souls that fate had snatched away from the living. Staying true to form, he gave her a wink and a playful wiggle of his eyebrows before ducking out of the bullpen and heading over to the elevator.

Beckett smiled wider and spun around to go back to her desk. As she sat down, she looked up to see everyone looking at her.

"What! A girl can't kiss her fiancé without it becoming some big spectacle for you all to watch?" she snapped, annoyed at how people felt that her personal life was so fascinating.

As soon as she had spoke, everyone quickly jumped about to look like they were busy. Rolling her eyes, she turned to her computer to see if there were any more financial tidbits that could help with solving Mr. Chance's murder.
Sitting at her desk pouring through financial records, Beckett let out a low growl of frustration as she glanced longingly over at his chair, as she ignored the occasional glance of a uniform or junior detective who busied themselves around the precinct. Castle had not been gone for more than twenty minutes and she already missed him… dare she say, needed him. It wasn't just that he made the job fun, or that his wild theories often did spiral into credible leads (not that she was ever going to admit that to him), it was the calmness and reassurance that his mere presence brought her.

Beckett had meant what she had told him earlier, that he was her partner, not just on the job, but also in all things… because it reality that was what he was. Castle was her true partner in life. When she was with him, all the songs made sense, and she felt a security and stability she had never thought she would ever feel again after her mother had been taken away from her. All the walls she had built up—all her defenses—they just crumbled away around him. He burrowed his way into her heart, planted his flag, and refused to leave. And Beckett found that she welcomed that, even relished it.

At precisely thirty minutes from when Castle had departed the station, her cell phone rang and his picture appeared on the screen. A light smile touched her lips and she picked up, pressing the answer button.

"Right on time," she said, grinning widely, feigning surprise.

"I can be punctual when I want to be," Castle voice took on a mock wounded sound, but she could hear the smirk on his lips even if she could not see it.

"I take it reservations have been made?" Beckett inquired, pulling out a pen and placing it on a notepad, prepared to copy down the where and when of the reservation.

"Seven thirty, a table for three at Giardino della Vita," Castle said.

"No way… shut the front door!"

"Huh?"

"Giardino della Vita?"

"Yeah… is there a problem with that particular restaurant?" Castle inquired, sounding worried.

"Only that it is about the hardest place to get a reservation," Beckett replied. "I mean… when it opened six months ago, Lanie and I tried to get a reservation for a girl's night out, but they were like full for almost eight months. How the hell did you get a reservation for a dinner in less than eight hours before?"

"I… I know the owner," Castle said softly, trying to sound modest. And obvious nervous over her reaction.

Beckett took a deep breath and leaned back in her chair, pinching the bridge of her nose. She took quick breaths to calm herself down. She had no idea why she was getting angry over this. Well, she was surprised, yes, but why angry? Closing her eyes as she took another breath, Beckett lowered her brow and stared off at nothing as she realized why she was finding this so upsetting. He's using his celebrity and personal contacts to basically cut in line at one of the newest and popular restaurants in all of New York, that's why.
"Kate?" came Castle's worried voice. "I… I can cancel the reservation, if you like. And find somewhere else… less… less expensive, if that's what is bothering you."

*I'm going to have to get used to this with him,* Beckett told herself. *He hasn't done anything wrong here. He's Castle and he was just being himself. He wants us to have a good night out with my dad; he… he's just trying to make a good impression.* Her inner dialogue calmed her down and she let out a long breath.

"No, that's okay," she said, her voice almost flat and emotionless. "It… it sounds great," she continued, trying to sound brighter and more upbeat. "I… I guess I just have to get used to it is all."

"Get used to what?" Castle questioned, actually sounding completely baffled by her reaction.

"To your fame and celebrity," Beckett said. "I mean, we've gone out to nice places, but nothing like this… we… we've never had to cut in line before."

"We're not cutting in line," Castle said. "Alfredo always holds a table open for me."

"What! You are not telling me you are on a first name basis with the owner?"

"Um… I take it a yes would not help me here?" he sounded worried now, even a little afraid.

*Calm down, Kate,* Beckett told herself. *He hasn't done anything wrong. If he wants to take you and your dad to the hottest and most difficult place to get into, then let him. You know you've been dying to go there. You're just surprised he hasn't taken you before.*

Beckett let out a sigh and ran her fingers through her hair. "I'm sorry," she mumbled into the phone as a way of apology. "I guess I'm still getting used to the fact I'm dating Richard/freaking Castle."

She paused for a beat. "Sometimes, being with you, I think more about the man and not the celebrity… does… does that make sense?"

"Perfect sense, Kate," Castle responded, and she smiled, since she could hear the grin back on his face. "It's why I love you so much, because you see me, not the fame or the money."

"Well, I am a big fan, though," she grimaced. *God, what made me say that?*

"Ooh!" she could practically hear his eyebrows wiggling. "I'm saving that one for a later date, Miss Beckett."

"Uh, right, okay," Beckett nodded, thankful he wasn't going to make a big deal over her slip. "Dress?"

"Huh?"

"I don't have a dress for such a nice place, Rick."

"Oh… don't you worry about that, Kate," Castle replied. She could just imagine him smiling smugly as he continued. "I've gotten you the perfect dress for the occasion. You are going to look simply stunning in it."

Beckett blushed. No doubt she would. Castle had a knack for selecting just the right dress to compliment her figure. He had done it on more than one occasion, and she actually found herself a little excited to see what he had gotten her this time.

"Thanks, I'm looking forward to tonight," she said softly into the receiver, unconsciously fiddling
with the loose strands of her long brunette locks as she leaned back in her chair. "I'll call Dad and let him know the time and place."

"Oh, almost forgot," Castle said, cutting her off. "I put the reservation in your name."

"My name?" Beckett knitted her eyebrows together as she sat forward, confused.

"Yeah," Castle said, and she knew he was nodding his head even though she couldn't see him. "I thought, you know, just in case your dad gets there first and asks."

"Oh," Beckett raised her eyebrows, amazed at his forethought. "Yes, I'd rather he learned from me whom I am dating, instead of from the maître d'."

"Good," he said. "So, see you at six?"

"Mmm," she hummed as she thought, narrowing her eyes. "Maybe I'll just come straight over right after I get off."

"Don't you want to shower and put some make-up on?" Castle questioned.

"Yeah, I do," Beckett affirmed. "But I can do that just as well at the Loft than at my apartment. I'm sure Alexis or Martha will let me borrow some of their make-up supplies. And besides, the dress is there."

"Wow… just wow," Castle's voice sounded beyond belief.

"What?" she asked, a little confused by his reaction.

"Oh… it's nothing, just… you know? A couple of months ago, you would never have even thought of doing such a thing."

Beckett smirked and leaned forward on her desk, resting her elbows on the flat surface. "Maybe I did," she teased him, lowering her voice and making it as sultry as she could. "Maybe I fantasized about coming over to the Loft, slowly stripping off my clothes and climbing into the big comfortable… bathtub."

Castle let out a hot breath and she could here him groan. "God help me, Kate, but you are going to be the death of me," he chuckled softly.

"But seriously, that tub… god… that tub is so damn comfortable, Rick," she said. "And I'm just talking about that one attached to the guestroom, I've yet to try out that one in your bathroom."

"Well, we took the shower portion out for a test drive earlier this morning," Castle teased her back. She could just imagine the mischievous sparkle in his dark blue eyes.

Beckett felt her neck and cheeks warm as she flushed with the memories. She bit her lower lip and lowered her eyes. "Yes… that was fun, but I'm talking about simply relaxing in the tub, not… not what we did."

"Well, either way it is a stress reliever, in my opinion," Castle spoke smugly. He paused, then his tone changed. "Would you like me to run a bath for you… so you can take some time to unwind before the big night?"

"Oh god, yes, that would be so wonderful, Rick," Beckett sighed, almost imagining the rapturous feel of slipping back into that massive tub in the bathroom attached to the master bedroom at the
"Then it shall be awaiting you when you get off work, my dear detective," Castle murmured softly in a loving voice, a kind of voice Beckett had never really heard before. She was momentarily stunned by it, more so by the fact that such love was being directed towards her than that it was coming from Castle. She knew he was capable of such love, but she never, in a million years, would have thought she'd feel such love directed towards her.

"Thank you, Rick," she replied softly, turning away from the bullpen to give her some more privacy in her call. "That… that really means a lot."

"Always, Kate," Castle warmly replied, the love in his voice permeating her being and warming her heart. "Always."

Beckett smiled. "See you later."

"Later," he concurred. "Love you."

"Right back atcha, Rick," she replied, emphasizing the "K" in his name.

Castle made a noise like he was shivering with anticipation for her return and she laughed. They said their goodbyes, and then she hung up. Turning back to her desk, Beckett felt a new sense of completeness, as if her life had been empty and unfinished until he had shown up and filled that waiting spot. She smiled, and got lost in her thoughts of being with him, just being, until she remembered she needed to call her dad and let him know when and where to meet for dinner.

*Giardino della Vita is a pretty fancy place, I hope Dad has a nice suit*, Beckett absently thought as she dialed his number.

XXX

Sighing, Beckett slid down into the hot water, immersing herself in it. Slowly, she leaned back against the backrest, and let out another sigh of contentment. Reaching over and picking up the bar of fruit scented soap, she began rubbing it over her skin. She smiled softly to herself, amazed at how Castle had managed to stock his own bathroom with all the soaps, shampoos, and lotions she used. She knew it should startle, maybe even frighten her that he knew her so well, but it didn't. If anything, it only made her love grow deeper and stronger for him.

When she had arrived at the Loft after getting off work, she had expected Castle to demand accompanying her in the bath to "help relieve the stress of the day." But he didn't. Beckett was stunned, and had not known what to say. When she had gone to the master bedroom, stripped of her clothes, letting them fall into disorderly pile on the floor, she glimpsed the dress he had picked out for her.

It had brought tears to her eyes. The dress wasn't overly fancy, and definitely not gaudy, or racy… not at all. It was rather simple, yet stylish and elegant, exuding a grace that just fit her. It was clearly her, and she could already tell that it would compliment her figure, accentuate the green of her eyes, and contrast brilliantly with her pale skin and brunette hair. Castle had been right… she would look stunning in it. And it wasn't a tight form fitting dress, which pleased her, because she was highly aware of the slowly forming baby bump in her middle.

After giving the dress a once over, and her approval, Beckett turned to see him standing in the doorway, a boyish smirk on his face as his eyes roamed her nude body.

"You're gorgeous, Kate," he said softly, with a warmth in his voice that had her heart melting.
"Now... just the way you are."

"But I'm naked," she protested, blushing profusely.

"Exactly," Castle replied with a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows.

Biting on her lower lip, Beckett smiled softly and hooked a hand up, gesturing with a finger for him to come to her. He did, and wrapped his arms around her bare waist as she leaned in and kissed him slowly on the lips, whispering a quiet thank you for simply being him and for loving her.

"Always, Kate," was his response as he buried his face in her hair, taking in her cherry scent. "Always."

Smiling at the memory, Beckett slid further down in the tub and submerged herself, soaking her hair and running her fingers through the wet strands as she broke the surface again. Humming to herself, she popped the cap on the cherry-scented shampoo and lathered it into her hair, rubbing it deeply into her scalp, making that cherry smell that drove Castle wild permeate every fiber of her long tresses.

Once finished, Beckett climbed out of the tub and released the plug, allowing the water to swirl down the drain. She reached over and grabbed a large towel and wrapped it around her body.

Glancing at the clock as she hurried out of the bathroom and into the bedroom, she sighed with relief, realizing she had plenty of time and did not need to rush herself in getting dressed.

She noticed a pile of clothes besides her on the floor and recognized them as Castle's. Chuckling softly as she shook her head, she surmised he had changed whilst she had been taking her bath. She tiptoed over to the door and inched it open. The faint sounds of him typing away on his computer brought smile to her face as she allowed herself to imagine that their little chat when she was undressing for her bath had somehow inspired some playful banter or steamy sex scene between Nikki Heat and Jameson Rook. Beckett laughed at herself as she finished drying off and padded back to the bathroom.

Of course you inspired him, Kate, after all you are his muse, right? she thought as she worked another towel through her hair. Finding the hairdryer, she removed it from the wall holder and turned it on to full, drying her hair and using a comb to help. As she stared at herself in the mirror, drying and combing her hair, Beckett nearly gasped at the reflection of herself.

"I'm in Richard freaking Castle's bathroom," she said softly to herself, more of a whisper under her breath than anything else. "And I'm getting ready for a dinner with my dad to tell him that I'm in love with Richard freaking Castle, marrying him... and oh, yes... I'm carrying his twins!"

"What now?"

"CASTLE!" Beckett nearly slipped on the wet tile floor. Her heart seemed like it was going to burst out of her chest and her face was flushed bright pink with embarrassment. She put her hand over her hammering heart and gave him a fierce glare. "Oh my god, Castle... don't you ever knock?"

He gave a nonchalant shrug, and sauntered through the door, having been leaning on the doorframe. She wondered how long he had been there... how much had he heard? His face seemed to be permanently set in a smile, the corners of his lips curving upwards ever so slightly. Beckett stepped back from the mirror as he walked past her, opening up the drawers below the marble countertop. She narrowed her eyes and watched as he pulled out some hairspray.
"What are you doing?" she asked, blushing a little more as he glanced over at her, his eyes taking a quick skim of her half nude body. Beckett crossed her arms under her breasts and glared at him. "Castle?" she said, adding the hint of warning to her voice.

"Just want my gorgeous hair under control for this dinner," he said, calmly, giving her a playful wink before spraying his hair. Her eyes flicked up and she looked at his chestnut locks... *God*... she just wanted to run her fingers through it. "You know," he added, and she could detect a bit of anxiety in his tone, "I wanna make a good impression."

"You'll do fine, Rick," she assured him, reaching out and placing a hand on his arm, stilling him.

He gave her a weak smile and looked her in the eyes. Beckett was always stunned with how he could stare into her eyes. It was like he could see her soul, and what amazed her even more was that she was not afraid of it. She was... a year... hell, just months ago, but now... no. She was not afraid of allowing him to love her and of loving him back. She was ready to dive into it with him and just be. Be Mrs. Castle.

Of course, being typically him, he noticed the giddy, almost goofy grin that was forming on her face. "Why... Detective Beckett, are you thinking dirty thoughts?"

"No," she asserted quickly. It was the truth, her thoughts had not been towards the naughty end of the spectrum, but now that he mentioned it, she could not help but remember all the little touches and sensations evoked when they connected and made love.

Averting her eyes as she tried to stifle a blush, she turned back to the mirror and continued to work with her hair, watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"Do you think I should wear a tie?" Castle asked, thankfully allowing the conversation to shift.

She glanced over at his reflection in the large mirror and smiled at the adorable worried look on his face. Sighing, she allowed her eyes to wander the rest of him, as she finally took in what he was wearing. Castle always looked good, in whatever he wore, but the suit he was wearing... it simply complimented all his features in just the right way. Not only that, but it fit his personality... not the playboy, page six Richard Castle, but her Rick, the man, not the persona developed for publicity.

"I don't know," Beckett said. "I've never been to _Giardino della Vita_, so I cannot say what their dress code is."

"Well, is your father going to be wearing a tie?"

She thought for a while. "Yes," Beckett nodded.

"Then a tie it is," he said, turning to leave the bathroom. "I think I have a dark sage green tie that would good well with your dress."

"Trying to match our color pattern, Rick?" she called after him as she turned back to the mirror and looked at her reflecting, deciding she'd add just a little bit of make-up, not too much, but just enough to hide how fatigued and exhausted she really was.

The twins had not been kind to her during the interlude between Castle's departure from the precinct in the afternoon and her arrival at the Loft that evening. She was hoping they'd behave and let her enjoy the five star cuisine at _Giardino della Vita_. Beckett was still a little overwhelmed by the idea of it, of going to one of the most hip and hottest restaurants in New York City. Sure, Castle had taken her to upscale restaurants before, but this... this was different. This was a dinner with her dad, where, for all intensive purposes, she was introducing him to the man who was going to be his...
future son-in-law and the father of his grandchildren.

"I want to look my best," Castle shouted back from the bedroom. "Oh… almost forgot, Mother said you could borrow her make-up kit, I think she brought it down."

Beckett dropped her eyes to the counter and smiled, seeing it. "I see it," she informed him. "I'm just going to put on some light make-up, nothing fancy."

She heard Castle make some noise of objection. "Crazy woman… you're beautiful just as you are… au naturel."

Beckett's chest tightened and her breath hitched up. Did he know what he did to her by saying such things? He probably didn't, and if he did, he would still say them, because for him, it was the truth… it was how he felt. And once she'd opened up to him, and allowed him in, he wasn't going to go anywhere. He was never going anywhere. He was still here, and not going to leave… no matter what.

Letting out a soft sigh of contentment, for the first time pleased with the direction in which her life was heading, Beckett opened Martha's make up box and looked through the selections. She liked that Castle like the real her, but she felt the need to apply some make-up, to get dolled up, so to speak. It made her feel good, and damn it… she liked that feeling!

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'm still going to put some make-up on," she called out to him, glancing through the opened door to the bedroom, seeing him trying on ties.

"Whatever makes you happy, dear," he called back.

_Did he just 'dear' me?_ Frowning for a moment, Beckett tried to think of a quick comeback, but she couldn't find one. So instead, she simply shrugged and said, "Good." She then turned back to the mirror and began applying some eyeshadow.
Chapter 15

After finishing the final touches of the light make-up she was donning for the evening, Beckett took a long look at herself in the mirror, pleased with the outcome. She found herself smiling like she had not smiled since… well, to be honest, since she could ever remember. And her smile just grew when she exited the bedroom and caught sight of Richard Castle, her fiancé—a thrill still rushing through her at that thought.

Like always, he was so handsome, dashing and gorgeous, but he didn't need to hear that… his ego was already big enough as it was without her fueling the fire. So, instead of giving him any verbal approval, she slowly sauntered across the room to meet him, reaching up and straightened his tie (he'd selected a dark green necktie that perfectly matched the green dress she wore), while giving him a tight smile. After she'd finished with his tie, Beckett gave it a rough pull, tugging him down until their lips met in a brief yet emotion filled kiss.

Castle's breathing hitched up as she backed away, his breath warm on her cheeks. She stared up into his eyes, watching as they darkened with desire. Giving herself a triumphant smile, loving the effect she had on him, Beckett took a step back to let him get a good look at her.

"God… your beautiful," he declared, his eyes widening as he took in her entire appearance. His voice was breathy and quick, and it was clear that she had managed to leave him breathless with a kiss that had been one second away from no longer being labeled chaste. He took another shuttering breath, bringing a hand up to his lips. "So… the car," he said, still catching his breath, "will be here shortly… shall we?" He gestured towards the door.

Beckett made a move to accept his proffered hand before stopping and raising her hand. "Let me just grab my clutch," she said, turning to quickly walk back to the bedroom and rummage through her bag, which she had summarily dropped there when she had arrive three hours prior.

She found the small clutch, which she had earlier placed her I.D., change for cab rides, lip balm, and an emergency make-up kit, and took it out of her bag. When she turned around, Beckett smiled, finding Castle leaning on the doorframe, his eyes wide… not even hiding the fact that he had been checking out her ass as she had leaned down to go through her bag to find her clutch. Instead of her standard eye roll, she allowed her eyes to roam over him. He looked good in that suit… really good.

No doubt, guessing by his playful wink and the wiggle of his eyebrows, he was thinking the same thoughts that were currently bombarding her mind. She was almost tempted to give her dad a call and ask for a rain check on dinner… and it was that thought that brought her back to reality. She couldn't stand up her dad after not seeing or speaking with him for almost two months. And they really did need to tell him before things got too far along.

She cleared her throat and averted her gaze for a moment, taking a quick breath to cool off her warmed cheeks. "We should probably get going… you said the car was waiting?"

"Oh… yeah," Castle seemed to snap out of a trance. He gave her a warm smile and extended his arm.

Rolling her eyes, she nonetheless wrapped her arm around his as they walked out of the bedroom. As they stepped out of his office and into the kitchen and open lounge area, Beckett was both startled and surprised to find Martha and Alexis waiting for them.
"Kate, darling, you look marvelous," Martha declared, in her typical dramatic fashion, giving her air-cheek-kisses.

Beckett disengaged from Castle as she and Alexis exchanged a brief hug. "Your hair looks amazing!" the younger Castle nearly squealed.

She shook her head in disbelief. She had not really done that much with her hair, but from the look on Castle's face, Beckett had a feeling that he was in complete agreement with his daughter's assessment. Despite her best efforts, her cheeks changed to a noticeable shade of pink. Castle flashed her a smirk, casually draping his arm around her waist and tugging her closer as he nuzzled his nose into her hair.

"Mmm… cherries," he hummed in a quiet, almost breathy voice so that only she could hear. She felt a tingle run down her spine and she blinked, trying to suppress the growing shades of pink from deepening, as she blushed even more.

"Um… thank you, Alexis," Beckett finally replied, trying desperately to ignore Castle as he so obviously kept taking in the scent of her hair. Something about him doing that so openly in front of his family made her extremely embarrassed. It was just too much of an intimate gesture to share with others… especially when those others were blood relatives. Turning her focus back to Alexis, she continued, "I really didn't do that much… just allowed it to curl naturally, and pinned it up just a little more than I normally do."

"Well, no matter what you did, Kate, it looks great!" Alexis enthused.

"Just take the compliment, Kate," Castle murmured into her ear.

"Yes, darling," Martha concurred, giving her son a conspiratorial wink.

Suddenly a camera was out and pictures were being taken, and Beckett tried her best not to blush at all the fuss that was being made over her… over them, as she was not used to—and usually hated—being the center of attention. *This almost feels like prom night, where my mom and dad kept taking pictures of my date and me.*

Her thoughts were cut off when her mouth was unexpectedly captured in a kiss. She unintentionally let out a soft whimper as Castle kissed her senseless. She literally swooned into him, and was only vaguely reminded that others were present by the rapid flashing lights of the cameras as Martha and Alexis took pictures to immortalize this occasion.

After what could have been an eternity, Castle leaned back and winked at her as she blushed profusely at their intimate display of affection right in front of his family.

"I think that's enough," Martha declared, surreptitiously giving her a knowing wink as the older woman obviously took notice of how embarrassed Beckett was.

"Yeah!" chirped up Alexis, already pulling up the images on her camera to look through them.

"We should get going," Castle said, glancing over at the digital clock on the oven in the kitchen.

"Yes, yes!" Martha nodded. "Wouldn't want you two to be late for a dinner as important as this."

The Broadway diva stepped over to Beckett and lowered her voice. "You do look marvelous, darling."

"Thanks, Martha," Beckett choked out, amazed at this entire family and how they embraced her as one of their own, even before she and Castle had started dating, let alone becoming engaged.
Alexis gave her another quick hug, careful not to mess up her hair or make-up, and then turned to her father, who was pouting, wanting to get in on the hugging action as well. He could be such a two-year old at times.

"Now be home before 11," Alexis said, in mock-maturity as she placed a hand on Castle's shoulder, pretending like she was the parent, which sometimes, in this weird father-daughter relationship, she was.

"No promises," Castle chuckled as he once again reclaimed Beckett's waist with his arm and began directing her towards the door. "You two lovely ladies have a fun evening… I've left pizza money on the counter."

"PIZZA! YES!" Alexis squealed as she hopped over to the island countertop. "Thanks Dad!"

Beckett and Castle bid them goodbye and then slinked out of the Loft.

XXX

The car waiting for them was a fancy black town car, which Castle had specifically ordered for the occasion. It was idling by the curb outside his building, when they exited. As they climbed in, Castle gave an explanation for the expense of the town car, no doubt noticing her disapproving frown.

"Riding across midtown in a cab to Giardino dell Vita just won't cut it for this dinner," he murmured out as a way of explanation.

Beckett just rolled her eyes at him, yet still smiled to herself, silently enjoying the comforts and amenities that came with the hired transportation. Her disapproving frown notwithstanding, Beckett actually agreed with his decision to call for the town car service instead of the stereotypical yellow New York taxicab.

The first half of the ride was excruciating silent, and she could quickly literately sense his nervousness return with a vengeance. She thought it was adorable. He was always usually so confident and sure of himself, yet the prospect of meeting her father was making him shake with worry. The fact that Castle was this anxious and concerned about making a good impression with her father imparted how much their relationship meant to him. Unlike all his previous dalliances, this relationship—this precise one—meant something to him, and was more than just good PR for book sales… though the press was probably just going to love their relationship, and eat it all up. And then sales would simply start soaring to record numbers. Oh, Black Pawn is going to just love me, she thought whimsically.

As the drive across town to the five-star restaurant continued in a mixture of awkward and comfortable silence, Castle only seemed to grow more anxious, to the point where Beckett was becoming worried herself. When they reached the halfway point, stuck in some light traffic, she leaned against him and reached down to pick up his hand, slowly intertwining her fingers with his and giving him a reassuring squeeze, feeling highly optimistic that her father would like Rick Castle. She also was absolutely positive that her mother would have simply loved him.

Her mother had always been a fan of his books, which was part of the reason Beckett herself had started reading them. In a strange, almost sad sort of way, her mother had introduced her to Castle, since Beckett had started reading the books as a way to recover and remember her mother. The hardback first edition of In A Hail of Bullets that Beckett owned had been her mother's, and the memory of standing in line with her mother to get it signed by the up and coming author was seared into her mind.
She had never thought that the day her mother had talked her into going to the book signing would have turned out to be the day she would meet her future soul mate… because in all honesty, that's what Richard Castle was. He filled the empty part of her soul that she had never known was empty. And she would always be thankful that she had given in to her mother's plea to accompany her to the store… besides, Castle was really cute back then. And he wasn't that bad now, either.

Shifting closer to him and pulling his hand up to hold it close to her heart, Beckett gazed up into his eyes as he turned to look down at her. "Don't worry, he's going to simply adore you," she whispered to him, giving him a soft smile of reassurance.

Castle sighed and gave a nod. "I truly hope so, Kate," he said, pausing for a beat to take a deep breath that racked through his whole body. "My god, I... I haven't been this nervous since... since... since the first time Alexis ever had a cold!" He laughed lightly, trying to ease his anxiety.

She joined him, laughing softly, and held his hand tighter, moving it down to her lap as she played with his fingers, pulling his fingertips over her hand and letting him feel the ring that she proudly displayed on her finger. It was her way of showing him that she was not embarrassed or worried, that she was confident and sure about tonight.

"Just relax," Beckett spoke in a soft soothing voice. "Everything is going to turn out just right."

"I hope so, after all, we are going to be dumping quite a lot on him all at one sitting," Castle said, letting out another sigh of worry.

"I... I know it's a lot, but I think he can handle it," Beckett replied in a soft murmur. "And besides, I know for a fact that my mother would have loved you and would be thrilled to have you as a son-in-law," she said, deciding to share some of her earlier thoughts.

"Really?" he sounded almost doubtful.

"She was a big fan," Beckett smiled wistfully, remembering her mother lounging in the living room, her head tucked into one of Castle's latest books while her Dad and her watched a Yankee game. "It's because of her that we met."

"I thought it was a murderer patterning his killings after my books that introduced us," Castle interjected, grinning mischievously as he remembered their first encounter at the launch party for *Storm Falls*.

"Well, that's discounting all the book signings I attended, where you just saw me as another fangirl," she quipped back, giving him a teasing batting of her eyelashes.

"I cannot believe I never tried to hit on you," he said.

"Oh, you did," she said. "Each time."

"Good," he smirked with a nod.

"And each time, you fell flat on your face," Beckett brought him back down from the clouds. "Honestly, where did you learn to hit on women?"

"I plead the Fifth!"

"Anyway," Beckett continued with her story, "Mom wanted to go out to this book signing of this young and up-and-coming mystery author named Richard Castle—I thought that name was ridiculous by the way."
"Think differently now, don't you?"

"As I was saying," Beckett gave him a playful glare, "Mom wanted to go to your book signing, and well, she talked me into going with her. I could not believe how long that line was, but it was worth it. My god, Castle, you were so cute back then."

"I was?" he narrowed his eyes. "Wait a sec, which book was this?"

"The first."

"In A Hail of Bullets?"

"Yes."

Castle squinted and glanced out the window as his brow furrowed in thought. "No… can't be…," he shook his head, turning back to look down at her as if he was seeing a ghost. "You were that teen who just stared at me with a slack jaw when I said hello and asked how you were doing? Hell, if I remember correctly, you could hardly say anything back."

Beckett's eyes grew wide in horror. He remembered? How could he remember that! She opened her mouth, intent on denying it, but the truth was written all over her face.

"You had a crush on me, didn't you?" he smiled smugly and wiggled his eyebrows. "Teenage Kate Beckett thought that I… Richard Castle… was hot!"

"Now, I didn't say that!" Beckett finally got her voice back after the initial shock that he remembered meeting her at that book signing so long ago.

"Come on!" he whined, acting so much like the child that he was. "Admit it… you had a crush on me back then."

"Alright, fine," she snapped, a little irritated. "I thought you were hot. There! Are you happy with yourself?"

"Extremely."

"Good."

An odd silence descended upon them as the traffic began to break up and the town car started to pick up speed. Castle pulled her hand up out of her lap and brushed his lips against her knuckles.

"Thank you," he murmured.

"For what?" Beckett looked over at him, uncertain as to what he was thanking her for.

"For sharing that with me," Castle replied sincerely, his words serious. "For letting me know how confident you are in me… in us. It… it means a lot, Kate. It tells me that as long as you're by my side, I'll be fine."

Beckett's heart fluttered and she smiled warmly. "Ditto."

XXX

The town car pulled up to the curb outside of the restaurant, and Beckett felt her chest tighten in anticipation. She believed everything she had said, but just like Castle, she was nervous about telling her father. Yet for her, it was more about finally filling her father in on all to latest
developments in her life… and one of them was a whopper.

Castle got out of the car first, and offered her his hand. She smiled up at him and accepted, stepping out onto the curb. As her eyes caught sight of the sign with *Giardino dell Vita*painted in large cursive script, Beckett began to feel her own sense of wariness about this meeting with her dad. Though she felt confident that he would like Castle, what she really wasn't prepared for was the one-two punch, so to speak, that she was about to deal out to her unsuspecting parent.

All right, maybe a one-two-three punch.

Firstly, she had neglected to inform him that she and Josh had broken up, as in his e-mail it was obvious he thought she was still seeing the cardiac surgeon. That omission then segued into the fact that she was now dating—scratch that—engaged to Richard *freaking* Castle. But all that seemed moot next to the most startling news that Jim Beckett was about to become a grandparent… with not just one grandchild, but two.

Beckett clutched tightly onto Castle's arm as they made their way across the sidewalk and through the doors, walking right past those waiting in line to be seated. They had a reservation, so they didn't have to wait, making her feel less guilty about 'cutting in line'. Looking around the richly decorated foyer of the restaurant, she spotted her father waiting for them by a small ficus tree (which she was slightly surprised to find growing inside the restaurant's entrance). She beamed proudly, seeing him dressed up in a suit and tie was a nice change from his usual attire.

Scanning through the faces of those arriving, his eyes eventually found hers and his face stretched into a large grin as Beckett detached herself from Castle. Jim Beckett wrapped his arms around her and gave her a quick hug and an affectionate kiss on the cheek.

"You look so beautiful, Katie," he said, smiling at her as they pulled out of their embrace. "Your mother would be proud."

"Awe…," Beckett melted. She secretly loved it whenever her father did that, telling her how her mother would feel. And he obviously knew it. "Thanks, Dad."

Jim Beckett smiled wider, pleased to see his daughter smiling. Then he turned to greet the man coming up alongside his daughter. Castle grinned and extended his hand to shake the one Jim was offering. "And you must be the surgeon… Josh, right?"

Beckett paled and almost panicked at that moment. She watched with wide terrified eyes as Castle took her father's hand and shook it, a smile plastered on his face, his eyes doing a very good job of covering the embarrassment he was feeling.

"Um… Dad?" Beckett breathed out, however she was not loud enough over the din of guest talking to be heard.

"No… it's Rick Castle, actually," Castle was saying while she stared on in shock, giving her dad a polite smile as he corrected him.

Jim's eyebrows rose and he looked over at Beckett. "*Castle?* As in *Richard Castle*, the writer?" Her father frowned as he continued to keep hold of Castle's hand. Beckett swallowed, having the distinct impression that these two men were about to have a battle of wills. Jim briefly glanced over at her, raising an eyebrow, asking for an explanation.

Taking a quick breath to calm her nerves, Beckett gave a small smile and nodded. "Sorry, Dad… I wanted to tell you, but things have been… well, hectic, to say the least. I broke up with Josh almost
two months ago."

Her father unexpectedly let go of Castle's hand and stepped back, appraising the younger man with almost suspicious, yet definitely protective eyes. Beckett watched with trepidation, growing more worried by the minute as her father simply look at them, taking note of how close his daughter was standing to the writer.

"The writer…?" Jim stuttered, clearly stunned and surprised. "The… the tag-along… that annoying thorn in your side… he… he's the man you're dating now?"

Beckett almost went completely pale when her father started listing off all the things she had initially called Castle when he had first started being her constant shadow at work.

"How long?" her father inquired.

"Huh?"

"How long have you two been dating?"

"Oh… about a month," Beckett replied, stepping closer to Castle and lowering her hand to meet his, interlacing their fingers together. He squeezed her hand, giving her his support and strength, and by the way he straightened, she guessed that her touch was helping him out as well with this awkward moment.

Jim Beckett lowered his eyebrows and stared at them intently, his eyes dropping to their linked hands. Beckett was about to give her dad a little look to tell him to stop, when she noticed that he was grinning wildly and holding back a laugh.

"Dad?" she narrowed her eyes.

"Sorry, I… I couldn't help myself," Jim chuckled softly, smiling even more. He turned to Castle. "Sorry for giving you a scare, Rick. I recognized you from your picture on the book jackets from all the books Johanna bought."

"Then why did you—?" Beckett started.

"Katie… you never told me," he said, with a shrug. "I would like to be kept informed about what is going on in your life, you know? I am your father, after all."

Beckett gave a small smile. "Yes, I know. And I'm really sorry, Dad…," she apologized. "It… it's all just been a bit overwhelming." She paused and then added. "And we've been so busy at the precinct."

Castle was just standing next her nodding his head in agreement with everything she said. She thought it was adorable, and she leaned her head against his shoulder, smiling even more as she gave their interlaced hand a quick squeeze.

"Why don't we go get seated and start this dinner," Jim suggested.

Castle gave a quick nod, and he led the way over to the maitre d', the two Becketts following behind. As they approach the podium, the maitre d', dressed in a very fine black suit with a matching bowtie, and was looking down at the list before him.

"Reservation for… um… Beckett," Castle said, as the man looked up to smile at them.
"Ah, Mr. Castle!" the maitre d' enthused with a large friendly smile. "Why did you not just say it was you? We would have seated your party immediately."

Beckett almost laughed at the blank look on Castle's face before he softly shook his head and regained his composure. "Uh…," he looked over at Beckett and her dad. "Just flying under the radar, Maurice." She cast a quick glance up at Castle's face, not missing the fact that he was on a first name basis with the maitre d'.

"As you say, Mr. Castle," Maurice looked at them all and smiled, his light eyes taking note of how Beckett's arm was linked around Castle's. "Your table is ready, right this way."

As they entered the main room of the restaurant, Beckett felt her jaw drop in amazement. All the tables were around very aesthetically and elegantly along cobbled stone floors, everything surrounded my fresh and lush foliage, all Italian in origin. She could see why the restaurant had been named *Giardino dell'Vita*: The Garden of Life; it was almost like they would be eating in the middle of a vibrant garden. Even the lights above were casting a soft warm sunlight atmosphere that contrasted with the cool moonlight outside.

"This is amazing," she whispered softly, leaning closer to Castle as the Maurice led them to their table.

Once they were seated, at a secluded table surrounded by green and wildflowers, Beckett could not help but grin from ear to ear. The entire place was almost magical. And she simply loved it. As she glanced over the menu, reminding herself to ignore the prices, Castle ordered some San Pellegrino for all three of them. For a second, Beckett was going to panic when he made that order, but then she remembered her dad, and knew that such an order omission of wine would not be a clue to him about her condition.

After the waiter, a young man named Lino—yes, Castle knew his name and almost seemed to be good friends with him—returned with their San Pellegrino in bucket of ice and a basket of warmed bread with a vignette sauce, they made their orders. Lino exalted all their choices, then disappeared through the tables and foliage that dominated the entire restaurant.

They settled into light conversation. Beckett was thankfully that her father wasn't too overwhelmed by the fact she was dating someone else than he had thought she was. In fact, Castle and him seemed to be getting along quite splendidly.

"So, you base your books after my daughter," Jim said, pausing to take a sip of his San Pellegrino. "I just finished *Naked Heat* last night."

"Yes," Castle nodded, then froze. "Not everything. I mean, it's from my imagination… not… not that I imagine..." He swallowed hard. "I'm not doing too good here, am I?"

"Oh, I think you're doing just fine, Rick," Jim chuckled slightly, giving his daughter a wink.

Beckett rolled her eyes at the two of them. She was just about to join in on the conversation, planning on helping out Castle, when Lino materialized out of nowhere with their food. It all looked simply delicious. Castle had ordered Risotto Amore—arborio rice with chicken breast, mushrooms and basil, in a white wine cream sauce.

She was tempted to steal some of his, but then her plate was put before her, and she licked her lips, staring at the Eggplant Parmigiana she had ordered—layers of eggplant, mozzarella and Napoli sauce. Beckett flicked her eyes up and examined her father's plate, Primavera Ravioli—ricotta and spinach filled ravioli with fresh vegetables in a Napoli sauce as well.
"This all looks so amazing," Beckett said, smiling up at the two men sitting at the table with her.

"Then let's dive in!" Castle replied, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Just so you know," Beckett chimed back. "I might steal some of yours."

"Feel free to steal away whenever you wish, Kate," Castle chuckled. "What's mine is yours."

From across the table Jim Beckett smiled widely and chuckled softly. Beckett turned to him with a questioning look. "Yes?"

"Oh, nothing," he said, shaking his head. "I'm just finally seeing all of the things you've told me about for so long."

"Have you been saying good things about me behind my back?" Castle raised his eyebrows, him and Jim exchanging a conspiratorial look.

**I think they are getting along a little too well**, Beckett thought as she shook her head at them and graced Castle with one of her patented glares and eye rolls.

The two men laughed and soon they all were moaning softly at the exquisite flavors of their meals. And true to her words, Beckett did steal some of Castle's Risotto of his plate, moaning at the extravagance of it. The food was so good. And thankfully the twins did not complain at all throughout the entire meal.

For dessert, Castle ordered them Cassata. Beckett had never had it before and was pleasantly surprised to find it was a confectionary layered with strata's of chocolate, nougat and almond gelatin, with candied fruit. Halfway through their enjoyment of the Cassata, Jim let out a sudden gasp.

"Katie… is… is that what I think it is?" he asked, his eyes looking down at her hand.

Beckett felt her chest tighten, realizing that he had noticed her engagement ring. She set her fork aside as everything seemed to become silent. The rest of the world melted away and it was just the three of them.

"Katie?"

"Yes," she said, after taking a breath and reaching over to hold Castle's hand. "We're engaged."

Castle squeezed his hand back and she could sense him holding his breath, waiting for Jim Beckett's response. Beckett swallowed and glanced up at her father. His eyes were wide and he looked back and forth between the two, then, ever so slightly, he began to smile.

"I'm so happy for you, Katie!" he beamed, leaning across the table as she relaxed and held up her hand for him to examine at the ring. "Oh, this is so you. It's perfect."

"I know, isn't it!

Holding her hand in his, Jim Beckett look down on the simple yet elegant silver band holding three small diamonds that sparkled in the low light. He glanced up at Castle and gave a nod. "Good job, Rick."

"So… you're not mad?" Beckett asked.

"Oh no, I know how happy he makes you, and just seeing you two together here…," his voice
hitched up with emotion as his eyes grew watery. "Katie… oh, am so happy for you."

Beckett felt her own eyes growing watery as well and she reached out across the table to hold her father's hands. Castle placed his hand on top of hers and they stayed that way for a moment before. Leaning back into her chair, Beckett let out a sigh of relief that the first two surprises were out of the way. He had taken them well, and she just hoped that the final bit of news would be received with the same overjoyed happiness that was currently exuding off her father.

"Dad…," she spoke tentatively, reaching over, again, to Castle to hold his hand for support. "There's something else, too."

"Yes?" Jim Beckett inquired, wiping his eyes a bit with the cloth napkin, his smile fading as he noticed her worried expression. "Katie, what is it?"

"I'm pregnant," Beckett said as quickly as possible, like pulling a Band-Aid off. She tensed, awaiting his response.

"Pre—preg—pregnant?" he stammered.

"Yes," she nodded, Castle squeezing her hand as her breath began to hitch up in panic. "With… with twins."

"Twins," Jim gasped, looking startled as he leaned back raising his hands to run them down his face.

They remained there in silence, allowing Jim to absorb this latest blossom of information. This was a night of surprises, to be sure, and Beckett was hoping that this was not going to send it over the edge, and that he'd be as happy as she was. Castle held her hand tight, and as she braced herself for her father's reaction.

After, what seemed like an eternity, Jim Beckett's answer came. Slowly, a small smile began to form on his lips and his eyes lit up. "I'm going to be a grandpa," he murmured softly. His smile grew and grew and then he was simply permeating with excitement and delight. "Oh, Katie… this… this is so great."

Beckett let out a sigh of relief and smiled back at her dad. "You're not upset?"

"Upset? Why would I be upset?" Jim replied, shaking his head at his daughter. "To be honest, I never thought I've ever get to be a grandfather…," he lowered his voice, turning a bit serious. "You've always been so focus on… I just never thought you'd actually find the time."

"I just had to find the right guy," Beckett smirked and glanced sideways at Castle with playful eyes.

"And I just had to wait for her to see the light," Castle joined in, as Jim laughed, watching as the young couple gave each other a quick kiss on lips, Beckett blushing slightly at having kissed Castle in front of her father for the first time.

"Well, I'm glad she did," her father said, making her roll her eyes as the two most important men in her life exchanged conspiratorial glances and winks.

Oh great… this is going to be so much fun, she thought. Hey, at least they're getting along…no need to start complaining about it now. Her thoughts were interrupted when Castle leaned over to kiss her again, Jim laughing softly in the background.
Chapter 16

Ding.

They stepped out of the elevator and out towards the bullpen. His arm was casually draped around her waist, and for the first time in a long while, Beckett found that she did not care about the obvious PDA that was being displayed here in the precinct. After all, the other day she had practically gone ballistic on people for gawking at her when she had broken her "no PDA" rule herself, when she had pulled Castle close for a kiss before he left to set up reservations for their dinner with her dad.

So, Beckett reckoned that to completely hide the fact that they were a couple—an engaged couple, no less—by suppressing all public displays of affection was no longer a priority. The main reason behind such actions was no longer an issue, so she allowed Castle to let his touch linger around her waist, his fingers twiddling slightly against her right hip.

Crossing the bullpen to her desk, Beckett put her bag down and then slipped out of Castle's grasp, sitting down in her chair and reaching over to boot up her computer. Castle smiled down at her and gestured to the break room, telling her he was going to make them some tea, since they had both given up coffee for the duration. She smiled back up at him, and ran her bottom lip under her teeth as she watched him saunter towards the break room.

Letting out a soft sigh, content with the direction her life was heading, though still a little overwhelmed by the speed of it, Beckett spun back to her computer and opened up her e-mail inbox. She narrowed her eyes, seeing something from the electronic forensics department on the records she had requested the day before. Opening up the e-mail and the attachment, Beckett found herself staring at the bank records of Todd Nichols, the victim's son-in-law.

From what she was seeing, Castle's financial motive might just turn out to be true. It appeared the son-in-law had set up some accounts in some offshore banks that did not have to answer to the Feds. As she skimmed through the rest of the records, it became clear, however, that none of this was any tangible proof. All it really showed was that Mr. Nichols was keeping some of his money a secret from his wife, and his whole family, apparently.

"Ooh, what you got there, detective?" came Castle's voice as he sat down in his chair, careful not to spill any of the hot tea. He placed her hot cup on her desk and brought his up to his lips, blowing over the rim to cool off the boiling liquid.

Beckett raised an eyebrow at him and smirked. "Forensics was able to back track all of Nichols' complete financials," she informed him. "He's got some money stashed away offshore."

"Oh, he is totally our guy," Castle interrupted, grinning like a schoolboy.

She rolled her eyes. "Hardly convincing, Castle," Beckett burst his bubble. "All this says is that Nichols lied about his financials. Actually, from this, I don't see a real motive for murder. He has enough money and doesn't need the windfall from Mr. Chance's estate."

Castle leaned in, resting an elbow on the edge of the desk. "Maybe it's something more than just the money," he speculated. "Maybe... just maybe... Mr. Chance discovered his son-in-law was holding out on his daughter, confronted Nichols about it, and then Nichols killed him."

Beckett bit her lower lip in thought, and then shook her head. "Seems unlikely," she replied. "From
what we've seen it doesn't look like there was much disagreement between the family. In fact, they all seemed quite happy."

"Well, I just don't think this was some case of random violence—" his mouth stopped in mid-motion as her jaw tightened. "Beck—Kate…"

"Castle," she warned with a hard edge to her voice as she slipped back away from him, leaning into the backrest of her chair. Beckett blinked rapidly, silently cursing her damn hormones for disrupting her ability to control her tear glands. She was not going to cry! She clenched her jaw and gritted her teeth. "There is no such thing as random violence. There is always a reason."

"Kate, I'm sorry," Castle said in a soft voice, reaching over to place one hand on her arm. "But sometimes… sometimes it is. Sometimes people just… just kill people."

Beckett took a strong inhale of air through her nostrils and looked at him, knowing he was right. But she couldn't accept it. For so long her mother's murder had been chalked up to random violence, when in reality something bigger had been going on. It was thanks to Castle's unwarranted probing into her mother's death that they had even found that out. And they had only scratched the surface of it.

"Even if it is just a mugging gone bad, we are not… I repeat not… going to label Mr. Chance's murder as a case of random violence," she breathed heavily through her nose, not knowing why she was so angry with this. "Am. I. Understood?"

"Completely," Castle said, removing his hand when he caught the look in her eyes. She was giving him her glare, and he knew well enough to back off when she did that.

Beckett gave a nod, then reached for her tea and took a tentative sip, glancing over at him from behind the rim of the mug. "Sorry," she murmured.

"No need to apologize, I spoke without thinking," he said with a wave of his hand, dismissing it.

"No… Castle, stop," she said, putting the mug down on her desk and leaning forward, lowering her voice. "You were only trying to help and I… I just snapped at you for no reason."

"Beckett… Kate," he placed his hand over hers and squeezed it gently. "No harm is done… forget about it, okay?"

She sighed, but relented with a nod. "Okay." She leaned back and punched at her keyboard, bringing up the financial records again. "Why don't you look these over with me, then… a fresh pair of eyes can always help?" Beckett gave a light smile, hoping to make up for her previous snappish behavior.

"My eyes are all yours, detective," Castle said, picking up his chair and scooting it over so that he had an unobstructed view of the computer screen.

XXX

When lunchtime rolled around, and after Castle's insistence, she allowed him to make a run over to Remy's to get them some burgers—she could not help but laugh when Ryan and Esposito overheard and Castle had to then agree to get them something as well.

The case, however, was still going at a snail's pace. After going through the financials one more time, Beckett was fairly confident that the only thing the son-in-law was guilty of was hiding some of his money from his family… and the taxman. Other than that, nothing incriminating could be
found. So they were back to square one, with no suspect.

As Castle made his way over to the elevator, Beckett pushed herself up out of her chair and followed him, ignoring the smirks coming from Ryan and Esposito. Stepping into the elevator with him, Beckett waited for the doors to close before turning to him. Castle watched her with curious and somewhat confused eyes as she slowly took his hand in hers and placed it on her stomach, where the two lives they had created were growing inside her.

She looked down at the sight and smiled, before glancing up to find Castle smiling as well. "I love you," she said softly.

"I love you, too," he said, giving her one of his goofy grins before leaning down and capturing her lips in a soft gentle kiss. She closed her eyes and leaned into him, his hand moving from her stomach and slowly rotating around her waist until it was resting on the small of her back, holding her closer to him.

When they pulled back to breathe, she looked up at him with apologetic eyes. "I'm sorry for snapping at you earlier," she said, needing to apologize, despite his protests that there was no need. "It… it's just the hormones… and… and well, this is all happening so quickly, and not at all as I had imagined."

"It's okay, Kate," he replied, placing his hands on her shoulders. "I can take it."

She bit her lower lip and looked up at him with a doubtful gaze. "You sure?"

"Absolutely. Yes." Castle grinned and wiggled his eyebrows. "Besides, the payoff is worth it."

Beckett could not help but smirk at his response, and relented with a quick nod. "Alright, just… be… be patient with me. I'm not used to really sharing my life with someone."

"For you… I'll do anything," Castle replied with a warm smile, then leaned forward and planted a soft kiss on her forehead just as the doors dinged open. "Be back in twenty." He then hesitated for a second before dipping his head down and giving her a quick chaste kiss on the lips before departing from the elevator.

Beckett smiled, and waved to him as he turned his head over his shoulder to get one last look at her before he exited the precinct. She ran her arms around her frame and shivered, suddenly feeling cold without his presence by her side. She narrowed her eyes and reached out, hitting a button on the elevator.

The doors closed and the conveyance began to move again, taking her to the basement level and the morgue.

Lanie was in, a body on one of the tables. Beckett avoided looking at it, as she could tell that the M.E. was currently examining the chest cavity after having done a Y-incision. Lanie had already done the autopsy of Mr. Chance, so this body must be from some other homicide that another team was investigating.

Glancing up past the plastic screen covering her face, Lanie smiled. "Hey girl, what do I owe for the pleasure of your company?"

"Just taking a break from the case," Beckett said absently, slowly stepping around the autopsy table, still keeping her eyes away from the ghastly sight. "Castle's making a run over to Remy's to get some food. I hope you don't mind, but I asked him to pick you something up as well."
Lanie let out a soft chuckle and paused in her work. "That's nice of your boy."

"My boy?" Beckett furrowed her brow and stared at Lanie, completely puzzled.

Lanie's eyes crinkled and she chuckled. "Yeah, your boy... you know, your other half, your significant other, your fiancé, the father of your unborn twins... whatever you wanna call him."

"Fine, he's my boy, as you put it," Beckett conceded with a sigh, but she still smiled just the same. "Just don't go saying that around him."

"Oh, what's this all about?" Lanie stepped back from the body and raised the screen cover over her head. "Trouble in paradise?"

Beckett laughed and rolled her eyes, crossing her arms under her breasts. "I'd hardly call it paradise... but it's the closest I will ever get," she said after a moment.

Lanie raised an eyebrow and shrugged. "Alright... but seriously, Kate, what's up?"

She sighed and looked away for a moment. "I sort of snapped at him earlier, when we were building theory."

"You always snap at him... it's part of the thing you two got," Lanie shook her head, not really getting what Beckett was trying to say.

"I know, but this time... I feel like it was different somehow," she said. "I mean, like now that we are together, I take things too seriously sometimes. And he just brushes it off like it was nothing."

Lanie hesitated for a moment before nodding. "I get it," she said. "You do tend to think with a tunnel vision sometimes, and not see what's around you. But Castle... damn girl... he brings you out of that. And ever since you finally admitted your feelings for each other, not to mention that obviously delicious romp you had with him that got you in the situation your in... you've been much better. He's good for you, Kate. As you're good for him."

"But... are we moving too fast?" Beckett inquired, fiddling with the engagement ring on her finger. "It's all... well... just all overwhelming at times." She knew she was making no sense, especially when she had been the one to pop the question. But sometimes Beckett felt a little suffocated by it all.

Lanie sighed and stepped fully away from the autopsy she was performing, knowing she was going to have to give Beckett all her attention. "How was dinner with your dad last night?" she asked, changing the topic of the conversation.

Beckett blinked and looked up, a wide smile creasing her face. "It was great," she said. "Castle got along better with my dad than any previous boyfriend I introduced to him."

"And how did he take the news?" Lanie questioned.

"To be honest, I thought he'd be upset... maybe even a little angry that I wasn't married yet," Beckett confided. "But he wasn't. Dad... he... he was just very happy. Overjoyed, is more like it. Apparently, he had kind of given up hope of having grandchildren." She paused and bit her lower lip.

"So, honey, what's wrong then?"

Beckett knitted her eyebrows together and stared off into space for a long while. "Nothing...
nothing's wrong. I… I just guess I freaked out a bit with how snappish I got. And how he didn't mind it at all."

"Well, girl, you are pregnant! Those hormones are bound to go wild on you now and then," Lanie said with a chuckle. "And from the sound of it, you didn't even scare Castle off. If anything, writer boy was just reeled even further in."

Beckett rolled her eyes and smiled at her friend. "Yeah, I guess so," she said. "Thanks, Lanie."


She had really needed to just talk some of this stuff out… with someone that was not Castle. She had never worried she had scared him off or messed things up—their ride in the elevator was a testament to that, what with the loving look in his eyes when he had glanced back at her before he had left to get lunch.

Castle was hers, and she was his. Nothing was going to change that. She glanced at her engagement ring, basking in its simple elegance and how perfect it was for her. It would always amaze her how he knew her so well. Even if she had not gotten knocked up, Beckett knew that they were always heading towards this. Even when she was with Josh, she knew. Deep down she had always known that Castle was her one… her one and done.

Beckett felt her warm smile at that thought radiate out, and soon after Lanie shooed her out of the morgue so that she could continue with the autopsy. Castle would be back with lunch soon, so she went back up and waited for him in the bullpen, absently playing with the ring on her finger, while—with her other hand—she fingered the ring on the necklace around her neck, making a decision that she hoped would strengthen their relationship.

XXX

The five of them—her, Castle, the boys, and Lanie—ate lunch in the break room, filling the silence with small talk. Castle would occasionally make one of his jokes that made everyone laugh, and would also "honor" them all with a spoiler from his upcoming novel. He made a point of informing Lanie and Esposito that he had made their fictional versions get together before they did. Esposito gave him a "dude, shut-up" stare, while Lanie just winked at Castle and leaned into her man.

Beckett finished with her fries before Castle was even halfway through his, so, still hungry she started stealing from him. "Wait a minute! Those are my fries!" he objected, his eyes twinkling at her.

She swatted his hand away playfully and gave him a mock glare. "Hey! I'm eating for three here!" she quipped back, making everyone laugh as Castle raised his eyebrows and gave a nod, throwing his arms up in surrender and just pushing all his fries over to her.

At one point Castle reached up with a napkin and wiped some stray ketchup on her lips, making her blush at the intimacy of such an act. The boys and Lanie made "ooh and aah" sounds, earning themselves a patented Beckett glare. She then rolled her eyes at then and leaned up to give Castle a light kiss, her cheeks still warming with a blush at their public display of affection. But hey, they were on break, she could kiss him all she wanted right now.

Sometime during the meal, one of Castle's hands had somehow managed to land itself on her thigh (under the table, away from view), and Beckett started having trouble ignoring it. She tried to distract herself by talking with Lanie, but Castle kept moving his fingers around in soft patterns that had her wanting to pull him into the janitor's closet and have her way with him.
Eventually, Castle stopped it, seemingly aware of how much it was making her squirm and embarrassed. The talk slowly revolved back to them, and their relationship, much to her chagrin. Beckett sucked up her embarrassment and self-consciousness, reminding herself that these were her friends, and that she had no reason to fear being judged by them. In fact, all were very pro her and Castle being together. By the end of the conversation, the others had agreed to help Beckett move out of her apartment and into the Loft.

Lanie was the first to leave, announcing she had to finish up on the autopsy she was performing. The M.E. stood up and gave Esposito a kiss before sauntering out of the break room, giving Beckett and Castle the opportunity to repay the Hispanic detective for his previous "ooohs and aaahs" when they had kissed. Esposito gave them all a mock frown and grumbled, saying something resembling "it's no big deal."

Finishing up lunch, they dove straight back into the investigation. Ryan and Esposito went out to do some follow up questions while Beckett and Castle reorganized the murder board and ran theory. Castle still seemed convinced in was the son-in-law, and he keep pushing that theory. Beckett tried shooting him down, but then reluctantly agree to hear him out.

He went into a long detailed story about how the son-in-law had never really liked his father-in-law… that the feeling was mutual. Then out of the blue, Castle said that Todd Nichols, the son-in-law, had a mistress, and Beckett was floored, and utterly confused and baffled by his reasoning.

"How… how do you reason that, Castle?" she asked, stopping him in the middle of his long story.

"The money trail," he said.

"What…? But we've gone over it a dozen times!" She shook her head. "If Nichols was cheating on his wife, we would have found evidence already."

Castle furrowed his brow in thought, and then pointed at her computer. She sighed and nodded, letting him sit in her chair, which he almost got him squealing with excitement like a kid in a candy store. She shook her head and walked up behind him, leaning down to look over his shoulder as her opened up the financial records again. He went to the offshore accounts and indicated a steady incremental decrease in the intervals between account transfers.

"While you were doing a re-read of the autopsy report, I did some checking," he explained. "And found out that all those large money transfers were going to another account, with an account holder by the name of Lilly Mohner."

"Wow, Castle… look at you, doing actual investigative work," Beckett teased gently, running a hand along his neck, making Castle smile.

Just then, Ryan and Esposito came in, a blonde woman between them. They watched as Ryan took the girl to one of the interrogation rooms, while Esposito came over.

"Yo, Beckett, we might have a suspect for you," he said. "Kevin and I were checking out the local area again and some neighbors remembered seeing Mr. Chance having an argument with this chica…" He removed his notepad from his jacket. "Her name's—"

"Lilly Mohner," Beckett finished with a nod.

"Yeah, how'd you know that?" Esposito narrowed his eyes, glancing down at Castle.

"Detective work," the writer said with a grin.
Lilly Mohner broke easily. It didn't take Beckett long to have the girl telling her the story of how Mr. Vance Chance had found out about his son-in-law Todd Nichols and her. Chance had come over to talk with her, telling her that he knew and that he was going to give her the benefit of the doubt, that she was unaware of Nichols being married to Melody, his child.

She told Beckett and Castle that she was completely shocked, having believed Nichols was divorced and would never had been "the other woman" if she had known. Beckett could tell the woman was telling the truth; there was too much sincerity in her voice, too much stored up grief. Eventually Lilly told them how Nichols had arranged for a fictitious birthday party gig for his father-in-law, and lured Mr. Chance out there (giving them a reason for why he had been dressed up in a clown outfit).

Cause of death had been a knife wound to the heart, and Lilly had saved the knife, leaving it untouched. Forensics would later confirm that it had Nichols' fingerprints on it, confirming Lilly's story. Lilly, herself, alibied out, having been at a yoga class during the time the murder had occurred.

After finishing up their interview with Lilly, Beckett had Ryan and Esposito go out to pick up Todd Nichols. And four hours later, after a grueling two hours in the interrogation room, Nichols confessed and was begging for a plea deal. Beckett left the room with a foul taste in her mouth, leaving the rest to the district attorney's office. She sat at her desk, filling out the paperwork, occasionally glancing up and gazing at Castle's empty chair, wondering where he had disappeared to.

He had been with her throughout all of it, but as soon as it was time for paperwork, he had vanished. She rolled her eyes. *Typical.* It was like he was her partner when there was a murder to investigate, but when it came time to do paperwork, he was just the shadow.

Beckett narrowed her eyes and focused on the paperwork, wanting to get out of here and into her bed. She was super exhausted from the long day and just wanted to curl up and go to sleep. Her nose twitched and she caught the scent of an enticingly delicious aroma. Arching her neck, she looked over her shoulder, raising her eyebrows in surprise as she saw Castle walking back into the bullpen with what look like two large burritos in tinfoil, the silver wrapping was gleaming in the florescent lights that hung from the ceiling above.

"I thought you had gone home," she said as he sat down in his chair.

"What? And leave you without feeding the mother of my children!" Castle gave her a feigned hurt look. "My dear detective, you should have learned by now, it's going to take a lot more than boring ole paperwork to get rid of me... in fact... I don't think you're going to get rid of me at all. I'm here to stay."

"That's sweet of you," she said softly, looking away for a moment as she blushed slightly, before returning her gaze to his.

"Think nothing over it," he grinned and raised the tinfoil wrapped burritos. "I got chicken or steak, which do you want."

Beckett looked back and forth between the two. Wrapped up in the silver foil they both looked exactly the same, and they smelled the same too. "Hmm, I guess I'll have the steak," she said, holding out a hand.
"Ah, but I got that one for myself," he faked a pout, but his boyish smirk soon took dominance again.

"Oh, stop complaining, Castle," she gave him a quick smile, and then began to unwrap the tinfoil. "Thank you, by the way," she added, moving one hand to touch his knee. Then she leaned across the distance and gave him the quick kiss on the lips.

Castle smiled, no doubt pleased she was beginning to break her no PDA at the precinct rule every once and a while. "Anything for you, Kate," he replied, his lips curling upwards in a warm and loving smile.

They ate and talked, mainly about the case, since it was still in the forefront of her mind. Castle wasted no time in pointing out that he had been right all along, that the son-in-law had been the killer. Beckett pointed out that the motive had been different than Castle had originally theorized.

"He was trying to cover up his affair," she said, after swallowing a large bite from her steak burrito. "It had nothing to do with money."

"Ah, but the money trail led us to Lilly Mohner, which then led us back to him… Todd Nichols… son-in-law… murderer," Castle interjected with a wink.

Beckett rolled her eyes, but smiled. "Fine, Castle… you solved the case, happy now?"

"Extremely!" he grinned and wiggled his eyebrows, before moving forward to kiss her on the cheek, an act that left her slightly stunned and blushing.

Despite the fact that everyone at the precinct knew about them, it was still going to take Beckett some time to actually accept the public displays of affections, even when she was the one that initiated them. She was not used to such things, but she was willing to move out of her comfort zone with Castle. It was one of the things that she was able to do with him that she had not been able to do with anyone else. She felt safe with him, safe enough to try new things and broaden her horizons.

Castle remained silent after their late dinner, allowing her to finish her paperwork promptly and as quick as possible. Captain Montgomery was still in his office when she turned it in, and he told her to take tomorrow off. She protested, but then he put his foot down and lightheartedly threatened to put her on traffic duty for a month if she so much as poked her head into the precinct. She relented with a sigh and nod, and left his office, finding Castle already standing by her desk with her bag and jacket in hand.

Beckett gave him a little glare and nodded back towards Montgomery's office. "Was that your doing, Castle?"

"I know nothing," Castle asserted with a smirk, holding her jacket open for her.

"You can say that again," she mumbled under her breath as she rolled her eyes and accepted his help with her jacket. Pulling the flaps shut around her frame, and taking a deep breath, she turned around to face him. "Look, Castle… I'm really tired, is it okay if we just go back to my place and… and just go to bed?"

"Of course," Castle murmured, pulling her into a light hug and kissing her forehead. He slinked his arm around her waist and they walked to the elevator. Once out of the precinct, Castle pulled out his cellphone and called Alexis, informing her that he'd be staying the night at Beckett's apartment, but to expect him back in the morning.
Forty-five minutes later they were at her place, curled up together under the covers of her bed, sound asleep.
Chapter 17

Beckett woke slowly, with a tired yawn, still exhausted and fatigued from the long day yesterday. When her eyes fluttered open, she smiled, remembering how she went to sleep, curled up tightly against Richard Castle. But when she reached across to the other side of the bed, she did not find him. The sheets were cool, and the impression on the other pillow was the only evidence he had been there.

She could not help the tightness in her chest, the worry, the insecurities, and the fear. Beckett slipped out of the covers and threw her long legs over the side of the bed, standing up and glancing around the room for evidence that he had been there. She brushed her bed hair out of her face and slowly ran her hands down her body, stopping at her middle to confirm the very small bump that was evidence of her condition. So that part was not a dream... she was pregnant.

The shirt that was barely resting on her shoulders was large, and when she gripped the loose fabric and pulled it to her nose, she smelled him... smelled Castle. She smiled. More evidence that being with him was not a dream. Beckett turned to her nightstand and grabbed a scrunchie, bunching her hair up into a loose ponytail as she walked out of her bedroom and towards the kitchen, where an enticing aroma was waiting her.

There was a post-it note on the refrigerator, and she recognized Castle's chicken scratches. For a writer, he had rather cramped handwriting. Sometimes she wondered if he could even read his own notes. She snatched the post-it up off the refrigerator and attempted to decipher his writing.

Gone home to make Alexis breakfast and see her off to school. I baked some muffins. They are still in the oven, keeping warm. Sit back and relax. Will be back by 10. Love you, RC.

She smiled and turned to the stove, opening the oven and finding a tray of blueberry muffins. Grabbing an oven mitt, Beckett removed the hot tray and put it on the counter, taking in a long and slow whiff of the muffins. The aroma was wonderful and her stomach grumbled in response to the olfactory tease.

Beckett pried one of the muffins out of the tray and held it up to her nose, teasing herself again before taking a small nibble of the baked good. A warm feeling encompassed her insides as she swallowed. Only Castle would think of her like this and make her something to eat. It was actually really sweet of him, and she could not help but smile even more at the prospect of waking up every morning for the rest of her life with him doing something like this.

Turning around with the muffin in hand, Beckett stepped over to the coffee maker, and then stopped. No. No coffee. She frowned, still missing her morning cup, but knew it was probably best to stay off of it for the duration of her pregnancy. She filled the teakettle and turned on the stove, heating the water up. As she waited for the water to come to a boil, Beckett prepared herself a cup, and looked over to the table, finding the newspaper waiting for her.

"Castle," she smiled at his thoughtfulness.

She slipped down onto the couch, opening the newspaper, and began to read while she waited for the water to boil. Castle's shirt had slipped down a bit on her shoulder, so she tugged it back up. She frowned. She should probably take a quick shower and change before Castle got back, especially if she wanted to do what she had planned.

Getting up from the couch and refolding the newspaper, putting down on the counter, Beckett
turned off the stove… the tea could wait. It was 8:45, so she still had plenty of time to get ready before Castle returned. She padded back to her bedroom and rearranged some things before heading into the bathroom to take a shower.

XXX

Beckett was out of the shower by 9:15. It had felt strange sleeping in and then taking a leisurely shower, yet despite all that, she found that she was slightly relieved at not having to go into work today. Wrapping her hair up in the towel, and pulling a bathrobe around her frame, she padded barefoot back out into the kitchen. She replaced the kettle on the stove and turned the burner own.

Her stomach grumbled, and she figured that she better eat a little more, since all she had had so far was just one muffin. She looked around, and examined her kitchen counter. She smiled when she saw her fruit basket. Castle must have restocked it at some point. She grabbed a banana, figuring that she needed the vitamin B-6 and vitamin C, and the potassium. Beckett peeled back the yellow skin and munched on the soft fruit within as she stepped over to where she had placed the newspaper. She flipped through it as she ate, reading some of the articles in the book review.

Finished with the banana, Beckett went back into her bedroom, tossed the bathrobe aside, and removed the towel from around her head, letting her long brunette hair cascade down around her face. She shook her head and ran her fingers through her tresses, deciding she would let her hair dry naturally and curl… Castle liked it when her hair curled. He had never said it out loud, but she could tell by the look in his eyes when she allowed her hair to do so.

Stepping around the bed, Beckett stood before the wall length mirror and judged her naked appearance. She turned to the side, running her hands down to her stomach. It was not obvious, but she could make out the beginnings of the swell that would soon grow large and consume her middle. Her chest clenched with a feeling she had never felt before and she smiled.

Beckett had never really thought about becoming a mother. Her entire focus had been on her job… and her obsession with her mother's case. Suddenly that seemed selfish.

Sighing, she looked away from her reflection, realizing that her obsession with solving her mother's case was going to have to be reevaluated. In seven months, it would not longer be just her. She'd have two lives that depended on her, and she did not want to let them down. She wanted to be there for them, completely, without any distractions.

Turning back to her reflection, she smiled softly, slowly running her bottom lip under her teeth, thinking of the man that she would share all that with. Beckett smirked and laughed lightly, remembering what she had originally thought of him when they had first met. He seemed so immature and juvenile; she could not wait to get rid of him. And then, thanks to his friendship with the Mayor, she was stuck with him.

Part of her was disappointed when they first met. He was, after all, her favorite author, and no one really likes seeing what those they idolize are really like. She had had a huge crush on him in college. And when he declared that he was "really ruggedly handsome" she had to bit her lip to keep herself from agreeing with him.

Admittedly, she had found him annoying for the first couple of weeks, but then… ever so slowly, he grew on her, and she found she craved her time with him. It was a little unnerving. Beckett had never needed someone like she had begun to need him. He was a rock, something that anchored her to the world. And part of her had hated him for it, while the other had loved him.

And then that whole fiasco with Demming and Gina happened, and whatever relationship they
could have was stunted. It took her finding him over a body, arresting him, and his constant prying for him to weasel himself back as her shadow. And then, when it became clear that his relationship with Gina wasn't really going anywhere, it was too late. She was with Josh then.

Frowning, she looked away from her reflection again. She felt shame and guilt over that. She had used Josh as a barrier… an excuse for not admitting her feelings for Castle, even when it was painfully obvious that Castle was never going to go anywhere, no matter what she said or did. She sighed and turned back to her reflection, suddenly feeling depressed.

"Kate! You up?"

Her eyes snapped wide open and she turned her head towards the door, suddenly highly aware she had yet dressed. Beckett glanced over at the clock: 9:30. He was early. She could hear him rustling about in the kitchen.

"Yep, you're up!" he said. She could hear the grin in his voice. "The water's ready. Want me to pour some tea?" He paused, waiting for her answer. When none came, he continued, "Kate? You there?"

She cleared her throat of the lump that had suddenly appeared and gave a hard swallow. "In here!" she called out. "I… I'm just changing."

"Okay," he hollered back. "You want some tea?"

"Yes, please," she answered, quickly moving about, pulling on panties and strapping on a bra.

Beckett grabbed a pair of jeans and tugged them on, sucking in her stomach to button them up. Damn… they're already feeling tight. Finding a plain white t-shirt, she pulled it on, and then tugged her hair out around the collar, allowing the long strands to fall down her shoulders and back.

Turning back to the mirror, she looked at her reflection, judging her appearance. Her lips were in a flat line as her eyes roamed over herself. She hadn't had time to put any make-up on, even just some light make-up. Blinking she looked away from her reflection, and smiled softly. She was always self-conscious about her appearance, yet around Castle she felt safe and secure about herself. He was the only man she had ever been with that she was not afraid to allow him to see her with no make-up on. He only ever saw her… and he always thought she was beautiful, even when she did not.

"Hello gorgeous."

Speak of the devil…

Beckett's smile grew wider as she felt his nose nuzzle into her still slightly damp hair. He pushed back some of her hair and lightly kissed her neck. He backed away, and she turned her head, closing her eyes as their lips met in a slow and affectionate kiss. Backing away, Castle held up a cup of tea. She accepted it with a soft smile and gave him another kiss.

"Thanks," she said, smiling at him as he grinned at her.

"I would have woke you when I left, but you looked so peaceful and happy I didn't want to wake you," he said as she blew across the lip of the cup. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes," she nodded. "It's nice to sleep in, sometimes."

"After that case, I'd say you needed it," Castle said, jerking his head towards the door, and she
nodded.

They walked out of the bedroom and over to the kitchen. Castle leaning against the counter and smiled over at the baking tray, noticing one the muffins was gone.

"Did you like the muffins?" he asked.

"Yes," she smiled. "That was very sweet of you."

"Well, I thought I should make up for not being here when you woke up," Castle explained raising his cup to his lips and taking a quick sip.

Beckett took a long drink from her tea and swallowed, averting her eyes, as she put it down on the counter. "Rick… I… I was wondering if I could take you someplace today," she asked.

"You wanna take me somewhere?" he seemed surprised.

"Yes."

"Where?"

Beckett bit her lower lip and averted her eyes once again, before gazing back up at him. "I… I want to introduce you to my mom," she said.

Castle stood still for a moment, his cup of tea hovering motionlessly before him. His eyes slowly grew wider, and then he turned, placing the cup down before shifting back to her. "Really?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"I… Kate…," his voice was thick with emotion. His arms slowly snaked around her waist and he pulled her too him, hugging her tight. His breath grew heavy and his hands rubbed up and down her back with tender motions that spoke more than words ever could. "Kate…," he murmured in a soft voice against her ear. "Thank you… it… it means so much to me that… that you'd want to share that with me, to introduce me to your mother."

Beckett slid her arms tighter around him and buried her head in his shoulder, releasing a breath she did not know she had been holding in. She had been uncertain about his reaction to her offer to take him to her mother's grave, and it touched her how much it meant to him... how humbled and honored he was about it. This was a first for her. She had never taken a man to her mother's grave. It had never felt right.

But with Castle… it felt right. It was right. He was the man she loved, the man who loved her more than just the father of the children growing inside her. He was her everything.

She let out a soft breath and pulled back, reaching up to caress the side of her face, her eyes moist with tears, seeing the same reflected in his eyes. "You are my family now," she said. "And I want her to know you. To know how much you mean to me. Of the love I have for you and you have for me. And of the future we are creating with that love."

Castle moved his hand up to her, holding it, turning her palm out to kiss it lightly. "You truly are extraordinary, Katherine Beckett," he said. "Just when I think I couldn't love you anymore than I already do, you prove me wrong."

Beckett smiled and leaned into him, pressing her forehead against his. They stayed that way for a while, staring into each other's eyes and sharing breathing air, before she pulled back and smiled.
"Let me grab a coat and I'll take you to see her."

XXX

They took her car, because this wasn't the sort of thing you grabbed a cab for. Castle was uncharacteristically silent during the drive, seeming to sense she needed some quiet time. Beckett had always preferred silence during her drive to her mother's final resting place, and it amazed her that he knew that without her even having to tell him. It gave her time to prepare herself, both mentally and emotionally, for the visit, even if it was just really a cold grey slab of stone sitting on the ground that she was visiting.

The drive, itself, did not take long. She had memorized the route, and could, if she wanted to, drive it with her eyes closed. The route was so familiar to her that they were there before she knew it. And as they stepped out of the car, Beckett could already feel that tight clenching in her chest she always felt whenever she came here.

She closed her eyes, taking in deep calming breaths, trying to ease the tension from her shoulders. The gentle breeze picked up and blew some of her hair across her face. She shivered in the chill, and then stopped, feeling a warmth encompass her. It took her a moment, but she soon realized it was the feeling of having him near, of his presence by her side. His hand came up and tenderly brushed her hair back, tucking it behind an ear.

He leaned forward and kissed her cheek, then stepped back. She smiled softly, forever grateful for the universe for bringing Castle into her life, even if, at the time, she had not realized what was happening. Slowly, she slipped her hand down into his and interlaced their fingers together. He squeezed back, tenderly rubbing his thumb against the back of her hand.

"Thanks for coming, Rick, it... it means a lot," she said as she turned to look at him.

"It means a lot that you want to share this with me," he answered sincerely, his voice low and filled with feeling.

She gave him small smile. "It means a lot that you care," she replied, slightly amused at them for rambling. Beckett let out a weak laugh, and shook her head.

Curling her fingers more securely around his, she then turned and led him away from the car. The sun was out, yet it was still cold, which she found to be oddly appropriate. As they wove their way through the headstones, Beckett's heart thumped profoundly in her chest. She had never done this. It was a completely new experience for her, bringing a man to her mother's grave. She had never gotten into this kind of comfort zone with a man before, which spoke volumes to how right Castle was for her.

Castle let her pull him along, keeping silent as they went deeper into the cemetery. They marched up a small sloping hillside, sparse trees dotting the grounds. The area around the visitors' path had been landscaped with wildflowers. And as she continued leading him along, he suddenly stopped, pulling her over to a patch of flowers. Beckett gave him a confused look as he crouched down before the flowerbed. Then her eyebrows rose in understanding as she watched him collect some flowers.

Standing back up, he glanced over at her and gave a small smile. "For your mother," he explained.

"Thank you," was her response as she returned his smile with one of her own.

They resumed their hike through the cemetery, and eventually they reached the crest of a small hill
that surveyed a small artificial lake. A cluster of trees stood around them, giving the place a serene and peaceful feeling. Beckett took a deep breath and clutched onto Castle's hand, suddenly needing the reassurance of his presence. She had never needed someone as badly as she needed him. She swallowed past the lump that had manifested itself in her throat and inclined her head towards that grey slab of stone that rested not far from where they stood.

"She… she's there," she managed to choke out through the overwhelming grief that always came when she visited her mother's final resting place.

Castle shifted and pulled her into his arms, allowing her to release some of her burden, and share it with him. She absorbed some of his strength, and pulled back the sob that had wanted to come out. Brushing her hair back, she wiped at her eyes and the dry tears that had begun to form.

Tentatively, with her arms wrapped around him, Beckett took a step forward, towards the tombstone. Closing her eyes against the unwanted wash of emotion that was flooding through her (part of her wanted to blame the hormones), she slowly extricated herself from Castle's reassuring and comforting embrace. She needed to take the final steps on her own.

Seeming to understand this by her actions alone, Castle hung back as Beckett covered the remaining distance by herself. She paused before the stone slab sticking up in the grass covered earth, staring down at the words etched in the stone:

Johanna Beckett
Beloved Wife and Mother

She heaved in a breath of cool air that caused her to shudder slightly. The grief of it all seemed to be rushing back to her. She would never forget the day she was told. No one could ever never forget such a thing. She stood there, reliving the moment over and over, letting the awful truth confirm itself once again with the cold hard reality that her mother was dead. That her mother could not really bask in the joy she wanted to share with her.

"Hi mom, it's me… Kate," her voice almost cracks at the heartbreak of it. She can feel the tears on the edge of her eyes, and she blinks, willing them away, wanting to be strong. God, sometimes she felt so ridiculous talking to a slab of stone, but the grief counselor had told her it would help. And it had.

Beckett had visited her mother's grave quite frequently during her adult life, to share little things with her. When she had first met Castle… she had come and told her mother. After the Dick Coonan case, she had come and told her mother. When Castle had left for the summer with his ex-wife, leaving her alone and shaken, she had come and shared her grief with her mother. When he returned and weaseled his way back in, she had kept her mother informed.

Then things only grew more complicated; her conflicted days, when she was confused… always confused.

There was the Triple Killer case, Natalie Rhodes, and then Detective Raglan's murder. Kissing Castle… god, even undercover, it had left her breathless, and it only served to confused her even more. That entire case had been eye opening, not just about her mother's case, but also about how far Castle would go for her. He had tackled Lockwood, literally punching the daylights out of the hired assassin to save her, and afterwards he had given his answer of how far he, Richard Castle, would go for her, Kate Beckett: Always.

She shared her frustrations about Josh with her mother, and how her feelings for Castle had never changed… only grew deeper the longer he stayed around. The freezer incident… some would say
she should have talked with a therapist, but instead she talked to her mother. She sought some solace in explaining things to her mother's grave; even knowing she was never going to get the advice she craved.

Beckett shared all the ups and downs of her life with the stone tablet that denoted where her mother's worldly remains were laid to rest. It was her therapy. Her way to release some of her burdens.

"Kate?"

Beckett blinked and turned her head towards the sound of his voice. He was still standing at a respectful distance, waiting for her permission to approach. She closed her eyes and sucked in a breath. She was ready, ready to finally tell her mother what she had longed to tell her, that she wished she could truly tell her. But she would have to settle for what fate had given her.

She gave a nod, granting him the permission he needed to close the gap between them. Without hesitation, Beckett took his hand in hers and turned back to her mother's grave.

"Mom… this is Richard Castle," she said, her voice wavering slightly with the emotions that were running through her veins. She swallowed past the lump in her throat, and then continued. "I love him, Mom. And… and he loves me." She paused and smiled slightly, knowing exactly how her mother would have said then. "Yes, Mom, he's that Richard Castle, the writer you like so much, and yes, he is very handsome."

Out of the corner of her eye, Beckett spotted Castle's lips curve upwards ever so slightly. She tightened her hold on his hand, interlacing their fingers even further together.

"I'm going to marry him, Mom," she murmured, almost in a whisper. "You were right; there was someone out there for me. Someone who would love me for me. And here he is." Beckett paused and closed her eyes, feeling a tear trickle down her cheek. God, she wished her mother could truly be here to hear this next bit of news. She placed her free hand over her middle, and opened her eyes, gazing down at the tombstone. "We're expecting, Mom. Twins. I… I'm going to have twins. You're going to be a grandmother. Dad's thrilled… he never thought this would happen, but it has… and I… I couldn't be happier."

Her words not with standing, she began to breakdown. Castle shifted, pulling her to him, allowing her to lean into him and draw comfort and solace from his presence. Yet despite the crack in her voice, and the sobs that were taking over, she was happy, truly happy with how her life was. She just wished her mother could be here to share in it, and to help her along the way… to answer questions and give advice that only a mother could. She buried her head in Castle shoulder, tightening her fist in his shirt as she released all her grief over what had been stolen from her.

When she calmed, Castle eased back and tenderly kissed her on the forehead, an act she found to be extremely intimate and telling of how close they truly were. She blinked, wiping her eyes as she watched him step away and kneel before the headstone.

"Mrs. Beckett," he spoke in a low voice, yet filled with confidence in his words. "I may never have the honor of meeting you, but through your daughter, I feel like I know you. The integrity, courage, and strength that you instilled in Kate are a testament to your character.

Your daughter has grown into a remarkable woman. She is truly extraordinary. And not a day goes by that I don't thank fate for allowing me to meet her. She is truly one in a million. I love her with all my heart and swear to you that I will never—never—take her love for granted." He placed the small batch of wildflowers against the base of the stone. "Thank you, for giving her to me. I don't
know what I would do without her."

Beckett was amazed—stunned, really—by his words. If she had ever doubted his love before today, now she did not. She felt tears sprinkle down her cheeks, but these were a different kind of tears. Wiping her face, she brushed her hair back and stepped up behind him as he stood. Castle slowly turned around to face her, sighing when he saw her tears. He reached up and caressed the side of her face. She closed her eyes and eased into his touch.

"She would have loved you, you know?" she asserted softly as he pulled her into a soft embrace.

"I'm sure the feeling would have been mutual," he said, resting his chin on the top of her head.
"After all, I have her to thank for you."

Beckett smiled and tilted her head back to look him in the eyes. "And if it were not for her, I would never have read any of your books. And I would never have... have fallen in love with them... or you."

"Hey," he rubbed his fingers along her jaw, holding her chin in his hand, dissuading her from crying again. "It's alright... it's okay. We have each other now. And that is all that matters."

She nodded and pushed up on her toes to give him a light kiss. "Thank you for coming."

"Thank you for inviting me," Castle replied, moving to wrap his arms around her. She sighed, resting her head against his shoulder as she turned in his arms, looking down at her mother's grave. A soft smile graced her lips, knowing her mother would have approved.

XXX

Sitting in a trendy outdoor bistro café in SoHo sipping some freshly squeeze lemonade, Beckett smiled to herself. Today had gone better than she could had hoped, and their love for each other only seemed to have been affirmed by visiting her mother's grave. The words he had spoken still echoed in her ears and it made her all warm and happy to know just how much he loved her. She wondered why she had even been worried about it.

She looked up and smiled as Castle came out from the interior of the bistro with their deli sandwiches. He returned her smile and sat down placing her lunch down before her. Beckett unwrapped the brown paper from around her sandwich and took a small bite, savoring the fresh flavors from her pastrami sandwich.

"So, I was thinking," she stared, but was interrupted when Castle reached over with a napkin to dab some mustard off the side of her mouth.

"Sorry, yes?" he smiled, giving her a wink.

Beckett bit her bottom lip to suppress a laugh and rolled her eyes. "With the case solved, I was thinking we could start planning me moving in."

"Really?"

This time she did laugh. "Oh, I wish you could see your face, Castle," she smirked. "Of course I'm going to move in, I wasn't joking about that."

Castle put his sandwich down and reached across the small table and placed his hand over hers. "So when were you thinking?"
"Sometime next week," she said. "I'm sure we can get Esposito and Ryan to help."

"We'll bribe them with pizza," Castle put forth. "And if they need further incentive to help out, I can always bribe them with a game of Madden... or Halo."

Beckett laughed. "Video games? Are you kidding me?"

"No, I'm deadly serious," Castle said with a wide boyish smirk, his eyes glittering. "And hey, Halo is like so awesome, Kate. Don't knock it until you've tried it."

She rolled her eyes at him. "You are such a child sometimes."

"If I'm a child, what does that make you, huh?" he chuckled and snatched her hand up and kissed her palm. He smiled and his eyes softened. "So... next week. You moving in?"

"Yes," she nodded. "I'm moving in."

"God, I'm so loving my life right now!" Castle declared.

And then, in a move so fast that she was completely caught off guard, he leaned across the table and captured her mouth in a passionate kiss that left her breathless and wanting more. Suddenly she wished they were back at her place and not at an outdoor café.
"What do you have in this box, weights?" Castle groaned as he walked into the bedroom, carrying a box, his eyes squinty and his mouth in a thin line as if he was straining with all his might not to drop it.

Beckett turned her head and looked over her shoulder, smiling up at him. "Oh… that one… books."

"Books?" he echoed, puffing as he eased the box down to the floor, where it landed with a thud. He took a deep breath, and feigned wiping his sweaty brow. "Are they all hardbacks or something?"

She shifted, pushing herself up off the floor, where she had been organizing her clothes before she placed them in the impressive walk-in closet and the wardrobe. "Open it and see for yourself, Rick," she said with a smirk, her eyes glinting with delight.

Castle hesitated, looking at her with some concern, as if there was going to be a rubber snake inside that would make him jump and squeal in terror like a little girl. She watched, slowly chewing on her lower lip and holding a hand near her mouth as Castle cautiously unfolded the cardboard flaps on the box. His eyes grew wide and shot up to her, his lips turning upwards in a sly smile.

"My books!" he exclaimed.

She nodded, hiding her smile behind her hand. "Yes. Most are first editions… and are autographed."

He was picking one up and examining it in his hand. Opening the cover, he flipped to the title page and found his handwriting: To Kate, XOXO Rick Castle. He chuckled and looked back up at her. "You know, I feel kind of bad, but I honestly don't remember writing this," he said, looking up at her, his eyes locked with hers. "I mean, I think I should, after all I wrote those hugs and kisses." He chuckled. "You must have looked hot that night."

"Must have?" she teased, crossing her arms under her breasts and giving him a taste of her famous glare.

"Um… what am I saying here? You're always hot!" he quickly said, trying to cover himself. Castle cocked his head and looked at her with a leer. "Did I mention how sexy you look in those skinny jeans?" He wiggled his eyebrows to add effect to it.

She laughed and shook her head. "Well, enjoy it while you can, Rick," she said, sauntering up to him. "Because I might not be able to wear them for a much longer."

Beckett looped her arms around his neck and tugged him down for a quick kiss. Castle moaned into her mouth and his hands easily found their way to her bottom, pulling her flush against him, and he proceeded to squeeze her playfully. She pushed back and gave him a playful smack on the chest, her mouth wide with mild embarrassment as her cheeks warmed with a blush.

"Castle!" she admonished him.

"What?" he blinked innocently.

"My dad could walk in any minute," she elaborated, moving her fingers over his shirt, straightening out the ruffles that had occurred when he had tugged her up against him. She looked down at herself, and straightened her own shirt. "Come on, Writer Boy, let's get all the boxes in, then you
can help me unpack."

"But I was going to play Halo with Ryan and Esposito," Castle protested, throwing up his arms and pouting like a child.

Beckett rolled her eyes and laughed softly. "Maybe I'll join you guys, then."

He stopped in his tracks, his draw dropped in surprise. "Really?"

She looked over her shoulder and smirked. "I said maybe, Castle. Don't get your hopes up."

"Oh, they're already up, my dear detective," he quipped back, hurrying to catch up with her.

XXX

"Hey sweetie, where does this go?" her dad asked, standing in the foyer with a large box cradled in his arms.

Beckett looked up from the box of dining ware on the kitchen island. She closed the box, and crossed the distance between them, narrowing her eyes as she examined the words written in black marker along the side of the cardboard box. "That one goes in the office," she said.

"And where's that?" Jim inquired, his eyes looking around.

As she turned to point in the direction of Castle's office, which he had insisted they share, making it their office, Alexis came down the stairs from her room and offered to help.

"I can show him, Kate," Alexis volunteered. "I'm finished with my homework, so I'm free now to help out."

"Thanks, Alexis, that's really nice of you," Kate said, giving the teen a grateful smile.

"No problem, Kate!" Alexis beamed and skipped over to help Jim take the box to the office.

Beckett stepped back and watched, seeing her dad and Alexis chitchatting comfortably. She smiled, wanting her dad to get along well with the entire Castle clan, since they were all part of her family… her growing family, she reminded herself, placing a hand on the small bump that had finally begun to show itself. Her chest tightened and a lump formed in her throat. Her eyes started to get watery.

"Ah, girl, you gonna start to cry on me?" Lanie's question snapped her out of it.

She rolled her eyes and snorted. "What? Me, cry? Ha! Are you trying to make a joke?"

Lanie chuckled and shuffled in with a box. "Don't act all stoic. I know you can cry… and those watery eyes look happy not sad, so I'm not saying you were sobbing… just happy is all."

Beckett smiled tentatively. "All right, fine… I guess it was all just hitting me, you know? Moving in… with Castle."

"I'm proud of you, girl!" Lanie beamed, and then hooked her head back. "Javi and Ryan are down in the lobby arguing over how to get that fine looking black leather arm chair up… gosh, Kate, when did you ever find the money to afford a chair like that? And I know Writer Boy didn't buy it for you… isn't his style. But, damn, do it looks deliciously luxurious!"

"Yeah, it's mine," she laughed softly, remembering seeing it for the first time and just having to
buy it, despite her lack of funds. "I had to live on TV-dinners for more than half a year, but I managed.

"You know, Castle's got some nice looking chairs around here," Lanie said, using her chin to gesture towards the lounge and living room.

"I know," Beckett gave a half-smile. "But it's mine… I bought it… and, if nothing else, it's my favorite chair to just plopped down in, relax, and read a good book."

"I get it," Lanie nodded, giving her an understanding look. "Even though you're moving in, you need something that is still you."

"Exactly."

"Well, it certainly looks comfy," Lanie beamed and continued on into the Loft, putting the box down on the coffee table in the living room.

"Do you think I should go down and make sure they don't scuff the leather?" Beckett asked, suddenly becoming worried for her favorite reading chair.

"No, I think Castle's got it covered," Lanie asserted, straightening up and taking a quick breath. Satisfied, her friend turned back and gestured towards the door. "We got a few more boxes to clear out and the moving truck guy is saying that he's got another apartment to go to, so we gotta get those boxes out."

"Oh god, yes, I completely forgot," Beckett felt like slamming a hand to her head. "I got a little distracted trying to decide where I'm going to put everything."

"I know! Who knew you'd have so much!" Lanie remarked with a chuckle.

Beckett laughed along with her friend and followed her out, giving a nod to Martha, who was helping to unpack the boxes sitting in the kitchen. She was organizing the contents onto the island countertop for later storage. There was a part of Beckett that didn't think they would need any of it, since the Loft was pretty well stocked, but Castle had insisted that she keep some of her own plates, bowls, cups, mugs, and glasses… even some of her silverware (which she thought was ridiculous, but she chose not to argue about it). However, on Sunday, they had donated her pots and pans, and other cooking ware, to the Salvation Army. At least he had conceded to that.

"Hurry up, Kate!" Lanie called out, holding the elevator for her.

Beckett moved her feet and hurried to catch up. They rode the elevator down to the lobby, where the Three Stooges were still debating over how to get her favorite reading chair up to the Loft. Surprisingly, they were unable to fit it into the elevator. The store's delivery service had brought it right to her apartment door, so she did not know how they had gotten it to her floor. The three men were currently engrossed in a debate over how best to heave it up the stairs. Phil, the doorman, was acting as a sort of referee as each argued their points for their respective plans.

"Looking good boys!" Lanie smirked as she walked past.

"Keep it up!" Beckett added with a chuckle as she followed Lanie past them.

Castle looked up and winked at her, and she could tell by the glint in his eye that he so very much wanted to turn what she said into some famous innuendo of his, but then his attention was taken back to the debate when Ryan started vigorously promoting his plan.
She rolled her eyes at the two detectives and the writer, and then frowned, hoping that her favorite chair was not an unintended victim in the war of male egos going on.

Phil excused himself from the argument that sprouted up between Ryan and Castle—it looked like Esposito might have to step in between them to prevent a fight—opening the door for them, and then assisting them in removing the final boxes from the moving truck and bringing them into the lobby.

After placing the final box, which also happened to be one of the lightest—everyone seemed to be going out of their way to make sure she didn't do any heavy lifting—Beckett went to pay the moving truck driver, but then realized she didn't have any money on her. She asked the guy to wait just a minute, and she dashed back into the lobby to find that the argument had shifted and it was now Ryan and Esposito that were caught up in a heated debate.

"Castle, can you give me your wallet?" she asked, coming up to stand beside him, her eyes watching with amusement as the two junior detectives continued to argue.

"Sure," Castle seemed slightly out of it. His head was still mostly in the debate going on. He absently reached into the back pocket of his jeans and handed over his wallet.

Beckett smirked to herself. *That was easy.* She spun around and walked back out of the lobby, opening his wallet and looking at the obscene amount of credit cards that greeted her. *Oh my!* For a moment she thought about absconding with one and just splurging on some clothes, something she had not done in a long while. *I mean, come on, he wouldn't miss one of these.* *Would he?* She chuckled and shook her head. That was so not like her.

The truck driver was waiting by the curb and happily accepted payment, and the large gratuity she gave him. As she walked back to the building, she shook her head. She was going to have to have a talk with Castle about keeping so much cash in his wallet. It was dangerous.

XXX

"I cannot believe you just let her walk away with your wallet," Esposito snickered as he poked fun at Castle.

"Yeah," Ryan chimed in, "we might just have to take away your man card for that blunder."

Beckett held a hand over her mouth to hide the laughing smile that was stretching over her face at the hilarity of it all. The funniest part of it all—in her opinion—was that she *still* had his wallet. He had yet to ask for it back. For his part, Castle took their teasing in stride.

"Oh, ha-ha," Castle gave them a tight smile. "Not like you haven't done the same thing with Jenny? Or Lanie... Javi?"

Esposito stiffened at Castle's use of Lanie's pet name for him. He glowered and grumbled some curse in Spanish under his breath as they turned the corner in the stairwell. The boys had finally decided on a plan to get her chair up to the Loft, which she was happy about, since it was the last thing that needed to be brought up. Beckett and Lanie stood on the landing above them... "supervising". In actuality, they were just enjoying the entertainment.

Earlier, before they had begun the trek up the stairs, Lanie had berated the three men for being so absorbed in their little manly contest that the women and the older gentleman (Jim took no offense to Lanie's choice of words) had to carry the remaining boxes up to the Loft by themselves. Esposito was the first to offer an apology, seeming to sense that his *chica* was none too happy with him.
Castle and Ryan mumbled apologies after, Castle adding a puppy-dog look to his expression of regret as he gazed sorrowfully up at Beckett.

"Just a couple more floors, boys," Lanie hollered down at them, the amusement she was feeling meeting her eyes.

"Maybe I should help them," Jim offered, standing next to Beckett.

"No," Beckett shook her head. "They didn't help with the other boxes, Dad. So this is all on them." She turned and gave him a soft smile, reaching over to give his arm a squeeze. "Why don't you go back up to the Loft? You and Alexis can order us some pizza."

Jim smiled back at his daughter and leaned over to kiss her on the top of her head. "Okay, Katie, what kind of pizza do you want?"

"Just pepperoni will be fine," she said, and then turned to her friend. "Any preferences, Lanie?"

"Pepperoni's fine, hon," her friend replied. "Oh, but you better get at least one veggie pizza."

"Yes," Beckett nodded. "Ryan's a vegetarian," she explained to her dad.

Jim nodded, and then left through the door leading to the corridor so he could call the elevator and ride it the rest of the way up to the Loft. Beckett turned her attention back to the boys. They were making good time.

"Whoa, take it easy with the pace, guys," Castle said. "I'm not as young as I once was, and I don't want to throw my back out. The last thing I need are back problems?"

"Oh and why's that, Castle?" Esposito quipped back.

"Um…," Castle hesitated, his eyes jumping up to Beckett. Esposito followed his gaze and she felt herself visibly blush. She didn't like the direction of this conversation. Thank God her father had left when he did.

"Er… Okay, we'll go nice and slow then," Ryan interjected, saving his two friends from the awkwardness they had stepped in with their banter.

It was a good thing that Beckett and Lanie had been "supervision" because at one point their help was needed, though everyone tried to shoo Beckett away from any lifting. She grumbled at them and gave them all her patented glare, which worked. They grudgingly allowed her to hold one part of the chair. Both Castle and Esposito were with her, so she really didn't need to lift that much, just help steer it around the turns.

They had to use some creative thinking to get the chair through the door and into the hallway. But once that was done, it was a simple matter of carrying it into the Loft. Beckett had already picked out the perfect place for it, and she let the others move her chair to the spot she indicated. It was right next to the large windows in the lounge area. She had selected it because on previous visits she had noticed how the sunlight had filtered through the glass and cast the area in a warm glow.

"I think I need a drink," Castle puffed out, wiping sweat from his brow. "Alexis, dear, could you fetch your old man a glass of water."

"No problem, Dad," the younger Castle chirped. "Detective Ryan? Esposito? Would you two like a glass of water as well?"
"Yes, please," the duo, responded in unison, earning a snicker from Castle.

The doorbell buzzed. Beckett looked over towards the foyer and the still opened door. The pizza delivery guy had arrived with a large stack of pizzas. Castle glanced over and began patting his jeans, in search of his wallet. Beckett laughed and waved her hand at him, holding his wallet up in the air.

"I got it!" she called back at him as she cross the open area, her dad and Lanie joining her. Beckett greeted the delivery guy, gave him the said amount and a tip, and then took the pizza boxes from him, dividing them amongst herself, Lanie, and Jim. She kicked the Loft door close, and went back to the kitchen, where they placed the boxes down on the island countertop.

"I'll grab some plates," Martha volunteered.

Castle walked over, an arm around Alexis's shoulder, his free hand holding a large glass of water. He smirked at her as he raised it to his lips and took a big gulp. "So, am I broke now?"

Beckett laughed and exchanged a look with Lanie before handing over his wallet. "No, but I think we'll need to discuss the amount of hard cash you keep in this," she said.

He took the wallet back and returned into his back pocket. "Not even fully moved in and she's already giving financial advise," he teased.

Everyone laughed and Beckett gave him a playful slug in the arm, which got even more laugh than his quip. He smirked and mimicked a courtly bow of surrender to her, earning him more laughter. Beckett narrowed her eyes. Two could play at this game. She bit her lower lip and accepted his challenge by doing a formal curtsey, which was not so easy while wearing skinny jeans.

Castle stared at her, and just shook his head, clearly not expecting her to play along. "You win this round, Kate," he surrendered, taking her hand and kissing her knuckles like some prince charming from a fairy tale.

"If you two lovebirds are done playing googly eyes, I think it's time we dig in," Lanie cut in before things got carried away. "I'm starving."

"Hear, hear," Esposito concurred.

"Right, here's the plates and napkins, darlings," Martha said, sitting a stack of plates on the side of the counter. "And if needed, some forks."

They all collected slices of pizzas, Ryan thanking them immensely for the vegetarian, though he admitted that he would have been okay with just the pepperoni. Everyone ate in the living room in front of the large plasma TV watching the pre-game telecast of the Yankees game.

Since the pizzas were so big—no doubt they'd have leftovers—Beckett helped herself to a slice of the vegetarian on her second run. She thoroughly gorged herself on the pizza, feeling exceptionally hungry, which concerned her slightly. She had never eaten so much pizza before and it had her worried. It was not until she reminded herself that she was carrying twins and, in a sense, eating for three, that she relaxed and just let it go. Besides, Castle nearly matched her for the number of slices consumed, which made her feel better.

Alexis excused herself when she finished, saying she needed to get some reading done for class. Martha had already taken her leave, having a meeting with a financier for her acting school. Lanie had to leave, since she was working the night shift, having switch shifts with Perlmutter to help with the move.
Jim took that opportunity to make his leave as well, wanting to get back home in time to catch the
eend of the game before going to bed. Beckett walked him to the door and gave him a hug.

"Thanks for coming, Dad," she said as they backed out of their embrace.

"It was nothing, Katie," Jim replied, rubbing her arms affectionately. "It was nice. He makes you
happy, and I can tell. I don't think I've ever seen you have as much fun, or laughed as much, in
quite a while."

Beckett bit her lower lip and nodded. "He does make me happy," she agreed. She hugged him
again. "Don't be a stranger, okay? You're welcome here anytime."

"Yes, anytime."

She broke from her hug to see Castle standing by them. He extended his arm to shake hands with
Jim, but then her father surprised the writer by giving him a great big bear hug.

"Thanks, Rick," he said.

"Um… er… you're welcome?" Castle responded, his brow creased, and his perplex eyes looking
over to her for an explanation.

Jim laughed and gave Castle a pat on the shoulder, before turning and giving Beckett one last hug
and kiss on the head before departing. Castle came up beside her and wrapped his arm around her
waist as they waved goodbye.

"What was that about?" he asked, turning to nuzzle his nose into her hair.

Beckett closed her eyes and shivered. She gently eased him back, highly aware that they still had
two houseguests. "For making me happy," she answered. "Isn't that what any father wants out of a
future son-in-law?"

"I suppose so," Castle replied, ignoring her previous push and leaning in to kiss her lightly.

Beckett sighed and gave in, not even caring if they had an audience. She just wanted to kiss him so
badly that she just didn't care anymore.

XXX

"Whoa! Whoa! What just happened?" Castle sat up straight, flustered, baffled and confused.

"I believe I just killed you," Beckett answered with a smirk as she leaned back, her mischievous
grin turning into a beaming triumphant smile.

Castle looked over at the boys. Ryan gave a shrug.

"Dude, you got owned," Esposito said with a small sympathetic nod before turning his attention
back to the game.

Beckett watched Castle make a pouting face, before turning her eyes back to the white sheet he had
pulled down earlier so that they could use a projector to play Halo. Somehow, she still couldn't
remember how, Castle had managed to convince her to play the video game with them. Part of her
was questioning why she was doing this when she could be curled up in their bed reading a book
instead. But she found that she was actually enjoying herself, being one of the boys and
playing their game… not to mention beating them at it.
And besides, Castle had tossed up the challenge. She just had to accept it. And the results of which could not please her any more than they already did. She was gaining plenty of fuel and ammunition for future use.

"Ah! Man!" Ryan let out a shrill cry, his eyebrows shooting up in shock.

"So not cool!" Esposito said not soon after with a shake of his head.

"You snooze you lose, boys," Beckett teased with a giggle. She narrowed her eyes and concentrated on the bottom right of the screen. Castle shifted besides her, and she jabbed his ribs with her elbow.

"Ow!" he hooted.

"No cheating," she hissed.

"No cheating?" he echoed, sounding almost like a petulant child. "You kidding me! Are you sure you haven't played this before?"

"Positive," Beckett smirked, adding a click of her tongue as she worked her nimble fingers over the controller. She squinted at the screen, and covered her face in an emotionless mask, stalking her prey.

Castle squirmed besides her, then jumped up and hollered in dismay. "What the hell just happened?" he cried out, gesturing wildly towards the screen in a dramatic fashion.

"She's slaughtering us, bro," Esposito answered.

"The question was rhetorical, Espo," Castle groaned and plopped back down on the couch, rubbing his hands over his face. "This is so not fair."

Beckett rolled her eyes and laughed. "Well, you are the one who asked me to play, now weren't you?"

"Yeah… but I had no idea you'd be so good at it," he protested, whining like a five year old.

"I do have one of the best marksmanship ratings in the department, Castle," Beckett said, giving account for her supremacy in the field of video game battle.

She heard him grumble something under his breath as his character re-spawned into the game. Beckett flicked her eyes back and forth between the screen and him as she pulled the trigger button. Castle gasped, and threw up his arms.

"You are so camping!" he declared, turning to stare at her with wide accusatory eyes.

"Yo, dude, keep it easy, if you keep freaking out, there is no way we can beat… and I'm dead," Esposito said, letting out a frustrated sigh. He turned to Ryan. "It's up to you, Kev."

"What? No… come on, guys… you know out of the three of us, I'm the weakest link," Ryan implored as he worked furiously with the controller.

Beckett bit her lower lip and knitted her eyebrows together as she concentrated on the hunt. She could feel Castle's eyes on her, and knew that he was watching, no doubt wanting to say something about how adorable she looked when she focused. A mischievous glint was in her eye as she found her prey. Castle noticed and she caught him trying to signal Ryan. Without looking away from the
screen, she jabbed her elbow into his ribs, making him flinch. He got the message and remained silent.

Ryan started making little worried noises as he maneuvered his character around, searching for cover as he avoided the shots Beckett was taking at him, and then BAM! One shot got through and the game screen flashed, the game announcer's voice declaring "GAME OVER."

"You know what?" Beckett said, glancing around and rejoicing at the defeated looks on their faces. "That was actually kind of fun."

Castle harrumphed. "Fun? It was a massacre! A bloody, horrific, massacre. Makes the sacking of Troy seem tame by comparison."

She rolled her eye and laughed at him. "Now you're just exaggerating," she said, smiling at him. "Anyways, it's not my problem that you all seem to suck at this game… what did you call it again?"

"Halo," both Esposito and Ryan groaned.

Castle gasped like he was offended by her remark. She gave him an innocent look, and batted her eyelashes at him, before tossing her controller into his lap.

"I think I'm going to go lay down and do some reading," she declared, standing up and sauntering off. "You boys have fun."

"Guys… what just happened?" she heard Ryan ask in her wake.


There was a pause, and she looked over her shoulder and saw the two detectives glaring at Castle. He blinked and gave them a charming smile.

"How about we play a game of Madden?"

XXX

Later that evening, after Ryan and Esposito had finally left, Beckett ventured back out into the kitchen to grab a cold slice of pizza, still feeling a bit peckish. Castle was sitting in the lounge, his laptop perched on his knees as he typed away furiously on the keyboard. Beckett took a small bite and placed the slice back down onto the plate. She then padded across to look over his shoulder, watching as he filled a blank page with words.

"Whatcha workin' on?" she drawled out as she sauntered around the couch to slide down onto the cushion besides him.

Castle glanced over at her and smiled warmly. "I had some inspiration for Nikki Heat," he said. "I think Heat Rises might be my best to date."

"Oh?" she hooked up an eyebrow.

"Yes," he nodded, shifting closer to her. "Nikki's going to start seeing Rook as more than just an occasional bed companion—and extremely talented one, of course—and more as a life companion."

Beckett smiled. "I like that," she gave him her approval. "Nikki needs Rook. Even if Nikki doesn't always say it out loud."
Castle smirked, and his eyes darkened with desire as he bore his gaze deeply into hers. "Rook needs Nikki, too. More than she'll ever know."

Her chest tightened and she looked at him, hearing his words and knowing the true meaning. They weren't talking about Nikki and Rook anymore, but about themselves. She flashed back to all their playful banter over the years, remembering all the innuendos, compromising positions, and stolen glances. They had lost so much time dancing around the issue.

Heaving in a deep breath, Beckett stood up and held out her hand. "Come to bed, Rick," she breathed out, amazed at how right and satisfying it felt to say those words. "Your Nikki needs her Rook to make love to her in their bed."
Beckett offered her hand, waiting for him to accept. He looked up, his eyes glowing with love, making her heart clench in her chest and soft fluttering feelings to manifest in her core, reaffirming everything she had thought about their relationship. He quickly saved the open document on the computer and then shut the laptop down. Leaning forward, Castle placed the device down on the coffee table, then turned and took her proffered hand, his eyes dancing with mischief, yet underneath love still shone through.

She smiled at him as he slipped his arms around her waist, slowly pulling her against his body as he planted faint kisses along her neck. She moaned softly and arched herself into him, loving the feel of his hands as they ran up and down her back. His lips danced up her neck and he nibbled playfully on her earlobe, making her shiver and tingle all over as his hands moved down to grab her bottom.

"Castle…," she placed a hand on his chest and eased away slowly. "Not here."

He sucked in a deep breath, his face flushed with arousal, and his eyes dark with desire. "Yes… bedroom," he nodded.

Beckett tugged him along, pulling him past the doorway through the office, ignoring the boxes stack there. They'll unpack tomorrow. Right now, she just wanted to feel him between her legs. They moved quickly into the bedroom, Beckett spinning around to ram her lips against his, startling him.

Stunned, Castle did not respond immediately. Beckett grinned into his mouth and sucked on his bottom lip before flicking her tongue out and taking his breath away. He chuckled, a low primal sound, and his arms snaked around her, his palms cupping her backside and lifting her up off the floor. She helped him out and wrapped her legs around his hips, locking herself to him. Her arms quickly slipped around his neck and she deepened their kiss, pushing her tongue past his moist lips and tasting the unique flavor that was Rick Castle.

When they broke the kiss, they stayed close, their lips a breath's distance for one another, just barely touching. They breathed together, each filling their lungs with the same shared air as they stared longing into the other's eyes. Beckett's entire body was tingling and coming to life like never before. Well, that was not entirely true. She'd felt this way before—many times in fact. But it had only happened when she was with him… with Castle. And this was more than the need for sex, like she'd had with some of her previous boyfriends. This was a need that only Castle—and him alone—could fulfill.

She leaned her forehead against his and he carried them towards the bed, dipping his head down to kiss her neck. Beckett clutched at his hair, moaning softly as he worked his magic along the curve of her neck, kissing and sucking. He found her pulse point and he worked on it, making her eyes roll back into her skull with the shrill euphoria it brought her.

Castle turned around and slowly walked backwards the rest of the way. Never once did he remove his mouth from her neck, not even to see where he was going. His internal navigation was amazing, because he lined them up perfectly with the center of the bed. Gently, he eased down, perching himself on the edge of the mattress as Beckett shifted her legs around him so that she was now straddling him.

He kicked off his shoes and his hands moved to help her with hers, but she had already removed
them when she went to read while he played video games with the boys. Castle laughed at his error and took the opportunity to tickle her toes. She gave him a playful swat on the chest.

Pushing on her knees, she hovered up above him, her long hair tumbling down over her face as they locked eyes, the mutual desire and love reflecting back between them. His hands moved, pushing her hair back to reveal more of her graceful features. His fingers were tender and loving as he tuck her strands back, his thumbs affectionately rubbing her cheeks.

"So beautiful," he mumbled, barely loud enough for her to hear.

Her breath hitched up, her body bubbling with sensations and feelings leaving her almost numb by the sheer magnitude of pleasure that came from just hearing his voice while she was gazing into his cobalt blue eyes. Their eyes remained locked as he moved his hands from her face, running them down her sides. One snaked around her torso to rest comfortably on the small of her back, holding her to him. The other slipped back up, sweeping along the sensual curve of her neck.

His fingers found her skin and he danced them along her jaw line and along her parted lips before spreading them out and palming her cheek. She sighed softly and closed her eyes, easing into his hold. Turning her head, she brushed tender kisses into his palm and fingers.

"Why me, Castle?" she could not stop herself from asking. "You could have your choice of women… but you chose me?"

Castle waited until she was finished talking, his eyes intent, forever focused on her. He then moved his hand away from her face and into her hair, digging his fingers into the long brunette strands and tilting her head back to him.

"For a long time, I thought I could do that, settle for ordinary," he paused and glanced up at her. "Because that's what it would have been with anyone else. Ordinary. But I wanted something more. I wanted extraordinary. And with you, Kate… I have that." He swallowed hard, averting his eyes for a bit as he thought. "You make me a better father to my daughter, a better son to my mother… and in general, a better man."

"Really? Rick, you were already an amazing father before I came a long," she protested, gently shaking her head in disbelief.

Castle chuckled as she caressed the side of his face. "Perhaps, but you made me want to be better than I was," he said. Taking a short breath, he turned his head up to fully look at her, the love in his eyes was oh so very clear. He moved his hand back up to her cheek, cradling it in his palm. "Let's just say that with you, for the first time ever," his lips quirked up in an amused smirk, "all the songs make sense."

"What about Kyra?" she asked, remembering how he had called her 'the one that got away'.

He furrowed his brow in thought, and she began to wish she had not asked. She didn't want to know. Castle shook his head. "Not with her," he whispered, almost like even it amazed him. He gave a nod, reaffirming his assertion. "The songs make more sense with you. With her, I wanted it to be right. But it just wouldn't work. And with you, it feels right… it is right." Castle paused, looking confused for a moment. "Does… does that make sense?"

Beckett smiled down at him. "Yes… yes it does," She leaned her head down as they softly kissed. She caressed the side of his face with her hand, her fingers ghosting along the fringes of his hairline.
Castle was the first to deepen the kiss, moving his hand around to the back of her neck, clinging to her hair as he pulled her closer. Beckett placed a hand on his chest, giving herself some support as she pressed her body into him. As she broke the kiss, gasping for air, Castle made a growling noise.

She smirked, her chest heaving as her center warmed, her body craving to reconnect with Castle in that most intimate of ways. Their eyes locked as her hair cascaded down around her shoulders. Her small grin grew into a beaming smile as she noticed that Castle was taken aback by the sheer unbridled desire that was radiating out from her eyes.

Her gaze drifted over his countenance, and all she saw was him and his love for her. She bit her lower lip, and smiled. Moving her hands, her fingers found the buttons of his shirt. Castle moved his hands to hold her hips as she worked quickly on the buttons until she was able to part the shirt open and run her fingertips down his bare chest, making him shudder.

Beckett let out a groan of deep want, not caring that he could hear the desperate need in her voice. His skin was warm under her fingertips, and the way he responded to her touch made her all the more hot for him. Letting the animalistic need take over, she pulled at his shirt, roughly tugging it back over his shoulders and carelessly tossing it to the floor. Sucking in a deep breath, she gripped the sides of his face, holding him still as she stared deeply into his eyes. Those blues were so blue, so lovely.

"I love you, Richard Alexander Rodgers," she murmured, using his birth name, in a sense letting him know that she loved the man behind the persona that was Richard Castle, bestselling mystery author.

"Oh god, Kate…," his voice was barely above a whisper and he paused, swallowing hard as he averted his eyes for a moment, composing himself. "I must have done something really great in a past life to have such good karma now."

Beckett chuckled, low and sensual, noticing how his eyes momentarily dropped to her chest as it shook with her amusement. She smirked and tightened her grasp on his head, tilting it back up to her eyes. They stared at one another for a long time, each softly panting as the need and want… the intense passion shimmering beneath the surface… only burned hotter as the seconds ticked by.

"How attached are you to this shirt?" Castle asked, bringing her out of their smoldering stare.

"What?"

"This shirt," Castle reached up and slightly tugged on the collar. "How attached are you to it?"

She ran her lower lip under her lip and smiled, seeing what he was getting at. "Not much."

Castle smirked and his fingers curled around the fabric. In one swift motion, he yanked hard, buttons snapped and flew out, tumbling and bouncing down to the floor. He flung the shirt away and his head immediately dipped down to explore the newly exposed skin of her chest. Beckett gasped in surprise, and let out a low moan as his lips began to caress the tops of her breasts. His hands fumbled around on her back, searching. She let out a little noise of delight when his talent fingers found the bra hook and he used his expertise to free her of it.

Fisting his hair, Beckett held him against her breasts, loving the way his lips danced over her flesh and how his tongue flicked out to tease her nipples. It was so much like the first time they were together, her mind momentarily floated back to those blissful memories of that wild and hot night. She groaned and lowered herself, grinding her hips against his straining desire. Castle let out a
breathy whimper and his head dropped motionlessly against her chest. She smiled wickedly, loving what she could do to him.

"Are your jeans too tight, Rick?" she asked with a teasing grin, soothingly rubbing his shoulders.

"They were fine before," Castle let out a hot breath. "But now that you mention it… they do feel like they may be a size or two too small for me."

Beckett chuckled and slipped off him, lowering herself and resting her knees on the floor as she ran her hands down his chest. He shivered and groaned, his head lulling backwards as she unbuckled his belt and popped the button on his jeans. She unzipped him and told him to lift his hips. He obeyed like a good little boy, and Beckett grinned widely as she removed his jeans and boxers in one fell swoop.

She stood and quickly shimmed out of her skinny jeans, absently letting out a sigh of relief at finally freeing herself of them. They were so tight that they took her panties off at the same time, even though that was not her intent. She had wanted to tease Castle some more, but looking back on it, she couldn't care less.

Stepping out of the pile of clothing on the floor, Beckett moved back over him, planting her knees on either side of his hips as she rubbed her now nude body up against his. She ran her hands up and down his chest as his hands caressed her thighs while she teased him even more by brushing her warm center against his strong arousal. He let out a whole body groan and his fingers dug into her thighs.

"God… so wet," he gasped.

Beckett gave him a sly smile. "I did say that Nikki wanted her Rook, now didn't I?"

"I just had no idea you really meant it!" Castle exclaimed, closing his eyes as he groaned again while she rubbed against his straining need once more. He moved his hands up her legs and securely grabbed her hips. She locked eyes with him as a mischievous smile slowly spread over his lips.

"Castle!" she warned.

The world spun and she let out a cry of surprise—even though she had been suspecting it—as she suddenly found herself surrounded by the heavenly soft comforter. She blinked a few times, getting her bearings. Finding herself lying on her back with Castle looming above her, Beckett relaxed and raised her arms, looping them around his neck and pulling him down for a kiss. His lips met hers hungrily and he shoved his tongue into her mouth, stealing her breath and stifling the moan that was rising up in her throat.

Castle dropped down, kissing his way down her neck and between the valley of her breasts. He stopped at her navel and hummed against the small bump, kissing it twice. "I love that we're having twins," he said, breaking the mood for a moment, but in a pleasant way. She arched her neck and looked down at him, smiling as she watched him nuzzle his nose against her bellybutton.

"You already have a glow about you, Kate," he mumbled into her skin. "To be honest, you're always glowing, in my opinion, especially when you smile," he looked up at her, resting his chest on the soft baby bump. "Never stop smiling, Kate."

She ran her hand along the side of his face as she looked down at him, granting his request and giving him a beaming smile. "As long as I have you, I doubt very much I'll ever be able to stop truly smiling, Rick," she answered him, truly believing her words.
Castle smiled and turned to kiss her navel. He chuckled. "No navel ring," he smirked. "And no evidence that you even had one."

She snorted and rolled her eyes. "Some times I just liked to tease you," she replied.

"Well, at least that tattoo wasn't a tease," he grinned wiggling his eyebrows, lightly kissing her stomach again. Smirking, he laughed softly, his warm breath blowing across the planes of her body, making her shiver. "It's like a little decal for your bumper."

"Oh really?" she feigned an indignant huff.

Castle shifted, hugging her lower half and kissing her just above her waist, oh so close to another part of her that she wanted his lips on. "Fear not, m' lady," he murmured. "Your secret is safe with me."

She laughed and ran her hands through his hair, ruffling it so that he looked adorable. "You better, or you may not get to see it for a long time."

"Then I solemnly swear to not tell another living soul," he replied, his eyes turning deadly serious as he added, "for as long as I live."

Beckett's breath caught in her throat and they just stared at one another, their eyes saying more than words could. It was always like that with them. When words could not do, or were not appropriate, their eyes would do the speaking. She had seen the love in Castle's eyes a long time ago, she had just been afraid to admit it.

Castle broke their eye contact, and murmured soft kisses along the bottom of her abdomen, before moving further south to his final destination. He rubbed her legs as she opened them for him, unashamedly inviting him in. His lips pressed like silk against her inner thighs, running butterfly kisses up and down her skin, giving her gooseflesh.

"Castle," she groaned in frustration, wanting his lips elsewhere and not afraid to allow her annoyance to show… or her desperation to have him, for that matter.

He shook with mirth, causing the bed to shake as well, which in turn made Beckett laugh. Then she gasped and trembled with anticipation as she felt his breath against her moist center. His cheeks rubbed against her thighs as he buried his face between her legs, his mouth latching on to her quivering wet flesh. Her breath hitched up and she whimpered softly in pleasure, sensations dancing up and rippling like waves throughout her warmed body. She ran her hands down her body and reached for his hair, fisting the brown strands tightly as his tongue began to work wonders on her.

"Oh god… Rick! Yes… yes…," she moaned, pushing her head back into the pillows, her body arching up in undeniable pleasure. He really did have a talented tongue.

She involuntarily bucked up into him a couple of times, so he gripped her hips, holding her steady as she squirmed and wiggled, wanting more and more as he continued to please her with nothing but his tongue. Beckett was quickly losing all control and it was entirely his fault. Her breaths became heated pants and her spine tingled with delightful sparks of nirvana, which resulted in her occasionally squeezing her legs around his head, which he made no complaints about.

"God, what a rush!"

Beckett was positive that she was going to come undone, but just as she felt the build up towards that crescendo, Castle backed away, licking his lips like he had just finished a delicious appetizer,
and giving her a wink that said he couldn't wait for the main course. She groaned and glared up at him. He mumbled soft apologies as he worked his way back up her body. She trembled slightly with anticipation of finally connecting with him again. She knew it had only been two nights since they had made love, but damn did it feel a like an eternity. She was so glad she had moved in, now they could make love every night if she fancied.

Castle was making slow progress; he was just now reaching the bottom curves of her breasts. She wanted him now and could not stand the wait. "Castle," she growled, not hiding her anger about being toyed with.

He chuckled and moved his hand up to the side of her face as he repositioned himself so that they were face to face. "Relax, babe," he soothed reassuringly.

"Babe? No. Don't call be babe," she hissed. "I am not your—" But then whatever words she was going to say were lost when he dipped his head down and began to suck on her neck.

All coherent thought left her right then. His lips danced along the curve of her neck and she felt her treacherous body respond immediately to him. His hands caressed her legs and he gently guided them further apart, and damn it, but they just spread willingly. Beckett closed her eyes, pouring everything into the kiss, giving her body a pass for the evening. She'd deal with that little pet name later; right now she wanted him… so very badly.

Taking back control of her movements, Beckett moved her long legs, beckoning him in as he settled his hips between her thighs. His hands caressed the smooth skin of her legs; his fingertips brushing along like the wings of a butterfly.

Beckett ran her hands down the planes of his back, moving down to grabbed his muscular buttocks. She laughed when Castle flinched in surprise at the strength of her tight grip. He tilted his head to look at her with a playful grin. Beckett returned his mischievous smirk with a matching passion.

Then his eyes changed, softening and filling with love. "You're so beautiful, Kate… so very beautiful," he murmured, his breath brushing against her cheek.

She trembled, in awe by the love he had for her. Never had she felt this much love directed solely at her from a man—maybe for her body, but not for her, all of her… the complete package. Beckett smiled lovingly back at him and moved her hands back up, needing to touch him. She ran her fingers along the sides of his face, watching as he closed his eyes and smiled softly, obviously overwhelmingly pleased by just having her touch him in such a fashion.

"You're not so bad yourself, Castle," she quirked up an eyebrow and smirked.

His smile matched hers as he moved forward and captured her lips. Beckett arched her body and slipped a hand between them, gripping his burning need in her hand. He groaned into her mouth, but did not break the kiss. She held him, and stroked her fingers up and down his length, teasing him with her touch.

"Kate," he pleaded into her mouth, still not wanting to break away from their kiss, like it was oxygen for his lungs. "Not that I don't mind the way your fingers so brilliantly pay attention to every little detail, but if you keep doing that…"

She flicked her tongue out and ran it along his upper lip as she stopped her teasing. "Sorry," she murmured, batting her eyelashes, not the least bit sorry.
Castle rolled his eyes in a gesture that was far too similar to her own. Beckett narrowed her eyes at him, and squeezed her fingers as a way of punishment for mimicking her. His mouth dropped and he shuddered, his body like pudding in her hands.

Smiling triumphantly, Beckett loosened her grip and directed him towards her. Her inner muscles pulsed with want, seriously in demand for some Castle loving. She flirted her eyes up and saw him staring back at her. The gaze they shared spoke volumes, just like before, saying more than word ever could. Placing him at the ready, his tip resting against the edges of her moist folds, Beckett shivered in anticipation of feeling him once again filling her completely.

"Jamie?" she smirked, keeping in line with the method that she had used earlier to lure him to bed.

"Yes, Nikki?" he laughed, playing along.

"Please, enough foreplay… just… just make love to me."

Castle held her in his arms, and deeply kissed her before leaning back and locking eyes with her. He moved his hips slightly, and Beckett shook in pleasure, her mouth dropping slightly at the feeling of him sliding halfway inside her. She shook her head, glaring at him with irritation in her eyes when he stopped, and she mouthed 'don't stop, please… all the way.'

Obeying her silent command, Castle finished his entrance into her body, thrusting up in one quick motion, filling her and making contact with her core. Beckett gasped and bit her bottom lip, trying to suppress the need to scream in rippling ecstasy. She writhed under him as he buried himself deep inside her, pushing his pelvis right up against her hips.

Her body was already tingling, still feeling the sensations from his talented tongue on her special place as he began swaying his hips and kissing her cheek, jaw, and neck. She rested her hands on his flanks, her fingers slowly digging into his skin. It took her a while to recover from that first internal pulse of ecstasy, but soon she was moving with him.

Their hot breaths mingled as they kissed, each tasting and breathing the other's air as they stared at one another, foreheads resting against one another.

This was so intimate and so different than anything she had ever done. Sure, Castle had made love to her like this before, but she had never truly participated… well, she was there and enjoyed it greatly, but she had allowed him to do all the work as she simply basked in his talented skills. But this time, she moved with him, swaying her hips up to meet his. Not just him, but both of them set the steady rhythm that they danced to.

Something was different about this night. And it was not just the new physicality she displayed now as she moved with him; it was something more. Beckett had never stared so long or so deeply into the eyes of her sexual partner. Such a change only seemed to accentuate every beat of her heart and magnify the pulse of pleasure through her body as Castle moved inside her. She loved this feeling, and for the first time truly knew it was only because she honestly and completely loved the man above her.

Averting her eyes for a moment to regain her composure—she didn't want to risk him finding out just how much this meant to her—Beckett bit her lower lip as she thought, her cheeks flushing, however, as the intensity of the feelings within her rose to new heights, mixing with the soaring pleasure that came from being with him. For now she wanted this revelation kept secret, but she was only kidding herself. Castle's hand moved to turned her face back to his. He kissed her gently and brushed her hair away from her face.
"Me too," he said.

"What?" she choked out after swallowing past the lump in her throat.

"I've never felt this way before either," he explained, pausing in his motions, leaving himself buried deep inside her as he continued. "I've never felt this connection with anyone. It… it's almost spiritual, if that makes sense."

She nodded, agreeing with him. "It does… more than just the physical rightness of it," she laughed lightly at her words.

Castle smirked and kissed her again. "God, I love you."

"I love you, too, Writer Boy…," she teased with a grin. "Now stop lolling about and get back to work!"

He chuckled and rammed his lips into hers, stealing her breath as he picked back up where he had left off, increasing the pace, yet still keeping it slow and tender… and loving.

Beckett moved her hands up and gripped his shoulders, staring up past him at the ceiling, releasing control and simply living in the moment, allowing herself to be here and solely here without any distractions. Castle moved, turning his attention to her shoulder and neck, finding that one sweet spot, besides her pulse point, that drove her wild. She gasped, stunned when he found it. She had never told him about it. Moaning, more loudly than she would have liked, Beckett rolled her head against his shoulder, brushing her lips against his skin and returning the favor.

When her orgasm came, it came hard and she writhed in exquisite rapture under him as he too reached completion deep within her depths. Beckett moaned and closed her eyes at the feeling of her insides becoming so warm and tingly. She had only ever felt this way with Castle.

And now she was just realizing that it was because when she was with him in this way, she was not just having sex, but making love. And lovemaking was not the same as mindless pleasurable sex. Lovemaking included the baring of your soul to another, willingly becoming vulnerable and exposed, and trusting that your partner would not harm you.

Castle was the only living soul she felt safe and comfortable to do that with, to let him all the way in and see all of what she was, the good… and the bad. And what made it all the more right was that he would not turn away in horror or disgust. He loved every single part of her being. All of her, the strong confident hard-ass detective, the grieving daughter, and the vulnerable woman, who was afraid of loving, in fear she would lose it all and never find the happiness she truly wanted. He shunned none of it, welcoming it all into his life and heart. In summation, he loved her, and that was all she ever needed to know to trust him and feel secure in letting him know everything that she was.

Later, as she laid curled in his arms, their legs tangled, their bodies still damp with the sweet post-coital dew of lovers, Beckett smiled softly, realizing that this was her life now. She was cherished, honored, and loved by a man who saw the beauty and strength in her when even she could not.

_Yep, finally letting Richard Castle into your heart was the right decision, Kate. He is your one and done, _she thought, absently nodding against his chest, and then giggling as he chose that precise moment of clarity to awkwardly shift and grunt a loud snore.
It was nice being able to sleep in, something Detective Beckett rarely did, but after the long day of moving into the Loft, added with the intense impassioned lovemaking with Castle before bed, Kate Beckett was pleased to have the luxury of sleeping in.

Three years ago, if someone had told her that she'd be engaged to—not to mention expecting twins with—Richard freaking Castle, she would have laughed in their face. Sure she had thought he was cute and charming, in a juvenile sort of way, but she would never have believed it would have gone this far. That being said, she had no regrets or complaints. And if she could do everything over again, she wouldn't change a thing—well, maybe a few things, but she'd love to keep this outcome.

Opening her eyes slowly, blinking in the faint light coming through the edges of the curtains, Beckett smiled softly. She felt warm, safe, and loved… feelings she had once believed were beyond her grasp. As she shifted, seeking a more comfortable position, she caught sight of him. A smile tugged at her lips as her eyes roamed over his relaxed countenance.

"Have you been watching me sleep?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Maybe."

She chuckled softly and shook her head. "You know what? A couple of months ago I might have called that creepy…," she began.

"And now?" he interrupted with a smirk.

She bit her lower lip as she smiled, glancing up at him from under her eyelashes. "I think it's kind of sweet."

He brought a hand up to caress the side of her face as he leaned down and kissed her softly. She smiled even more into his kiss and brought her hand up to his face, running her fingers through his unruly bed hair.

"Good morning, Kate," he murmured as they broke away, resting his forehead against hers.

"Morning, Rick," she replied, grinning with sheer happiness. It was a little startling that she could even get like this. But this was the new her, the new Kate Beckett.

This was her first day waking up in her new home, in her new bed, with her future husband… her one and done. She couldn't be happier. Sighing, she ran her fingers along his jaw, before snaking her arms around his neck to pull him back in for another delicious morning kiss. She could get use to waking up like this.

His hand snaked under the blanket and she giggled, feeling his fingers glide down her torso to rest just under her breasts. He grinned at her and wiggled his eyebrows, before dipping his head back down to kiss her again. As Castle leaned back, a lopsided grin on his face, Beckett slipped her hand down his back and gave his backside a playful slap.

"Ooh! Someone's in a playful mood," he chuckled as, underneath the blanket, his hand deftly moved further south until his fingers were slightly brushing along the toned flesh of her thigh.

Beckett brought her bottom lip under her teeth and looked up at him coyly. "If we keep at this, we'll never get out of bed."
"And that's a bad thing?" Castle inquired, giving her a sly leer.

She shivered. God, she wanted him. "Bath," she suggested, her mind working on its own wavelength as her eyes darkened with need and desire.

"Huh?" he was slow to catch up, and then it dawned on him and his grinned turned wide until he looked like the Cheshire Cat teasing Alice with his rhymes and riddles. "Oh… oh…oh!"

Suddenly he was jumping out of the bed, tossing the covers off them, and Beckett blushed fiercely, knowing she was completely nude. To be honest, she was still getting used to all of this. But before she could completely get lost in her silly embarrassment, her eyes began to milk in the glorious sight of Castle before her. He smiled down at her and before she knew it, he was hefting her up into his arms bridal style. Beckett laughed and wiggled around, almost kicking her legs in excitement as she got caught up in his infectious glee.

Beckett clutched at him, holding tight as he swayed gently, turning to his side to bump the bathroom door open with his shoulder. Just the feel of their bare flesh brushing was enough to stoke the fires of desire in her core. Castle carried them through the threshold and kicked the door shut.

"I can walk, you know?" she chuckled in his shoulder.

"Yeah, but I like this way better," he wiggled his eyebrows, but relented and let her legs down, allowing his hands to gently skim along her hips as her feet found the bathroom tiled floor.

With her arms still wrapped around his neck, Beckett pulled him down at she pushed up on her toes and kissed him, slipping her tongue into his mouth as he groaned. She dropped her hands down his chest and found her way down past his waist, delicately curling her fingers around his building desire.

"Oh god," he shuddered and moaned, his head dropping forward as she began stroking him gently.

She smiled and rested her cheek against his as she murmured ideas into his ear. His hands rested on her hips and he buried his head into her hair, blowing kisses along her scalp as she continued to run her fingers up and down his length, making him firm and harder. He groaned into her hair, and he moved one of his hands, cupping her left buttock and squeezing. Beckett gasped and let out a whimper of want.

"The bath…," he mumbled between hot panting breaths.

"I want you," she replied with a breathy moan. "The bath can wait!"

She brought her hands up to his shoulders and his hand gripped her waist, lifting her up and sitting her on the edge of the sink counter. She pulled him to her and kissed him passionately, cradling his waist between her legs. His straining need pressed firmly up against her inner thigh and she let out a hot moan.

"God! Now, Castle!" she ordered, slipping her hand between them and bringing him to her.

Castle held her legs as they collided, meeting in a rush of pants and gasps. He groaned and thrust his hips forward, making contact. Beckett stifled a loud moan as she rocked her hips against him. Her fingers dug into his arms as they moved, kissing and sucking face. His hands touched her in all the right places and she held on and enjoyed the ride.

"Yes… yes," Beckett panted, her head falling forward and resting against his shoulder as he
quickened his pace, with each thrust digging deeper and deeper into her.

She clutched on to him, sucking on his neck, grazing her teeth along his pulse point, making him shudder under her touch. Clenching her long legs around him, she hooked them together above his backside, slightly changing the angle, allowing him more room to go even deeper than he already was.

Beckett closed her eyes, and tried to school her breathing, but it was impossible. She was coming undone, and she bit into his neck as she let loose. Her entire body quaked and convulsed, her inner muscles squeezing at him, begging him to come with her. Castle groaned and held her tight to him, her breasts pressing against his chest as he pulled her close. He trembled and his muscles tensed as he groaned in release, filling her with him.

"Oh, Kate," her name passed his quivering lips in a loving moan as he moved his hands up to brush her now damp hair away from her face, grabbing her face in his hands as he moved in to capture her lips.

"Rick," she whispered, her lips meeting his as they kissed, both of them floating away in the sheer rapture of their connection.

XXX

It was close to eleven by the time the two of them made it out of the bedroom. Since she had the day off, Beckett had planned on doing some major unpacking today. So, with that in mind, she was dressing casually, in a pair of grey sweats and a dark blue tank top with a zip up NYPD hoodie over it.

Castle had donned a pair of well-worn faded blue jeans and a Superman t-shirt. When she had watched him pull it over his head, Beckett had laughed, seeing the little smile on his face. Her teasing only made him pout. But then she did something unwise while in a room—alone—with Richard Castle. She turned her back on him.

At this point, she had yet to put her tank top on, so Beckett was standing there in nothing but her sweats and bra as she looked through the moving boxes for something to wear (she had yet to fully unpack her clothing). Castle snuck up behind her, lightly placed one hand on her hip, and then leaned against her back, brushing his lips close to her ear as he whispered x-rated commentary in regard to their morning activities, making her blush as she recalled all the things they had done during their "bath."

"What would you like for… er… lunch, I guess," Castle said, glancing over at the digital clock on the oven top.

Beckett could not help but giggle softly, placing a hand near her mouth. Castle looked at her with amusement, his brow slightly scrunching up, curious as to what she found so funny. He didn't ask her, per se, but she could tell by the look in his eyes that he wanted to know.

She sauntered up to the island countertop and jumped up on one of the barstools. Leaning her elbows on the marble surface, she rested her chin on her hands and glanced across at him with a bemused grin.

"This is my first time sleeping in so late… in a long time," she gave him the explanation he was after.

"Oh," he laughed lightly, then wiggled his eyebrows. "Hopefully it was because you were enjoying
"Oh, I was," Beckett grinned back, swaying slightly as she stared at him. God, I'm like a lovesick teenager. This is ridiculous!

"So…," he drawled out slowly, glancing about the kitchen. "Breakunch?"

"Breakunch?" she repeated, giving him a questioning look.

"Yeah, breakfast, and not quite lunch," he said with a wily grin.

"Don't you mean 'brunch'?" she asked, eyeing him like he had gone insane and may need to be committed.

"Ah, my dear, brunch is dull… boring," he said moving about the kitchen. "It's been done."

"And breakunch—?"

"You got it," he shot her a wink. "It's brand new. In fact, I just invented it this very morning."

Beckett shook her head and rolled her eyes, but smiled nonetheless, enjoying his craziness. "Well, it doesn't sound too appealing," she said. "Especially if it involves that s'morelet thing. Yuck." She shuddered.

His face dropped. "But it's so good!" he whined like a child. "Come on, Kate, you've got to try it."

She straightened her back and gave him one of her infamous glares. He faltered and smiled, trying to charm himself out of it. But she wasn't going to budge. "Just a regular—normal—omelet will be fine, Castle."

"Fine," he stuck his lower lip out in a pout, then his lips quirked upward and he smirked his boyish smirk. "But I'm making myself a s'morelet." He turned around to begin preparing the ingredients. "You are going to be so envious."

"I'll take my chances," she quipped back, cocking an eyebrow up in challenge and jumping off the barstool and walking around to the refrigerator to get herself a glass of orange juice. What she really wanted was a cup of coffee, but both of them had given it up for the duration for her pregnancy. But God, did she still crave it. Yeah, she was a coffee addict. It was her one weakness. No judgments, 'kay?

And it appeared that Castle had even stashed the coffeemaker somewhere, getting rid of temptation, as it were. She sighed, letting out a soft groan of frustration, which thankfully Castle didn't notice. And besides, her morning wake up call that Castle had given her this morning, had done the trick, even if she was a little sore between the legs… it was worth it.

As she opened up the cupboard and removed a glass, she paused, for a moment startled that she even knew where the glasses were. She shrugged it off as quickly. After all, this was going to be her home now. She poured herself a glass, and then glanced up at him, questioningly. He gave a nod and she poured him one as well. Putting the carton back in the refrigerator, she looked around, seeing that the Loft was empty.

"Where's Alexis and Martha?" she asked. Beckett was already thinking about unpacking and how helpful the two would be. She could tell that Martha had already taken the time to unpack and put away all of her kitchenware. That alone was a big help.
"I think Alexis is out shopping with her friends," Castle answered over his shoulder as he worked on their breakunch (he really was a crazy man sometimes, but she loved him). "And I think Mother is meeting with some contractors for her acting school."

"Any idea when they'll be back?" she inquired, retaking her seat on the barstool as she took a sip from her orange juice.

Castle shrugged. "Alexis said she'd be back for dinner... as for mother... who knows," he chuckled.

As Castle worked on his breakfast concoctions, Beckett found the newspaper neatly folded at the end of the counter. She smiled and reached over, flipping it open and spreading it out on the countertop as she actually took the time to read some articles. She rarely got to read the paper; most of the time she just caught whatever news she could from the radio or from the late evening news (that is, if she actually got back from the precinct in time to watch it).

They ate in companionable silence, her sitting on the barstool and Castle leaning against the countertop across from her, creepily watching her eat her normal omelet. He tried impressing on her that the twins would love his s'morelet, but she kept her resolve and refused the offer of a taste. He pouted and moaned like a little child, which she remedied with a quick kiss. That had him smiling again.

As Castle cleaned up after them, Beckett leaned back from the counter and looked around, seeing boxes stacked around the Loft in various places. She crossed her arms and gave a nod. It was time she unpacked and made this place her home.

XXX

Why was she so tired? It wasn't even past four yet, and she was feeling a little fatigued. She didn't know why. They hadn't done anything strenuous... besides their morning "workout" in the bathroom. Castle did most of the heavy lifting—when needed. Sighing, she looked over her shoulder and spied Castle shifting things around the living room, making room for another shelf he had ordered to hold all of her books. She did have quite a lot, which so did Castle, and she knew that some of their collections would overlap, but Castle had insisted she keep all of hers.

The first thing they had done was work in the office, taking out things and arranging them. Castle had found a place for her "private" murder board. She had expected him to make some comment about bringing it into their home, with their family, but he didn't. He understood her need for it. They did make sure it was hidden well, so that neither Alexis nor Martha would accidentally come across it.

At first, Castle had insisted that they share his desk, but Beckett felt like that was intruding a little too much on his writing, so she put her foot down and said no. He pouted and sulked. After thirty minutes of awkward silence, they ended up on the couch in the living room necking like crazy teenagers. Beckett was sure that if Martha hadn't come home early and walked in on them, they would have probably made love right there on the couch.

Castle groaned, his head dropping against her shoulder. She laughed and rubbed his back sympathetically. "I'll make it up to you tonight, Ricky," she whispered in his ear.

He grinned and leaned back and kissed her quickly before helping her up.

Martha helped Beckett arrange her clothes in the large walk-in closet as Castle made some calls to get her the desk they had left at her apartment to be brought over (since she had declined his offer
of sharing his). With Martha's help, Beckett had finished organizing her clothes quicker than she had thought she would.

"Thanks, Martha, that was really kind of you to help," she said, when they had finished.

"You're family now, darling," Martha said, with a dramatic wave of her hand to dismiss. "It's nothing."

With that said, Martha sauntered back out to the living area and talked with her son. Beckett watched from the office doorway, unsure of what was being said. Whatever it was, it seemed to have gotten Castle a little apprehensive. When Martha went upstairs, presumably for a nap, Beckett went out to investigate.

"What's the matter, Rick?" she asked.

"Huh?" he looked up, startled.

"Castle?"

"It's nothing, Kate," he said, being evasive.

She crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes. He wilted under her glare and caved in.

"It's about our wedding," he said.

"Oh…," Beckett's mouth dropped, her arms falling to her side. "What… what about it?"

Castle sucked in a deep breath and stood. "I know how you like your privacy, Kate, and that our wedding day should remain a private affair, but…"

She didn't like that but. "But what, Castle?" Beckett asked, knitting her eyebrows together, trying to focus. Her mind was already going to wild places, like he was going to take it back, and not want to marry her. What would she do then? Was she just to be his live-in mistress or something, who just also happened to be the mother of his kids?

"The press," he said, looking at her with some concern.

"Oh," she released a breath she had not known she was holding in. What was she thinking? He had said always, and with him, she should know by now that he meant it. That he kept his promises. "What… what about the press?"

"Well, remember how I suggested having the wedding here in the Loft?" he asked.

"Yeah, and I liked that idea," Beckett nodded. "Doing it here will allow us to keep it small and simple."

"Yeah, I know that," he sucked in a breath, raking his fingers through his hair as he averted his eyes for a second. "But doing it here will attract the eyes of the press… especially the paparazzi."

"Oh…," she gave him a blank look, then frowned as realization hit her. "Oh!"

"I know," Castle gave an understanding nod, stepping forward to put a hand on her arm, tenderly rubbing his thumb. "So… I was thinking about it… about what to do."

"And?"
"Well, and I sought my mother's advice."

"What did she suggest?"

"The Hamptons house," he said, looking at her with some trepidation. "We'd have privacy out there… and then we could have a beach wedding."

Beckett lowered her eyebrows and stared off into space, thinking. What did she want? To marry Richard Castle was the answer. But really? What kind of wedding did she want? After all, it was her day, her one and only day, since Rick was it for her… her one and done. Looking around the Loft, she thought it over. She looked up at him, and noticed his worried expression.

She gave him a soft smile and nodded. "Okay."

"We could do something else…," he quickly began, yet not hearing her answer.

"Rick… I said okay," she said, putting a hand on his mouth to silence him. He mumbled against her hand and she smiled. "Actually, I kind of like the idea." She paused and quirked up an eyebrow. "The beach is secluded, right?"

He bobbed his head, her hand still pressed against his mouth. She smiled, feeling his lips move against her palm. He hummed, and she removed her hand, shifting it up to hold the side of his face.

"You're really sweet sometimes, you know that?" she asked.

Castle laughed. "I do try."

She pushed up her toes and kissed him softly as his hands moved down to hold her hips, attempting to pull her closer. She wiggled out of his grasp and rolled her eyes at him.

"I said later tonight, Castle," she gave him a little heated glare. "Speaking of which," she fought a yawn. "I'm a little tired. The twins must be growing."

Castle chuckled and kissed her forehead.

"Alright, go take a nap, and I'll call Paula and the start the ball rolling on our wedding," he said, bringing her close for a hug.

She nodded against his chest. "When we finally finish unpacking, we'll start planning, okay… I promise," Beckett said, tilting her head up to look at him.

Castle brought his hand up and brushed her hair from her face. "Anything, Kate… anything for you," he said, then pulled her close and kissed her long and deeply.

Beckett melted into him, slowly snaking her arms around his neck as she deepened the kiss even more, loving how their bodies seemed to meld so perfectly together. Breaking away for air, she sighed and rested her forehead against his. "You spoil me, you know?" she said, her lips tugging upwards slightly.

"Yeah, I know," he gave her a quick peck. "But you're worth it."

She laughed, and pulled him to her for another soft kiss before reluctantly letting go of him and retreating to their bedroom for a late afternoon nap.

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"No!" she heard a shout, and knew it was him.

Confused as to what was going on, she marked her place and closed the book, slowly putting it down on the nightstand before shifting herself up into a sitting position and glancing over at the clock. 6:22. She perched on the edge of the bed, resting her hands on her tummy, and listened.

"Damn it, Gina, I said no!" he shouted again.

*Gina! What's that bitch doing here?* Beckett thought, a little ashamed she would use such language to describe Castle's editor… and ex. She clenched her jaw, recognizing there was still some bitterness down there about last summer.

Pushing herself up onto her feet, Beckett padded across the bedroom and stood by the door that led into the office. Gina was standing in the middle of the room—immaculately dressed, as always—hands on her hips as she glared at Castle. He was shimmering with anger behind his desk, leaning forward; his knuckles perched on the flat surface.

"I was merely making a suggestion, Richard," Gina was saying. "I was thinking of the potential sales."

Beckett watched as Castle sucked in a deep breath, clearly trying to rein in some of his anger. He backed up, and crossed his arms over his chest. "You don't get it, Gina," he snapped with a heated glare that almost matched her own. Beckett was a little surprised to see him like this. She had never seen Castle so angry before. Not like this. "She's not some floozy bimbo I'm using for arm-candy to get nice pictures."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Gina asked, sounding a little hurt.

Castle huffed and rolled his eyes. "I'm not marrying Kate for publicity or book sales," he explained, pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration. "I'm marrying her because I love her, and want to spend the rest of my life with her."

"You said that when you married me," Gina countered.

"Yeah? Well, I guess I was being stupid then," he sneered. "Look, Gina… I understand where you are coming from, but Kate is not a trophy to me, not something to flaunt around to say, hey, look what I got, or to gain sales for a book."

"Come on, Richard!" the blonde protested, shaking her head. "The story is too juicy to ignore. Sales will skyrocket once it's announced that the author of the Nikki Heat books is marrying the real-life inspiration for his character."

"No!" Castle literally stomped his foot in irritation at having to repeat himself. "Damn it, Gina… are you deaf? I said no, and I mean it. No. No. NO!"

"Richard?"

"Gina!" Castle grounded his teeth and glared hard at her. "You're my editor. It's your job to edit the work not to create it. We may have been married once—a mistake, if you ask me—so I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and pretend we didn't have this conversation." He paused, and swallowed hard. "You are not to use Beckett in any of the promotions. Just like Alexis, she is out of bounds territory… is that understood?"

Gina opened her mouth to object, but then closed it and gave a slight nod. Beckett watched as Castle sighed with relief and the tension in his shoulders evaporated. Gina stepped closer to the
desk and placed her hand along the edge, running her fingers along the surface, as if trying to remember what is had been like to be married to him, or to have loved him, if she ever had.

"You must really love her, then," Gina commented, glancing up at him with serious eyes.

Castle unfolded his arms and rubbed the back of his neck and gave a nod. "Yes, I do, more than anything," he said.

Gina let out a soft laugh, and Castle frowned. "Sorry," she said, giving him an apologetic look. "I just never thought I'd see the day."

Castle gave a grunt. "Come on, Gina, you knew that the playboy Richard Castle was all just an act, something to help sell the books. It was never the real me," he said.

"Yes, I know," Gina conceded. "Something I found out after we married."

"I may not have loved you like I should have, which I'm sorry for, but at least I can say I was faithful," he said with some bitterness.

Gina dropped her gaze from his and looked away. "I'm sorry," she mumbled. "I guess I misjudged you. Still do, I guess."

"Yeah, well, Beckett doesn't," he said. "Sure, we may butt heads sometimes, and have some pretty intense arguments, but in the end, she understands me, she knows me… and she loves me."

"I'm happy for you, Richard," Gina said, looking up, bringing a hand up to tuck a strand of blonde hair behind an ear. "Truly, I am. You deserve it. You really do."

Castle gave her a genuine smile of gratitude. "Thank you, Gina," he paused, and then sat down in his chair, still rubbing his neck. "Please see to it that my private life is left private."

Gina nodded. "I assume you've already contacted Paula about this?"

Castle nodded. Beckett had heard him make the call to Paula Haas, and had heard his side of the conversation. Apparently, that one had gone a lot better than the one with Gina. "She's a friend," he said. "Of course she knows. She, at least, knew enough not to suggest what you did."

"Again, I'm sorry, I misjudged the whole situation," Gina said. "I... I thought she was just…"


"I know that now, and I'm sorry, Richard," Gina reiterated.

Behind the door, Beckett grinned wickedly, loving how Castle wasn't giving Gina a pass for obviously suggesting that Black Pawn use their relationship to garner more sales for his books. She glanced back at Castle and watched as he flipped through some papers on the desk.

"Is this everything?" he asked, his tone completely business.

Gina gave a nod. "Yes. Four more books, with a potential of adding another two if those are hits… which with you, I have no doubt they will be."

Castle grinned. "Black Pawn's lucky that our awful married life together did not completely damage our professional relationship," he said as he picked up a pen and quickly signed the contract.
Four more Nikki Heat books, with the potential for two more! Beckett didn't know what to think of that latest development. With that now added to the puzzle, she wondered when that had been decided. Heat Rises wasn't even out yet, and Black Pawn was already signing him for more Nikki Heat books.

Gina stepped forward when he moved the papers across the desk towards her. She leaned down and looked over them and gave a nod. "That's everything," she said, picking the papers up and putting them into a folder.

"You'll have the complete and finished Heat Rises manuscript on your desk by tomorrow morning," Castle said, standing up and shaking her hand in a complete business manner, with no indications that they had been anything other than author and editor.

"Right," Gina nodded. "Good evening, then, Richard."

"You can see yourself out, yes?" Castle asked, raising an eyebrow. "I'd like to check on Kate, she's taking a nap."

Beckett froze. Oh great, he's going to come back in and find out that I was awake and probably heard the whole thing. That could be further from the truth. Hearing everything he said just made her heart pump even more profoundly with love for him. Castle had made it very clear that she was not something he wanted simply to flaunt and brag about, that he wanted her because he truly wanted to marry her because he loved her and not because it would make for good PR or boost sales.

"How's she doing?" Gina asked, obviously aware of the pregnancy.

"Good," Castle gave a nod as he moved around the desk, his back now to Beckett. She took the opportunity to admire his toned backside. He really did look great in jeans. She'd have to get him to wear them more often. "She gets tired a little easier, and is finally starting to show."

Gina nodded and looked away, her eyes looking sad. It was almost like the woman was envious of everything Beckett had that she had once had. If you cared about him so much, then you shouldn't have cheated on him, Beckett thought, knowing that she would never do such a thing to Castle. He meant too much to her, and simply knowing that he was with her for all the right reasons was beyond amazing.

"Well, I should get going," Gina said.

Castle nodded and Gina left the office. He stood there for a moment, running his hands through his hair and letting out a long frustrated sigh. "God, sometimes I wish I wasn't so damn famous," Beckett heard him groan.

She frowned. Did he think she hated that part of him? That she wished he were a faceless person in the crowd? Before she could be found out, she padded back for the bed and crawled back up on it. She propped her back up against the pillows and picked up her book. She was going to have to rectify his misinterpretation of how she felt about his fame.
Chapter 21

Beckett sat, perched on the edge of her desk, her eyes narrowed, focused on the murder board.

Greg Tennison—forty-two, divorced, middle management at some small time shipping company—had been found dead in his office earlier that morning. Lanie put the time of death between midnight and one the previous night; the cause of death… now that had been the interesting thing. Well, to be honest, the boys (and Castle, can't forget about Castle) had jumped to conclusions upon seeing the snake slowly wrapping itself around the man's torso.

"Hey Castle," Beckett had said with a smirk, when the snake poked it's head up and looked at them. "I think I found us a pet we can take home."

Castle had visibly paled, making it hard for her not to hold back her amusement. Lanie just shook her head and waited for animal control to come in and remove the reptile.

Once they had gotten back to the precinct after the on-scene questioning of the janitorial staff and some of the employees, who had been at work early, Castle had started right in on his absurd theories. She rolled her eyes as each theory became more convoluted and preposterous. She, on the other hand, clamped down on forming any theories of her own until Lanie had finished with the autopsy.

And that's what Beckett was doing now, waiting on Lanie for an autopsy report, and on the boys, who were following up on a lead to where the snake came from. She adjusted her weight on the edge of her desk and groaned, placing a hand on her middle. She was really starting to pay for skipping breakfast—the twins weren't happy, and neither was their father.

Speaking of which, where was Castle?

Beckett frowned and glanced around, not seeing him. He had wandered off at some point, talking animatedly on the phone. He seemed upset about something, and also appeared like he was trying to keep something from her. Beckett had been suspicious, but at the moment her attention had been on the case.

Sighing, Beckett turned back to the murder board and placed her other hand on her stomach, joining the one already there, promising the twins that as soon as daddy got back, they'd get fed. When she had exited the elevator with Castle and the boys earlier that morning, she had gotten some looks, everyone almost openly stared at the now visible bump that had formed during the two weeks since her move into the Loft.

Two weeks. The time just seemed to fly by. It only seemed like yesterday that she and Castle had finished unpacking the last box (oh wait, it had). Two weeks and she was completely moved in. And Castle was beginning to put some pressure on her to help out with the wedding plans, which is what had him MIA. She remembered now. He had said he was talking with their wedding planner, Gloria DeGrass—a witch if ever there was one—but she came highly recommended, and most importantly, Castle hadn't used her before. So they considered Gloria free of any bad vibes that had accompanied the previous wedding planner, who had orchestrated Castle's previous two marriages.

"Third time's the charm, eh?" Castle had winked at her before wandering off, already in a shouting match with the wedding planner over flower.

*I mean, how girly can he be?* Beckett sighed with a frown. She knew she should really be helping
out. It was her wedding, too. Her one and only. Some might say she was being unrealistic saying that, what with the divorce rate in this country—not to mention Castle's past record in matrimony, but she was determined to be a one and done kind of girl. And to have Rick Castle as her one and done.

Gloria was thrilled about their plans for having the wedding on the beach at the Hamptons house. Beckett thought she might have relented to that idea too quickly. Sure, it was more secluded, but didn't the paparazzi have like a permanent helicopter flying around the Hamptons spying on all the rich people there? At least that's what she was led to believe by the gossip magazines that she occasionally indulged in—one of her few guilty pleasures. Beckett was a little worried that the paparazzi would get wind of their nuptials and camp outside his beach house, waiting for them to arrive.

Not to mention the fact she was pregnant. She did not want to share that news with the entire public. At least not yet. The whole 12th precinct already knew, but that was a given, seeing as they had all gawked at her this morning. Everyone, who had not been in the know, had been shocked. She had managed to wear loose blouses during the past weeks, hiding the growing evidence of her condition, but this morning they had been in a rush, so she had been unable to take the time to select carefully. As a result, her condition was painfully obvious.

Grinding her teeth, Beckett scowled at nothing, wishing things could be easier. Month number four was rapidly approaching, so she was showing…and much more than she had been prepared for. Dr. Elam told her it was because she was carrying twins, and that she should be prepared for growing a lot larger—and quicker—than most other women (something Beckett wasn't too thrilled about).

"Penny for your thoughts?"

"Huh?" Beckett blinked and glanced to her left, finding Castle standing beside her, his eyes sparkling as he milked in the image of her sitting on the edge of her desk with her hands resting on her still small, yet obvious, baby bump.

"You looked far away," Castle said, stepping closer as she scooted over to make room for him. He lifted himself up and plopped down beside her with a smirk and wiggle of his eyebrows.

"Hungry?"

Beckett ran her lower lip under her teeth. "That obvious?"

"Well, there's a lovely stack of waffles back home that got ignored this morning, so I'm guessing yes," he blinked innocently, making her feel guilty for skipping breakfast, something she was now greatly regretting.

"I know… sorry," she murmured, turning her head towards him, leaning in closer. "I know you woke up early to make them for me."

Castle shrugged. "Well, just don't come complaining to me when Dr. Elam berates you when you fail your check-up next week," he said, smirking.

Beckett snorted and rolled her eyes. "I'm not going to fail," she paused and frowned. "Though you're probably right about me getting a lecture. After dinner last night, my dad said I was too skinny for a pregnant woman." She glanced up at him, to hear his opinion on the matter.

He ran his fingers over his mouth, like he was zipping them shut. "I'm staying clear of that one, Detective," he grinned. "Though… to be honest, I wouldn't mind a little more meat on the bones…"
mainly for selfish reasons."

"Oh," she raised an eyebrow, curious now. "And what sort of reasons would those be?"

Castle didn't fail her. He leaned closer, invading her personal space, something she had ceased to admonish him for. "Gives me more to fondle during foreplay… not to mention grab a hold of during… other things," he whispered, his mouth close to her ear, his breath warm against her skin.

Beckett involuntarily shivered, her eyes closing as her mouth dropped, her traitorous subconscious putting images into her mind. When she came too, she saw Castle leaning back, a smug grin plastered on his face. She narrowed her eyes and gave him her infamous glare.

"Just for that, you ain't getting any tonight, mister," she quipped back with a little devious smile that betrayed her hollow threat. Oh, she was going to have her wicked way with him tonight.

Her smile grew wider in triumph as Castle groaned and shuddered, immediately responding to her lust filled gaze. Swallowing hard, he averted his gaze to regain his composure. "So," he spoke up, his voice breathy with suppressed want. "Lunch?"

Beckett nodded, pushing herself up off the desk, but deciding to have a little fun before she completely gave in to her hunger. "You know," she said turning to face him, placing her hands on his chest and fiddling with his lapel. "We could go down to the corner, I think there's a hotdog vendor there."

"But you hate street vendor hotdogs…," Castle objected, narrowing his eyes suspiciously. "Plus I don't think I could handle watching you eat a hotdog right now… too much imagery for my poor little mind to handle."

"Aw, poor baby," she quirked up her lips and laughed softly, loving how he seemed so enthralled by her laughter. "Is that a request, Rick?" Beckett clicked her tongue on the end of his name.

Castle gulped and visibly grew flushed in arousal. But then that cocky smile spread over his lips and he looked up at her with his dark cobalt eyes. "Is that an offer, Kate?" he challenged.

Beckett held back a grin and patted his cheek. "You'll see," was all she said, before stepping back to allow both of them to "cool off". God, just teasing him now got her all hot and bothered—or maybe it was the hormones. Either way, she was currently turned on, which was a bad thing, since they were at work.

"Alright," Castle sucked in a deep breath and stood up, raking his fingers through his hair. "Lunch...?"

"Yeah, lunch," Beckett nodded, placing her hands on her tummy. "These two are starving… not to mention me."

"So… um… how about the taqueria down the street?"

"Juan's?" Beckett asked. "Is that where you got those burritos from that other night?"

Castle sat up and grinned. "I knew you loved those!"

"Shut up, Castle," she rewarded his glee with a little glare.

He wiggled his eyebrows, pleased with himself, as the small smile on his face told her. Taking a step closer to her, he tentatively placed an arm over her shoulder, glancing around to see if anyone
was watching. Beckett chewed on her lower lip and grabbed her coat as they walked towards the elevator.

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"Kate?"

"Castle!" growled Beckett as she stomped away from him, marching into the break room. She didn't even need to look back to know that he was following.

She could not believe he had just done that… and right in front of the boys and the Captain. God, she was so embarrassed. No. Mortified. Yes. Mortified was actually a better word for it. And like the child he was, he didn't even know what he had done. It aggravated her to no end. Turning around to face him, she planted her arms across her chest, her stance one of determination and power.

Castle faltered a bit when he stepped through the threshold of the door, his eyes taking in her, discovering that he was in trouble. Beckett clenched her jaw and her muscles tensed.

"Close the door," her voice was barely restrained with suppressed fury.

He gulped, clearly terrified. But he obeyed her request, shutting the door, and then, without instruction, closed the blinds, giving them absolute privacy. Part of her had been dreading this… the inevitable first fight. She knew it was coming. She just hadn't expected it to happen at work. Which, in the end, just made her more pissed.

She fumed, watching as he took a long calming breath, preparing for what was to come as he finished. Turning back to her, he looked up at her with his big soulful eyes, trying to soften her steel. It didn't work.

"I can't believe you just said that!" she snapped, breathing heavily through her nostrils.

"Kate…"

"No," Beckett shook her head. "No. You just don't get it... do you, Castle? This is my job! It's what I do."

Castle lowered his eyebrows, turning into serious Castle. She stammered, feeling the need to back up, not knowing what to expect. The times they had gotten into a heated argument, it was startling how different he was. Beckett was always unprepared for what was to happen when this occurred. She swallowed and waited.

"This is different, Kate," he huffed, breathing heavily, his frustration radiating off his every pore. "You are different. Damn it, don't you see that?"

Beckett scowled. "All because I've agreed to marry you doesn't mean I'm surrendering my free will!" Beckett struck back. "And last time I checked, it's still my life. Not yours!"

Castle took in a shaking breath and raked his fingers through his hair. "But it's not, Kate," he said, his voice pained and frustrated. "Not anymore."

"Oh," Beckett raised her eyebrow, suddenly realizing what he was going on about. "Oh…," she frowned, and glared at him. "What the hell?"

"Kate, you're pregnant," he protested. "You shouldn't be chasing after bad guys like this. Think
about the twins."

She stalked up to him and slapped him across the face… slapped him hard. "How dare you," she seethed. It was low, so low of him to use the twins against her like this. Damn it, she knew what she was doing. She’d been trained for this. This had been her life. She knew what she was doing!

Beckett immediately turned her back to him, not wanting him to see the tears in her eyes. God, it hurt so much to slap him like that, especially when she knew, deep down, beneath her anger and stubbornness, that he was only trying to look out for her… and the twins.

She lowered her head against her chest, feeling ashamed, but not having the courage to turn around and take it back, and ask for his forgiveness. She couldn't take it back. Not now, when the course had been set. Heaving in a deep breath, she tried to calm herself, thankful that he remained silent.

Choking back her sobs, and blinking—clearing her eyes—Beckett straightened her back and shoulders and turned back to face him. His hand was up on his cheek, rubbing it tenderly. Her eyes flashed with regret, seeing the red mark her strike had left. But then she remembered what he’d done, how he had embarrassed her… that he was trying to make decisions for her. She might be pregnant, but she was still capable of making her own decisions.

"Castle, go home," Beckett ordered, her voice almost breaking as she remembered the last time she had said that. It had been after the summer, when they had reunited, her finding him over a body with a gun in his hand, handcuffing him and then heatedly interrogating him over more than just the murder.

"Kate?" his voice was soft, his eyes pleading.

"No," she shook her head, using her long hair to obscure her face from his eyes. "Just… just go home, Castle."

Beckett risked a glance up at him, watching as he swallowed hard and looked away in thought. He clenched his jaw tight and his eyes flirted up to her and he swallow again, nodding. "Alright…," Castle said, giving up. And then with that, saying nothing else, he left.

She stood there in complete shock. Never, in both their working and personal relationship, had she seen Castle give up so easily. It was unnerving. Her mouth dropped and she shook her head, completely confused. Turning away from the empty door, she placed her hands on the edge of the counter, supporting herself as she took in several deep breaths, attempting to recover from this fight. It had left more emotional blows than she had expected.

The sound of someone knocking on the door pulled her back out of her befuddled mind. She looked up, hurriedly wiping the tears from her eyes. "Yeah?"

Esposito respectfully looked away, giving her time to compose herself. When she took in his expression, she knew that he was curious about what had happened. Ryan and him had probably seen Castle storm out and leave. Thankfully, when he opened his mouth to speak, he left it alone.

"Ryan's track down the snake guy," he said. "Captain thinks the vic might have uncovered an endanger animal smuggling operation."

"That snake is an endanger species?" she asked, trying to chuckle, but any amusement she might have found at that was made mute by her emotionally draining argument with Castle.

Esposito nodded. "Yeah, from South America. So… you coming with us?"
Beckett hardened herself, steeling her emotions and doing what she did best, pushing away her personal feelings and bringing up Detective Beckett. "You bet, I wanna catch this scumbag," she said, pushing away from the counter and marching towards the door, prepared to go out and do her job.

XXX

She was shaking. Her whole body trembling with complete and utter horror. It was supposed to be a normal pick up of a suspect... granted they had been thinking he could be their guy. The autopsy report had come up after lunch, it had revealed a deadly toxin in the bloodstream that the lab techs then found out came from the very same endangered South American snake that they had found slithering around the corpse.

But the takedown of the animal smuggler had left Beckett rattled. She pushed her way into the restroom, leaving the interrogation to Esposito and Ryan. She needed to be alone right now. She needed to let what just happened to sink in and register with her mind.

Pounding through a stall door, she collapsed on the toilet seat and crumbled, allowing everything out as she relived everything, how close she had come.

When no answer came from the door, except the sounds footsteps scrambling away, Beckett had nodded to the boys. Esposito kicked the door down, and like normal (without thinking), she had charged in, gun raised. Ryan and Esposito were behind her, shouting out, identifying themselves as NYPD. Moving purely on instinct and training, Beckett surveyed the dark room, spotting the back door, hearing footsteps. Before the boys could take note, she was taking off after the suspect.

But something was wrong. When she turned the corner, she had somehow missed the sound of a shotgun clocking. Ryan had barely been in time to pull her back before the blast shot out. Her eyes had gone wide in terror, and one hand dropped to her middle. Realization struck her as Ryan and Esposito charge around the corner, guns raised, shouting, telling the smuggler to put the shotgun down. The man had complied, but Beckett had been left shaken. She had been in a breath's distance from getting shot, point blank in the chest, by a shotgun.

The memories of the encounter came flooding back to her as she broke down in the bathroom stall. God, Castle had been right! she screamed at herself. He was right. She was wrong. She sobbed mercilessly. She had been so stubborn, wanting to maintain her independence that she had put her unborn children in danger. Now she knew how Castle had felt, and why he had been worried. Hell, she was almost scared to death about what had almost happened. She vowed that she'd be more careful in the future, and would voluntarily take desk duty when she got further along (though she wondered if the Captain would force it on her early, due—in no small part—to how today had gone down).

Beckett didn't know how long she had been in there, but when she came out, Ryan was taking down the murder board, putting it in a case storage box, telling her that the perp had confessed to killing Greg Tennison when he had stumbled upon the smuggling operation. Esposito was taking the guy down to booking.

She nodded absently and went over to her desk, picking up her coat and purse. "If you don't need me, I'm going home... I... I have some broken fences to mend," she mumbled under her breath, glancing up to Ryan with a worried expression. She rarely talked personal stuff with them, but they were like brothers.

He nodded, giving her an understanding look. "Good luck," he offered softly.
A sad smile spread across her lips, wondering if he'd had similar arguments with Jenny when they discussed the possibilities of getting injured in the line of duty. "Thanks," she sniffled, and then pulled her coat on and grabbed her stuff. Glancing back, she saw Montgomery leaning against the doorframe into his office, watching her. She bit her lower lip, wondering, again, how long it was going to be until he benched her and put her on desk duty.

Getting into the elevator, she tugged her coat tighter, hugging herself and closing her eyes to keep back the tears and horror of what could have happened. She felt like a complete fool. If only she had listened to Castle.

Beckett was on autopilot, and almost drove herself back to her old apartment building before remembering she didn't live there anymore. Since she had been driving in the wrong direction, it took her over an hour to reach the Loft, and then another twenty minutes to get into the underground parking garage—she had forgotten the resident code to open the gates. Thankfully, Phil (the doorman) had been nearby, heard her loud cursing, and came to investigate. He quickly saw what the problem was and helped her out, punching in his code to open the gates up for her.

She gave him a quick thank you, then sped down into the garage and found a spot.

The ride up in the elevator seemed to take forever. She kept going through scenarios in her mind of how the rest of the evening would unfold. Beckett wanted to apologize and tell him he had been right, and that she'd be more careful... but nothing in her mind came up with any pleasant outcomes. She had the nagging feeling that this might be the first night since she moved in that she'd sleep alone.

When she finally arrived at the Loft, it was silent, saved for the stereo system. It was playing the 2nd Movement from Beethoven's 7th Symphony, which oddly almost felt appropriate. All the lights, except for some in the kitchen, were off. The glow coming from there softly illuminated the open lounge area.

Being as quiet as possible, Beckett slipped out of her coat, hung it up on the coatrack, and put her purse down on the door side credenza, along with her keys, which rattled and made more noise than she had been hoping. She froze, her eyes darting around to see if anyone would appear. When no one did, she relaxed, just a bit. She was still tense and overly jumpy due to how close she had come from getting shot.

She walked quietly across the open area, ignoring the stereo, figuring she'd probably come out to read some and unwind—if Rick was asleep—figuring it was best not to wake him if he was. And she needed something to help her relax. As she shuffled through the office, she decided she'd grab one of Rick's books. They had always helped her calm down and soothe her reeling thoughts (something she'd never tell him).

Pushing open the bedroom door, she paused, squinting in the dark. He wasn't there. Frowning, she tried to suppress the rising panic. Her mind quickly retraced her steps. It was dark, and the Loft was quiet except for Beethoven drifting out from the stereo systems in the open lounge area.

The couch.

Guilt rose up in her as she thought he had banished himself to the couch, thinking she would kick him out of bed once she had gotten back (if she had come back). She knew herself... at least, the old Beckett, who would have sulked and pouted, stubbornly refusing to admit her mistake, even when confronted head on with it. Now, this Beckett, the one Castle had helped make, wanted nothing more than to seek his forgiveness and crawl into bed with him, reminding herself that she was, in fact, still alive.
She flicked on the bedroom light and went to the walk in closet, depositing her shoes by the foot of the bed as she went. She stripped out of her work clothes and grabbed one of his large t-shirts she had taken to wearing to bed. Then, in nothing but her underwear and his t-shirt, Beckett padded back out to the living room. Approaching the couch with caution, she peered over the edge and her suspicions were confirmed.

Castle was on his back, his eyes closed, his chest slowly rising and falling as he slept. He didn't look peaceful, though… far from it. It looked like he was having nightmares. She couldn't blame her, especially with his over active imagination; she could only guess at the hundreds of scenarios his creative writer's mind was conjuring up.

Tiptoeing around the couch, Beckett hunted for the fancy universal remote. Locating it on the floor by the left arm of the couch, she fumbled around with the myriad of buttons and controls, before finally finding the dial that operated the stereo volume. She lowered the volume and then turned the stereo off. Placing the remote on an end table, Beckett returned her attention to the sleeping Rick Castle.

She smiled softly as she gazed down at him, secretly loving it when she got to watch him sleep. However, right now she wanted to wake him. His brow was creased in his sleep, and it was painfully obvious he was having a very, very bad dream. He was still dressed in his purple button down shirt and black slacks. His blazer was thrown across the back of the couch and his shoes rested, lopsided, underneath the coffee table, where a half drunk glass of—she sniffed it—scotch sat.

Bending over him, she ran her hand along the side of his face, feeling clammy and wet skin. Oh, she had really upset him, hadn't she? She wondered if he always got this anxious whenever they went into tense situations. Brushing his damp hair away from his brow, Beckett leaned over him and kissed his forehead, trying to soothe him.

Castle's head shook slowly, as if he was trying to deny the tender reassurance of her touch. After that, Beckett couldn't help herself, she climbed up onto the couch and wiggled her way into him, snuggling closer, her arms wrapping around him, needing to cling to him. She buried her face in his shoulder and breathed in his scent, needing him. Slowly, she moved her lips to his throat, and began to kiss him softly.

He unconsciously hummed in approval. Beckett bit her lower lip and smiled. She so very much loved having this power over him. Slinking her arms around him, Beckett buried herself more into him, wanting to simply cease the difference between them, wanting his warm embrace, to feel that affirmation of love and life that came when he held her.

Wetting her lips, she went back to work, tediously kissing her way up his throat, not really trying to wake him, just needing to taste him. Her heart thumped profoundly in her chest as her mouth made it's way up to his jaw and across his cheek, pausing at the corner of his mouth. She sucked on his lower lip slowly, before using her tongue to probe past his lips, opening his mouth and kissing him deeply as he slept.

A moan rumbled up from the bottom of his throat, traversing their connected mouths. Beckett groaned in want, and adjusted herself to straddle his sleeping form, moving her legs around his middle and gently bucking her hips against him. Castle gasped and his eyes opened wide in surprise, only to close when she descended on him again, ramming her mouth into his and kissing him even more deeply than she had been when he was sleeping.

His hands moved, traveling up and down the curve of her back as she continued to explore his mouth. They moaned and hummed together, sweetly swimming in the sensual motions of their
bodies as they melded together in their embrace.

Beckett sighed and pulled back, resting her forehead against his as his hands came up to brush her hair back, his fingers tangling with her long brunette strands.

"Oh, Castle… Rick… I'm sorry," she murmured, sharing a breath with him. "Oh god… I am so sorry."

Before he could say anything, Beckett captured his lips in another kiss. This one filled with regret and longing. He held her to him, kissing her back, and then sighed, letting his body relax.

"What happened?" he asked gently as she settled her head against his chest, her ear resting above his heart, listening to its steady rhythm.

"You were right; I was wrong… is what happened," she groaned, shutting her eyes. "The perp, Castle… he… he took a shot at me—point blank, with a shotgun. I… I could have died. I… I… Oh, Castle?" The tears from her breakdown in the restroom back at the precinct returned and she turned her face into his shirt, wetting it with her tears.

Castle let out a breath and held her, letting her shed her tears against his shirt. Beckett lost herself in it, completely letting go. He was the only one, saved for perhaps her father, she did not mind seeing her like this. When she had cried herself dry, Beckett sniffled and wiped her eyes, taking in his wet shirt.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled. "You're shirt's all wet now."

"It's okay," he said, rubbing her back as she tilted her head up to look at him. "I'm sorry, too."

She knitted her eyebrows together, confused. "For what?"

"For leaving," Castle explained. "I… I was just so frustrated that you wouldn't listen that… that I couldn't take it." He paused, swallowing hard as he admonished himself. "I should have stayed."

"I was the one who shouted at you to leave, it… it wasn't your fault," Beckett replied, turning away to rest her head against his shoulder, breathing in his scent. She clutched at his shirt in a tight fist.

"Do… do you forgive me?"

"You have nothing to be forgiven for, Kate," Castle said.

"Yes… I do!" Beckett snapped, pushing up to look down at him, baffled by his reaction. He should be gloating in his rightness now, not comforting her. "I'm a terrible mother, Rick." She placed her hands on her stomach. "I put the twins in danger by going out there and acting rashly. I… I should have been more reasonable and careful."

"Esposito and Ryan were there, and you made it out safe and sound," Castle said, sitting up to pull her into his lap. She resisted at first, but relented, leaning her head against his shoulder as she sighed in defeat. "They had your back and you're here now, ready to learn from what happened, not ignoring it."

She nodded. "I'll be more careful next time," she whispered. "I… I promise."

"Okay," he inclined his head, effectively ending the conversation. "You hungry? Have you eaten anything?"

She shook her head, no to both questions. He made a move to get up, but she held him down, not
yet ready to let go and be removed from his warm embrace.

"Can… can we just stay here for a little while longer?" Beckett asked in a quiet voice, hating how weak and needy she sounded.

"Sure," Castle's warm voice replied. He kissed her on the temple and then leaned back, resting his back against the couch and allowing her to snuggle up against him.

Beckett closed her eyes as she laid her head against his chest, curling up, her arms wrapped around his waist, her legs tangling with his. "Rick?"

"Yes?" he rubbed his hand down her back in response, so affectionate and loving.

"I love you," she whispered. "Even when I'm a complete bitch… I love you."

His chuckle shook them and she smiled softly. "And I love you, Kate… Always," he kissed the top of her head. "Now, rest."

She sighed and obeyed him, closing her eyes and pushing away the images of nightmares, instead calling up the memories of being with him… and being loved.
Chapter 22

The soft pitter-patter of rain against the windows, though quiet, was still enough to bring Beckett out of her pleasant dreams. A small yawn broke through, assisting in waking her up. Slowly, Beckett blinked in the dim light, stretching and turning her head around, a little confused—at first—to why she was on the couch and not in the comfort of their bed with Rick's (yes, she thought of him as Rick now in her inner thoughts) warm body resting oh so close to hers.

Then, ever so slowly, the fog of sleep receded, and she remembered the events of the previous day. She sat up rather quickly as it all rushed back to her. The anger, the adrenaline, the panic, the terror, and the grief… it all came at once. Suddenly everything was dizzy. She was lightheaded and her tummy made a growling noise, adding to her already bombarded consciousness. Taking a slow deep breath, Beckett calmed her rattled nerves and reminded herself that she was safe and sound at home…

*Home.* A small smile touched her lips. She had a home. She really, really did have a home. This place… Castle's Loft was her home.

Her tummy decided to grumble again; the twins, no doubt, angry about not being fed since lunch.

"Ah, someone's hungry!"

Beckett knitted her eyebrows together and arched her neck over the back of the couch. She smiled wide and happy, seeing him standing behind the kitchen island counter, a frying pan on the stove.

"Watcha making?" she asked, still kind of groggy. She kneaded the heels of her hands over her eyelids as another yawn escaped.

Castle chuckled. "You're so cute," he quirked up his lips and winked, then grabbed the handle of the pan and shook it a bit, making the contents sizzle.

The aroma drifted across to her. "Bacon!" Beckett perked up, beaming like a child on Christmas. She slipped off the couch and quickly padded across the cold floor, her mouth already salivating.

"Have I told you lately that I love you?"

"In fact, yes," Castle grinned a silly boyish grin. "But I always like hearing it."

"Well, I do," Beckett asserted, moving up behind him and snaking her arms around his waist. She hugged onto him and kissed his neck. "Thank you… for earlier."

Castle sighed. She couldn't tell if it was from relief or contentment. "We both needed it," he replied softly, turning to wrap an arm around her waist and hold her against his side as he dipped down to give her a sweet kiss on the lips.

Beckett moaned into his mouth and fisted his shirt, pulling him closer. The kiss quickly deepened. She darted her tongue out and licked his bottom lip, asking for entrance. He surrendered, parting his lips and soon their tongues were dancing together. Castle groaned into her mouth and she smiled, pleased with herself and the power she held over him. Beckett had always had this power over men, but it had never pleased her as much as it had with Castle.

Thunder sounded in the distance and the pitter-patter of the rain against the windows seemed to increase dramatically.
"Bacon?" he gasped, looking torn between tending to the sizzling strips and giving the interior of her mouth a more thorough inspection.

"Bacon," she nodded, smiling softly, and kissing the corner of his mouth, before stepping back and glancing for the clock. "What time is it?"

"Um… about eleven, why?"

"Oh…," she laughed softly. "I thought it was later… a lot later. How long did I sleep?"

"About an hour," Castle answered, then his face took on a decidedly devious look to it. Beckett planted her hands on her hips and gave him a stern look. "Richard Castle… what did you do?"

"Nothing bad," he assured her. "Just… um… took some photos."

"What?"

"Just some photos," he repeated. "You… you look so peaceful laying on the couch that I just had to take some pictures to immortalize the moment."

"Oh," her scowled faltered… then she remembered how little dressed she really was. "Castle…!"

"Hey there, calm down! I did not take naughty pictures, Kate…," he paused and he smiled mischievously and wiggled his eyebrows. "Though, if you're interested in doing that later… I'm game."

Beckett huffed and rolled her eyes. "Ain't happening, Castle. Just be thankful I even let you see me naked—"

"Not to mention all the other things I'm know allowed to touch… and do," he interrupted.

Her eyes went wide and she could already feel the faint hints of a blush appear on her cheeks. Castle laughed softly and winked at her. Beckett took a deep calming breath and turned away, heading for the refrigerator, looking for the carton of milk. When she opened the refrigerator and didn't see it in it's standard place, Beckett groaned and leaned forward, pushing some leftovers out of the way and finding the milk in the far back of the refrigerator. As she reached in to pull it out, the bottom of Castle's t-shirt rode up on her back. From behind her, she heard Castle whistle.

"I like the pink," he said, and she could hear the open leer in his voice.

Straightening back up, letting the shirt fall back down to cover her backside and the pink panties she was wearing, she turned back to him and cocked her head, quirking an eyebrow up. "Gotta problem with pink, Rick?"

"No… none at all," Castle crooned, his eyes playful. "Oh, by the way, I like the shirt, too… nice touch." He winked.

Beckett gave him a tight smile, but her eyes betrayed how much fun she was having. Of course, he could tell and he smirked triumphantly. Reaching up into the cupboard, Beckett retrieved too glasses. "So, are we just having bacon?" she asked, noticing there was nothing else out as she poured both of them a glass of milk.

"Um… no," he said, just as the toaster popped, sending two roasted slices of whole wheat flying
up. Castle did a little pump with his fist and quickly retrieved them, then pulled out a jar of peanut butter.

She stared, puzzled, as he began to spread the peanut butter over the toast. Castle noticed her staring as he glanced up.

"Yes?"

"What are you doing?"

"Making peanut butter and bacon sandwiches," Castle replied with a smirk to his lips, like it was obvious. "What does it look like?"

"Peanut butter and bacon… sandwiches?" she furrowed her brow, looking at him like he was insane.

"They're so good, trust me," he assured her with an easy grin. "Plus, they're a great late night snack."

"What about a banana peanut butter sandwich?"

"I've already made the bacon, dear," Castle looked over at her with a raised eyebrow. "It seems a shame to waste it when I got two dull and ordinary peanut butter sandwiches just waiting to become amazing."

"Amazing, huh?" And wait? Did he just dear her? He'd started doing that a lot lately. Beckett narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms. She was going to have to put a stop to that.

"Not just amazing, my dear detective, but amazingly amazing!" Castle grinned widely.

"You've been reading Douglas Adams again, haven't you?" she asked with a bemused smile.

"You got me. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy… it really is a mind bogglingly amazingly amazing book," he answered, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Just make your sandwiches, crazy man," Beckett laughed, unable to help but smile at his child-like antics. She leaned over and grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and pulled him over for a quick kiss. His hands dropped to her hips and he tried deepening the kiss. Beckett chuckled and shook her head pushing him away. "Stop that, I'm hungry."

He pouted, but nodded.

"But perhaps after I eat," she threw him a bone, "we can make out on the couch like two horny teenagers."

That had him smiling again, his eyes sparkling in the way she loved so much. Beckett could not help but laugh at herself, and how free she was around him. Lanie was right. Castle was good for her.

Castle quickly finished up the bacon, and then, with a dramatic flourish to his movements, he placed generous amounts between the toasted whole-wheat slices (both of which he had lathered thick with peanut butter). Part of Beckett was dreading the calories and saturated fat from such a late night snack, but seeing as she was supposed to be "packing it on" (as Castle had so offensively put it a couple of days ago—she punished him for that… though not too much, after all he still was useful in satisfying certain urges she had late at night), Beckett decided she needed to stop being
such a worrywart. All in all, despite some of Castle's more—to put it nicely—"eccentric" gourmet tastes, Beckett had actually been eating a lot better since moving in.

They ate at the island countertop, sitting on the barstools and bumping knees, acting very much like lovesick teenagers. Beckett found this side of her amusing, but it was nice to just let go and have fun. And… despite her skepticism, Castle's peanut butter and bacon sandwiches were actually okay. It was either that, or she was just really hungry and it really didn't matter what she ate. She was just happy she got extra bacon.

Unexpectedly, the memory of almost getting shot returned in a mad rush, nearly knocking the air out of her lungs. Beckett gasped and put down her nearly done sandwich, her knuckles turning white as she clutched onto the countertop.

"Kate?" Castle's concerned voice broke through.

"Oh… Rick," she slipped off her barstool and would have collapsed onto the floor if Castle hadn't caught her. She leaned against him, burying her face into his chest, seeking comfort in his strength.

She choked back a sob. "I… I could have died today," she whimpered, hating herself for succumbing to could haves. She fist his shirt in her hand and held him closer. His arms wrapped around her, locking behind her back and holding her up as her legs gave way. She cried into his shoulder, wetting his shirt, yet again with tears.

Sniffling, she backed away and wiped at her eyes. "Look at me, I'm a mess," she shivered. "I'm a trained homicide detective… dammit! I should not be wailing like this."

"Shh, Kate," Castle soothed her, caressing the back of her head. "It's alright to let your emotions out. You don't always have to be the hard-ass detective. Right now… just for right now… be Kate Beckett, the woman… not the detective."

Beckett nodded into his shoulder and sighed. "Thank you," she murmured into his ear, looking down and playing her fingers across the button on his shirt.

"It's what I'm here for, Kate," he answered into her hair. "I'm not just your partner at work, but in life now."

"Yeah, I guess so," she smiled. "I sometimes forget that."

His hand came down and gently caressed her jaw before tilting her head up so that she was looking at him. "Whatever you need, Kate… whenever… wherever… I'll always be there for you… always."

She smiled up at him. "There you go again, saying that word," she said. "Always."

"I say it because it's the truth, Kate," Castle said, his eyes proving his words.

Pushing up on her toes, Beckett made contact with his mouth, silencing him before he could continue to talk. She kissed him softly and slowly, savoring the flavor of his mouth, mixed with peanut butter and bacon. She smiled, and deepened the kiss, leaning into him.

Castle held her to him, and before she knew it that they were back on the couch. She backed away and let out a hot breath, suddenly very turned on. "I need you," she growled hotly, and pushed him back into the couch, moving over him to straddle his hips.

Bending down, she rammed her mouth against his, grabbing at his shirt, working on the buttons.
Castle's hands ran down her sides and grabbed her hips, holding her against him as she rocked, rubbing her core against his burning desire. She gasped, feeling the intensity of his own need.

"Rick!"

Swept back up in a searing kiss, Beckett removed the last button and rubbed her hands up and down his chest and abdomen. His stomach was a little softer than it had been a month ago (he'd been having too many sympathy cravings with her). Though, she really couldn't care less. Castle, no matter how he was, was hers, and she wanted him. Anyway he was. And besides, she enjoyed the fact that he'd splurge wit her—it made her feel less guilt when she did.

Castle was the first to break away, his mouth trailing a blazing hot trail across her cheek and jaw. Beckett shuddered and moaned, arching her back as his hands ran up under the large t-shirt she was wearing. His fingers soon discovered she had no bra on, and he groaned in want, bucking his hips up into her.

"Kate," he groaned, when she let him breathe. He immediately descended on her neck, finding that place just beneath her ear that drove her wild.

She clutched onto his hair, gasping and grunting as her want soared higher and higher into the stratosphere. Outside, the storm thundered and clamored, seemingly rising with the same intensity as they were. Castle growled, and his mouth latched onto her pulse point. That's it… she was done for. Alice was going to tumbled down the rabbit hole.

Beckett's mouth dropped and she let out a loud breathy moan, shocked by the rippling pleasure that was dancing all throughout her body.

"Castle?" she trembled with want. "I… I… I need you…"

He gripped her tightly and she squirmed, not wanting to move, but soon relented, letting him shift her unto her back, resting her beneath him on the couch. She reached down and tugged on his belt buckle. Castle's hands joined hers and together they unclasped the buckle and unzipped his pants. He wiggled around, kicking his pants off and letting them fall of onto the floor.

Beckett leaned back into the couch cushions and opened her legs for him, smiling as he settled between them, pressing himself against her. She groaned, her head pushing back as she felt the heat of his arousal. God, she loved it how she excited him!

His hands were all over her, running up under her shirt to touch her breasts and rub her flesh. She was eager to return the favor. Pushing his shirt back over his shoulders, she ran her fingertips down his chest, fiddling with the small hairs and tickling him.

Castle chuckled. "No fair… no tickling," he grunted, and then moved, shifting, his need brushing against her core.

They both gasped at the sensation and she reached down, pulling up the hem of the t-shirt, revealing her pink panties. Castle groaned as he moved a hand between them and felt how warm and wet she was.

Grabbing his face, Beckett pulled him back to her, kissing him hard and desperate. She wanted him
to take her right there. It was more than just her need to make love with him. After almost getting shot, she wanted to feel him, feel herself, to know that she was alive and could still feel.

Beckett felt Castle's cheeks flush with a burning need that matched her own, his fingers skimming down her body to play with the edge of her panties. They broke away, gasping for air. He rested his forehead against hers and they locked eyes. His dark blues were fogged with desire and need, with love in there as well… always there. She had just never allowed herself to see it before.

"Here?" he asked, his breath hot and moist against her cheek.

"Yes, here," she said, nodding while she lifted her hips as his fingers pushed under the waistband of her panties.

*BANG*

"Wha—what was that?" Castle gasped, his head jerking up, his eyes darting about.

"Alexis?" Beckett asked, her cheeks turning red with premature embarrassment about being discovered by the teen.

Castle shook his head. "She's spending the night at Paige's."

"Martha?"

"She's staying over at some friend's place that's closer to her acting school," he said, his eyebrows coming together. "Something about wanting to make sure that construction workers don't mess up something… I don't remember."

"So we're alone?"

"Yes," he nodded. "It was probably just the storm outside…"

"Probably," Beckett agreed with a nod, smiling up at him and caressing the side of his face.

"Okay…," he sighed, and then turned his attention back to her. "Now, where were we?" Castle finished his question by dipping down to kiss her sweetly. Beckett arched herself up into him, his hands running down her again, searching for the edges of her panties.

*BANG*

"God! What the hell?" Castle groaned, his head shooting up again.

The noise was quickly followed by another and another, each in quick succession of the previous one.

"The door!" Beckett gasped, finally making the proper connection through her pleasure fogged brain.

"Dammit," Castle hissed. "Who the hell could that be at this time of night?"

He pushed up and rolled off the couch, cursing. Beckett groaned and shivered, now suddenly cold without his warm body over her. Castle grabbed his pants and tugged them back on as she watched. He leaned down and cupped her cheek and kissed her quickly.

"This ain't over," he assured her.
"It better not be," she quipped back with a teasing smirk.

Castle grinned, his eyes sparkling as he stood back up. He quickly darted around the couch and disappeared, rushing for the door. "I'm coming! I'm coming!" he shouted, clearly frustrated and iritated with the interruption.

Beckett leaned back against the cushions, adjusting her hair, waiting for him to answer the door, slam it in whoever-it-was's face, and then returned to her. She heard him groan and unlock the door. The next thing she heard nearly made her jump with surprise.

"Finally, Richard!" came a shrill voice. "What in the world took you so long? I've been knocking for nearly fifteen minutes."

"Mer—Meredith?" Beckett heard Castle stammer in surprise.

Before she knew it, Beckett was sitting up and peeking over the edge of the couch. She needed to see this to believe it. As her eyes locked on the foyer, she spotted the red-haired witch.

"Of course, it's me, silly," Meredith feigned a laugh, though still looking amused at his stunned expression. She strolled in, uninvited, rolling in a suitcase behind her while Castle just stood there in shock.

"What… what are you doing here?" Castle asked, shaking his head and coming to.

"I'm in town for a few days, thought I'd stop by and see Alexis… and you, too, Richard dear," Meredith smiled as her eyes took in his appearance. "And looks like I got here right in time. Does my little kitten need some help?"

Beckett was stunned with how quickly the red-haired actress had moved in on Castle. Meredith was reaching out for him, one hand already fiddling with the loose lapel of his opened shirt. He shivered and backed away as she leaned closer. His hands dropped to her shoulders and gently pushed her back as she tried to kiss him. "Meredith, stop… no," he said, shaking his head. "You can't just come barging in without calling first."

Meredith looked at him, confused. "Oh, stop it, Richard… you know you like it," she teased, moving back in and cornering him against the wall. Beckett glowered, suddenly being overwhelmed with feelings of possession and the desire to mark her claim, as she watched Meredith run her hands down Castle's chest. "Just like old times, Rick. Just you and me… remember Tahiti?"

"Meredith, we're divorced," he feebly protested as she moved closer, his expression almost looking horrified.

His ex-wife laughed. "Never stopped us before," Meredith said in a singsong voice as she leaned in to brush her lips against his.

That was it!

She had been hanging back to allow Castle to deal with her, but since he seemed completely inept with pushing off the advances of his crazy ex-wife—the deep fried Twinkie (his words), Beckett decided it was time to act. Slowly, she stood up from behind the couch and cleared her throat… loudly.

That caught everyone's attention. Meredith jumped, startled, and her head spun around, her eyes locking on Beckett. The detective crossed her arms under her breasts and returned Meredith's stare
with a withering scowl.

"Richard?" Meredith shook her head and ignored Beckett, turning to speak to Castle as if the brunette wasn't even there. "What... what's she doing here?" she demanded haughtily. The redhead pointed an accusatory finger towards Beckett, as if she had just caught her husband having an affair with a cheap harlot. The ridiculousness of it almost made Beckett want to laugh. Almost.

"She lives here," Castle said, taking the opportunity to slip away from Meredith's grasp.

The actress huffed and frowned. "I haven't read anything in the papers."

"We haven't exactly gone out of our way to call attention to ourselves," Castle cautiously explained, his eyes darting back and forth between his ex-wife and the detective, who were both now giving each other death glares. "Nor have we tried to hide it... we've just... been spending most of the time staying in."

"And having sex, no doubt," Meredith groaned, looking fervently back and forth between Castle and Beckett.

Beckett's cheeks were still flushed and her lips swollen from their impassioned make out, which—if it had not been interrupted—would have definitely led to some steamy lovemaking, which, in the end, just made Beckett loathe Meredith's uninvited presence all the more. After the day she had, the detective felt she was entitled to some Castle loving.

"Oh... and Meredith," Castle was coming over to her; he smiled softly and reached over for her left hand. Guessing what he was doing, Beckett returned his warm smile, and allowed him to take her hand and hold it up, letting the diamond engagement ring sparkle in the overhead lighting from the foyer. "We're engaged."

"What?" Meredith almost looked devastated by the news, but she quickly recovered and put on a face of indifference. She looked up at Beckett with cold angry eyes. "Don't get too comfortable, he'll soon tire of you. Just like the others. And in the end... he'll come back to me. He always does." She paused and took a quick frustrated breath. "After all, I am the mother of his only child!"

Beckett fought the urge to laugh as a small smile tugged at her lips. With Castle still holding her left hand, she stood fully up from the couch and walked around to stand beside her fiancé. She didn't care about her almost nude appearance, or the fact that her body was still tingling with arousal. Beckett was going to put this trollop in her place.

Giving Meredith a mirthless smile, Beckett let go of Castle's hand. She dropped her hands to her waist and stretched the fabric of the loose t-shirt she wore around her slightly protruding belly. Meredith's eyes went wide and her mouth dropped. That look of complete devastation washed over her face again, and this time, it stayed.

"As you can see," Beckett spoke for the first time, "things are different this time."

Castle smiled, almost proudly, and kissed her cheek, before dropping one of his hands to her small baby bump and lovingly stroking his fingers over it. She turned her head into his and let him kiss her softly, adding that sweet tender kiss to the arsenal she was stocking against the deep-fried Twinkie.

Backing away, Castle gave a slight nod, his eyes letting her know just how grateful he was to have her. Beckett watched as he turned back to Meredith. "I'll book you a room at the Plaza and then call you a cab," he said, and then squeezed Beckett's hand before disappearing to find his phone.
Meredith looked like she was about to collapse, and the woman turned around and clutched onto the handle of her suitcase roller. Her disoriented eyes shakily flirted up toward Beckett. "How long?"

"What?" she was startled by the question.

"How long has he been in love with you?" Meredith asked. "Because he's in love with you. Truly in love. He… he never looked at me the way he looks at you."

Beckett raised her eyebrows, surprised at such an admission from Alexis's mother. But, just the same, she inclined her head in acknowledgement of the implied compliment and answered the woman's question with what she knew was the truth. "From the very beginning."

"And you? How long have you been in love with him?"

She thought for a while, and then tilted her head slightly. "The same, I guess… it just took me a little longer to realize it."

"And… and when did this…?" Meredith shook as she gestured towards Beckett's small baby bump.

"Almost three months," Beckett replied, running a hand over her belly. For the first time that week, she was thankful she had grown much more than she had anticipated.

At this point, Beckett kind of felt sorry for Meredith, watching as the woman took stock of everything that had happened, all the changes that were going to affect her life and lifestyle. Richard Castle—the once famous playboy author—had been reeled in and caught. He was still a famous author, just minus that playboy part. That part… that part was just for Beckett now. No longer could Meredith swoop in and have a fling with Castle and then vanish.

There was also Alexis to consider. Beckett watched as the woman's brow creased and furrowed as her eyebrows came together in thought. Yes. It was clear that Meredith was now just realizing that she might even have some competition for Alexis's affections. Beckett would never try and intrude on Alexis's relationship with Meredith, but she could understand the teen's distress over her mother's unreliable patterns.

The silence that had sprouted up almost seemed deafening now, as was the tension in the air. And it seemed that Castle was the one to deflate it. He came sauntering back from his office and clapped his hands loudly, making both women jump.

"I've got you the usual suite at the Plaza," Castle said to Meredith, already moving to help her out of the Loft. "And a cab's been called. Teddy, the night doorman, will help you out to the curb."

"What? But… aren't you going to see me out?" Meredith asked.

"Meredith, Meredith, Meredith," Castle tutted like a disapproving parent. He let out a long sigh and shook his head. "This is our home," he gestured towards Beckett. "And," he began to become sarcastic, which was not lost on Meredith, "as much as I enjoy your company, we've had quite a trying day and would like some peace and quiet. And frankly, Mer, peace and quiet aren't in your vocabulary." He paused at the door. "Now, if you're serious about spending time with Alexis, give us a call tomorrow and we'll set something up. Okay?"

Meredith nodded feebly, and glanced once more over Castle's shoulder at Beckett, her eyes lost and alone. Beckett knew that the woman's understanding of the universe had just been shattered, or at the very least turned upside down, but right now she was inclined to agree with Castle. Despite the late hour, she was okay with sending Meredith away. After all, this was their place, and Castle was
right, with the events of the day they'd just had, the two of them needed some peace and quiet—though Beckett had other plans… plans that might not involve peace… or quiet, for that matter.

Saying his final goodbyes, Castle ushered Meredith out and towards the elevator before closing the door and locking it shut. For a moment, he stood there, his back to Beckett as he let out a long shuddering breath.

"God, I'm sorry about that, Kate," he said with a long exacerbated sigh as he turned back around.

Beckett gave him a soft smile of reassurance. "It's alright. It was bound to happen sooner or later," she told him.

Castle gave a tentative nod of agreement, rubbing the back of his neck and looking off into nothing. Beckett stepped over to him and gently looped her arms around his neck, pulling his attention back to her. She pushed up on her toes and kissed him soft and slowly, lingering longer than was necessary. His mouth dropped open as she leaned back, a mischievous grin gracing her lips. His eyes darkened as his eyebrows lowered, the heat of his desire almost palpable.

"Now, Mr. Castle…," she said in a low and sultry voice. "I believe we have some unfinished business."

Beckett let her hands fall down his arms until her fingers interlaced with his. Tugging him along, her smile grew wider as she led him to their bedroom.
Chapter 23

Ignoring the peeved part of her at having her plans stalled by an unexpected appearance of his ex-wife—in truth, she could probably never truly hate the woman, after all, without her there would have never been Alexis, and Beckett would never trade anything away not to have that wonderful girl in her life—Beckett tugged Castle through the office and into the bedroom.

She had discovered fairly early on that the round knob located near the light switch was, in fact, a dimmer. Knowledge, which now, she used to her advantage. Letting go over one of his hands, she quickly flicked the lights on and then turned the dimmer, bring the lights down to a soft warm glow that could only enhance the mood. Turning back to Castle, Beckett found that her hypothesis had been right. His eyes were wide and dark, filled with even more desire than they had been just a moment ago.

"You're so beautiful," he mumbled, snaking his hands around her body and pulling her up flush against him, their breath hot and shimmering.

One hand moved up the curve of her neck and fist ed her lush hair, holding her still. Her breath hitched up as her eyes darted to his. The movements so much like that undercover kiss. And then his mouth was ramming hard against hers, his tongue prodding and probing her mouth. Beckett moaned and her knees became weak. She was sure that if his arms had not been around her waist, she would have collapsed to the floor in a molten hot puddle of goo.

"God… I love you," Castle panted as they backed away to refill their lungs of some much needed oxygen. Her chest heaved in breaths and his eyes flicked down for a moment, and she smiled inwardly, loving how he could never keep his eyes from drinking in her curves. "Is… is it wrong," he began asking, looking back up at her, "that watching you claim your territory was so… hot?"

Beckett chuckled, low and throaty. "No… not at all," she caressed the side of his face. "In fact, I think I just love you all the more because of it." She leaned in closer, fiddling with the lapel of his shirt before dropping her hand down his chest. He closed his eyes briefly, letting out a soft groan of want as her fingers trailed closer to his waist.

Smiling, Beckett deftly undid the fastenings of his slacks and unzipped him—all with one hand. Then she spread her palm wide along his lower abdomen, and pushed her hand under his boxers, wrapping her fingers around his ever hardening desire. Castle let out a breathy grunt and his head lulled forward, resting on her shoulder as she began to slowly stroke her fingertips up and down his length.

"Wow, it's really easy to turn you on, isn't it?" she said, smiling as his need grew at a rapid pace.

"With you" he replied, panting heavily, "It always is." He turned his head, his breath moist and warm against her exposed skin. Castle hummed something, and then his mouth was on her neck, sucking softly.

Beckett shivered, not expecting the sudden assault on her sensitive skin. He worked his hot mouth up the sensual curve of her neck and he found that area just under her ear that drove her wild. Her breath caught as he latched on, his tongue swirling around over the surface of her skin. Gasping, she used her free hand to clutch onto him for support, yet, despite all the outside stimulus he was providing her, Beckett still had enough of her coherency to continue teasing him with her other hand that was still in his boxers.
Abruptly, Castle pushed her back, pulling her hand away. And then she found herself being lifted up off the ground. She laughed lightly and buried her head in his chest, kissing his exposed skin. He groaned and kissed the top of her head. Soon they were on the bed and Castle was looming over her, his hands running under her shirt, his hands playing with the soft flesh he found there. No doubt, he was thrilled she wore no bra underneath.

He kissed her lips and jaw, and then blazed a hot trail down her throat. His mouth continued down her body, kissing her through the fabric of the loose shirt she wore. He reached her navel and his tongue darted out, creating a warm wet path around her protruding bellybutton. He rested his head there for a moment, and kissed her small bump with loving kisses, his hands moving along her growing tummy like he was already caressing the little ones growing inside. Her heart swelled with the image, and she felt her arousal pulsate with renewed passion, fueling the flames with more desire.

Leaning back, he kissed her bare thighs as his warm hands rubbed up and down her soft skin. His cobalt blue eyes glanced up at her, sparkling and filled with a mutual desire and love. It was breathtaking to behold, really. Beckett was still trying to get used to it, and despite finally living with Castle, not to mention being engaged to him, she would always be amazed by the love he had for her.

Castle moved a hand between her thighs, and Beckett gasped, bucking her hips up into his fingers. His fingers teased her through the silky fabric of her panties… oh he was so talented. Arching her neck, she looked up at him, her breath growing hot and heavy. Castle let out a rumbling groan and palmed her center with his hand.

"God… so wet," she heard him whispered, almost as if he was surprised he had the same effect on her that she had on him.

Beckett smirked and pushed her hips up into his hand, loving the feel of his hand cupping her core. Castle smirked, and his eyebrows did a little roll, like a crowd doing the wave. No doubt he was pleased that she was already so wet and ready.

Moving his hands with a skill that had Beckett grabbing the blanket to anchor her to reality, Castle slipped his fingers under the waistband of her panties and tugged at them. She lifted her hips, and he pulled her pink panties down her long legs, letting his fingertips brush along her skin, and then casually tossing them to the floor.

And then he was on her, his mouth and tongue exploring her center in a way that only Castle could. Beckett arched her back, her eyes closing as a moan escaped her mouth. She fisted his hair, squeezing her legs around his head as he continued to tantalize and tease her with nothing but his tongue. He was a wordsmith for a living, so he obviously had a talented tongue.

"Rick…," his name came tumbling out of her lips before she could stop it. And the use of his first name, something she still hardly ever did, only appeared to encourage him, sending her into new realms of bliss she never knew existed.

Castle held her squirming hips down with his hands, his thumbs idly rubbing her skin as he continued to work on her. Beckett pressed her head back into the pillows and let out a hot breath, feeling the pull of the sweet oblivion of release coming on. Then, just as she was about to fall over the edge, Castle pulled back, stalling the mad rush of pleasure sensations that had been building up. He ran his tongue up from her moist core and past her navel, pushing her shirt up to expose her breasts to the warm air surrounding them.

His tongue danced up along the valley of her breasts and then he was kissing her, his tongue
meeting hers inside her own mouth. Beckett let out a long moan, surprised at the sudden sensation of tasting herself. Castle pulled back, running his hands down her body, stopping to give her breasts some much needed attention while he dipped his head down and kissed both of them, pausing just long enough to tease her nipples with his tongue and fingers.

Beckett heaved in a deep breath, wanting to feel that connection with him, wanting it so badly she was quite literally aching all over to feel it again. "Castle…," she grunted through heavy pants for air. He didn't hear her, too absorbed with giving her breasts equal attention. "Castle… Castle… RICK!"

"Uh… what? Yes?" his head jerked up and he rested his chin between her breasts as he gazed up at her, his eyes dark, brimming with love and desire.

Her heart clenched and she heaved in a deep breath, her chest rising and falling, him along with it. He rubbed his hands over her breasts and smirked, leaning over to plant soft butterfly kisses along one of the soft mounds of flesh.

"Rick… please… I need you," she hated how her voice sounded so pleading and needy. Since when did she become such a mess?

"Kate?" there was a touch of concern in his loving voice. Beckett thought he might still be thinking of her breakdown, about how close she had come to being shot. His eyes were welling up with unshed tears, and her heart ached to see him with so much despair.

Taking in a deep breath, she moved one of her hands to caress the side of his face. "I just need you, Rick. Please?" Beckett said, trying to explain. She wasn't as good with words as he was, and sometimes it was hard to try and tell him what she was thinking. They had good repartee when they were theorizing and bouncing ideas off each other. She could handle that just fine. Flirting… flirting was easy. But this… the bare bones, and raw emotion… the need… now that was hard.

Castle shifted, leaning up over her and bringing his hand up to hold the side of her face. He brushed her dampening hair back and ran the pad of his thumb along her right cheek, staring into her eyes. She sighed. This… this she could handle. Talking with their eyes was what they did best, out of everything they did… well, they did do some other things pretty damn good… but this… eye sex, as Lanie called it, was one of their stronger skills.

His lips began to tug upwards and he smiled broad and warmly. Dipping his head down, he captured her lips in a sweet loving kiss, tender and gentle, with no force or intruding in it. It was a kiss of assurance and understanding, of love. Just by looking into her eyes, he knew what she needed… what she wanted. And that was them. And Beckett loved it.

Castle quickly removed himself of his slacks and boxers, and Beckett opened her legs for him, inviting him in. Clad only in her oversized t-shirt, and him in his opened button down, they came together. Beckett arched her back and let out a loud moan, a mixture of approval and pleasure, at the feel of him entering her. She squeezed her legs around his waist, pulling him closer, deeper.

He stillled, resting in her for a moment, as he lowered his mouth to hers as they kissed, savoring the feeling of their connection. And then, ever so slowly, he began to thrust. It was gentle and tender… and exactly what she needed. Before being interrupted on the couch, Beckett had wanted something hot and passionate, something raw and hard, to make her feel alive… but now… seeing how Meredith reacted to the news that Castle was officially off the market, Beckett fully realized just what she had. And she could not appreciate it any more than she did now. So she wanted it like this, not hard or rough, but slow and loving, something that was tender, yet still passionate.
She moved with him, rocking her hips up into his as he came down to meet her, and though their movements were slow and gentle, their kisses were heated and fierce. Their bodies melded into one another, and Beckett savored the impact of their flesh slapping together as Castle quickened the pace, taking them closer and closer to the threshold of orgasmic bliss.

His mouth was on hers and she closed her eyes, moving her hands up and down his back, and then clutching at the back of his head, fisting his hair as she held him to her, exploring his mouth while he explored the depths of her warmth with each singularly powerful thrust of his hips. One of his hands snaked between them, and she gasped when he found the sensitive nerve bunch. He rubbed and teased it, bringing her with him as they soared over the edge, heading high into the clouds.

Beckett moaned with sweet approval into his mouth as she felt herself come undone. She squeezed him and pulled him with her, and he grunted, his muscles tensing as he poured everything that he had into her. Castle pressed his body hard against her and he held her face in his hands while he kissed her deeply, their breaths passing between each other.

Coming down from the high, Beckett softly sucked and kissed the soft place where his neck met his shoulder. Castle chuckled breathily and turned his head to kiss the side of her mouth before fully capturing her lips for another soaring kiss. As he leaned back, resting his forehead against hers, his hips still cradled between her long and slender legs, Castle let out a warm satisfied breath.

"You're extraordinary, you know that?" he asked, nipping at her nose.

Beckett bit her lower lip and smiled up at him, her eyes judging his expression. "No…," she said, softly shaking her head. "I'm not extraordinary… but you know what?"

"Hmm?" he hummed in response.

"We are," Beckett replied, then pulled him back down for another kiss.

XXX

Beckett yawned widely and blinked her eyes, trying to adjust to the change in the light. Pausing, she frowned, confused for a second, remembering going to sleep wrapped in the comforting embrace of Castle's arms, their bodies still slick with the sweet dew of their lovemaking. But as the fog slowly receded, allowing Beckett to take in her surroundings, she realized that the warmth of Castle's body was no longer where it had been last night.

Then she felt it. Her eyebrows knitted together and her nose wrinkled. Instinctively she almost tensed her muscles when she felt the fingertips brush up along her bare abdomen, but then she caught a whiff of his scent, making her smile. Straining her ears, she could make out him whispering softly, his fingers still caressing the growing area around her middle.

It was then that she realized he was talking to her baby bump, and she smiled, feeling warmed by the realization. She let out a surprised, but welcomed, gasp when his warm lips touched her bare skin, below her navel, very close to another part of her body… a part her had thoroughly kiss last night, much to her delight and pleasure.

"How long have you been awake?" he chuckled softly, moving up so that he was alongside her again, face to face.

Beckett let out a sigh of contentment and raised a hand to touch the side of his face. She smiled up at him and smirked at the way his hair was all ruffled from sleep and their lovemaking. Laughing lightly, she moved her fingers up and combed them through his hair. Castle watched her with
intrigued and bemused eyes.

"Haven't answered my question yet, Becks," he said, raising an eyebrow as she brought her hand back down the side of his face, her fingertips ghosting along his jaw.

"Not that long," she finally answered. "But... long enough. Were... were you talking to the babies?"

He smiled, shifting to a more comfortable position on his side, his hand coming up to capture her wandering one. Castle interlaced their fingers together as he brought her hand down between them. She smiled and played with his fingers.

"Yes," he admitted, his eyes sparkling. "I was telling them about the extraordinary mother they have."

"What about their goofy father?" she asked, smirking. "Did you tell them about him?"

"No," he shook his head, deadpan. Then a beaming smile cracked his face wide and he wiggled his eyebrows. "That's a surprise!"

Beckett rolled her eyes and laughed. Then she frowned and looked away, thinking. "Rick... we haven't talked about names yet," she said, just realizing this.

Castle was silent, and she had to force herself to look up at him, to reassure herself that, despite the fact he was comfortably squeezing her hand, he was still there.

"I know," he said with a nod. "I was just waiting for you. No pressure, Kate... none at all."

"I'm getting close to three months, Rick," Beckett said, deciding it was best to call him by his first name during this conversation. This was their family they were talking about. So he should be Rick now, not Castle. Castle was for the precinct and when she was teasing him. Rick... he was Rick during times like this.

"I know," he nodded again, disengaging his hand from hers and brushing back some of her long brunette strands. She sighed and closed her eyes, easing into his touch as his palm cupped the side of her face. "And, if possible, you're even more beautiful than before."

Beckett laughed meekly. "You say that now," she said. "But just wait until I balloon out and become the size of an elephant."

"You'll still be beautiful," Castle asserted, sounding deadly serious. "Nothing could make you any less beautiful than you are. Always."

She smiled and craned her neck forward, kissing him softly on the lips. Sighing, she leaned back and looked him in the eyes. "Thank you."

"Always," he mumbled back and his fingers ghosted down her face and over her lips, until then dropping back down to the mattress between them. She sought them out with hers and they intertwined their fingers again. "Besides..." he had a cheeky grin. "There'll be more of you to love." He gave her a suggestive wink.

Beckett scoffed at him and rolled her eyes, giving him a playful slap. Castle chuckled and his mirth shook the mattress. Beckett bit her lower lip, trying to hold back her own laugh, but it was infectious and soon she was laughing as well.
"Names, Castle… we need names!" she said, trying to stifle her giggle-fit.

"Alright, names…," he lowered his brow. "I'd suggest Alexander, but we already have an Alexis Castle, so an Alexander Castle would be kind of weird… just saying."

Beckett nodded. "I agree, plus… you're my Alexander, Rick," she said with a smirk, remembering what the psychic's daughter had told her. "She was right by the way."

"Huh?"

*Oh… I forgot, I never told him the complete 'prediction' that that woman gave me*, Beckett thought, raising her eyebrows in realization. "Remember the case with the psychic?"

"How could I forget," he said with a smirk. "That's when I told you my birth name was Richard Alexander Rodgers."

"Yes," Beckett nodded. "But I didn't tell you all of it. She said… she said that I would meet an Alexander, and that he'd be very important to me, and that, as she said it, on some future date, he'd save my life."

"Oh," Castle smirked. "Kind of a belated prediction, seeing as I've saved you're life numerous times."

"Really?" she favored him with one of her glares. "You're keeping score?"

Castle gave her a lopsided grin. "Someone needs to."

"And this is assuming you're the Alexander that she mentioned," Beckett said, teasing him.

Castle made a feigned pout. "Who else could it be?"

"I don't know," she said, turning onto her back, letting him follow her until he was resting on his elbow and looking down at her. She pulled his hand along with her and rested it on her stomach, still fiddling with his fingers. "But… you're probably right. You're the only Alexander that is important to me, and… and you have saved my life," she grudgingly admitted.

"And you're very welcome for that," Castle murmured, leaning down to kiss the side of her face.

She smiled. "I'm not talking about you storming into my burning apartment, or you punching the daylights out of Lockwood," Beckett said, seizing his hand and moving it over her small baby bump, spreading his fingers wide, her own fingers sprawled over his. "I'm talking about this."

"Getting you pregnant? How is that saving your life, Kate?" he asked.

Beckett chewed on her lower lip and looked over at his befuddled expression. He looked so adorable when he was confused. "It's more than just getting me pregnant, Rick," she said. "But it's part of it."

She paused and took a deep breath to collect her thoughts. This conversation had gone in a completely different direction than she had anticipated. She had planned on chatting idly about potential names for their kids until the alarm clock went off, not about this. However, Beckett thought it seemed the right time, especially with the event of the previous day and almost getting shot. He needed to know how important he was to her, and what this meant to her, to simply be here, lying in bed with him and talking.
"I was going nowhere," she spoke up, her voice a little shaky with emotions. "My life, that is. I had my job, my grief for my mother's murder, and that was it. That was me. I let her death define who I was. And that was a dark and terrible thing. But then you... and all your goofiness and fun came into my life."

Beckett risked a look over at him. Castle was watching her in silence, his face almost unreadable. But she could tell, by the slight tick at the corner of his mouth that he was fighting the urge to grin.

"And damn... did I fight you," she said, continuing. "You were everything I wasn't and... to be honest, it frightened me, letting you in and admitting that I might have feelings for you, even as small as they might have been at the beginning. And I'll admit, I misjudged you. Let my misperceptions cloud my opinion of the type of man you were."

She swallowed, taking a break to gather her thoughts. "And then, somehow, I don't know, you became the most important thing in my life," she said. "And I was having fun... real fun, for the first time I can remember. And damn, did I want you... but I resisted it, not wanting to risk my heart with you, because I thought you'd take it and break it... and I knew... I knew that if that happened, I'd never recover."

The tug of his smile was gone now, and Beckett could tell she was getting to him, that he was starting to see the depths of how much he meant to her. "And then that summer came around, and you said it was going to be our last case," she looked away. This part was going to be the hardest to admit. "And... and you invited me to the Hamptons, but I was with Demming at the time."

He squeezed her hand, silently giving her support. She smiled, slightly, but then the memory of that day came back.

Looking away from him, not wanting him to see the tears she knew were going to appear, she continued. "I broke up with him, Rick... I broke up with him to go with you to the Hamptons."

She heard Castle gasp, and she turned her head back to look at him, no longer caring if he saw the tears in her eyes. "Really?"

"Yes," she sniffled. "I... I was going to tell you in the hall, but then... then..."

"Gina," he supplied, his face twisting and filling with regret. "Ah... damn."

Beckett let out a sad laugh. "Yeah... damn."

She shifted and moved her hands up to touch his face, to reassure herself that this was not a dream, that they were really here having this conversation; a conversation that was a long time coming.

"I think you broke my heart that summer, without actually intending or knowing," she admitted with a sigh.

"Oh god, Kate, I'm so sorry," he said, moving his hands up to hold her face. "I'm so sorry."

"No," she shook her head. "It was just how it happened. Nothing to be sorry for. You didn't know." She laughed mirthlessly. "How could you?"

He nodded and sighed, leaning down to kiss her forehead. She closed her eyes and smiled, pleased that despite everything that had been thrown at them, they had still managed to come together. She let out a breath, knowing the hardest part was still ahead.

"I met Josh at a bar outside of the city," she said softly, keeping her eyes averted. This was always
going to be a sore part in their past. "I needed to get away and just clear my head. I tried to get you out of my system... I really did, but I couldn't. You were already there. Always there, in my heart. Had been. And I couldn't get rid of you."

"He was a mistake," she continued, after taking a breath. "I tried to convince myself that I cared about him, but I didn't. I never could. Not when I was already in love with you. But seeing you in the papers with Gina... it... it hurt so much. I never thought I'd be so jealous in all my life, but I was. I actually wanted to be her, with you, in the papers." She looked up at him, feeling a little more confident. "Imagine that, me, wanting to be seen on Page Six with Richard Castle!"

The statement had the desired effect and Castle laughed, the amusement reaching his eyes, telling her it was not feigned for her sake. He smiled and kissed the top of her head. "You could still be," he said, half-joking.

"Yes, and I will," she nodded, shocking him. Beckett looked him up and down, seeing him staring at her with a slack jaw... speechless. She smiled slightly and brought his hand over to run it along her growing belly. "Besides... soon, it won't be easy to keep this a secret. Might as well make an announcement on our own terms."

"Really?" he asked.

Beckett inclined her head. "You can call Paula and make an announcement. I... I want the world to know that you're mine, Rick Castle," she asserted, shifting onto her side and grabbing his face in her hands, his eyes roaming over her features, trying to judge the seriousness of her statement.

"All right," he spoke hesitantly, unsure. "I'll do that then."

Beckett smiled and kissed him long and hard, letting him know through actions, rather than words, that she approved. She leaned back down onto the mattress and he laid down next to her. He looked at her expectantly, and then she realized that he was waiting for her to continue with her story. She sighed and smiled at him, relenting.

"When you came back—"

"You mean when you handcuffed me, which by the way, was hot," he interrupted with a suggestive smirk.

"Okay, easy there," she teased, grinning at him, probably thinking the same thing he was. Sometime she'd have to bring out her handcuffs when they fooled around. "As I was saying," Beckett schooled her expression, making it as emotionless as possible. "I was pissed as hell at you."

"I know," he said with a sigh and nod.

"Not one call, Castle, not one!" she didn't mean to yell at him, but she did. Beckett figured there was still some hurt over that summer, though it hardly seemed important now, since they'd finally worked out those issues and were together. She softened the steely gaze she'd developed and placed a soft hand on his arm. "Sorry," she lowered her voice.

"Just continue," he reassured her, tenderly rubbing her arm.

She gave him a weak smile and nodded. "There was a part of me that didn't want you to come back. I'd found Josh by then, and I was trying to get over you... but let's be honest, it's not easy to get over you. Especially when I was in love with you already."
Beckett looked him in the eye. He didn't look like he was judging her, like she had expected when she confessed she had still kept seeing Josh even when she already knew she was in love with him. She expected him to be a little cross about it… so much time wasted, and all that. But no. If anything, he actually looked touched by her comment.

"I wanted you gone, and away, that's why I yelled at you and told you to go home… but," she smirked, remembering, "you couldn't. Not you."

"How could I stay away?" he laughed and kissed her neck. She moaned and closed her eyes.

"Castle?" she pleaded.

"Right… you were telling me, in a long about way, by the way, how important I am to you," he said, his lips quirked up slightly, but he still looked genuinely touched and honored that she was sharing all of this with him. Even if some of it was hard to hear.

Beckett took a deep breath. "I don't know if you know, but I was insanely envious of Gina. I wanted to be her… that's why I kept Josh a secret. He wasn't something serious. You don't know this, but I was actually angry with him for showing up at the precinct after that case. I had told him to wait for me outside, but he came up instead."

"Why?"

She sighed. "To size up the competition," she admitted.

"Really?" Castle laughed. "He felt threatened by me?"

Beckett looked at him and nodded. "How could he not be? I was with him, but in love with you. And he knew it. I think he always knew it. That's why it wasn't really as hard as I had thought it would be when I broke up with him."

Castle gave a slight nod. "It was more difficult with Gina," he confessed.

She looked up at him, nodding, remembering watching him struggle with the decision, and not knowing how to respond to his questions for advice, since she was not some impartial viewer. She had wanted him to break up with Gina, even if she was already too deep into it with Josh to get out and be—what… available? Whatever it was she had wanted, she knew she wasn't sad at all to see him dump Gina.

"We never slept together," Castle said, startling her.

Beckett raised her eyebrows and stared at him, knowing immediately he was telling the truth. "Why?" she found herself asking, not knowing why.

"Didn't want to complicate things," he asserted. "Sex… as you know, can often complicate things. And with Gina, for the second time, I had wanted to do things right. Too often or not, I always mess things up by jumping into bed too quickly. Remember that fiasco with that actress?"

God, yes… she remembered that. Beckett scowled, not really liking it. It had been a time when she had first begun to think he was different than her original impressions, and then he'd gone and slept with that actress and basically confirmed those impressions. But then his reaction to it all changed her mind. He had looked dejected, even used. Seeing him like that had stunned her, and it was yet another thing about him she had misjudged.

"Sorry to bring that up again," Castle's voice broke through her thoughts.
"No, it's alright, continue with what you were saying," she said, looking up at him with apologetic eyes.

Castle smiled softly and nodded. "But things were different this time with Gina. I'd reached a time in my life that that was not enough anymore. I wanted something real, that wasn't just physical... I wanted a real relationship. A lasting one. So, if that meant no sex, then... so be it. And frankly, that was not too difficult with Gina. I mean... you and me have had sex more than I've had with Gina in my entire relationship with her, and we've only started sleeping together last month—besides the time you had your wild and wicked way with me. Damn... I wish I remembered some of that night."

Beckett stared at him like he was crazy. She had been listening to him talk, but she had tuned out a little when he had said that he and Gina hadn't slept together during their second go at it. Unexpectedly, she felt guilty and dirty for all the times she'd thought Castle was off with Gina, doing the deed, and had called Josh over for what was really—when she thought back on it—nothing but revenge sex. Josh never knew. He never cared. He just took what he got. Really... that was what the majority of their relationship was... physical. It might have gotten to feelings with him, but it really never had with her, not as far as liking him.

"I'm sorry," she said out loud, not knowing why she was apologizing. But she felt the need to.

Castle frowned and gazed down at her with a perplexed look. "No need to apologize, Kate," he assured her, wrapping an arm around her and rubbing her back. "I have that now... with you, everything I ever wanted... and more." He kissed the top of her head and hugged her close.

"Wait a minute...," she knitted her eyebrows together, suddenly thinking of something. "So... does that mean—?"

Before she could finish her question, Castle nodded. "Yes. A month ago, in your apartment, was my first time in almost a year... well, at least that I can remember," he smirked, adding that tease about her getting him drunk and then having her way with him.

She smiled back a little, not knowing why it pleased her so much that he had, in a sense, become celibate during his wait for her to finally see the light and dump Josh. It must have been torture for him to watch that. If the roles had been reversed, Beckett knew it would have been agony for her.

Sighing, she leaned into him, closing her eyes and savoring the feeling of being in his arms. This was what she wanted too, and needed. "This," she spoke softly, leaning back to look him in the eye. "This is what I was talking about, Rick. This is what really saved my life. Being here, with you, being loved and being able to truly return that love... that is what saved my life, having what everyone else has, and actually letting myself have it. That... that is what has saved me. And I owe it all to you... for not giving up on me and sticking around."

"Always," he purred and kissed her, deeply. She closed her eyes and melted into him, basking in the love she felt for him and the love he so obviously felt for her. Backing away to breathe, Castle rested his forehead against hers. "So?" he said softly, running his fingers up and down her side. "When did you decide to finally let me in? To actually start allowing yourself to love?"

Beckett thought for a moment before answering. "Probably between the time you broke up with Gina and when Natalie Rhodes shadowed us," she admitted. "Natalie, she said some things to me... things that I knew were true, but had been ignoring. And... and really, I was jealous of her, seeing how you looked at her and saw Nikki Heat. I mean, come on, I'm Nikki, right? Not her?"

"Yep," he assured her, kissing her shoulder. "You're Nikki Heat, always have been, always will."
"And you're Jameson Rook," she said with a grin.

He nodded, if only a little tentatively. Beckett laughed at the scared look on his face. "Don't worry, I'm okay with that," she said. "Besides, you're fantasy has become reality now."

He chuckled and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her closer. "Yes, it has," Castle nodded against her neck, his breath dancing across her skin. "And I couldn't be happier with the results."

"Nor can I," she agreed, turning her head to meet his lips with hers.

They kissed softly, merely enjoying one another's company. And then the alarm clock went off. Castle leaned back and groaned, his head dropping down on her shoulder. Beckett laughed, and rubbed his back sympathetically.

Grunting in frustration, he pulled himself back and his lips quirked up. "I guess we'll discuss baby names later."

"Yeah, later," Beckett said with a nod, a smile tugging at her lips as she stifled a laugh at how far off topic they had gotten. "Right now, I need a shower. I love this feeling of having been fully satisfied by my man, but I really do need to clean up for work. I'm okay with them knowing that we're together and all, but some stuff should just be between us."

"Agreed," Castle said with a nod, leaning over to kiss her cheek as he kicked the covers off and hopped off the bed. Beckett adjusted herself and willingly accepted his offered hands to help her up, smiling as he let his hands get in a few last intimate touches before they separated. "How about I make some pancakes while you're taking your shower?"

"With bacon?"

"Of course, wouldn't dream of doing it otherwise," he said with a smirk and a sparkle in his eyes.

"Sounds perfect, then!" Beckett grinned, leaning in and kissing him lightly before pushing him away and heading for the bathroom.
Chapter 24

Friday. It had not come quick enough. The case… well, she didn't want to think about the case, even if she had to finish up her paperwork before she could leave for the weekend. So, she lowered her eyebrows and focused, intent on getting the work done as soon as possible so that Castle and her could make the appointment with the wedding planner.

Yes. The wedding planner.

Beckett groan to herself and shook her head, trying to clear her mind so that she could concentrate on the paperwork. Things had been different since they had gotten engaged. For one thing, Castle did not leave the precinct when a case was closed up and only paperwork remained. Now he stayed, and either sat in his chair, staring at her all creepily, or played Angry Birds on his phone.

Once he had forgotten to mute the sound and Beckett almost snatched it out of his hand to help him get the three stars on the level he kept playing over and over again, just to get it over with. But she had refrained herself to a simple quick glare that had him quickly apologizing with a smile and turning the sound down.

Presently Castle's chair was vacant. She hadn't really been paying too much attention to him, and Beckett figured he was just anxious that they'd be late for their appointment. He had, after all, been doing all the planning, which she felt a little guilty over, since it was her wedding too. Sighing, needing something to drink… craving coffee, but knowing she couldn't, Beckett pushed herself up out of her chair and paused for a moment, adjusting to the change in her center of balance that had started becoming more pronounced with each passing week.

It had been two weeks since Meredith had showed up late at the Loft, thinking Castle was still available for a quick romp. And that following weekend had been Beckett's official three month check up with Dr. Elam. She was progressing along nicely, and Beckett was happy when Dr. Elam had told her that she was doing a good job at stepping up her eating. Castle had grinned at that. She gave him a little roll of her eyes, but smiled back, thanking him for making sure she was fed.

Thinking back on her doctor's appointment and how they had finally been able to make out the fetuses on the ultrasound, Beckett smiled. Even though her swelling middle was evidence of what was growing inside her, it had been nice to see it, and especially having Castle there with her to share the moment.

Stepping past the break room door, headed for the vending machine down the hall, she paused, hearing the voices coming from beyond the opened doorway. She stopped and kept out of sight, listening.

"Oh, come on, Castle, you've got to let us throw you a bachelor party," it was Ryan talking.

"Yeah, dude," Esposito spoke up. "And besides, it's up to Ryan and me, since you've picked us as your dual-best men."

Beckett smiled at that. Out of everyone he could have chosen as his best man, he picked not one, but two… and they just so happened to also be her close friends as well. She suddenly raised her eyebrows in realization that she had yet to ask Lanie to be her maid-of-honor. She'd correct that shortly, but first, she wanted to hear the rest of this conversation.

"Look, guys, I don't need a bachelor party," he said. "I've had two already, and judging our my
other two marriages went, I'm not going to risk it with this one. This one… this one I want for
keeps."

She did not know why, but hearing him say that made her heart swell and her smile grow even
wider.

"Come on, man," Ryan whined.

"Fine… then not a party, Castle," Esposito said. "We can just go out for drinks or something… just
the three of us."

Beckett peeked around the edge of the doorframe and watched as Castle swayed slightly as he
thought about it. Ryan and Esposito were seated in the chair by the table, and Esposito was leaning
back in his seat with his feet up on the table. Both Ryan and Castle were facing away from her, and
it was only Esposito that caught sight of her. She noticed him grin and a certain mischievous glint
catch in his eyes.

"Drinks?" Castle was mulling the idea over.

"You, you know, we can go to that club near the airport, you know… Pussy Catz," Esposito said
with a wicked grin.

She noticed Castle's back go straight. "Seriously, Espo, you're seriously suggesting taking me out
to a strip club for my bachelor party," he said. "I don't think Beckett would like that… not to
mention when Lanie finds out."

Beckett had to hold back the tremendous laugh that wanted to come out at seeing Esposito's
amused expression fall flat.

"Not cool, dude," he grumbled under his breath, crossing his arms over his chest. "Not cool at all."

Ryan snickered. "Why don't we just go to the Old Haunt and play pool."

"Now that's a good idea," Castle said with a nod.

Smiling to herself, wondering why she was so pleased that Castle had declined the offer of going to
a strip club. It was… not him. Normally he would jump at the opportunity. Of course, that would
have been before they had got together. She paused and frowned. Had Esposito somehow tipped
Castle off that she had been standing in the doorway? Beckett shook her head of the idea and
turned towards the vending machine. She'd get a soda, and then pop on down to the morgue for
some last minute fact checks on the autopsy for the case report (while also asking Lanie to be her
maid-of-honor).

As she walked away from the door, she heard a soft chuckle and thought she heard Castle's voice
drifting through saying, "Do you think she bought it?"

Oh… so her suspicions had been right. Well, two could play at that game. She'd get him back for
that… and she'd have him eating out of the palm of her hand when she was done.

XXX

"Hey, girl, what can I do for you?" Lanie asked as Beckett walked into the morgue.

Holding the case folder to her chest, Beckett smiled back. "Just wanted to double-check a few
things for the official case report," she said. Then paused and smirked. "And to ask you to be my
"Damn, girl, it's about time," Lanie said with a chuckle as she moved to cover the body that she had just finished working on. "If you had waited longer I might have had to smack you."

Beckett laughed lightly and rolled her eyes. "Sorry, just, everything's been rather busy with the case… and other things."

Lanie nodded, understandingly. They quickly covered the material related to the case before the M.E. directed Beckett towards her small desk in the corner. Sighing with relief, Beckett sat down in the chair opposite Lanie's as her friend sat down and begun tidying up her desk.

"So, now that you've officially asked me to be your maid-of-honor, is there anything you have in mind for a bachelorette party?" Lanie seemed entirely too thrillled about it. "Because, I've been thinking of some ideas."

In truth, Beckett really didn't want anything big, especially since she was pregnant and growing large by the week. Frowning, she looked away for a moment. "I don't know," she mumbled and then looked back up at her friend. "To be honest, Lanie, I really haven't thought about it."

"Really?" Lanie looked surprised.

Beckett gave her a pointed look and then put her hand on her growing belly. "Not like I can do that much in the way of partying with these two growing inside me."

"Point taken," Lanie nodded. "Maybe then we could do a girls' night in. You know, kick Castle out of the place and watch chick flicks and stuff our mouths with comfort food and such."

Beckett smiled. That's exactly what she'd like to do. "Oh, and chocolate ice cream… can't forget about chocolate ice cream."

"Wouldn't forget about that, no way," Lanie said with a smirk. "Maybe little Castle could join us."

She nodded. "Yeah, I'd like that," Beckett said, thinking that she'd like to spend some more time with Alexis without Castle around. After all, she was about to become the teen's step mom, not to mention the fact that she was also going to be giving the girl two new siblings… a little further in advance than she had originally planned (wait… did she just admit to herself that she had been planning to have Castle babies?). Frowning for a moment, Beckett remembered what she had overheard in the break room.

Leaning forward slightly, Beckett lowered her voice, not really knowing why she was, but doing it anyways. "Do you know that Esposito and Ryan are planning on doing for Castle's bachelor party?" she asked.

Lanie knitted her eyebrows together and gave Beckett a look before relenting with a nod.

"Well?" Beckett pushed.

"I really shouldn't tell you," Lanie said, looking torn. "But what the hell, you're my best friend, and you're marrying him, so why not."

Beckett didn't like the sound of that at all. "What?" her heart sank, thinking that they were going to be going to a strip club, just like she'd expect of Castle… the *old* Castle. "They… they're not going to some club, are they?" She hated how desperate her voice sounded.
Lanie threw back her head and laughed. Beckett frowned, not knowing why she was laughing. Her friend looked at her with a bemused smile and shook her head, wiping at her cheek from a stray tear that had manifested at her amusement.

"Sorry, Kate," she said, taking a breath to calm herself. "It... it's just the look on your face when you said that. But..." and here it was, the confirmation of what she had thought, "No. Javi told me that they were going to tease Castle about taking him to some strip club, but were really just going to go out to the Old Haunt and drink some beers and play some pool."

"Oh," Beckett said, leaning back, then narrowing her eyes, remembering hearing Castle's voice. "Are you sure? I mean, positive, that that is what Esposito told you, and that he wasn't just covering?"

"Please, girl," Lanie clucked her tongue and shook her head. "I've got that man tied around my little finger. No way in hell he's going to go to some strip club if he wants to share my bed."

Beckett smirked and shook her head at her friend's confidence. She wished she had that. She didn't know why she was thinking these things. It was obvious how much Castle loved her and the way he'd make love to her... well... it spoke more than words ever could. Her eyes must have glazed over with the memories of her private times with Castle in their bed (or shower), because the next thing she knew Lanie was clearing her throat.

Blinking, Beckett looked up at her friend and blushed, realizing what she had been thinking of while seated there.

"That good, huh?" Lanie said with a bemused smile, quirking up an eyebrow.

"Lanie...," Beckett scoffed, rolling her eyes, wanting to keep what she and Castle did private. It was way to intimate, in her opinion, to gossip about, even to her best friend. She then pushed herself up and grabbed her case folder. "I'm heading on up to finish this. I'll call you tomorrow to talk about the... er... modified bachelorette party."

Lanie nodded and waved her hand. "Try not to snap the head off that wedding planner when you see her," she called after Beckett.

"Me? Snap at some woman trying to help me get married to Richard Castle... I think not," Beckett quipped back.

"Girl... Imma smack you," Lanie teasingly threatened, no doubt remembering all the times Beckett had snapped at her when she'd tried to suggest the detective put aside her misgivings and jump Castle.

"Talk to you later, Lanie," Beckett waved her hand over her shoulder as she moved as quickly as possible towards the elevator.

XXX

They stood in the elevator, annoyingly cheerful music playing in the background. For some reason it made her recall images from the case, which she didn't want to think about. So, she pushed those images out of her mind and reached over for Castle's hand. He looked over at her, slightly puzzled, but accepted her offer, and squeezed her hand in reassurance. Sighing, Beckett flicked her eyes up to the digital numbers on the screen. Two more floors and then they'd be on the eighth.

Squinting, she tried to steel her focus on what they were here to do. The date had been decided on, and she smiled, remembering picking it. Somehow, it seemed appropriate, to get married during
Memorial Day weekend. Last year, if things had gone according to her wishes (and desires), that weekend would have been the beginning of their relationship. But... no. She didn't want to think about it. That heartache was in the past. Now... now was what was important.

She startled when she felt his lips on her head, pressing softly and soothingly against her temple. His hand disengaged from hers and he draped his arm over her shoulder, squeezing her close, as he kissed the top her head again. Beckett closed her eyes and sighed, smiling softly as she just allowed him to comfort her.

The ding of the elevator, announcing they had arrived at their destination, called her back to the present. Allowing him to keep his arm around her shoulder, they walked out and down the hall towards the woman's office. Beckett frowned, seeing the typeface on the glass door, informing everyone of the woman's name and profession: GLORIA DeGRASS—WEDDING PLANNER.

Pausing at the door, she jerked her head up and looked at Castle. He looked back at her with confused eyes. "You sure you want to do this?" he asked. "I know you find her a pain in the ass, and I can deal with her, if you want."

"No," she shook her head. "This is our wedding, and I want to be involved in planning it. I should have been involved since the beginning." She paused and took a breath, giving him an apologetic look. "I'm sorry for making you do most of it on your own."

He sighed. "It's alright, you had other things on your mind," he replied, caressing the back of her head and brushing a kiss against her hair, pausing longer than was necessary. He hummed in approval as he leaned back. "You smell like cherries."

That made her smile. Beckett looked at him with beaming eyes, the smile actually reaching them. She'd never been as happy as she was now, and she found it slightly amusing that all it took was Castle saying something so... so very him. "I know," she said with a sly grin, and then pushed the door open, entering the reception room of the wedding planner's office.

Gloria was in and waiting for them so the receptionist just gestured them in. Castle bobbed his head in thanks, and Beckett could not help but notice how the blonde woman seemed to eye him up. She felt an almost primal need to kiss him right there, to mark him as hers, but she resisted. With his fame and celebrity, Beckett had no illusions that there were and would be mobs of raving fangirls. For crying out loud, she used to be one of them... not that he needed to know that.

Settling into the wedding planner's office, Beckett was once again reminded why she disliked her so much. Though in the business of marriage, Gloria DeGrass seemed to despise the very notion of cheer and merriment. Her office was decorated in subdued dull colors that hardly inspired confidence in the thought that this woman could make your happy day memorable.

"Ah, Kate, is it?" the older woman asked. She had black hair with a silver streak on one side.

Beckett nodded.

"Nice of you to finally join us," Gloria gave her a stern disapproving look, as if implying that she should have been meeting with them from the start. Beckett had only met the woman once or twice, and both had been very brief.

"Um... yes," Beckett inclined her head, trying to remain polite as Castle and her settled into the loveseat that sat across from the woman's chair. At least she seemed to understand the notion that a couple getting married should wish to sit together.
Castle rested his arm around her shoulder and she looked up at him for a moment and smiled, before leaning comfortably into his side. She put her hands in her lap and turned back to look at the woman. Castle, meanwhile, absentmly (or not) placed his free had on her thigh, which was, needless to say, sort of distracting.

Gloria started in immediately, almost like a bloodhound, but her prey that she was fretting out was more money. Beckett could see what the woman was doing, but Castle seemed almost oblivious. Somehow they got talking about engagement photos, and were tentatively planning a photo shoot with some photographer, which, if Beckett was honest, she thought was costing too much. She shift slightly, and Castle moved with her. Her back was killing her. She just wanted to get back to the loft and crash on the couch and maybe order a pizza.

"Oh my," Gloria said, her eyes going wide. "You… you're pregnant!"

Beckett frowned, seeing the woman staring at her. She looked down to see that the loose blouse she had been wearing had been stretch tight, probably do to her shifting around on the couch, and it was now showing off her baby bump. It had been well hidden up until then. The silence that engulfed them after Gloria's startled explanation was nerve-racking. Trying to smile, Beckett glanced up at Castle.

"I thought she knew," she whispered.

He shook his head. "It… um… never came up," Castle said, almost looking lost. "And, I didn't think it was that important."

"Not important," that was Gloria. They both turned their heads. Castle made a face that told her that he had forgotten they weren't alone. Beckett merely frowned, and tried to smile. "Mr. Castle… this is very important." The woman paused, seemingly to collect herself. "Alright… forget the photo shoot. We'll reschedule it until I can come up with a way to…" she waved her hands in the direction of Beckett's growing baby bump, "hide that."

"What? Hide—" Beckett was cut off before she could say anymore.

"Honestly, you two, you should have told me about this from the very start," Gloria said, giving them both a stern look.

"Why?" Castle asked. "It doesn't change anything. We're still getting married."

Beckett nodded. She thought he had a point. If she weren't pregnant, she would still want to marry Rick. Granted, her pregnancy had accelerated the date, but it had always been leading up to that. Even though it took them nearly three years to see it (all right, maybe her, he probably knew long before she did).

"Why?" Gloria echoed and laughed. It wasn't a real laugh, and Beckett didn't like the empty hollow gesture of it. She hated fake people. That had been one of the things she had been wrong about Rick. She had thought he was fake… that he was just like the persona in the papers. But she had been wrong about him.

So, she was inclined to give Ms. DeGrass the benefit of the doubt. However, remembering the history of their wedding planner, Becket found it amusing that Gloria DeGrass, who made her career out of helping people get married, had, in fact, never been married herself.

"Really, Mr. Castle?" Gloria continued, never missing a beat. "Of course you know, I'm going to have to run some spin on this."
"Spin?" Castle furrowed his brow, truly looking mystified. "I… I don't understand."

"Oh… please, don't patronize me, Mr. Castle," Gloria interjected, leaning forward. "You don't have to hide the truth from me. I've seen it enough times." She looked at Beckett and smiled. "He knocked you up, didn't he? And now… foolish young thing that you are... you're rushing into a poorly conceived marriage with him."

"Wait? What?" Castle stammered, looking at Beckett with a confused expression.

Gloria laughed, this time it wasn't hollow, but full of true mirth. Beckett narrowed her eyes, feeling her ire rise at this woman's assumption. Granted, she had gotten pregnant before they even had a real honest to god relationship, but she resented the fact that this woman—who clearly knew nothing about them, despite all the work she'd put into planning their wedding—actually thought that the only reason they were getting married was because she'd gotten knocked-up.

Castle seemed to sense her vexation, and he moved his hand over hers, squeezing it as he tried to soothe her. He gave her a look, his eyes telling her to calm down. They communicated briefly, just with their eyes, and he got it very soon that she was pissed, and that she was not going to take this. He sighed outwardly, in show of his relenting, and squeezed her hand.

"Now… we'll have to find a way to hide the fact that your—" Gloria was saying.

"No!" Beckett snapped, her brow lower and her eyes set and determined.

Gloria blinked in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, no," Beckett said.

Gloria laughed again, this time it was back to that hollow fake laugh. Beckett grounded her teeth together, feeling her blood rise. God, this woman really was a witch, wasn't she? No wonder she'd never been married!

Huffing, having had enough, Beckett grabbed the arm of the loveseat and pushed herself up. Castle followed her. She gave him a look, and he nodded, immediately agreeing to whatever it was she had in mind. She wondered if he truly knew what he was getting himself into by agreeing.

"That's it," Beckett said, turning to the woman. Gloria blinked, startled by the sudden change in her clients. "I can't have someone who doesn't think we're getting married because we're in love, planning my wedding."

Gloria shook her head, like she thought Beckett was insane. "Look, honey," she said, giving them both a long pointed look. "This wedding… its rushed. I mean, how well do you know Mr. Castle. Do you really want to spend a lifetime with him? And… you know… you're not that far along, you could still—"

"Oh hell no!" Beckett huffed. "You did not just suggest what I think you did!"

The older woman held her ground and merely blinked in response.

Beckett rolled her eyes and let out a hot breath. Did this woman really plan weddings for a living or was this all some sort of weird twisted joke at her expense? Because, in her opinion, Ms. DeGrass knew next to nothing about weddings.
"We're getting married because we love one another, not because I got pregnant," Beckett stated. "And you should know that. At least, you would, if you had actually listened to Rick when he talked to you… trust me, he does not know how to keep his mouth shut."

"That's true," Castle nodded his head.

She gave him a quick smile of thanks for backing her up. Even now, he had her back. He always had her back. That's part of why she loved him. He'd never leave her. She'd known that before, yet had not truly seen it and what it meant.

The woman harrumphed. "Look, missy," she directed her statement towards Beckett. "I think I've been accommodating with this whole rushed wedding, which, I think, shows a lack of true commitment."

Beckett huffed in a breath, her chest heaving. "We're getting married because we're in loved! And I… I don't need you're negativity around for that."

The older woman's jaw dropped, and, for the first time, looked concerned. Oh, Beckett was under no delusions, she knew the only thing the woman was really worried about was losing them as clients… and the money attached to them.

Gloria stammered for a moment before finding her voice. "Are... are you firing me?"

"Yes… I suppose I am," Beckett said, crossing her arms over her chest and giving a decisive nod. "This is our wedding, and I'm not having someone who doesn't even understand that… planning it."

Castle took a sharp breath and Beckett looked over at him. His eyes were wide and he was staring at her with a mixture of shock and awe. Before Ms. DeGrass could say another word, Beckett spun on her heel and grabbed Castle's arm, pulling him along with her as she stormed out of the office.

The receptionist jumped out of her seat in surprise as they came marching out. Beckett shot the poor woman a heated glare, sending her falling back into her chair with a look of pure horror on her face. She felt a little guilty about that, since it wasn't really the blonde's fault, but damn it, she was angry… pissed, and she wasn't in a charitable mood. Beckett almost missed the solid click clack of her high heels. She was used to the sound of her footsteps resounding throughout the room. Now, only in flats, her aggressive steps weren't really that audible. At least she still had her stride, even if it was shuffled back a bit because of her change in gravity.

Castle made no complaints about her leading the way as they pushed past the glass the door and walked down the hall towards the elevator. Reaching it, Beckett stopped, took a long hot breath, trying to rid herself of the sticky feeling of her frustration with that woman, and rammed her hand against the button… not once, but several times, cursing the machine for being so damn slow.

"The nerve of that woman!" she hissed in frustration. She ran her hands through her hair and sighed. "Look, Rick… I know I kind of put us in a bind back there. But don't worry, okay? I'll… I'll do it. I'll take care of everything. This is my wedding after all… so I might as well take control and plan it out and…" she stopped talking as she looked over at him, an eyebrow quirking up as she noticed the way he was gazing at her.

"That…," he breathed out, "was so… hot."

Beckett smirked at him, and gave him a wink. "You think that's hot, Rick, just wait until our wedding night," she said, adding a sultry quality to her voice that she knew would drive him wild.
"What?" Castle let out a startled gasp, and then his smirk grew more lascivious. "Why, Detective Beckett, have you been holding out on me?"

She raised an eyebrow and stepped into the elevator as the doors open. "I don't know what you're talking about," she teased.

There was no need to look back to know he was following her. He had followed her for three years now, and over the past few months, he had made it very clear that he had no intention of stopping. As soon as the doors closed, Beckett turned on him and pushed him up against the back wall of the elevator.

He let out a gasp of surprise, but was unable to really respond before she was ramming her lips against his slightly opened mouth. Beckett was proud of the way she made him tremble and groan. Her own pulse was quickening, and she could feel the rush of arousal course through her veins. Who knew that standing up to some witch wedding planner would turn her on so much! Maybe it was the need to prove that what she had just said that she and Castle had wasn't nothing… that it was something and that it was real.

We they broke away for air, both panting, she looked up at Castle with a mischievous glint in her eye.

"Oh god…," Castle breathed out in a hot breath. "Must. Get. Home… NOW!"

Once out of the lobby and on the street, Castle quickly hailed down a cab. The rushed inside and Beckett leaned against him, her hand on his thigh, slowly moving up towards his center, making him squirm with need and want. She smiled, stifling a chuckle, when he rapt on the plastic window separating them and the cabbie. The man looked back, confused, before Castle held up a hundred dollar bill, offering it to the man if he got them to the Loft in record time.

And the cabbie definitely earned his extra hundred dollars.

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Tumbling through the door, hands grabbing and mouths searching, Beckett and Castle made it back to the Loft mere minutes after Castle had flashed the 100-dollar bill. Her heart was pounding fiercely and it was like that was the only thing she could hear, that… and Castle's voice softly panting her name in-between passionate kisses.

Still moving, she grabbed at his shirt collar and began working the buttons. His hands placed around her waist and drifted down to cup her rear, hoisting her up as she wrapped her legs around him. Her baby bump didn't get in the way at all, which surprised her. She made no complaints.

She sucked on his neck and grazed her teeth along his pulse point, earning a shuddering groan from his throat as he wobbled around for a moment, before bumping the door to his office with his shoulder.

"Rick!" she hissed his name out, the want and need clear in her voice.

He kissed her soundly, silencing the moan that wanted to come out. Castle deftly kicked the office door close and carried them over to the couch. Beckett was amazed at how fast they'd manage to divest themselves of enough clothing to make contact, and once that connection was made… the world simply melted away. It was like they were the center of the universe.

The rhythmic thrusts of Castle's hips against hers, pounding her deeper into the couch cushions, made her insides come alive, and she responded with everything she had. Forgotten was the anger
and following terror at having to plan the wedding on their own. Simply being with him… having him want her, need her, make love to her, made Beckett feel like she could do anything.

Castle made a strangled moan as she repositioned them, straddling his hips, and taking over the pace, grinding herself against him and squeezing her legs, tightening her hold around him.

"Oh, God… Kate," he whimpered in sheer admiration and love for her and her abilities to please him.

She kissed him, and one of his hands grabbed her bottom, squeezing, as his other pulled at the top of her blouse. Arching her back, Beckett gave him space to kiss the tops of her breasts as she continued to buck her hips against him, his hand on her backside helping to keep her to him and set the pace.

Her head lulled back, and she moaned, much more loudly than she would have liked as she came undone, pleasure surging and pouring all over her as her muscles tightened around him, pulling him along over the edge. Castle grunted, his wet mouth running along the top of her breast, searching for her nipple. His hips bucked up into her as his hands gripped her and held her in place as he pushed as far as possible.

"RICK!" Beckett screamed his name, her voice laced with undeniable pleasure as he touched something inside her and sent her over again.

Perception was blanked out and she was overwhelmed with a feeling of physical rapture that was unlike anything she’d ever experienced. And he had teased her about holding back?

When she came to, her head was resting on his shoulder and her whole body was tingling with the aftershocks. She shuddered, the remnants of her double release rippling down her spine like waves in the water. She sighed, utterly satisfied and kissed his neck gently, before moving up to his jaw and seeking out his lips.

Castle seemed to want the same thing, because it did not take long for their lips to meet in a languidly deep kiss. "You're amazing, you know that," he muttered against her lips when they parted, both still heaving in deep pants of air, neither fully recovered.

"You aren't that bad yourself, Rick," she replied with a playfully grin, and wiped the smug smirk off his face with another kiss.

In their haste to make love, neither had truly undressed, and Beckett adjusted her blouse to cover herself while she searched for her pants on the floor. Castle had it easier… he simply had to tug his slacks up and zip. Finding her pants, Beckett pulled them on and looked over her shoulder at him, feeling his fingers running up and down her back in tender motions.

"You overheard, didn't you?" he asked.

"Overheard what?" she feigned ignorance, though knowing precisely what he was talking about.

"We're just going to go to the Old Haunt, toss back a couple of beers and shoot pool, nothing more than that," he said, sighing.

"No strip club, huh?" Beckett arched an eyebrow and smirked back at him.

Castle laughed and rewarded her with a lopsided grin as he leaned his head against the back of the couch, his hand still running up and down her back. "Don't know about those two, but I certainly don't need a strip club to see a naked woman… and then have the added benefit of being able to
touch and," he wiggled his eyebrows for effect, "do delicious things to."

She bit her lower lip and blushed, nodding. "I guess so...." Beckett replied, then averted her eyes for a moment. Slipping back into his arms, she leaned into his chest and sighed contently as he wrapped his arms around her, his hands settled on her baby bump.

"I got everything I need right here," he murmured into her ear, his nose nuzzling into her hair. "And I couldn't be happier."

Beckett smiled, and felt her heart swell with all the emotions she had thought would always elude her. Settling into Castle's hold, she sighed again and turned her head towards him. He knew what she wanted, and he tilted his head to meet her. Their lips brushed against one another's briefly, before her mouth opened in offer. His hot mouth seized hers and his tongue entered, stifling the moan that was coaxed out of her throat by the action. She closed her eyes and lost herself in the kiss, wanting simply to taste and savor the unique flavor that was her Rick.

"Thank you," she whispered, backing away and leaning her head against his.

He smiled and kissed her temple gently, his nose nuzzling into her hair. "Anytime, Kate," was his response. "Anytime."
Chapter 25

Was she going to panic? No. Not her. Kate Beckett did not panic. Not when she had made a show of things, promising she was going to handle it since he’d put so much work into it already.

Alright… so maybe she’d bit off more than she could chew. Planning this wedding was a lot more stressful than she had thought it would be. Thankfully, though, Castle had gotten enough done while they still had Gloria DeGrass in their employment. So, it was not as difficult as it could have been. And it helped that Alexis was very enthusiastic and thrilled to assist her when Beckett asked the teen for help.

The first thing on her to-do list was the engagement announcement and photo. She left the announcement to Castle, well the writing portion, she'd have to read and approve it before he handed it over to Paula to be posted on his website or given to the papers… whatever it was that had to be done to announce to the world that the white whale (as she had overheard a woman call Castle once) was now, officially, off the market.

Beckett had not been lying to Gloria when she had said she didn't feel the need to hide her pregnancy, but she wasn't completely ready to share that bit of news with the world. And Castle agreed. So, she didn't feel like much of a hypocrite when she started looking for photos of Castle and her (sans baby bump).

Presently, Beckett sat on the floor besides the coffee table in the living room, the photos arrayed haphazardly across the flat surface. She stared at them, still in somewhat stunned by the quantity. She had a few pictures of her own that she had taken once they had gotten together, but some of those were a little too intimate (i.e. either he or she or both, were naked).

So, Beckett had asked all their friends for photos they might have, expecting maybe one or two from each.

But that's not what she got. She had been totally surprised by the amount of photos that Esposito, Ryan, and even Captain Montgomery, had taken of her and Castle. Some of them had clearly been taken with subterfuge or at odd angles (to hide the fact they were taking the picture). Those three had surprised her with their photos. But from Lanie… no… she was not surprised there. Her friend from the medical examiner's office had over a hundred photos of the detective and the writer.

As Beckett looked through Lanie's stack of photos, she wondered when and where some of them had been taken, because she could not remember Lanie holding up her phone or a camera to take them, yet here they were, looking so professional that she was seriously considering asking her maid-of-honor to also take the official bride and groom portrait after the wedding.

"I got you some hot cocoa."

Her head darted up, and she involuntarily jumped. Looking up, she found the red-haired teen smiling down at her.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," Alexis said, joining Beckett on the floor and putting the two mugs of hot cocoa on coasters.

Beckett reached for hers and wrapped her fingers around the warm ceramic of the mug. She held the lip of the cup just under her nose and she inhaled the rich aroma. It made her smile. It smelled like home. Tentatively blowing on the hot liquid, she took her first sip and gave Alexis a thankful
"Thanks, Alexis, I really needed this," she said, running her tongue along her bottom lip to catch a stray droplet of hot cocoa from escaping.

Alexis nodded. "I thought you could use a break."

"Yes, I did," Beckett raised her eyebrows. "Who would have thought that all our friends would have taken so many photos of us?"

"Well, you two were rather obvious," Alexis said, cocking her head and grinning with a smile that Beckett attributed as a genetic heritage from the girl's father.

"Everyone says that," Beckett shook her head, marveled by it all. "But these," she gestured to the photos. "Some of these are from before your dad and me started dating."

"When I said you two were obvious, I was talking about before," Alexis elaborated, blowing across the lip of her mug. "I mean, look at those pictures… you can already tell by the way you two look at each other when you think the other's not looking."

Beckett scanned through the photos and reluctantly nodded, conceding Alexis's point. "True enough," she said, grinning with the memories of all their time together… the happy times, at least. "Your father is rather adorable."

"Um… yeah," Alexis furrowed her brow. "Just… just don't go calling him sexy or hot around me."

Beckett had to stifle her laugh, least hot cocoa come spraying out of her nostrils. She held it in and swallowed, and then, when it was safe, she let loose and laughed long and hard. Alexis looked bemused, but also a little worried.

"You're not, are you?"

"What?" Beckett sucked in a breath, coming back down from her laugh.

"Going to talk about how my dad's sexy and… uh… hot?" Alexis hesitantly questioned.

"No," she answered, watching as the girl sighed in relief. "But he does have a nice butt."

Alexis quite literally almost spit out her mouthful of hot cocoa. The teen looked at Beckett as the detective tried to hold back her amusement. Finally gaining her composure, Alexis shook her head.

"I think you spend way too much time with my dad," she said.

"Maybe," Beckett offered with a nod, and took another sip before placing the mug back down on the coaster.

A brief silence—a comfortable one, not awkward—descended on them as Beckett turned her attention back to the scattered photos on the coffee table. She could still not believe that it would be so difficult to pick out the perfect picture to represent her and Castle for an engagement announcement.

"Hey," Alexis chirped up, leaning over to the table and reaching for a stack on the other side. "Any good ones in this stack?"

"NO!" Beckett spoke loudly and quickly, reaching out and snatching the stack of photos before Alexis could get them. "You don't want to look at these… trust me."
Alexis made a face and shuddered. "Oh, believe me… I won't," she said, forcing out a little laugh.

Just then, Castle came strolling out of his office, a printout in his hand. He smiled, catching sight of his daughter and future wife sitting on the floor before the coffee table in the living room with photos of them all over the place.

"Hello, you two," he beamed, and knelt down to plant a kiss on Alexis's head, and then leaned down to give a quick chaste kiss to his fiancée. "Find anything good yet?"

"Dad, I think you should take this pile and hide it somewhere… maybe in your safe," Alexis said, gesturing to the photos in Beckett's hand.

Castle raised his eyebrows quizzically, and glanced towards Beckett for an explanation. She silently mouthed "intimate photos." His eyes grew wide and he nodded, taking the photos and holding them as far away from his daughter as possible.

"What do you got there?" Beckett asked, nodding her head to his other hand.

"The announcement," he said. "Ready for your approval, dear."

"Don't call me, dear," Beckett snapped playfully. "I'm not going to be your kept woman."

"Did I say that?" Castle chuckled, glancing down at Alexis before handing the printout to Beckett.

"No," Beckett replied. "But you've implied it quite a few times."

She smirked as he made a wounded expression. However his eyes still sparkled with amusement, so she knew he wasn't taking it seriously. Beckett snatched the paper out of his hand and held it up before her eyes. Alexis scooted over to read it over her shoulder.

We are pleased to announce the engagement of Richard Castle and Katherine Beckett. The happy couple will be marrying later this month in a private ceremony with friends and family. They would appreciate some privacy during this happy and joyous time. Thank you.

"Well?" Castle asked, knowing that Beckett had finished reading.

"It's rather short," was her first response.

He made a face. "Is that bad?"

"No… not at all, just… not expected," she said, looking up at him with a reassuring smile. "It's perfect… says exactly what needs to be said while keeping enough private that it doesn't feel like I'm opening my entire life to the whole world."

Castle beamed. "Great! So… all I need is a photo and I'll send it to Paula."

Beckett nodded with a frown. "Its so difficult."

Alexis suddenly jumped up and dashed out of the room. Both Beckett and Castle glanced up, startled, and then exchanged a confused look. The teen disappeared up the stairs and Castle shrugged. He slipped down onto the floor besides Beckett and placed his arm over her shoulder. She smiled softly and leaned into his side, resting her head on his shoulder. He turned his head and kissed her hair, taking a quick inhale as well.

"You know, you always smell like cherries…," he commented.
She arched an eyebrow.

"I've got no complaints," he winked and captured her parted lips in a quick passionate kiss.

She clutched at him with one hand, grabbing at his collar and pulling him closer to deepen the kiss. His hand shifted to her thigh, and his fingers squeezed her gently as she moaned.

"Um… gross," they were startled by the sudden return of Alexis.

Castle smirked. "Oh, come on, Lexi, you're old enough to know what two grown adults do when they are alone," he said.

Beckett gave him a whack on the side of the head and he merely shrugged as he raised his free hand and beckoned his daughter over. Alexis shook her head at her father's antics and stepped over, sitting down next to him. Beckett turned her face and smiled, secretly loving this image of all three of them seated on the floor beside the coffee table, Castle sandwiched between her and the teen.

"What you got there, pumpkin?" he inquired.

She looked over and noticed that Alexis had returned with a small white envelope.

"Remember when you and Kate went out to have dinner with her dad?" she asked.

Castle nodded, exchanging a look with Beckett. She rolled her eyes and chuckled softly.

"Here are the pictures Grams and I took," the teen said, opening the envelope and spreading the contents onto the coffee table.

Beckett arched her neck and looked down at the new photos. She smiled, seeing her and Castle standing so very close, his hand wrapped around her waist, almost possessively. She was wearing that green dress he had bought her that covered the small swell of her tummy, and he was very handsome in a dark suit with a matching emerald tie. Beckett then saw that photo of them kissing, and she blushed, remembering how she had lost herself in that kiss, momentarily forgetting about Martha and Alexis taking pictures.

"Wow!" Castle said, clearly impressed. "These are really good." He turned and looked at his daughter. "Are you sure it these are the same pictures that you and Grams took?"

"Positive," chirped Alexis, smiling proudly.

"What do you think, Kate?" Castle asked, shifting through the photos.

Beckett peered down at them, smiling. They were very good photos of them, and she did like how she looked in that dress. She nodded. "One of these might do, yes," she replied.

Castle handed them over to her and she flipped through them until she found one that she liked. It was one right before the kiss; she was gazing up at Castle with unbridled love, his eyes mirroring hers.

"This one," she declared.

Castle took it and scrutinized it for a moment before smiling widely. "Perfect," he concurred.

"What do you think, pumpkin?"

The teen nodded. "That's my favorite," she said.
"Alright," Castle let out a breath, disentangling himself for Beckett. "I'll go scan this and then send it and the Kate-approved announcement to Paula and we'll be done with that."

Beckett bit her lower lip, finally accepting that very soon the public was going to know about them and that she might have to suddenly face the press more than she normally did as a homicide detective.

"You okay?" Castle questioned, noticing her expression.

"Yes, I'm fine," she reassured him. "You still going out with Esposito and Ryan tonight?"

He nodded. "I'm off in twenty minutes, and then you, my lovely two ladies, have the place all to yourselves," he said, making a dramatic gesture with his arm to encompass the entire Loft.

"Oh, goody, girl's night in!" Alexis declared, clapping her hands.

"That reminds me," Beckett said with a nod, "I should call Lanie and we can do our little bachelorette party as your dad's out with the boy's doing his."

"Yes! That sounds great!" Alexis nodded, jumping up to run and get the phone for Beckett, who was still seated on the floor and was not as fast at getting up as she had been thanks her growing middle.

Beckett sighed and looked up at a smiling Castle. He held out his hand and she accepted it. Pulling her up, he brought her up close to him and wrapped his arms around her.

"You sure you don't want to have an actual bachelorette party?" he asked. "You know, go out to some place... you, Lanie, and Alexis?"

"No," Beckett said, shaking her hand. "Even if I didn't have these two growing inside me," she placed her hand on her baby bump, "I think I'd still prefer doing a girl's night in."

"Alright," Castle sighed and kissed her forehead, before dipping down to kiss her on the lips.

Beckett smiled into the kiss and hugged onto him. "And Rick?"

"Yeah?" he breathed out softly, breaking away and resting his forehead against hers.

"Don't get too drunk, okay? I wanna have my way with you when you get back."

Castle laughed and nodded. "Deal, detective."

XXX

Lanie was cleaning up the leftovers of the pizza and other junk food they had pigged out on while watching *The Notebook, A Walk to Remember* (that movie always made Beckett tear up), and, for something a little lighter, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

Alexis was sitting next to Beckett on the couch, her phone out as she texted with Ashley. She watched as the teen smiled down at something that her boyfriend had texted. When Alexis put her phone down, she noticed Beckett watching her.

"So, how are you and Ashley doing?" Beckett asked, looking over her shoulder for a moment to see Lanie in the kitchen, searching for the recyclables bin.

"We're good," Alexis said with a nod. "He's going to go to Stanford, and... don't tell my Dad, not
yet, but I'm thinking of trying to graduate early so I can go out with Ash."

Beckett raised her eyebrows, already knowing what her future husband's reaction to that would be. Alexis rolled her eyes and nodded.

"I know, Dad's going to freak, but at least with you and the twins here, it's not like the nest will be empty," the teen put forth.

"Yeah, about that… Alexis, we need to talk," Beckett said.

Alexis frowned, looking confused. "What about?"

"About the fact that I'm marrying your dad," Beckett said after a long breath. She had wanted to have this talk for a while. She knew they needed to have it, even if the teen didn't think so. The change in their lives that was coming was a big one.

"I'm cool with that, Kate," Alexis smiled. "You're going to be an awesome mom."

Beckett sighed. That is not what she had meant. Reaching out, she took hold of the teen's hand and squeezed it. "You're still going to be a part of everything, Alexis… an important part," she said. "And even though your dad's attention will now have to be divided between you and the twins, you're still always going to be his little girl."

"I know," Alexis said, nodding, and trying to smile.

She caught that. "You are," Beckett pushed out, needing the teen to understand. "No matter how much at times it will seem like you are being forgotten or put on hold because of something with the twins. You are always going to be his little girl and he will never… never love you any less."

Alexis locked eyes with Beckett. "And what about you?"

"What about me?" Beckett asked, confused.

"You're not worried about having to share him with the twins?" she asked. "I mean, you two haven't really been together-together for a while. You know, as a couple."

"Oh," Beckett raised her eyebrows and letting her hands fall down to her baby bump. She rubbed her fingers along the swell and sighed. "I'm willing to share him. Besides," she smiled, "he's willing to share me."

Alexis laughed lightly and nodded. "I guess you're right."

"And Alexis, just because you're growing up, it doesn't mean that you're no longer going to be his little girl," she went back to that. She knew it was important. As a daughter herself, Beckett relished her father's attention, and still wanted to be his little girl, no matter how old she got.

"I know," Alexis nodded. "I do… and I'm not worried or anything. I'm actually excited, really."

"Really?"

"Yeah," chirped Alexis. "I've always wanted a sibling. And though it's coming a little later than I would have liked, I'm still thrilled about it." The teen beamed brightly and raised a hand, asking permission. Beckett nodded and moved her hands, allowing Alexis to place one of her hands on Beckett's baby bump. "I'm going to be a big sister… and I wanna be the best big sister to these two."
"You're going to be wonderful, Alexis," Beckett assured her. "You're an amazing young woman, and I have no doubt about it."

Alexis smiled. "Thanks, Kate… that means a lot coming from you," she said.

Beckett returned the smile and put her hand on Alexis's. "I mean it," she replied.

"Hey, Kate!" came Lanie's voice.

Chuckling, she looked over her shoulder to see her friend standing in the middle of the kitchen looking lost and confused. "Yes, Lanie?"

"I've been looking for like ten minutes… where do you guys keep the recyclables?"

XXX

Beckett sat up in bed, reading. She glanced over at the clock and frowned. She had told Castle to be back at a reasonable time… but he was still gone. Narrowing her eyes, Beckett began to plan some punishment for him and the boys. Just as she was picturing giving his ear a real good twist as he shouted "Apples! Apples!" the door opened and Castle came stumbling in… drunk (the exact opposite of what she told him to do).

Groaning, she marked her place in the book she was reading and put it down on the nightstand as Castle came wobbling over to the bed, collapsing on the mattress with a sigh of relief.

She folded her arms across her chest and glared down at him, thinking she should do that ear twisting thing and see if he was coherent enough to actually shout "Apples!" Uncrossing her arms, Beckett reached over and slipped her delicate fingers around his ear… and twisted it.

"AH!" Castle hooted. "Apples! Apples!"

Beckett laughed and let go, leaning back against the headboard. Castle shook his head and rubbed his ear, turning his head to look at her with glazed eyes.

"What was that for?" he asked, sounding like a petulant five year old.

Beckett raised an eyebrow and gave him a pointed look. "Do you remember what I told you before you left?" she asked.

Castle shifted onto his side, so that he was fully facing her. He furrowed his brow and his eyebrows came together in hard concentration. His glazed, drunken eyes, flashed with realization.

"Oh… oh… OH!" he mumbled and his eyes shot up. "Damn… does this mean I'm not going to get lucky?"

Beckett snorted and held up a hand over her mouth to hide her smile. "With that breath… no," she said, giving him a disappointed look. "But at least I'm not banishing you to the couch."

"True," he slurred and leaned across the space between them to give her a wet and sloppy kiss.

Despite herself, she found herself moaning into the kiss as his hands rubbed her bare thighs, pushing up the large t-shirt she wore.

"Castle," she warned, shaking her head as she pushed him back. "Not like this… when you're drunk."
He sighed, and nodded. "Okay."

Turning, Beckett reached for the table lamp on the nightstand and turned it off before snuggling on the covers. Castle moved on the other side, kicking his shoes off and shimmying out of his slacks and hurriedly removing his button-down and undershirt. Castle burrowed under the covered with her and his arms wrapped around her, pulling her into his chest. She smirked and wiggled, pushing her bottom into his groin, making him groaned in want.

"Not fair," he whimpered.

"Take it as a lesson to not come back home drunk," she smirked and rested her head against the pillow. Castle let out a breath and she shivered, feeling the hot moister of it against the nape of her neck. He nuzzled the back of her head, his nose pushing into her hair. She could feel him taking in her scent and sloppily kissing at her neck.

"Castle… sleep," she instructed.

He sighed. "Yes, dear," he mumbled.

"And don't call me dear."

"Yes, dear."

And then he was snoring.
Blinking, Kate Beckett stared at her reflection in the mirror. What was she doing here? Why now? It was the weekend before Memorial Day weekend, and she could not believe she had waited this long to actually do this. Was she insane? Did she want to have an ulcer or pass out with the intensity of finding one that was just right? Again… what was she thinking?

Wait a second. She was a week away from becoming Mrs. Katherine Castle… Kate Castle. That made her smile. It was a warm feeling. Something, if she was honest with herself, she had never expected to ever feel. She'd dated quite a lot of guys over the years… only less than a handful had become serious. But none of them had made her feel the way Rick did. Not even Will… and out of all her previous boyfriends, he had been the only one she had ever thought about maybe (just maybe) marrying.

Three years ago, when she had arrested Castle for stealing (he claimed he was just borrowing) police evidence on their first case together, if someone had told her that she had just arrested her future best friend, partner, lover, husband, and father of her children… she would have laughed in their face and seriously considered recommending they be committed for insanity.

Now…

Now she knew better. Richard Castle was everything she needed, and everything she ever wanted. Not to mention, she had been a little excited when she first had him brought in during the Tisdale case. She was, after all, a closet fangirl… though that might be out of the bag now.

Sighing, Beckett brought herself back to the present and what she was currently doing. Her eyes dropped down as she scanned her semi-nude body. She was in the dressing room with only her underwear on, and she saw her baby bump.

Oh, yes, that's why I waited the week before my wedding to pick out a dress, Beckett nodded.

She had talked about this with Rick, and he had said it was up to her how she wanted to handle getting a dress. It was, as he had said, not really his business, since he wasn't supposed to see the dress before she walked down the aisle.

"You don't really believe in that, do you?" she had asked, curious about whether or not her fiancé believed in such superstitious nonsense.

Castle had been making their breakfast, and he flipped the pancakes and arched his neck over his shoulder to look at her. He batted his eyelashes innocently, and smiled awkwardly. "Just so happens I saw Gina in her dress before the wedding… and Meredith… well, with her there really wasn't that much of a ceremony. We just got married as quickly as possible." She nodded, understanding. He sighed and slumped his shoulders. "Both those marriages turned out… well, bad-obviously. And with you, Kate… with you I want to do it right. So, yes. I believe in that."

Beckett gave another nod, understanding his reasoning. "Okay… though, I still don't think the dress had anything with why those two marriages failing," Beckett had to point out.

Castle gave her a funny smirk and shrugged, nodding. "Probably right there."

"Probably?" she had quirked up an eyebrow and gave him a dubious look, mixed with a slight warning gaze.
"Um… absolutely… I meant absolutely right!" Castle had quickly responded with a nervous grin.

Now, standing in the dressing room of a high-end boutique that specialized in wedding dresses, Beckett smiled, remembering that conversation. It had been the night after his Bachelor Party, where he'd come home drunk and passed out on the bed. The pancakes the following morning were a way to make up for that, since she had made it clear before he left that she had wanted to fool around once he got back.

During her free time, after working on cases, Beckett, along with Alexis (and some help from both Martha and Lanie), planned out her wedding to the last detail. It would have been easier with a wedding planner, but Beckett had no regrets with firing Gloria DeGrass. The woman was crazy, and Beckett was actually happy she had put her in her place and simply fired her.

Beckett remembered how speechless Castle was with how she had torn into the woman. She had wanted to make it clear to Gloria that this day was hers and not anyone else's. It felt liberating doing that, until she realized that it put a whole mess in her lap. Thankfully Alexis had been more than happy to assist.

Her favorite memory of that Friday night a couple of weeks ago was not her tirade towards the wedding planner, but the aftermath it caused. Beckett had never thought that firing that woman would have made her so hot for her fiancé, or him as turned on as he was. Their passionate lovemaking on the couch in his office had been some of the best sex she had ever had in her entire life. And then came the cuddling and discussion of baby names. It made her feel all warm inside just thinking of it.

Smiling, she looked down at the swell of her belly. She was four months along now, and it was very clear to all that she was pregnant, especially since she was carrying two instead of one. Rubbing her hand along her stretched skin, she remembered how Castle would gently apply the ointment that Dr. Elam told them would minimize the stretch marks. He was so loving and tender when he did that, occasionally whispering to her middle, as if he was talking to their children.

As for the names… they hadn't really decided yet, since they didn't yet know the sex of the twins. There were three possibilities… two girls, two boys, or one of each. Beckett had no preference, but she knew that Castle was hoping for a boy (though he'd never say it out loud).

"Hey girl!" Lanie's voice called her back to the present… almost startling her with the abruptness of it.

Turning she saw her friend sticking her head passed the curtain and looking at her with those calculating eyes of hers.

"Lost in thought?"

Beckett nodded. "Yes… remembering things that… um… are just for me," she blushed, unable to really hide anything from her best friend.

Lanie smirked and rolled her eyes. "Damn, girl, you got it bad for Writer Boy."

"Hey, you called it, Lanie, from the very beginning, so you should just be happy that I finally took control and did what you said I should always do," Beckett countered.

"You mean jump his bones?" Lanie replied with her trademark smirk. "Because if that growing middle is any indication, you certainly did that."

She blushed brightly, her cheeks turning completely pink. "I… I was referring to giving Castle a
shot, you know… relationship wise."

"Uh-huh," Lanie smiled. "Well, I like mine better. You needed that… you need him… both ways."

"Okay, right, let's please not talk about our sex life... with identities of our significant others, it... it's kind of awkward," Beckett said, needing to say it. She had always talked about her sex life with Lanie, it was one of the things they did. Though when she had been with Josh, she had stopped. In retrospect, Beckett thought that that was proof that she was subconsciously aware of how she had been hiding in that relationship—using it as an excuse to not go to the next level with Castle.

Lanie gave a shrug that seemed to say "whatever" and then gestured for Beckett to come out. Sighing, she turned and grabbed the robe that was provided and slipped it over her shoulders, tying the band around her bulging waist. She was pleasantly pleased to find that the robe could still fully cover her. Lanie held open the curtain and Beckett ducked through.

Martha and Alexis were waiting on the other side in the small room outside, the younger redhead holding a beaded white dress. "Here, Kate, try this one," the teen said, beaming as she rushed over to hand her the dress.

The detective frowned and narrowed her eyes, giving the dress a skeptical look. "It looks expensive," Beckett said, glancing up from the white dress to Lanie and the others, Alexis and Martha. She felt a twinge of sadness in her chest that her mother could not be here doing this with her, but it could not be helped. She was there in spirit, Beckett knew. Absently her hand went up to touch her mother's ring that was still dangling from the necklace around her neck.

"Don't you go worrying your pretty head, darling," Martha exclaimed, smiling and producing a plastic card from her purse. "I took the liberty of snatching this out of Richard's wallet this morning while he was preoccupied making breakfast."

Alexis turned, startled, her bright blue eyes going wide with amazement. "His AMEX," the teen gasped. "Wow, Grams, how'd you get it?"

Beckett decided that Alexis was thoroughly impressed that her grandmother had been able to obtain this particular card, and it intrigued her. It wasn't like Castle worked really hard to hide his credit cards from the women in his life. Turning her attention back to the dress, Beckett allowed her eyes to fall over it, really looking at it. The material was soft and smooth, and she had no doubt that if she was still slim and flat it would look breathtaking over. The beadwork on the gown was very intricate and detailed and, before she tried it on, Beckett already knew she liked the dress. Not that she was going to pick this one, but she liked it.

"Lanie, wanna help me?" she asked.

Her friend nodded and they turned away from Alexis and Martha as the older woman described to her granddaughter how she had gotten the credit card. It sounded as if Martha was making it sound like it had been a task worthy of a Mission Impossible movie.

Closing the curtain, Beckett took the robe off and placed it on the hanger. With Lanie's help, she stepped into the dress and pulled it up, slipping her arms into the shoulder straps. The top portion of the dress was sleeveless, with a loose top that actually did quite a good job of hiding the swell of her belly. She found that she was oddly pleased with that.

Beckett had not been lying to anyone when she had asserted she was not embarrassed to be four months pregnant on her wedding day, but there was something about the idea of being pregnant and getting married. She didn't want other people getting the wrong idea when they shared the
wedding photos with the press (which she knew that they'd have to do). Eventually, when she gave
birth, it would be obvious she was pregnant at the time, but she felt like it was no one else's
business but hers and Castle's… and their family and friends.

Her breasts had already begun to swell and grow, and as she looked at herself in the mirror, Beckett
noticed just how much it had accentuated her bosom. The back of the dress sloped down, revealing
a generous amount of her skin. The edge stopped just above the small of her back, and as she
 glanced over her shoulder to look at it, she found it was sexy enough without being overly
provocative. And she was pleased that, despite some of the weight she'd gain during the
pregnancy, she still looked as alluring as she had before.

"So, what do you think?" Beckett asked, twirling around for her friend to see.

Lanie had watery eyes. "Girl… you look stunning," she said, wiping at a stray tear. "I can't believe
you're getting married. It feels just like yesterday that Castle was first beginning to shadow you."

Beckett sighed and nodded, hugging her friend. "I know… but in some ways it feels like it has
taken too long to get here," she admitted.

"I hear you," Lanie replied, returning the hug. Exhaling, and wiping the remnants of her tears of
happiness at seeing her friend finally in a wedding dress, the M.E. stood back and tilted her head
towards the curtains. "Wanna show little and senior Castle?"

Beckett smirked. "You've got to stop calling them that. It's Alexis and Martha now. And Castle's
no longer Writer Boy, he's Rick."

"Rick?" Lanie sounded out the first name of the mystery author like it was a foreign word. She
harrumphed and shook her head. "I don't think I'll ever get used to calling him that, or, for that
matter, hearing you call him that."

She shrugged and laughed, then opened the curtain to show the dress to Alexis and Martha. The
two Castle women gasped in surprise. Martha shook her head and nodded at the same time.

"That is simply stunning, darling," the older woman said.

"Oh, Kate, you look so beautiful in it!" squealed Alexis, bouncing with joy. "What do you think?"

Beckett raised an eyebrow and struck a pose before the long mirror and looked at herself,
appraising herself in the better light provided out here. She smiled, warm and long. She loved it, if
she was being honest. It was everything she had wanted in a wedding dress, and it was kind of nice
that she could pick out this one without worrying about her baby bump being too obvious.

"It's perfect," she said.

"Great!" Alexis cheered, grabbing for the credit card Martha was still holding.

"Whoa there, kiddo," Martha wrangled with Alexis to retain possession of the plastic card. Turning
to Beckett, she gave her a soft smile. "Before we jump on this one, let's try on some other dresses,
just to make sure."

Beckett nodded. "Good idea, best to not immediately buy the first dress I try on," she turned to
Lanie. "Why don't you go see if you can find another one that I can try on and Alexis, here, can
help me change out of this one?"

"Ah, Kate… I don't know if I can find a dress as good as this one," Lanie asserted.
Beckett gave her a challenging smile. "You can try."

After two more hours of trying on different dresses of varying styles, Beckett had decided that the first one was the best. She wasn't just picking it because it was the first one she had tried on, she was picking it because of how it made her feel when she wore it... and she knew the backless portion would simply drive Castle crazy.

With Alexis's help, Beckett removed herself from the last dress she had tried on... this one simply looked way too old school for her tastes. It was like something her Grandmother—scratch that—Great-Grandmother would have worn. While Alexis took the dress back to the sale rep, Beckett changed back into her day clothes.

She had actually dressed rather casual, more so than she normally did. And no one seemed to judge her for wearing sweats, granted they were NYPD workout sweats, but still... they were sweats. She slipped on the long sleeved turtleneck and then found her coat. Pulling it on over her shoulders, and tugging it until it was just right, Beckett then emerged from behind the curtain to find the others waiting for her.

Martha handed her the credit card with a sly smile. "Want to do the honors, Kate?" she asked.

Beckett bit her lower lip and smiled. "I don't know if I can yet, Martha," she admitted. "I mean, we haven't gone into the banks yet and combined our accounts." She frowned. They had yet to talk finances, and part of her was dreading that conversation.

If there was one thing she didn't want to be, it was a kept woman. She knew Castle wouldn't try and make her into one, but still... he did have more money than she had, and there was no way her salary could match whatever it was he paid for the rent at the Loft. Sighing, she shook her head.

"After we're married and I'm officially Mrs. Castle, then I'll use his card, but right now... no, that's okay," she finally answered Martha.

"All right," Martha replied with an understanding nod. Beckett had a feeling the older woman understood that she had yet to have that particular discussion with the writer.

"If Kate's not going to do it, can I?" Alexis asked, raising an eyebrow as she surreptitiously reached a hand out for the credit card.

Martha let out a sigh, and relented, releasing her hold on the card and letting Alexis skip off with it towards the checkout. The others followed, and Beckett smiled, watching as Alexis used Castle's American Express to purchase her wedding dress. As the teen signed the receipt, Beckett glanced outside, seeing that it appeared to be dusk.

"Don't worry, sweetie," Lanie said, coming up to stand besides her. "Javier and Kevin are taking care of Castle. I reminded him this morning before I left to pick you up that they needed to go out and get the tuxes."

"My Dad groaned over the color pattern," Kate said, smiling as she turned back to look at her friend. "He said he didn't look good in green." Her smile turned amused. "Partly Castle's fault, really. He had my Dad thinking I had picked out neon green, instead of the emerald green I had actually picked out."

Lanie laughed. "Leave it to Castle to make his future father-in-law go crazy," she shook her head at the antics of her friend's future husband. Sighing, Lanie placed a hand on Beckett shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly. "You and little Castle did good. That emerald green looks really good on
our boys… all three of them. And you're dad, too."

Beckett smiled. "He's so excited about walking me down the aisle."

"And how are you?" Lanie asked with a knowing look.

"I'm okay," Beckett sighed. "Though it's times like this that makes me miss her more, I know she's still here," she raised her hand and placed it over her chest, "in my heart. She'll always be here."

Lanie nodded and gave her a half hug.

"We've got it!" Martha came over holding up the fancy boutique box that held the wedding dress. "I say we girls go out and have a nice dinner… on Richard, obviously."

Beckett laughed, the older woman having unknowingly helped her out of the sorrow and sadness she had been slowly slipping towards with her thoughts of not having her mother here to share this important moment in her life.

"Sounds like a plan, Martha," she said. "But… let me just give Rick a call and let him know."

Martha shrugged. "Suit yourself, though we all know that we don't need his permission to go out and use this thing like crazy," the actress said waving the credit card in the air, Alexis laughing in the background as she did so.

Beckett shook her head and pursed her lips, trying to stifle the laugh that wanted to come. Turning her back to her family—because that's what all these people were to her… family—Beckett took out her phone and pressed the first speed dial button.

"Miss me already?" came his playful voice.

She rolled her eyes. "No," Beckett teased. "Just calling to let you know that we're going to go out to dinner… and use your American Express."

"You have my American Express? I was wondering where it had gone," he replied, chuckling softly.

"Martha took it out of your wallet this morning," she explained.

"When? Because I don't remember her doing so… and trust me, I keep an eye out for her and my wallet."

Beckett laughed and looked over at Martha, who frowned, apparently having overheard her son's comment over the phone. Ducking back away, Beckett lowered her head and smiled.

"Remember when I came up behind you and started kissing your neck while you were scrambling the eggs?" she questioned.

Castle made a sort of strangled noise on the other end. "Do I ever… the kitchen floor almost became covered in egg yoke."

"Well, whilst I was distracting you, Martha slipped into your office and got the card," Beckett explained with a smirk.

"Why you devil woman you," Castle chuckled.

They both laughed as they thought of that morning and how that simple act of her kissing his neck
had almost gotten out of hand and led to something else. She heard Castle sigh on the other end of
the phone.

"So... the dress—"

"I thought you didn't want to know about it?" she cut him off.

"I don't," he quickly replied. "Just... um... do you like it?"

She nodded. "Yes, I do... and I can't wait for you to strip it off me on our wedding night."

"Oh god, woman, you're going to be the death of me!" Castle groaned.

Beckett smirked. "I'll pay you back tonight, okay?"

"You better," Castle mumbled. "Have a good dinner with Lanie and my other lovely ladies."

"Will do," she said. "And you guys have fun playing Madden and Halo and having pizza."

"Hey... how'd you know we were—you know? You are spooky sometimes," he replied, laughing
softly.

"No magic required, Castle," she said. "I can hear Ryan and Esposito in the background."

"Oh."

Beckett laughed and chewed on her lower lip. "See you tonight, Rick... I love you."

"Love you, too, Kate," he replied, his voice soft and warm and full. "Always."

She shivered. Suddenly she wished she could skip dinner and go straight to dessert. Beckett knitted
her eyebrows together and forced herself to say goodbye. They both murmured another set of I love
you, and then they both hung up. Taking in a deep breath, Beckett turned back around and went
back to the others.

"Alright," she said, letting out a sigh, her flushed cheeks almost giving her away. "Let's go get
some dinner."
Chapter 27

The wind was roaring in her face, gathering up her hair and blowing it wildly around as she leaned back in the passenger seat and released as she let him drive. Yes. She let him drive. She could hardly believe it. She rarely let him drive, so she decided not to make a big deal out of it. Besides, this was his expensive Ferrari convertible, and, to be honest, she didn't know if she trusted herself to drive it completely safe and under the speed limit. Last time she had driven it had been under very different circumstances. It was an amazing car, and she couldn't wait to take it out more now that it would soon become hers as well.

Normally, she would have insisted that she drove. But since this was him, taking her to the Hamptons, to get married of all things, Beckett had decided she would let him have the wheel.

It struck her right then, the difference one year had made.

Last summer… God, last summer he had been driving out of the city, heading to the Hamptons… with Gina. And she'd... well, she'd been on her motorcycle, cruising around trying to forget him, and finding a stray distraction that lasted way longer than it should have. But now—a year later—here they were, together on this Memorial Day weekend. It was them—them, not him and Gina, or her and Josh—that were heading out of the city for the weekend. It was them!

"Do you want some music?" Castle asked, one hand leaving the steering wheel to reach for the radio dial.

"Whoa there, Castle!" she startled, coming out of her thoughts at lightening speed with her sense of danger on the rise. "Both hands on the wheel. You've got your fiancée and future children to keep safe, you know."

"Right!" Castle shouted back over the din of wind and traffic, quickly returning his wandering hand back to the wheel, and securely gripping it. "Thanks, by the way."

"For what?" she frowned, unsure whether he was thanking her for saving their lives just now, or for something else. She could never be too sure with him sometimes.

"For letting me drive," he answered, smirking. "You never let me drive."

"Seemed appropriate," Beckett replied, and then put her hand on her swollen belly. "Considering."

Castle nodded and gave her a wink, before turning his attention back to the road. They were approaching the city limits of New York and would soon no longer be in her city. It felt odd to Beckett. Odd that she even felt this way. She turned her head and watched the sign go by, marking their departure from the city that never sleeps. Swallowing, she tilted her head back and rested against the leather chair, glancing across at Castle as he remained intently focused on the road ahead, unusually silent.

"Rick?"

"Kate?" he answered back, cocking his head slightly to glance at her, though never fully removing his eyes from the road.

When he had looked over at her, she froze, uncertain at what it was she had wanted to say. Beckett furrowed her brow and looked away for a moment, gathering her thoughts. She turned back to him, and smiled slightly.
"This is nice," she finally said.

He hummed in response and gave a nod of his head in agreement. "Not driving? Or going away to the Hamptons with the ruggedly handsome Richard Castle?"

Beckett laughed lightly and shook her head, adding her habitual eye roll to his wiseass remarks. "Both, actually," she admitted, running her lower lip under her teeth as she hesitantly glanced over at him.

He rewarded her with his dashing smile, and bobbed his head approvingly as he changed lanes. "You know, I wish we'd done this sooner," he said, looking over at her.

"I know, so do I," she agreed. "A lot sooner."

"Like last summer," he said, pausing for a moment and wincing.

"It's okay," Beckett reassured him. "We've fixed all that now. But I know what you mean. Almost seems like we wasted a year."

Castle nodded. "At least it was a year that provided us with the proof that we were meant to be," he supplied.

Beckett grinned and leaned back into her chair, sighing. "Still seems too long," she said. "God… I've wanted you so long, Castle… longer than I probably would even care to admit."

He smirked, and she shot him a little glare, knowing she'd just boosted his ego a bit, which he really didn't need any help with. His ego was already big… too big. Of course, he had a right to that. It gave him confidence in who he was and allowed him to be the man she had fallen in love with. If he hadn't been so cocky at the start of their relationship—both working and professional—then they might not even be here now.

"I wanted you from day one," Castle asserted with a smirk.

Beckett threw back her head and laughed. "No! Really? I wouldn't have guessed," she replied, sarcastically. But then she grew serious. "I was tempted you know."

"Huh?" he seemed lost.

"Back then, after our first case," she elaborated.

"Oh... really?" Castle questioned, looking dubious.

"Yes," she nodded, remembering how she had chewed on her lower lip before taunting him with that line 'oh, you have no idea' and then strutting away, swaying her hips in a way she knew would drive him wild. Little did she know that he'd accept her implied challenge, even if that had not been her intention. The way she'd done that to him, she should have known better. Known she was challenging him to convince her otherwise. He'd accepted and met that challenge head on. Now, she couldn't be happier that he had.

"You know, I'm glad you turned me down that day," he said, as if reading her thoughts. "You put a challenge out there... and I just couldn't turn it aside. I think it started then. The loving you... oh, I still wanted in your pants—still do, always—but I think it was that challenge that forced me to look at you differently than I had any other woman in my life, and realize that what I really wanted was someone like you. A woman who wouldn't be so easily swept off her feet and into my bed. I'm so glad... so glad... that you didn't just become a notch on my bedpost."
She looked over at him with a raised eyebrow. "So I was right, then?" she asked, giving him a pointed look and a little glare. "Back then, all you wanted to do was make me one of your conquests?"

"Um," he stammered and swallowed hard, looking caught. "Well, not entirely… I would have liked a longer fling with you than some of the others… but things didn't go that route. And I'm so happy it didn't."

"So," she drawled out, letting him squirm. "When was it then, that you decided that I was more than just a challenge and something more?"

Castle lowered his brow in thought. "If I had to say, I'd probably go with somewhere between Meredith and the charity ball," he replied, tentatively looking over at her with a sheepishly scared look. "But after the charity ball… yep, right then I knew you were something more to me. Something better."

"Oh," Beckett frowned and sat back. "I… I thought it had been earlier."

"It had, trust me," he said. "But you wanted a definitive answer to when I knew… truly knew that you were something more than a potential good f—um… fling," he stammered out instead of the other f-word that had been about to fly out of his mouth. "And that's when it was. I mean, the way you just so naturally fit in with mother and Alexis at breakfast, telling them your version of events… right there… I knew you meant more to me than just a notch on my bedpost."

Castle paused and took a deep breath. He glanced over at her hesitantly. The look on his face informed her that he was worried he'd said too much. Beckett gave him a warm smile and reached out with one of her hands, placing it on his thigh and giving him a reassuring squeeze. "Besides… I think you said that I could make you one of my conquest, right?"

He smiled, and she smiled back, knowing she was the one that put that smile on his face.

"Yes, yes, I believe I did," he said with a glint of amusement in his eyes. "And I'd say I was right. Turned out that I did become one of your conquests." He chuckled, making light of their "first" time… a night he would never really remember.

"Yeah, I guess I did," Beckett replied, giving his leg another squeeze, before moving her hand further up his thigh, causing his breath to hitch up and his fingers to tighten on the steering wheel. "My last and final conquest… my one and done."

"Kate… if you keep doing that, we'll probably crash," he said, his voice breathy and filled with desire.

She smirked and slowly slipped her hand away, allowing her fingers to linger a little longer than was necessary. She gave him a sultry look and wink. "I look forward to testing out the bed at your Hamptons house," she said, mimicking a Castle move and doing a suggestive wiggling of her eyebrows.

He actually laughed… a sort of nervous laugh as he watched her. "Oh, God… Kate, you're going to kill me," he said.

Beckett's grinned mischievously and ran her tongue between her teeth as she gazed over at him, the wind continuing to whip her hair around.

"You know what?"
"What?"

"I think I like you like this," he commented. "You're... I don't know... more free and... and playful."

"Well, if I am, it's because my life has been overrun by this man who's like a nine year-old on a sugar rush," she replied, smirking.

He feigned a pout. "Oh, come on, you know you like it," he replied with a cheeky grin.

Beckett stuck her tongue out at him and then eased back into the comfortable chair, smiling. "I'm going to take a nap, if that's all right with you," she said.

"Fine by me," he said, turning his attention back to the road.

She yawned, wondering why she felt so tired this early in the morning... oh yes... last night. She looked over at him, giving him a little glare. He had kept her up late last night. Something about needing to thoroughly make love to her before they had to wait the whole weekend until they were then officially hitched. *Crazy man,* Beckett thought, shaking her head... *I'll soon change his mind.* Though she had no complaints at just how thoroughly he'd made love to her. Yep, no complaints at all.

XXX

"Kate."

Someone was calling her name, disturbing her sleep.

"Kate... Kate..."

Now they were shaking her, not hard, but enough to truly pull her away from the pleasant dreams she was having of two blue-eyed children playing in the sun-baked sand on a warm summer day along the shore. She frowned, trying to stay in the dream world, not yet ready to leave.

"Kate."

The voice came again, but this time it was followed by the soft press of something against her lips, a breath—all to familiar—washing her cheeks, the strong masculine scent of him invading her nostrils.

"Wake up, Kate."

Beckett startled, opening her eyes to find Castle's face hovering just inches away. Smiling warmly, she lazily slipped her arms around his neck and pulled him back for a sweet kiss. She moaned softly in approval as his tongue darted across her top lip before slipping into her mouth and beginning a delicious dance with her own tongue. When he pulled back, she playfully bit on his lower lip and giggled softly.

"We're here," he announced in a whisper, their breath mingling as they stayed close.

Loosening her arms around him, Beckett leaned back into the chair of the Ferrari and looked over his shoulder. Her eyes went wide. "Wow," she gasped. "This is your 'summer cottage'?"

He snorted in a laugh and leaned back into his own chair, pausing for a moment to lock the car in park and remove the key from the ignition. "Oh come on, Beckett," he mockingly scoffed. "You
know I'm loaded."

"Yeah, well… I didn't expect something like this," she gestured past the window screen towards the large luxurious mansion. All right, maybe mansion was going too far. It was only two stories, but it certainly covered a large square footage.

Beckett huffed and rolled her eyes as Castle wiggled his eyebrows, unbuckling his seatbelt and jumping out of the convertible. She glanced back over at the house. A beach house, indeed, she thought, raising an eyebrow and remembering how he had described the place. She knew it was by the ocean, she could hear the waves, but from the look of it… the trees and greenery, she wondered how much the upkeep was and whether it was worth it.

"How often do you come here?" she found herself asking as Castle walked around the car to open her door. Normally she would already have gotten out, but she was allowing him to be all gentlemanly. Besides, sometimes she liked it when he waited on her hand and foot… only sometimes.

"Not as often as I'd like," Castle replied, opening the door for her. "Though, I do find sitting by the pool in the sun sometimes helps me write. In fact… I wrote the final chapters of Naked Heat while sunbathing out by the pool."

"With Gina?" Beckett bit the inside of her mouth the moment she said it. She couldn't believe she'd just said that, especially with that slight bitter tone. Thankfully, Castle ignored it, merely nodding slightly and opening the door for her.

Extending his hand, Beckett sighed and accepted his assistance, looking up at him with a soft apologetic smile. She let him help her up out of the car, and she found, much to her chagrin, that she actually had needed his help. She grabbed him by the collar and pulled him in for a quick kiss.

"Sorry," she murmured. "I… I didn't mean for it to come out like that. I… I don't know what I was thinking."

"Shh," he soothed her, rubbing a hand along her arm. "Don't worry about it, okay. It's me and you now… and that's what matters."

She smiled weakly and nodded. He returned the smile and kissed her, lingering as his hand ghosted down her jaw and along the slope of her neck. Beckett sighed and leaned her forehead against his.

"Just… sorry," she repeated.

"It's okay," he whispered, leaning back to kiss her forehead and tucked her hair behind an ear as his thumb caressed her cheek. "The past is in the past."

Beckett nodded, and looked up at the house as Castle stood back and stepped towards the back to get their luggage. Her dress wasn't there. It would be coming with Lanie when the M.E. and Esposito arrived the next day. As she inspected the house, she had to admit, it wasn't as ostentatious as she had thought it would be.

It was painted white, with grey roof tiles, and a little grey shade for the shutters. Overall, it had the classical Hamptons feel to it, without blatantly displaying the amount of wealth she had expected from Castle when they had first met. In fact, there was a kind of homely quality to the whole thing. The grounds were well cared for, and there were beds of wildflowers dotting the pathway leading up to the front wrap-around porch.

"It's nice," she commented, turning back to Castle. "Not as… ornate… as I thought it would be."
"Oh, just wait until you see the inside," Castle smirked, lifting their rollers out of the back and onto the paved driveway. She looked at him questioningly, but he just grinned. "Oh… and you're going to love the master bedroom… especially the en suite."

"The tub?"

"The tub," he nodded with a wide grin and a sparkle in his eyes.

Beckett smiled back him, and held out her hand, offering to take her bag. He feigned a scoffed and jumped back from her.

"Oh no," he shook his head. "I'm not making you carry this heavy bag up the front steps."

Beckett raised an eyebrow and planted her hands on her hips. "I'm pregnant, Castle… not an invalid," she retorted. "I can manage to pull my own suitcase up the stairs. Besides… it's not really that heavy. It's not like I've brought a lot of clothes for our stay here."

Her smile grew wider when Castle's breath hitched up and his eyes grew dark. "Really?" he managed to breathe out. "Not… not that many clothes, eh?"

She pursed her lips and smirked, shaking her head. "Once the weekend is over, we'll have the entire place to ourselves, right?" Castle nodded, looking slightly confused. Beckett gave him a suggestive smile as she continued, "So, if that's the case… what's the point in having a lot of clothes, huh?"

She planted a light kiss on his cheek, loving the effect her light teasing had on him. While he was lost in his fantasying of their clothes-free honeymoon, Beckett surreptitiously grabbed the handle of her roller case away from his loose fingers, and started off towards the front door of the house.

XXX

All right, she hated to admit it, but she did require his help getting the roller case up the damn stairs. Not the ones outside, but the staircase inside, the one that led off the rather large foyer and up to the bedrooms on the second story.

Castle grinned in triumph as he hoisted both their luggage up the stairs while she followed behind him, waddling up, one hand on the banister. She gave the back of his head a little glare, but her eyes soon dropped as she watched how his jeans hugged his backside. She swallowed, feeling arousal course through her veins. This was what he did to her. And she could never stop it.

Fighting off her rising desire, Beckett gripped the banister tighter and hauled herself up.

They reached the landing of the second story and Castle led the way down the wide and spacious hallway. Beckett paused at each door and looked in. "Is the upstairs all bedrooms?" she asked.

"Kind of, yeah," Castle nodded. "The master bedroom is this way… come on."

She paused and looked into one room, noting the posters and stuff animals on the bed—Alexis's room. Turning away, she followed behind Castle, taking a moment to look at the pictures hanging on the walls. She was surprised, really, to see them. All of family. Nothing that really said this was the place the playboy author would bring a floozy for a romp in bed.

"Kate? You coming?"

Beckett blinked, having been lost in a picture of a much younger Castle holding a toddler Alexis as he sat on a swing. They both looked so happy. She smiled, seeing a little of their future in these family photos.
"Kate…"

She turned her head and saw Castle standing beside her, a small smile on his lips as he noticed what had distracted her. "I… I didn't really expect all of these," she gestured towards the pictures.

"Thought this was my love shack, did you?" he asked with a playful leer.

She chuckled and shook her head. "I guess I had misperceptions, yes," she acknowledged. "I probably should know better by now. You are more of a family man than I sometimes give you credit for."

Castle smiled and stepped closer, allowing her to ease into his body as he wrapped his arms around her in a light hug. He kissed her temple and then rested his chin on the top of her head, breathing in her scent. She closed her eyes and enjoyed being in his arms.

"In five or six months, there will be new photos to add to these," he said. "And then, over the years, many, many more."

Beckett frowned and looked up at him. "Just how many children do you except me to have?" she questioned.

He laughed, his eyes sparkling. "As many as you want, Kate," he said, then dipped his head down and surprised her with a quick kiss. Leaning back, he grinned and slipped his arm around her waist, his fingers fiddling along the side of her baby bump. "Alright, now let me show you the master bedroom."

"You've already been," she commented, noticing that he no longer had the luggage with him.

"I let you look at the photos," he explained with a shrug.

He opened a door for her and ushered her in. Stepping through, Beckett paused and gasped. The bed… the bed looked so big and comfortable. It looked like one of those beds out of a fantasy novel, with an overhang and silky curtains. The mattress was covered in a large downy pale blue comforter, and the pillows were of a grey hue.

Taking her eyes off the bed—ignoring the fact that it had been the first thing her eyes had been drawn too—Beckett looked around, noticing how the rest of the bedroom was decorated in matching colors. The small couch tilted to look out the windows was of a pale blue, the velvet pillows a light sand yellow color. White satin curtains, semi-see-through, framed the windows. Beyond them was a lovely view of the ocean, the waves lapping up along the sandy beach. It was a beautiful sight.

The dresser must have been of a sturdy wood, painted with whitewash to give it a rustic look, and had little red swirls painted besides the handles of the drawers. She even noticed what looked like little handprints along the side in blue paint. Beckett looked at him with an arched eyebrow.

"You sure this is your room?" she asked, dubiously.

"Positive," he said, moving past her to pick up the rollers. "And it's our room now, dear."

She bit her lower lip and glared at him. "Don't call me dear, I'm not some old maid."

"How about honey or babe?" he asked, glancing at her from over his shoulder as he hoisted their suitcases up and plopped them down on the padded bench by the foot of the canopy bed. Yes… the canopy bed!
Beckett stepped more into the room and gestured towards the bed. "That doesn't particularly look like a very masculine bed, now does it?"

He stopped, straightened and looked back at her with a frown. "You don't like it?"

"No… yes… I mean… that's not the point."

"Then what is the point?"

Beckett sighed. "I don't know."

Castle chuckled and shook his head. "Don't you think that at times, even I want to pretend I'm someone else… somewhere else?"

She looked up, confused. Why would he need to do that? He was Richard Castle. Then it dawned on her. His need for escape, to a fantasy world, where he could be whatever he wanted. A small smile tugged at her lips and she shook her head. "You wanted a fantasy themed bedroom, didn't you?"

Castle smirked and wiggled his eyebrows. "And now I have a fair maiden."

"Oh… I'm not some damsel in distress, Castle," she teased, rolling her eyes, as he turned back to their luggage, beginning to open them. "I don't need a knight in shining armor."

"Oh really?"

She nodded and crossed her arms under her breasts. "I got a gun," she reminded him. "So who needs the knight? He's dull and boring. I'd take the court jester, any day."

Castle snorted and looked at her. "Really? I'm the court jester?"

"If the shoe fits," she smirked, enjoying herself.

"Well, at least I get the princess," he said, turning back to the suitcase.

Beckett narrowed her eyes, noticing he'd gone for her roller first. She jumped forward, as quickly as she could while four months pregnant, and shoved his hands away.

"Oh no you don't," she said, scowling.

"What? It's not like I haven't seen your underwear before," he protested. "I was just going to put them in the drawer."

"I know… I… I just have some… er… more provocative pieces that I want to save for our honeymoon… as… um… as a surprise," she stammered out, feeling her cheeks flush with a blush.

Castle chuckled and reached up to a brush a strand of hair behind her ear. "You're so cute when you get all embarrassed," he said.

She raised her eyebrows. "I… I'm not embarrassed."

"Your pink cheeks beg to differ."

She huffed. "Fine… maybe I'm still getting used to it… it all."

"Really?" he snorted in a laugh and turned to his bag. Castle opened it and began retrieving his
Beckett sighed and brushed her hair back from her face, still feeling her cheeks all warm and hot. "I've never been good about sharing myself with someone else, Rick," she said. "You of all people should know that."

He nodded. "Yes, took me damn near three years to get you to finally admit we have a connection."

She smiled, and sat down on the bed, letting out a gasp of surprise. "It's so soft!" she exclaimed, running her fingers along the comforter. Taking a breath, she composed herself and looked back up at him. "I actually like that I haven't gotten used to it," she explained. "It... it makes everything special and wonderful... the magic, as you would say, is still there, and I always want it there with you."

Castle looked up at her and grinned. "I want that too, Kate," he said, leaning across the distance between them to cup her cheek in one hand. "Always." He then closed the final gap and kissed her soft and sweetly. He broke away just before the kiss turned passionate. Beckett groaned, and pouted at him. She was so hot and wet right now. She needed him desperately.

"Castle," she protested.

He raised his eyebrows and grinned. "Who'd guess that the thought of marrying me would get you so horny," he teased, finishing up with his luggage and moving the roller to the closet.

Beckett gave him a little glare and reached up to the top of her blouse and began to undo the buttons. "You think you're so strong, do you, jester boy?" she asked. "Think you can resist the princess once she's removed all her clothes."

Castle gulped and looked at her with big eyes, already beginning to glaze over with desire. She smiled tightly, knowing she would succeed. Slipping her blouse off her shoulders and tossing it to the floor, she stood up and shimmied out of her jeans. Stepping out of the puddle of clothing on the floor, she climbed back on the bed, only her underwear left. Turning onto her side, she laid down and patted empty side of the bed with her, looking up at him with a sultry look.

"Are you going to deny your princess, jester boy?" she asked with a smirk.

Castle took a deep breath, his chest heaving as he so obviously tried to restrain his building desire. Her eyes flicked down past his waist and she knew he had failed.

"Damn you, woman," he hissed as he hastily began undoing the buttons of his shirt. "You're going to be the death of me."

"You love it, so just shut up," she teased back, scooting over as he climbed up onto the bed besides her. "Make me laugh, jester boy."

"I'm not the jester," Castle asserted, kicking his jeans off.

"Oh? And who are you then?" she questioned, raising an eyebrow as she ran her fingers down his bare chest.

Castle groaned and reached out for her, his hands grasping her with skill as he spun her over onto her back. "I'm the King," he asserted. "And you, my dear... are my Queen."

"Oh... just shut up and kiss—"
His lips were on hers with a fiery passion that spoke more than words ever could with how much he desired her. His hands danced up and down her legs, causing gooseflesh to materialize in their wake. Her arms slipped around his neck, holding him to her as their kiss deepened and his fingers tugged at her panties.

Breaking away, he kissed her cheek and jaw, and then lathered her neck in his wet kisses. "This might be a little fast and sloppy," he groaned as she reached down and freed him from his boxers.

"Doesn't matter," she puffed out, her entire body burning, coming alive with the sensations that only Castle could call forth. "I just need you."

Castle's hot mouth blazed a trail back up her neck and he seized her lips as he pushed up into her, his hands holding her as she writhed in pleasure at the moment of connection.

"Oh god… yes," she moaned into his mouth as he began moving inside her.

He tugged at her bra, freeing one of her breasts so he could hold it in his hand. She moved her hips with him, for a moment wondering when they'd have to discover new positions to make love once her bump grew to enormous size. Pushing that thought aside, she lost herself in the feeling of being pinned underneath Castle, the soft mattress surrounding her, feeling him move and love her as only he could. It only took two more quick and deep strokes by him until she was falling over the edge, screaming his name and clenching her legs around his hips. He joined her seconds later, groaning her name and kissing her hard as they both soared through the wonderful sea of bliss.

"That… that was just what I needed, Rick," Beckett panted, her chest heaving as he slipped off of her and rolled onto his side.

Castle raised up on his side and looked down at her, running his hand along the lines of her jaw, her hair disheveled and skin slick with the dew of lovemaking. He reached down and gently replaced her breasts back into the cup of her bra and smoothed his palm over her chest.

"You're beautiful, you know that?" he asked.

She smiled and shrugged. "It's always nice to here you say that, yes," she grinned and smoothed back his tousled hair. "You're not bad yourself, Rick."

He chuckled, and then dipped down to kiss her softly. "How about some dinner… and then we go for round two?"

"What happened to waiting until we were officially hitched?" she questioned, raising an eyebrow.

"You," he harrumphed, feigning the look of a defeated man. "You are what happened. Damn it, woman, you've made me break my vow of celibacy until you're officially my wife."

"You complaining?" she asked, as she rolled over to the edge of the mattress.

"Hell no."

She placed one hand on her swollen belly and pushed herself up off the edge of the bed with the other. Looking over her shoulder at Castle, she smirked. "Well, glad I could change your mind, then."

Castle scooted over and followed her, giving her bottom a playful pat as he climbed off the bed. She pursed her lips and rolled her eyes, but welcomed the lingering kiss he gave her as he stood up besides her, his hand wandering.
"Good thing we have the place to ourselves until tomorrow," he murmured, resting his forehead against hers.

Beckett nodded, resting her hands on his bare chest. "Yes," she agreed. "Now… why don't you go cook us up something that can give us the energy for a full night, while I try out that bath you were bragging to me about."

"Yes, ma'am."
Chapter 28

She woke up to an empty bed, which irritated her greatly. Finally hooking up with Castle, and now getting hitched to him was supposed to mean she never had to wake up alone again. Beckett had been hoping to wake up to find him nearby, so she could then nestle into his broad frame and then go back to sleep… or maybe coax another display of their love before company arrived and they'd be kept apart—sexually—until after the wedding.

So, when she found his side of the bed empty, and cold, she huffed in annoyance, scowling into the space he was supposed to be filling. Then she smelled the most deliciously enticing aroma wafting up from downstairs.

Throwing the comforter off, Beckett climbed out of bed. She pulled the sheet with her, modestly covering herself as she walked over to the dresser. Opening it, she grabbed a pair of yoga pants and one of Castle's t-shirts, and quickly got dressed. Finding her slippers already set out for her by the door, she smiled and curled her toes into them before padding down the hall and going down stairs to find her future husband.

On the bottom story, she paused and took in the living room. Just like most of the rooms, the walls were white, as was the mantle and paneling around the fireplace. Set above the mantle was a painting that looked like a Jackson Pollock, but on closer examination, it was actually something from Alexis's elementary school years. She smiled. It fit with the rest of the décor… all very eclectic and so very Castle.

The fireplace was framed by two large bookshelves on either side, filled to the brim with books. She slowly ran her fingers along the titles, examining them. The collection here was just as impressive as the one back at the Loft. She looked back at the rest of the room. It wasn't wide open, like back in New York. This one seemed more full, cozier. The couches and armchairs were all a pale cream color and covered in soft cushiony pillows. The dark rosewood coffee table was littered with books and the occasional theater magazine.

All in all, the room felt like Castle… and her, Funny. She'd never been here, but she already was getting a vibe that said this was her kind of place. Then again, that shouldn't surprise her really, since Castle was her kind of guy. Her one and done.

"Kate! Is that you nosying about in the living room?"

Beckett raised her eyebrows and glanced towards the kitchen. How did he know she was up? She had been particularly quiet, wanting to surprise him. Alas, it appeared he did not want to be surprised. Well, that was his loss, now wasn't it?

She took one last look around the living room… already selecting which place she wanted to lounge in to read a book, before then padding across the soft carpet and towards the swinging door that led to the kitchen.

When she pushed through, she found him standing with his back to her as he hummed softly to some song playing on the radio. He lifted a spatula and she caught sight of what had enticed her olfactory senses and woken her up.

"Morning, beautiful!" Castle beamed, spinning around to greet her with the most adorable lopsided grin. "I made pancakes!" He quickly deposited the latest fluffy flapjack on top of a generous stack. Her mouth instantly began to water. "You know… I figured I needed to make a kind of thank
you… for last night.” He winked, his eyes twinkling.

His hair was sticking up in the back and he looked thoroughly adorable with his bed hair. Beckett was reminded of the time he had camped out in her living room during the case where the serial killer was obsessed with Nikki Heat (in a sense her) and had even gone so far as to blow up her apartment in an ultimately futile attempt to kill her. Luckily for her, Castle had her back. He always had her back.

"Well, I think you've got it all mixed up and backwards, Rick," Beckett said, padding around the island countertop to wrap her arms around Castle's middle and lean into his back, pressing a light kiss to the back of his neck. "I should be the one thanking you for last night."

"Oh," he visibly shivered at her touch and kiss, and Beckett smiled softly, biting her lower lip. "And… and why's that?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're the one who wanted to try and stay celibate until our honeymoon?" she giggled lightly. Her? Giggle? Not Kate Beckett. Kate Beckett did not giggle. She frowned slightly. Must be the hormones, part of her said. The other half disagreed. Could just be you're happy and excited that tomorrow you'll be married… to Richard freaking Castle!

"Well, for the record, you're hard to resist," he pointed out, gesturing with the spatula as he finished flipping the last of the pancakes. "Especially when you teased me like you did." His eyes darkened, already filling with desire. Beckett bit her lower lip, loving it how just in a baggy oversized shirt, and a pair of yoga pants, she was still desirable in his eyes.

Leaning around him, she pressed a quick kiss to his lips before slipping away and grabbing the plate stacked high with pancakes. "Love you, too, writer boy!" she smirked, locating the syrup already waiting to be used and dousing it all over her pancakes.

Castle's lips quirked up as he watched her use her fork to cut her pancakes into bitable sizes. She looked up at him from across the countertop as he spread syrup over his stack. A smile cut across her face as she stabbed one of the pieces and brought it to her lips, pausing long enough to take in the heavenly rich aroma before popping it in her mouth and chewing. An undeniable moan, unintentional, escaped from her lips as she savored the flavors.

"God, Castle… these are so good," she groaned in approval, before quickly stabbing another piece and stuffing it in her mouth.

Castle chortled loudly and shook his head, and then proceeded to try his best to keep pace with her, but in the end, she won. It wasn't even a fair contest, she had a head start, not to mention the fact she was eating for three, and probably had a more voracious appetite than him. He offered her more, and she gladly accepted.

"I don't think I've ever been this hungry before," she admitted, glancing up at him with a sheepish look, slightly embarrassed at how she was stuffing her face. Really, she'd never eaten like this before.

"I think it's hot," Castle said, wiggling his eyebrows.

She harrumphed and rolled her eyes. "You're only saying that because I'm pregnant," Beckett scoffed. "And you don't want to hurt my feelings."

"What?" he objected, feigning a pout. "Hey? Give me some credit. I think I proved just how hot I'm for you last night." He paused and smirked. "If you want, I can always prove it to you again. Right
Beckett raised her eyebrows at his challenge and bit her lower lip, not wanting to give in. Oh… he was so winning right now, but she wasn't going to let him know just how turned on she was.

Taking her silence as a victory, Castle smirked and tossed her wink. "Anyways," he let the matter go, much to Beckett's relief. "Stuffing your face just goes to show how much you like my cooking."

Beckett pursed her lips. But then her happiness took over and her mouth spread wide in a joyful toothy smile. "You are a good cook, I'll grant you that," she said. "To be honest, though, I was actually surprised by that."

Castle made a face. "Why would that surprise you?"

"Um… hello? You're a guy," Beckett said, like that was reason enough.

"I was a single father," he put forth. "I had to make sure my little girl got fed, now didn't I?"

"You could have had a nanny do that," Beckett offered, arching an eyebrow at him.

"Well, believe it or not, I have not always been this ridiculously rich," Castle said. "There was a time when just a can of tuna seemed to cost me an arm and a leg. And even now, I'm a small fry compared to the filthy rich. Not even a blip on their radar."

"You still manage to make a big splash on the society columns, though," she commented, wincing slightly as she said it. They had yet to truly discuss all the Page Six stuff and the impact it would have on their lives. Thankfully, it appeared Castle was in far too good a mood to let it bother him.

"Let's just say, I'm not all that disappointed to no longer be a main feature," he said, picking up the empty plates and taking them to the sink to rinse them off before putting them in the dishwasher. He turned around and half smiled as he thought of something. "And besides, I'd rather be an obscure and unknown author with you any day, than be the world's most recognizable novelist and have my face plastered all over every newspaper and magazine."

Beckett smiled at that and wrapped her arms around his neck when Castle walked around the island counter to join her. She parted her legs and he settled himself between her thighs as he leaned forward and kissed her. She closed her eyes and tightened her hold on him, pulling him closer, wanting to feel every inch of her soon-to-be husband—her partner… for life.

The kiss soon grew deeper and she could feel just how turned on Castle was in just a short amount of time. Hell, she was turned on too, but now was not the time. Guest would be arriving shortly and they both still needed to shower and change.

Reluctantly pulling away, Beckett let out a groan and rested her forehead against hers. He tenderly ran his fingers through her hair and down the side of her face, his deep blue eyes locked on her hazel-green. "As much as I want to continue with this… we really do need to get ready, Rick," she sighed.

"Yeah, I know," Castle agreed. "Hey," he smirked and his eyebrows wiggled suggestively. "We could shower together."

Beckett pursed her lips together and smiled. "Yeah… I… I'd like that," she murmured, blushing slightly… the heat in her core reigniting. She loosened her legs around his waist and Castle stepped back, holding up a hand. Taking it, she slipped off the barstool and together they went back
upstairs to share one more moment of private intimacy before everyone arrived.

XXX

His hands roamed all over her body, from her neck and shoulders to the little dip and curve of her ankle. Beckett could not help but moan when his fingers slid up and down her thighs, especially when they traveled closer and closer to the one place his touch would always make her lose control and give it all to him. But he didn't. He only teased her, drifting closer enough to feel how hot and ready she was, but far enough away that he never made complete contact.

"Castle..." she panted. It came out more like a whimper and Beckett could not help but realize just how desperate and needy she sounded. God, she really had it bad, didn't she?

Beckett lolled her neck back and rested her head on his shoulder as his hands continued to lather up the soap all over her body. He turned his head and pressed a soft kiss against her temple and she smiled.

"You know, you're really the first man I've let do this," she spoke up, speaking softly, though loud enough that he could hear her over the spray of the shower.

"Really?" he sounded slightly hesitant, like he thought she was just pulling his leg.

"Yes, really," Beckett said, arching her neck up to look at him, letting him know she was not toying with him. "The shower... it... it has always been my place... private place. Somewhere I could relax and just unwind alone. I've never let someone share it with me. Never... until you."

Castle smiled softly and tilted his head so their lips could meet in an intimate and languid kiss. She closed her eyes and hummed into his mouth, granting his tongue permission to enter. His hands moved up her body, one stopping to rest on her swollen belly, while the other continued up until he was palming one of her breasts. She moaned as his fingers flicked across her nipple.

Two could play at that game, she thought, and nudged her ass back into his groin, against his already straining arousal.

Fortunately, he interpreted the gesture correctly, and pulled her closer to him, flushing her back up against his chest. His hand on her belly wandered down to cup her between her legs.

"Yes," she moaned breathily, giving him approval. "One more time... Castle... one more time before we're officially husband and wife."

Castle dipped his head down and sucked on her neck, his tongue lathering up and down her wet hot skin, seeking out her pulse point. He found it in short order and had her panting and mewling in no time, his fingers working her between her legs in sync with his lips on her neck. He always did. Always could.

No man had ever affected her the way Castle did. With just a slight touch, not even sexual in nature, he could cause parts of her body to come alive that she had never known she could feel sensations like those in. It was unreal, really, that he held such power over her. But right now, she couldn't care less. She loved it, and she craved it like she had never craved anything in her life before.

Turning around in his arms, Beckett pressed her chest against his, and kissed the slope of his neck, mirroring what he had done to her. His hands ghosted down her back until both his palms were fully cupping her ass. He squeezed and groaned, his arousal pressing firmly up against her stomach. God, he was so hard... so warm.
"Kate," her name tumbled from his lips in a heavy sigh of want and need. It thrilled her that she could do this to him.

The effect they both had on each other was unlike any she had ever encountered, and it just screamed to the universe that they were right for each other. Not to mention that fact that when they connected in that most intimate of ways, it felt as if they had been made for one another.

"Rick," she returned his plea with his name from her lips… same tone, holding the quality of want and need that his voice had had.

Letting out a grunt from the strain on his muscles, Castle lifted her up off the shower floor. She placed her hands on his shoulders to help. They locked eyes and shared in a silent communication, one that was uniquely theirs and no one else's.

*Don't hurt yourself, Castle.* She told him with her eyes.

*I can manage, Kate.* So he was going with arrogant and cocky, eh.

*Still, I don't want you to throw your back before the honeymoon.* She was generally concerned.

*I can't help it if I want you so badly.* He was pleading now, not even bothering to hide how much he wanted her at this very moment.

*Neither can I.* She admitted sheepishly, blushing slightly.

*Let's just do it, okay?* He implored.

*Okay.* She agreed.

*Love you.*

*I love you, too.*

With their silent communication finished, Castle shifted his hold. Beckett moved her legs around his hips and he guided her down onto him. She closed her eyes and felt her breath hitch up at the feeling of him entering her body. No matter how many times they made love… that feeling, the feeling of him entering her… always felt like it was the first time.

Castle gripped her thighs and lowered her until he was buried deep inside her, up to the hilt. He staggered for a moment, gasping out a moan of deep pleasure added with the physical strain of holding them both up. She'd put on some more weight since the last time he'd held her like this, mainly because she was carrying two babies inside her womb, and the angle wasn't the same, since she had to lean back a bit because of the swell of her baby bump, but he still managed it.

After she'd come down from the high of their union, Beckett squeezed her hand on his shoulder until he looked into her eyes. "The wall?" she managed in a panting voice.

He nodded, still seeming to be in a daze of pleasure at being buried deep in her, which she couldn't fault him for—she felt the same way with having him inside her. Her heart pounded profoundly against her ribs as the euphoria of being united with him in this most intimate of ways swept throughout her body.

He staggered backwards until his back bumped into the tiled wall of the shower. Leaning against it took some of the strain off his muscles, and Castle sighed.
"Better?" she asked, her chest heaving. God, he'd yet to move inside her and she was already so close to coming completely undone.

"Much," he grunted. And then his fingers tightened around her thighs and he lifted her a bit.

Beckett closed her eyes and her mouth dropped in a gasp as she felt every inch of him recede from her before plunging back up into her warmth. She began to pant, the explosion of sensations in her body echoing all around her as she forgot everything but them. Her and Castle. Kate and Rick… forever linked together by the bond of their love.

Opening her eyes, Beckett focused on the object of her desire. Rick Castle. She stretched her head forward and captured his lips as he continued to lift her up and down, removing and impaling her with his throbbing manhood. She did her best to help, to take some of the burden off him, wanting to be a part of this, to show him just home much she wanted him… wanted this. What they were doing now should be physically impossible with how far she was, but somehow, by some fluke of reality, they were doing it, and Beckett was not going to complain.

With two more strokes, she came undone, clenching him tightly and screaming out his name, her nails digging into the flesh on his broad shoulders. Castle hissed and groaned, ramming his mouth hard against hers as he followed her, the burst of his release hot and warm inside her.

Beckett moaned and hummed in approval as she came down from her high, lowering her legs as she lowered her back down. She gasped out a disappointed groan when he slipped out of her, but it was necessary part, even if she didn't like it.

Castle looked down at her with dark eyes, his pupils still dilated from the natural euphoria that came along with physical release. He brought a hand up and cupped the side of her face. "You're so beautiful, Kate," he murmured. "So very beautiful."

Her cheeks reddened. He always had a way with words, and it always made her feel warm and tingly inside whenever he said things like that. For a highly attractive woman, Beckett never really thought much of herself. Sure, she knew that men thought she was hot and all, but being sexually desirable and being called beautiful were two very different things. And when Castle said it, she knew he meant it both ways; that she was beautiful on both the inside… and the outside. And that's what made it so real with him. So right. Here was a man who had seen her at both her best and worst moments, and to him, she was always beautiful.

"I wish I had your words, Rick," she replied softly, gazing back up at him with the same amount of love in her eyes that shone from his.

"You don't need words, Kate," he said. "Words are my thing. You speak with your heart."

Beckett sighed and leaned her head against his chest, turning into him to kiss his skin. "You have no idea how important you are to me," she said. "Without you… I honestly don't know if I'd even know myself."

Castle wrapped his arms around her and hugged her to him, dropping a kiss on the top of her head. "I love you, too."

She smiled and melted more into him, never getting tired of having his arms around her.

"Now," he breathed out, obviously still trying to recover from his release, pulling them back under the spray of hot water. "Why don't we get ourselves cleaned up?"
"No… no not that one," Kate shook her head, running her lower lip under her teeth as she regarded her fiancé. "The blue one… yes… that one. I like it. It… it brings out your eyes."

Castle's eyes crinkled with mirth as he swapped shirts on her instructions. He pulled the dark blue button-down shirt over his shoulders, and without hesitation, she reached out and began buttoning it up herself. He looked at her with raised eyebrows and a pursed smile. She looked up at him from under her eyelashes and smiled in return, pausing to push up and give him a quick chaste kiss. He chuckled and his hands landed on her hips, pulling her to him.

"Castle," she feebly admonished as his mouth descended on her neck, quickly finding her pulse point. Despite herself, she let out an airy giggle of delight and closed her eyes, basking in the feeling of him loving her. "We… we… we have guests coming soon. Any time now. We… we need to get dressed," Kate panted out.

"We still got time," he mumbled against her skin, his lips dancing up the slender slope of her neck to that point just behind her ear that drove her wild and made her toes curl. His fingers started to work their way up the back of her blouse.

Kate arched her neck back, running her lower lip under her teeth as she tried to regain control. It was just really, really hard… especially when he was touching her like this. Heaving in a quick breath, feeling the heat rising in her chest—and other regions—she brought her hands to his shoulders and gently pushed him away, giving him a chastising glare.

"We really don't have time, Castle," she said, not bothering to hide her own disappointment. "Lanie called while we were drying off. They'll be here in twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes is more than enough time," Castle insisted, slipping a hand down her lower back to grip her panty-clad ass and pull her to him, a playful smirk plastered on his face, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. "Besides… you've yet to get fully dress."

"Whoa, boy! Save it for the honeymoon!" Kate gasped, feeling the intensity of his desire for her. Involuntarily, she bucked her hips against him, earning a sweet moan from his throat. God, she wanted nothing more than to pick up from where they had left off in the shower, but really… they didn't have the time. Not if they wanted to give each other the right amount of attention they both craved.

Castle groaned, pouting like the child he was. "But I want you all to myself," he whined.

"Oh, you will, Castle… you will," she grinned, giving him a sultry look. "Just not now."

"Fine," he huffed, letting his hand drop from the secure hold he had had on her left buttock. She sighed, missing the contact, but knowing it was necessary. She needed to douse the rising fire in her loins.

Castle stepped back and finished buttoning up his shirt. He turned and gave her a little frown, before fully turning away to tuck the shirttails under the waistband of his dark jeans. Kate let out a hot breath, trying not to stare at his backside, as she absentlly rubbing her hands across her belly, and resisting the urge to let them slip further south. Closing her eyes, she focused on calming herself, both her rapid breathing and pulsating heartbeat.

Stepping over to the dresser, Kate rifled through her clothes, looking for the dark slacks that
would go with the purple blouse she had already pulled on. Her eyebrows knitted together as she sensed his eyes on her. Hooking her head over her shoulder, she gazed over at him with raised eyebrows.

"Yes?"

"Oh nothing," he grinned, sitting on the edge of the bed and pulling on his shoes. "Just… you know… admiring the view."

Her cheeks turned a rosy color as she bit her lower lip, noticing the direction of his gaze. "Stop staring… it… it's creepy."

"Can't help it," Castle crooned behind her, tying his shoelaces. "Especially when that little number you've got on only accentuates the natural perfection that is you." He winked, before leering more openly at her ass.

That's it… she was blushing even more. She could not believe this. How did he do this to her? It's not like they hadn't been naked together before. But no. He still seemed to hold that power over her to make her blush like crazy. Castle grinned and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Pink suits you," he said.

"Huh?" she blinked. Oh yes… she was wearing pink panties. How could she forget that? It was rather girly of her, which, oddly enough, wasn't like her at all. "Oh, Castle… just wait until you see what I've got for the honeymoon."

Castle chuckled as he stood up and stretched his back. "I'll get out of your hair, let you dress in peace," he said, too smugly for her liking, as if he was the sole reason she'd yet to get dressed.

"Okay," she knitted her eyebrows together, a little confused about how this entire conversation got started. She had no idea.

He sauntered over to her, his hand coming up to cup the side of her face, fingers digging into her chestnut locks. Before she could say anything, he pulled her to him, kissing her deep and hard. She closed her eyes and surrendered to it, unable to resist the magnetic pull that was them and their love. She let out a hot breath as they separated for air, letting him see her fluttering eyes and the desire slowly filling them.

"Good," he smirked.

"Good?" she echoed, raising a perfect eyebrow in question.

"Just had to make sure I wasn't the only one wishing we didn't have to play host today," he asserted, gesturing down to her hand, which was fist ing the front of his shirt tightly.

"Oh, Rick… I could have told you that," she rolled her eyes, a sly smile spreading across her face. "Now, shoo… and let me get dressed." She let go of his shirt and waved her hands, like she was trying to get rid of some stray cat that had wandered into the yard.

"Right, right," he nodded, slipping back, but not too quickly that he couldn't drink in the sight of her bare long legs before he had to wait until tomorrow evening to see them again. He bit his lip and gave a little shake of his head. "Tomorrow night can't come fast enough. I'm going to miss seeing those legs."
"Really? Just my legs, huh?" she teased him, her eyes sparkling.

Castle raised an eyebrow at her challenge. "Oh… I could go into great detail about what I'm going to miss… but then, we might become a little distracted by all the heat and desperate need it would generate. Then, we'd never leave the room."

"Right," she laughed, clucking her tongue at him. "Keep that up, Writer Boy, and I'll just have to kick you out."

He threw up his hands in surrender. "I'm leaving… I wouldn't want to get my beautiful face ruined before the big day."

Chuckling and rolling her eyes, Kate turned back to the dresser as Castle left her to it, as he went downstairs to prepare for the arrival of their guests.

XXX

She heard noises coming from downstairs. More specifically, she heard laughter. It sounded like the boys had arrived and were clowning around with Castle. Finishing up the final touches on her light makeup, Kate adjusted her blouse, feeling a little self-conscious due to how her growing middle was stretching the fabric. She frowned, hating how she looked in the mirror. One or two buttons seemed to be straining. Gosh, she huffed. She really liked this blouse and now… now it felt like it didn't fit.

Sighing, Kate turned towards the closet and pulled out a grey cardigan that was loose enough to wrap snuggly around her growing frame without looking like it was straining to do so. Besides, they were planning on barbecuing outside, and it was a bit windy. Thankfully the forecast for tomorrow had called for clear skies and fair winds. Slipping the cardigan on, she closed it quickly. She slipped on her flats (how she missed her high heels) and then departed the bedroom.

Walking down the hall towards the stairs, she listened more to the voices drifting up from the living room. It sounded like it was more than just the boys. Of course, Lanie and Jenny were there as well, but it also sounded like Martha and Alexis had arrived at the same time. That just left her dad. Montgomery and his wife would be coming tomorrow for the ceremony, so they wouldn't be here tonight.

"There's the blushing bride!"

Kate blinked and looked down to see Lanie halt halfway up the stairs, smiling at her. She spread her lips wide in a joyous smile.

"Lanie!" she rushed down the stairs, careful to watch her footing, and collided with her friend in a hug.

"Oof," Lanie let out a startled gasp as she returned the hug. "How you doing, girl?"

"Great, and you? How was the drive?"

"Okay," her friend nodded as they turned to walk down the stairs. "We were following Ryan and Jenny, but he got lost. Jenny was trying to talk him into asking for directions, but Javi wouldn't let him. So we ended up going around in circles for about half an hour until we noticed that the shrubbery was blocking sign for the turn off."

Kate smiled, all teeth and gum, just imagining how the boys tried to act all cool like they had seen it all the time, claiming they had only been stalling to give Castle and Beckett more time to get
ready. And according to Lanie, that's exactly what the boys had claimed. Kate laughed and held on to Lanie's arm as they continued their descent down the stairs.

"Well, I fell asleep during the ride out," Kate confessed. "So I'm afraid I can't even give directions yet."

They reached the bottom landing, and stepped down into the foyer. Turning, they walked into the living room where Kate saw everyone spread out, lounging around and talking. Martha was reclined on one of the armchairs, looking like she was already partaking in a mai tai. Castle was sitting in the other one, Alexis perched alongside him on the arm of the chair, one arm draped over his shoulder. Ryan and Jenny were sitting close together on the couch opposite the Castles, while Esposito was standing off to Ryan's left, glancing over at Alexis's Jackson Pollock inspired painting.

"Look who I found hiding upstairs!" Lanie enthused, laughing lightly as she pulled Kate further into the room.

"Lanie," she hissed under her breath. "I was not hiding upstairs."

"Sure you weren't," her friend shook her head, not convinced. Kate gritted her teeth and her eyebrows knitted together as she cast a glare at Lanie, before turning away and welcoming everyone as they came over to greet her. She gave Jenny a hug, and was surprised when both Ryan and Esposito gave her big brotherly hugs.

"Oh Kate, you beautiful creature!" Martha practically pounced on her with a spinning embrace that almost left her dizzy. She glanced over the diva's shoulder and cast a pleading glance over at an amused looking Castle.

Alexis was next, giving her the quickest hug, which she was grateful for, since all she wanted to do was stop hugging everyone. She was a little embarrassed about the whole thing, considering they'd all seen each other two days ago. And she really wasn't that much of a hugging person, unless it was with Castle. But she guessed she deserved it, since she kind of started with the hugging when she saw Lanie. It had just been hard, though, considering Lanie was her best friend—maid of honor—and this was the day before she got married.

Castle stood as everyone shuffled back to their places, Lanie and Esposito settling down onto the center couch as Alexis asked if anyone would like something to drink. Kate looked around and saw Castle extending his hand towards her. She smiled, accepting his proffered hand. He guided her around the coffee table and directed her into the armchair he had previously been sitting in. He took up the perch, where Alexis had been. Kate sighed as she sat down and smiled when she felt his warm arm slide around her shoulders.

"So, Lanie was telling me how you guys got lost," Kate smirked as she glanced between Esposito and Ryan.

Esposito shot Lanie a quick look before turning back and shaking his head. "No, not lost, just... um...," his voice trailed off as he tried to think of an excuse.

"Taking in the scenery," Ryan supplied, flashing his trademarked Irish grin.

Kate could not help but notice the look that passed between Lanie and Jenny. Yep. They weren't buying it either. The boys seemed to squirm for a moment until they turned their gazes towards Castle, seeking assistance.
"Oh yes," her fiancé nodded. "The view around here… amazing."

The way he said it, Kate knew exactly what he was talking about. And it had nothing to do with the scenery outside. Nope. From the intonations of his voice that he used when he crooned that out, Kate was positive he was really speaking about the view he had when she had leaned over the chest of drawers as she looked for pants. She must have started to blush… curse her body for betraying her… because the next thing she knew, Lanie was eyeing her with an expression that said, 'oh, you are so going to be telling me about this later'.

"Well," she let out a breath, not realizing she had been holding it in. "I'm glad you guys finally manage to fine the place."

"Yeah," Esposito nodded, craning his neck to look around the living room. "Pretty nice too."

"Yeah, Castle, how come you've never invited us out here before?" Ryan chirped in, snuggling closer to Jenny and giving Castle a look.

Castle chuckled. She could feel the vibration of his mirth as his arm around her shoulder tightened, pulling her more into his side. "If I'd known you were that desperate for a beach weekend getaway, Ryan… I'd have loaned you the keys."

"Seriously?" Ryan asked, his eyebrows rising in surprise. "I mean, like really… you'd let us borrow the place for a weekend?"

"Sure, absolutely," Castle answered smoothly, the smile still on his face. "What are friend for, eh? However… this weekend… I'm afraid… it's booked."

Lanie and Jenny laughed and Ryan furrowed his brow in confusion. "Huh?"

Esposito shook his head and looked away from Ryan. "Seriously, Bro?"

"Oh!" Ryan's eyes lit up with understanding. He looked up at Castle and winked. "I got you now."

"Took you long enough," Esposito murmured under his breath.

Alexis returned from the kitchen with some iced tea and water, placing them on the coffee table, and everyone reached out for their drinks. Kate held her glass in both hands and took a little sip. When she looked up, Castle was gazing lovingly at her, and she blushed. He leaned down, burying his nose in her hair as his lips brushed against her ear.

"You know… I find it adorable when you use both your hands like that," he whispered, sending shivers through her body. She bit her lower lip and glanced up at him, suppressing a smile.

"Care to share with the rest of us?" Lanie called out to them, breaking the spell.

Castle jerked his head away and glanced over at the M.E. "Nope," he shook his head and gave her a pursed smile. Kate merely shrugged and tossed a teasing grin at Lanie before taking another sip of her iced tea.

"Now they're keeping secrets from me," Lanie muttered under her breath, pouting and crossing her arms over her chest.

Kate leaned into Castle as he squeezed her shoulder. While he was chatting with Ryan about possible dates when he and Jenny could borrow the Hamptons house for the weekend, Kate gave Lanie a wink on the sly, letting her friend know that once they were alone, she'd give her some
gossip. If there was anything Lanie loved more than giving unsolicited advice, it was gossip.

XXX

The low music coming out from the speakers hidden along the side of the house was barely audible over the sounds of the ocean in the distance. After her dad had arrived, they relocated to the back deck. Most everyone else had changed into their swimsuits and were now playing a really intense game of Marco Polo in the pool. Kate, however, remained behind, sitting at the picnic table, chatting with her dad and Martha. If she wasn't so self-conscious about her pregnant appearance she might have been tempted to join the others, but she didn't.

"You sure you don't want to go swimming with them?" Jim asked, looking at his daughter with a hint of worry in his eyes.

Kate realized she must have missed something in the conversation, because her dad had that look on his face. She turned back to him and gave him a weak smile. She knew it was fake. He knew it was fake, but that was that. "No, I'm good," she lied.

"Katie?"

"It's ok, Dad," she reached over and patted his knee. "I'm fine. I really don't feel like swimming."

"Really?" came Martha. "Darling, you keep glancing over there almost every minute. Why don't you go in and change. I'm sure Richard would love it if you joined them."

"I'm sure he would," Kate smirked, her eyes dancing over to her fiancé.

"But?" Martha prompted, very astute, having sensed the but.

"He really hasn't yet seen me in my bikini," she said with a shrug.

"I'm sure he's seen you in far less than a bikini, Katiebug, considering the fact I'm finally going to become a grandfather," Jim laughed, and Kate shot him a look. She suddenly remembered whom she was talking with and she blushed extremely pink. "Ah, don't be embarrassed, Katie. How'd you think your mother and I had you?"

"Um… don't wanna hear it!" Kate closed her eyes and shook her head like she did when she was a kid. She knew very well what her parents did to make her, but she still didn't like hearing it. Something about thinking about your parents as sexual beings was just… shuddering.

Jim and Martha shared a laugh at her expense as she grew a deeper shade of pink as she blushed even more.

"So what is it, then?" Martha asked, pausing to take a sip of her latest mai tai (seriously, how many of those had she had?). "Don't tell me your embarrassed about your body, dear? You're lovely."

Kate blanched. "I really don't have my figure anymore," she confessed. "And… well, it's not like a bikini is the best option for a pregnant woman to wear."

Martha shrugged. "Does Richard have a problem with how you look?"

"No," she answered immediately without any hesitation. Her mind drifted off, remembering how he openly watched her get dress, his eyes lustfully drinking in all of her. "He… he says I'm beautiful."
"And you are, Katie," Jim said proudly, leaning over to give her a half hug and kiss on the cheek.

"No one here would judge you, Kate," Martha assured her.

Jim nodded. "We're all friends and family."

She closed her eyes and smiled, sighing. "Yeah, but... if it's all the same, I'll save that part of me for just Rick, okay?"

"Okay," Jim said, giving her another half-hug, obviously not wanting to force his daughter into doing something she was uncomfortable with.

"Besides," she let out a breath. "I'm sure after tomorrow we'll have the pool all to ourselves."

"True," Jim said, suddenly glancing over at the pool with a disapproving frown.

Kate snorted. "Really, Dad?"

"What?" he looked back, surprised. "I may like the guy, but I don't like the idea of him convincing my daughter to go skinny dipping, even if it's in his private pool."

Martha nearly choked on her drink and Kate just laughed, harder than she had in a while. Jim looked at her, completely baffled as to why she found this so funny. Oh, if only her dad knew the sort of things she and Castle had done whilst surrounded by water. She bit her lower lip, and blushed slightly. Better not think of their morning shower.

"Honestly, Dad... how old do you think I am?" she couldn't resist asking.

He grunted and shook his head. "Old enough to be pregnant, so I guess what you do in private is your business."

"You got that," she said with a smirk, then reached over to take a sip from her water bottle.

"OH-OH! NO FAIR!" Castle's voice drifted over through the air. "THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE MY PARTY! MY PARTY!"

Kate turned in her seat to look out at the pool, seeing that the boys were ganging up on Castle with Jenny, Lanie, and Alexis not far behind. She chuckled, and watched in amusement as all five of them splashed her cornered fiancé.

XXX

Their eyes were locked. Nothing else seemed to exist except them and their love. She felt a fluttering in her chest and she tightened her arm around her father's as they walked down the makeshift aisle of chairs that they'd spent the last hour or so setting up. They stopped and Jim turned to face her, kissing her on the cheek before taking a hold of her hand and bringing Castle's over, slowly placing them together until their fingers were interlaced. And then, beaming with pride, Jim Beckett stepped back and allowed his daughter to take that next step forward holding the hand of her future husband.

The rest of the rehearsal, and subsequent barbecue afterwards, just seemed to fly by. And before Kate knew it, everyone was heading upstairs to go to bed and get a goodnight's sleep before the big day. She stood in the living room, taking one last look around, knowing that by this time tomorrow, she'd be Mrs. Katherine Castle.
The man himself had been hauled away by the boys. Apparently, the groomsmen had something extra special planned for him. What that was, she didn't know. But from what she gathered from Lanie, as they went upstairs, it was just a bit of harmless fun. Something about locking Castle in the closet for a couple of hours to ensure he didn't besmirch Kate's honor before their wedding day.

"Oh god, Lanie, really?" Kate had replied, stunned.

Lanie gave an exaggerated nod as Kate regarded her friend with a bemused expression.

"Well, okay, I guess…?" her eyebrows came together, slightly confused. "Though it's not like he hasn't already, as you put it, 'besmirched' me," she had replied with a laugh, gesturing towards the swell of her belly.

Kate, herself, would be rooming with Lanie in another one of the spare rooms. No one would be sleeping in the master bedroom—to ward of temptation, according to Lanie. Kate had scoffed at it, fairly certain she could contain herself for just one night, but then again… things between her and Castle were very… heated, to put it mildly, just about anything could probably set her off.

Yeah, she reconsidered. It was probably for the best, especially when she took into account how turned on she'd been watching Castle climb out of the pool, all dripping wet, before toweling off. That had been embarrassing, since she had been seated right next to her father, who had caught her staring. Her cheeks had probably never been that red since Jim Beckett had caught a young Kate Beckett on the couch with Tommy Carson's hand up her blouse.

"You know what… yeah… you're right," Kate finally spoke up as Lanie finished turning down the bed in the guestroom they were sharing.

"Oh, I'm liking this," Lanie declared, giving her a triumphant smirk. "It's about time I get credit for something."

Kate raised her eyebrow and gave Lanie a pointed look. "Yeah, well, don't get used to it."

"And what is this that I'm right about?" Lanie asked, fluffing up the pillow.

"It not being a good idea for me and Castle to be in the same room right now," Kate elaborating, gesturing with her hands that it should be obvious.

"Seriously, Kate? You're that turned on right now that you'd be unable to keep your hands off him?" Lanie asked, her lips tugging upwards in a bemused smile.

Kate raised her eyebrows and her mouth dropped. Had… had she just said that out loud? Noticing the shocked expression on her face, Lanie let out a low chortle and shook her head as she prepared to climb into bed.

"Damn, girl, you've really got it bad for Writer Boy, don't you?" she chuckled, clucking her tongue in amusement.

Scowling, Kate shot Lanie a glare before following her lead and climbing into bed. "Yeah, well, how are you and Javi doing?"

"Oh no, Kate, you don't get to change the subject," Lanie shook her head. "This weekend is all about Caskett."

"Caskett?" Kate frowned.
Lanie froze and her eyes went wide… deer caught in the headlights wide. "Oh? Did… did I just say that out loud?"

"Yes, you did," gritted Kate. "And what's this about 'Caskett'?"

"Um… just you know, a nickname for you and writer boy that me and the boys came up with," Lanie offered, trying to pass it off as nothing.

Kate settled onto her side of the bed, almost feeling like she was a teenager again, having a sleep over at a friend's house. As she put her head on the pillow and narrowed her eyes, Kate pondered her friends' choice of nickname for her and Castle.

"I get it, kind of clever… but," she turned and looked at her friend. "Don't let Castle find out about it, okay? He already has a shipper name for you and Esposito."

"Oh really? Do tell! What is it?" Lanie enthused, seeming far too excited about the notion.

Kate pursed her lips and suppressed a grin. "Esplanie."

"Esplanie?"

"Yeah," Kate shrugged. "Because you're always explaining things."

"That's not really that clever," Lanie pouted.

"Well, too bad, Castle likes it and he secretly calls you two that behind your backs."

"Well fine, then," Lanie teasingly shot back. "I'll keep going on calling you two Caskett then."

"How will you do that, exactly?" Kate asked with a smirk. "Tomorrow, I'm becoming a Castle."

That silenced Lanie, and Kate was about to bask in her victory when her friend spoke up.

"Oh… but you'll still be Beckett at work. So it all works out just fine."

Kate huffed, surrendering to it. "Goodnight, Lanie," she grumbled and turned onto her side, putting her back to her friend and tugging the blanket up.

"Sweet Dreams, Kate," Lanie purred out with a slight chuckle.
Chapter 30

The mid-morning sunlight was filtering through the bay windows, giving the master bedroom a rich warm glow that just seemed oh so very fitting for the day that was to come. Kate Beckett stood there, having just finished her bath, clad in nothing but her undergarments, soaking it all in, both the sunlight and the enormity of what this day was.

It had finally come. The day she had never thought she would ever see; the day that she would commit her complete being to another person. In a way, it was mind-boggling. Never had she imagined she would ever reach this point. Certainly not with any of the men she'd dated in her past. None of them had been that elusive one-and-done.

Part of Kate had always believed that in putting that ideal up there—the idea of a one-and-done—was setting herself up for failure, creating an unrealistic, unattainable goal that could never be. But of course that was before she had met Richard Castle. He had never fit into her idea of what her ideal life partner would be like. And when they first met, she had certainly never envisioned she'd be here now, about to marry him. He had come as a surprise, an annoyingly frustrating surprise. But nonetheless, a happy surprise.

When he had first started shadowing her, she had been infuriated with the notion. Yet, somehow, he grew on her. More than that, really. She'd fallen completely, madly, insanely in love with him. And she had been in love with him, probably a lot longer than she would care to admit, even to herself.

Slowly, turning in place, Kate faced the tall mirror standing alongside the dresser, gazing at her reflection and running her hands along her expanding middle. She smiled, ruefully. If she were honest with herself, Kate felt that today would not have been possible without this pleasant accident. Part of that was kind of sad, because she had always hoped that eventually they would have reached this point, or at the very least stopped dancing around the issue. But she had been stubborn and confused, and so many things that it just hurt to think about it.

No. She had to stop rethinking things. The past was the past. All the mistakes and misinterpretations that had delayed this day weren't worth the stress of going over all the what ifs. Kate was trying to move on from all that, to live in the moment, to just be and bask in the love and happiness she felt when she was with Rick Castle.

She may have always believed she'd get here, or someplace close, with him, but it had been this unexpected pregnancy that had given her the kick in the pants to finally grab life by the horns and cease holding back. With her condition, it had been time to admit what she really wanted—who she really wanted—and just go for it, holding nothing back.

And now, here she was, getting ready to marry the man, who was, quite possibly, the greatest love of her life.

Spreading her fingers over her growing baby bump, she smiled softly. "Thank you, little ones," she murmured softly, speaking to the twins growing inside her. It was thanks to those two precious miracles that she was here now, and she was determined to thank them for that gift as long as she was capable. Kate Beckett was finally happy. And it was thanks to them, and their father… her soon-to-be husband.

Her smile grew wider and she beamed with the sheer overwhelming joy as the knowledge spread through every fiber of her being. Tears of joy pinpricked at her eyes and she blinked rapidly to hold
them back. But she couldn't. Her joy was just too great to be held back. She was happy. She was truly, really, happy.

XXX

Kate sat there, staring at the mirror on the vanity as Lanie fussed about her hair. An hour ago, her maid of honor came in and helped her change into the dress. Kate was pleased with how it turned out. She'd grown a little since buying it, but she was happy to find that the sleeveless wedding dress was still loose enough that it was not entirely obvious that she was pregnant, which, after all, was her intent. It helped that the skirt portion of the dress began just under her bust, flowing freely and loosely down her body, helping to hide her baby bump.

As she scrutinized her appearance while Lanie continued working on her hair, Kate took note of the swell of her breasts and how they had changed. Honestly, she had been a little startled when they first started to get bigger. Kate had never been really big, neither had she been small, but it was still kind of startling to see her breasts bunch together under the taut fabric of the dress's neckline. The pressure on her flesh created a very alluring, yet still tasteful display of cleavage she'd never had before.

The French doors, which led out to the small balcony, had been opened earlier, when they had finished putting Kate into her dress, and now there was a soft warm breeze blowing into the room. Kate shivered, feeling the gentle wind touch her exposed back. The sloping back of the dress went as far as the small of her back. She was very much looking forward to seeing Castle's reaction to it. The skirt billowed out beneath her, and the fine white fabric shined in the sunlight that filtered through the windows. All in all, it was an amazing dress, especially considering how it worked nicely in helping to hide her baby bump, without overtly doing so. It was a much better dress than she had actually pictured she'd get married in, when she had pictured such a thing—not that she ever did.

Kate rarely thought about marriage, let alone wedding dresses. She had been the queen of bridesmaids—always the bridesmaid and never the bride. She'd even told Castle something like that once, during their first year working together. It was amazing how open she'd been with him even then. She'd hardly known him—at least personally, she'd known him a lot longer through his books—yet she still somehow trusted him enough to share far more personal details with him than she would anyone else.

She supposed it was probably another sign from the universe that they were destined to be together.

"There! What'd you think?" Lanie inquired, taking a step back and inspecting her work.

Drawing her eyes up, returning to the here and now, Kate smiled joyously as she viewed what her friend had done with her hair. "Oh my god, Lanie, it's amazing!" she beamed, reaching up slightly, almost afraid to touch it, as if doing so would ruin it.

Lanie had worked Kate's long sun-kissed brunette tresses into an elegant and modern updo, held up by a small diamond tiara with green gemstones shaped into small flowers, yet some strands of Kate's hair was still free to tumble down in soft curls around her glowing face. Oh my... yes... she blushed, slightly embarrassed about the fact she was quite literally glowing with joy. She had truly never felt this happy about anything. It only confirmed what she already knew in her gut. That this was right. It was truly want she wanted... and needed. And he was right. He was her one-and-done.

At that moment a soft knocking came from the door. Kate arched her neck and glanced over as
Lanie stepped away and quickly covered the distance, cracking the door to peek out at whoever it was that was interrupting.

"Who is it?" Kate asked.

"It's me, Katie," came her father's voice as Lanie took a step back, allowing the door to open, admitting Jim Beckett before slamming it back shut, ever the protective maid of honor.

Kate gave Lanie a pointed look.

"What?" defended Lanie. "I've gotta keep Writer Boy from getting a look at you before the ceremony!"

"Writer Boy?" Jim quirked up an eyebrow as he glanced between the two younger women.

"Just a playful nickname for Rick. It's… um… a long story," Kate answered with a shrug before standing up to greet her father, giving him a soft hug.

He pulled back, rubbing her bare arms and beaming down at her, his eyes shining with pride and joy. She returned the smile, taking in how handsome he looked in the crisp black tuxedo and emerald green vest with a pale yellow bowtie. His suit was almost an exact duplicate to the suit that Castle would be wearing, though her soon-to-be-husband would be wearing a tie instead of a bowtie.

"Wow, Dad, look at you!" she grinned. "You dress up nicely!"

He chuckled, self-deprecatingly, and returned her teasing smirk with one of his own. "So do you, Katiebug," he replied, stepping back to fully take in the wedding dress as she did a little turn to give him the complete view.

They both laughed as their gazes returned to one another. Her father was the first to sober, and his expression changed, almost becoming somber.

"I have something for you," Jim spoke quietly. "Something your… your mother wanted you to have on your wedding day."

He reached inside his coat pocket and removed an object covered in a small linen cloth. Unfolding the fabric gently, he slowly removed it, and released from it's hiding place was a beautiful bracelet made of silver and emblazed with small precious blue gemstones that she immediately recognized as topaz, her birthstone.

Jim swallowed heavily before pulling his eyes up to meet hers. "Johanna bought this a month after you were born," he said. "It was always her intent to give it to you when you got married, you know… part of that something old, new, borrowed, and blue thing." He paused and swallowed again, clearly struggling with his emotions. He took a shaky breath and closed his eyes, regaining control. "I think she intended it to be for the something blue."

"It's beautiful, Dad," she smiled sadly with him as she stepped closer, placing one hand on his forearm and squeezing it gently. "And I'd love to wear it. Can you put it on?" She held her arm up and he smiled.

Putting the small linen cloth back into his pocket, he then unclasped the bracelet and slipped it around her right wrist before locking it back in place. His fingers lingered over the gift his wife had bought so long ago for their daughter, and then turned his gaze up to meet hers. Kate was smiling at him and he couldn't help but smile back.
"I'm so proud of you, Katie," he said, tears forming in his eyes. "And I want you to know that your mother would be too."

"I know, Daddy," Kate murmured, leaning in to his embrace, resting her head on his shoulder, though being careful as to not mess up Lanie's hard work. Shifting back, she closed her eyes briefly as her father kissed her forehead and gave her a final squeeze of his arms around her.

"I'll leave you girls now to finish up," he said, trailing a hand down her arm, and briefly clasping hands with his daughter.

Kate beamed at him, blinking rapidly to stop the unwanted flow of tears. She squeezed his hand once more, and then he let go and was moving to the door. Lanie opened it up and he slipped out, but not before glancing back at her from over his shoulder and giving her a warm fatherly smile.

Taking a deep breath, Kate turned and sat back down before the vanity. Lanie approached her and placed her hands on her shoulders as Kate held up her arm to gaze at the blue topaz bracelet now adorning her wrist. After a moment, her eyes darted up to match her friend's gaze in the mirror.

"Lanie… do you have anything I can borrow?"

XXX

"You look marvelous, darling!" Martha declared when Kate emerged from the ensuite bathroom, having finished putting on the last touches of her light makeup.

Kate smiled and blushed. "Thanks, Martha," she said, and then looked around the room at all the women with her. "All of you… thank you. You've made this morning so much easier."

Alexis grinned. "We're more than happy to help, Kate. You're family now."

"Yes," Martha swooped her arms up into the air in agreement.

"Well, technically not yet," Kate said, stepping around them to return to her seat before the vanity. "But in thirty or so minutes, yes." She smiled, all teeth and gum, feeling all giddy and bubbly. She could not believe it was almost time.

With the aid of Lanie, Alexis, Jenny, and Martha, Kate had been able to assemble all of the necessary things to fulfill the *something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue* tradition.

As her father had suggested, the topaz bracelet her mother had bought when she was only a month old was used for her something blue. After some debate between Alexis and Lanie, they had all decided that the small tiara in her hair fulfilled the something new. Lanie had some extra earrings, giving Kate something borrowed.

And it was from Martha, who had come prepared for this tradition, that Kate received a beautiful diamond necklace. Just like when Martha had loaned her that necklace for the charity ball three years ago, Kate had feebly protested borrowing the jewelry when the diva presented it, but with Martha and Alexis's insistence, she finally accepted the offering, letting the younger Castle help her put it on.

Now, Kate sat there, taking slow steady breaths, waiting for the ceremony to begin. Her dad had popped in a few more times after his initial visit, namely to check on her and see if she needed anything. She also got updates from him on the guests arriving and what Castle and the boys were up to. From Jim Beckett's last visit, Kate knew that Judge Markway had just arrived an hour ago,
and was going over some final details with Castle. Montgomery had arrived around the same time, and had snuck on up to pop on in and say hello before going back down to join his wife.

The gathering wasn't large. In the end, they had ended up inviting around fifty people, roughly. It was an interesting mix of her precinct family and Castle's friends from the literary/publishing world. His poker buddies were in attendance, along with Paula and some Black Pawn representatives. Thankfully Gina had announced she was not coming, not that that surprised Kate. Castle hadn't even invited her, so he had commented on wondering why the witch felt the need to RSVP.

There came a knock from the door.

Lanie excused herself from the chat that the other four women were having and went to see who it was. Kate watched from the corner of her eye, trying to calm her nerves and pay attention to the conversation that had been going on while she had been absorbed in her thoughts. But when Kate caught a glimpse of her father, her heart immediately began to beat faster.

It was time.
Chapter 31

She wrapped her arm around her dad’s and held on tight, feeling a fluttering in her chest as they walked down the stairs.

It was just her, now. All the others had gone and been escorted down towards the sand path leading up to the arched white trellis, covered in green and blue flowers, where Judge Markway and Richard Castle stood waiting for them. Kate took a long deep breath, her breasts pressing up against the taut fabric of her wedding dress as her chest heaved. Jim glanced over at her and raised an eyebrow.

"Katie?"

Releasing the breath, she smiled softly. "I'm just full of all this nervous energy, Daddy," she answered. "I don't know why I'm so… so anxious. It's just him. He's the right guy. He's the one.
And I want this… so bad…” she trailed off, her eyebrows coming together as her brow creased in confusion. "I just don't get it? Why am I so nervous?"

Jim Beckett pursed his lips for a moment before letting out a quiet chuckle, frustrating his already nervous daughter, who gave him a pointed glare for laughing at her. He paused at the base of the stairs, turned to her and took her hand in his, giving it a light squeeze.

"What you're feeling is perfectly normal, Katie," he said, as she took the final step and joined him on the bottom landing. She looked at him hesitantly. "Really," he pushed, trying to assure her.

Kate gave a non-committal nod and followed him around the table in the center of the foyer, and down the hall, leading to the back patio, where just the other night they had all sat and enjoyed some barbecue and laughed over jokes and anecdotes from the early days of her and Castle's partnership. She didn't understand why she was so nervous, and why it felt like her was hyperventilating.

Perhaps her father was right. Perhaps it was normal to feel some anxiety over your wedding day. After all, she was soon going to be making one of the biggest commitments in her life. A commitment, if she were honest with herself, she never thought she'd ever reach. Yet now, here she was, dressed in a simple, yet elegant wedding dress, arm wrapped around her father's, as she begun the last journey of her single adult life.

They emerged out onto the back deck, and Kate squinted her eyes in the sun. What a relief that was! She had never thought about the potential of having cloudy weather for a beach wedding. It was a good thing that nature decided to cooperate. So many other things in their lives had not.

Jim squeezed her arm, pulling her to a stop. She blinked and looked around, having been lost, once again in her thoughts. Taking a deep breath, she gazed out at the stretch of beach before them.

White folding chairs had been set up on a patch of sand, an aisle formed in-between the two sections. She was surprised to see that their parties were mixed. It wasn't like the traditional groom's family one side and the bride's family on the other. Alexis was already walking down the aisle, looking beautiful in an emerald green bridesmaid dress.

Earlier, when they had all been waiting in the master bedroom, Kate had taken Alexis aside and worked on the girl's gorgeous red hair. The teen looked so grown up with her hair in a loose bun, two green pins through her hair, holding it together, and two small blue flowers planted above her
right ear. And then is struck her, as she was watching the daughter of the man she loved, why she
was feeling like this.

Her mother.

Biting her lower lip and then soothing it with her tongue as her father guided her down from the
deck, Kate thought of her mother and all the things she had been unable to do with her. All the
things that a bride was supposed to do with her mother. She never got to do those things.

Pausing behind the crest of a small sand dune, Kate risked a glance down at her right wrist, spying
the topaz bracelet. It brought a sad smile to her lips as she thought. Maybe her mother was here.
This bracelet, a seemingly inanimate object with no special value, in fact was more important than
it appeared. Her mother, Johanna Beckett, had bought this for her… for Katherine Beckett, when
she was but a newborn babe. Johanna had got this to give her baby daughter on her wedding day.

Kate gasped in a breath of realization. She was still here. Her mother may not physically be a part
of this day, but through this bracelet, she was still here for her little girl. Unexpected tears formed
in her eyes. And it just wasn't the bracelet; it was her heart. Her mother would always be with her,
as long as she kept her memory alive in her heart and in her children. And if the memory of her
mother was kept alive, then her mother was not gone, not really.

Johanna Beckett had instilled in a younger Kate Beckett her morals, beliefs, and ideals. Kate had
never forgotten her mother's teachings, or her compassionate nature and dedication. It was all there,
inside her. She'd been imbued with the same determination of spirit. It was her mother's spirit, and
it burned strong in Kate.

She'd thought that everyone she'd loved had left her, but she was so wrong. Her mother, through
her compassion and spirit, was still there with her, in her heart. Glancing up at her father, she
smiled softly, sniffing, the tears receding as a contented happiness swelled up in her. Jim Beckett,
her father, was still here. She'd lost him once to alcoholism, but she'd got him back. Both her
parents, one alive and one dead, weren't gone. She wasn't alone. She would always have them, as
long as she kept their memory alive within her.

Jim caught her looking at him and raised his eyebrows in question. "Kate… is everything alright?"
he asked, gently wiping away a single tear that had escaped, careful to not ruin her makeup.

Kate laughed softly, biting her lower lip. "Yes, Daddy, everything is great," she paused and
squeezed his arm, momentarily resting her head on his shoulder. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Katiebug," he murmured, and kissed her temple, giving her hand a squeeze.

Alexis reached the dais under the arched trellis and Lanie begun her march down the aisle. Jim
arched his neck and looked over at her.

"Ready?" he asked, bringing her to their starting position.

"Yes."

Kate heaved in a deep breath and closed her eyes. As her eyes opened, her vision tunneled on the
man standing at the end of the aisle. He, too, had eyes only for her. His smile grew wide as he
cought sight of her and she could not help but grin back, all teeth and gum, a beaming joyous smile.

Before she knew it, she was moving forward, her father directing their movements. The soft sand
shifted on her sandal-clad feet as they walked down the aisle. Kate was vaguely aware that
everyone had stood and were watching her with rapt attention. But her attention was occupied,
focused solely on Rick Castle.

He looked so sharp and handsome in his tuxedo, with only one buttoned fashioned through the top clasp. The emerald green vest and almost golden yellow tie were crisp and in perfect order. His hair, had been trimmed since last she'd seen him, which was a feat, since that had been last night, just before they had been whisked away from one another and kept apart. It reminded her of the charity auction they went to undercover. He had looked so amazing in that tuxedo and part of her might have even fantasized about this very moment back then.

As their eyes locked, everything became calm. Her frantic heart was soothed and her breathing returned to normal. Everything was now so crystal clear and right. This was the moment she'd been waiting for all her life. A dream she never thought she'd ever see come true. And Richard Castle was the one that made it all possible. He'd stood by her in more ways than she could have asked, and a lot longer than she deserved.

He'd never lost faith, and belief in his goal of winning her heart. He might have had moments when he doubted himself, but those had been fleeting. His stance told of his confidence and assuredness that he had known he'd prevail against all odds. And for that, Kate was so very grateful.

And then she reached the moment. Her father was handing her over, her hand landing assuredly in Castle's warm palm. Kate beamed up at him, interlacing their fingers together as he gently tugged her forward to stand beside him. Then together, as one, they turned towards Judge Markway, ready to meet their future.

XXX

The kiss was explosive. That's the best adjective she could find to describe their first kiss as husband and wife. Castle's hand came up and cupped the side of her face, keeping their lips locked for probably longer than was decent, and then, all too soon, he was pulling away. Kate inhaled a deep breath of oxygen, feeling her lungs expand and contract as she took long deep breaths to regain her focus, her face flushed with excitement and joy, along with the tiniest hint of arousal.

Castle gripped her hand, brought it up to his lips, a boyish smirk on his face, a twinkle in his eye. He brushed his lips against the back of her hand, before pulling her with him as they spun around to face the applauding guests.

Kate laughed at the youthful carefree expression plastered over her now husband's face as he glanced over at her, grinning like the preverbal cat that had caught the canary. She laughed, again, having no doubt in her mind that she probably wore the exact same expression as he did.

Holding hands tightly, they smirked, speaking with their eyes, like only they could, and then rushed down the tunnel of cheering friends, laughing all the way.

XXX

"Oh, come on! You were so crying!" Ryan chuckled, nudging Esposito with his elbow.

"No, I wasn't," groused Esposito.

"You were too!" replied Ryan, grinning widely, probably enjoying himself way too much.

"No way, bro," Esposito shook his head.

"You had tears in your eyes, nothing embarrassing about that, Javi," Ryan said. "It was a very emotional ceremony. No one could blame you for tearing up."
"They weren't tears," Esposito defended. "It... it was windy. I got sand in my eye."

"Uh-huh, sure you did, honey," Lanie put in with her usual sass, taking great pleasure in her date's embarrassment.

"Hey, you're supposed to be on my side!" he asserted with a little glare.

"I'm having too much fun to worry about whose side I'm on," Lanie giggled as she took a sip of her champagne.

Kate smiled to herself, watching the entire exchanged. They were seated at the long table reserved for the bridal party that had been set up on the large grass lawn that stretched out besides the pool. Lanie was seated on her left, Castle on her right, and at the moment, she was finding this whole conversation very interesting. Taking the pause in voices to insert her own opinion, Kate leaned forward slightly.

"It really wasn't that windy, Javier Esposito," Kate said with a teasing smirk on her lips. "Just suck it up, and admit you cried." And then she added, quite factually, "I did."

Esposito crossed his arms and gave them all a little pout, making them all laugh. Castle squeezed Kate's hand, pulling her attention back to him. She smiled as he immediately kissed her, brushing his nose against hers as he lingered.

"I love you," he murmured against her lips, his warm breath sending tingles down her spine.

"I love you, too, Rick," she kissed him back, pressing her lips against the corner of his mouth and teasing him with a quick flick of her tongue.

Castle chuckled and narrowed his eyes at her as he sat back, shaking his head. "Just wait until I get you all alone," he playfully threatened.

Kate raised an eyebrow in challenge. "Bring it on, Writer Boy," she threw back at him with a cocky grin.

The look on his face was priceless, and Kate was wishing she had a camera to capture the moment, when suddenly a flash of light blinded her vision for a second. Castle blinked and turned his head, giving his daughter a feigned glare.

"We were having a moment, sweet daughter," he hissed in a teasing manner.

"Oh, sorry, daddy dearest, but I thought it was a moment that you might like to have a picture of," Alexis chirped back with a disarming smile before spinning around and rejoining Ashley on the dance floor.

Castle groaned and turned back to Kate. "I'm blaming you for her."

"Me!" Kate gasped. "Oh, no, no, no... that's all on you, Mr. Castle."

"Fine, Mrs. Castle," he grumbled, but the spark in his eyes belied his true mirth and happiness.

"Wow, what was that?" Lanie butted in, leaning over into Castle's personal space. "Did I just hear writer boy over there call you 'Mrs. Castle'?"

"Um, yeah, that is my name now, Lanie," Kate replied, raising her eyebrows in confusion over her friend's question.
"Really? I didn't know you were taking his name," Lanie asserted, furrowing her brow in thought. "Oh, wait…," she giggled. "Now I remember, you're taking his name, but staying Beckett at work."

Kate nodded and exchanged a glance with Castle. Perhaps her maid of honor had had a little too much to drink. Thankfully, Esposito pulled her attention away, and the happy couple were able to have another moment together. Castle ran a hand along her bare arm, leaving gooseflesh in his wake. She shivered and parted her lips, gazing at him from under her eyelashes.

"I can't believe we finally got married," he admitted.

"Well, you better believe it, because it's true," she said, snagging his tie and pulling him down for another kiss.

The DJ interrupted the festivities and announced that it was time for the bouquet toss. Having already had the first dance, and the cake, along with some of the other traditions associated with wedding receptions, the bouquet and garter toss were the only two really remaining.

Castle stood and helped Kate up to her feet as Alexis and Lanie, along with all the other non-married women, started to assemble in the middle of the dance floor as Beyoncé's *Single Ladies* blasted out from the speakers. Kate rounded the corner of the table and walked out onto the mobile wood planted floors that had been set up in the grass for dancing. She glanced around at everyone and smiled before turning her back to the crush of single women. Closing her eyes, Kate flung the bouquet up into the air beyond her.

Kate spun around and laughed as she watched Lanie wrestle with one of Castle's publishing friends for the bouquet, coming up triumphant, much to Esposito's chagrin. Everyone laughed as Lanie then walked up to her man and gave him a stern look that seemed to be telling him he'd better start looking for a ring.

Alexis pulled out one of the folding chairs from one of the tables and sat it down on the floor, giving Kate place to sit as the DJ, with a mischievous smirk on his face, switched songs. *I'm Too Sexy* by Right Said Fred started from the speakers and Kate blushed bright pink as Castle spun around, swayed his hips and strutted towards her like some supermodel, before dropping down to his knee and, far too sensually, skimming his hand down the front of her dress before slipping it up and under the hem.

An involuntary gasp escaped her throat as his fingers brushed up her bare leg. Her eyes dropped to his and she shook her head at him while biting her lower lip. Kate breathed heavily through her nose as her chest rose and fell as his fingers continued their journey upwards until he snagged the lace fabric of the garter and began to tug it down her leg, finally nudging it over her ankle and sandal, to hold it aloft over his head with a smug smirk and triumphant swirl.

Kate placed her hands on her lap, blushing profusely as the music continued. Castle resumed with his antics, strutting around her, one hand on his hip, the other still up, twirling the garter around on his finger. Then he stopped before her, spun on his heel until he was facing her and closed his eyes. Kate leaned slightly to the right and glanced around him at the assemblage of single men.

"Should I throw it now?" he asked in a low voice, so that only she could hear.

"Yes, please… I'm getting embarrassed sitting here with everyone staring at me," she murmured back.

"They're only staring because you're so beautiful," he replied.
Her heart thumped, her chest fluttered, and her cheeks only warmed more with his words. "Just shut up and throw the damn thing!" she hissed out with a playful roll of her eyes, grinning at him with a sly smile.

Out of all the men, somehow her father ended up with it, which was surprising, considering Castle's somewhat girly toss. Well, it didn't help that the wind had decided to shift at the very moment that he threw the lace garter up into the air. Kate laughed at her father's face, and then laughed harder when Jim then turned to a shocked Esposito and handed it to him.

Stunned, Javier Esposito then remained stationary for a moment, not sure what to do. Both Ryan and Castle nearly tackled him and clapped him on the back before shoving him towards Lanie with suggestions as to where he could find the best ring at a good price.

"Well that was amusing," Kate said as Castle came back to her as she stood up and reached out for his hand.

Castle cocked his head slightly and gave her a goofy grin. "It sure was," he chuckled, then laced their fingers together and tugged her close, kissing her softly, using his other hand to brush his fingers along the side of her face and down the slope of her neck. "Would it be rude if we told everyone that the party was over and to get the hell out?"

"Yes, yes it would," she replied breathily, stifling a moan. "But you could go ahead and do that, if you want."

"Really?" he raised an eyebrow, looking down at her questionably.

Kate chewed on her lower lip and glanced up at him from under her eyelashes, her eyes darkened with desire and want. "I want my husband all to myself," she gave him an adorable pout, which he kissed away and chuckled.

"We'll give everyone thirty more minutes, then kindly suggest they make their leave," he said. "After all, we've got to appear to be gracious hosts, don't we?"

"Fine," she groused, but smirked. "Thirty more minutes, then the honeymoon begins."

"Yes… the honeymoon," Castle mumbled and leaned down to kiss her, wrapping his arms around her waist as a slow song began to play.

They spent the rest of the reception out on the dance floor, in their own little bubble, swaying slightly to the music, their eyes locked and the occasionally soft brush of their lips as they awaited the time in which they could be alone and consummate their union as husband and wife.
Chapter 32

"No," she declared, crossing her arms beneath her breasts and trying her hardest to give him one of her infamous glares. "No way are you carrying me up those stairs. And if I have too, I'll put my foot down… as your wife! I can do that now, you know."

His jaw dropped and he stared at her with undisguised shock. He stammered and frowned, but seemed to be at a loss for words to combat her fierce and resolute declaration.

It was seven o'clock and all their guests, including family members, had finally left a little over half an hour ago, and now it was just them, all alone in a big empty house. Kate shook her head at her husband. She could not believe him. Honestly, does he really think he could carry me up the stairs? She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, her chest rising and falling with the act. When her eyes opened, Kate noticed that his eyes had fallen from her face and had grown dark.

Oh… now he was staring at her chest, at the cleavage that was created thanks to the taut fabric. A hint of a blush began to form at the base of her neck. She was always self-conscious about her appearance, more so now that she'd gained some weight and grown so large around the middle—she was carrying twins after all. So, it was actually nice to know that he still found her sexually desirable.

After watching him for a moment, Kate smiled coyly. "Alright, Mr. Castle, how about this," she tried to appease him. "I walk up the stairs on my own power, and then, you can carry me across the threshold and into the bedroom. Deal?"

The wide smile the greeted her was a reward unto itself. "Deal, Mrs. Castle," he murmured, stepping closer to her and nuzzling his nose against her ear before planting soft and nibbling kisses along her earlobe.

Kate let out a quiet breathy moan and eased into him, slipping her arm around his back, feeling the ripple of his muscles as his arms wrapped around her waist. One of his hands, fingers spread wide, came to rest on her swollen belly. He caressed her baby bump in such a loving tender way that it brought tears to her eyes.

"Oh, Rick," she murmured, shifting to bring her hands up to his face and pulled him down for a long and languid kiss. "I love you, so much."

He pressed his lips hard against hers, giving her everything that she wanted, and leaving nothing behind. She took in the unique flavor that was her husband, memorizing everything about him. His other hand gripped the side of her face, his thumb caressing her cheek as they continued to kiss, devouring one another. He held her like that for a while when their lips parted momentarily before ramming back together, hard and fierce, and so very desperate and hot.

Eventually, his hand moved, ghosting down the slope of her neck and around her shoulder to trail down her bare back. Kate let out an airy moan, halfway between a laugh and a groan, and arched her back as his hand flattened out, his warm palm sliding along the curve of her spine until his hand came to rest on the small of her back, temptingly close to her backside.

"God, I love this dress," he whispered in-between kisses. "You have no idea—no idea—how hard it has been for me to keep my hands off you."

"Nothing's stopping you now, Writer Boy," Kate laughed breezily, and brought her hands up to rest
on his chest. After a few more moments of leisurely kissing, she pushed him back and heaved in a deep gulp of air. "Take me to bed, Castle," she implored, her eyes big and round. "I need you… so very badly."

Castle brushed one final kiss along the side of her mouth, open and wet, before taking a step back and sliding his hand down her bare arm until their fingers were laced together. Kate slowly smiled, looking down at their interlocked hands, feeling and seeing the wedding band on his finger. He was hers. And she was his. They had finally done it. A mischievous smirk steadily worked its way onto her lips. Now it was time to consummate that union, and oh, she was looking forward to that.

"Come on," she insisted, her eyes twinkling with determined anticipation.

Kate moved first, and he followed. He would always follow her. He'd just committed himself to that, and she was still trying to wrap her mind around the notions that the philandering playboy Richard Castle had done that. She didn't know why she still thought of him like that, especially now that she knew the truth about him, that the playboy had always been a mask, a façade, a public image that was prompted by his publicity firm to sell books and that it was not the true him. The true Richard Castle was kind, generous, and so very loving. And loyal. He was so incredibly loyal, and she was not going to take that for granted… ever.

She climbed the steps with her husband behind her, hands still linked. Her husband. The words still sounded foreign to her, but the joy that pulsed through her veins at the mere thought was as euphoric as anything she'd ever felt before… well, maybe. Nothing could top the intense satisfaction that came when they made love, but this feeling was close to that. So very close.

They reached the top landing, and Castle crowded in on her from behind. She shivered, feeling his warm breath cascade down her bare back. His arms wrapped around her waist, and she leaned her back against his chest as he dipped his head down and softly sucked on her neck.

Then, before she knew what was happening, Castle was letting out a low animalistic growl and was lifting her up off the floor. She gasped out a soft surprised yelp, when the floor fell away from beneath her feet and she was pulled up against his chest. Kate laughed softly and rolled her eyes at him as he gave her a fiercely lustful gaze, his eyes drinking her in as he tugged her up against his chest. Kate shook her head at him as she looped her arms around his neck, helping him out.

He grunted and pulled her up, shifting her weight in his arms as he turned them to the left, marching purposefully down the hall towards the master bedroom.

Kate sighed contentedly, resting her head on his shoulder. She closed her eyes and breathed in his scent. A rich cologne, with a musky hint to it, and something sweet, as well. So very Castle.

She giggled, actually giggled. They're about halfway there when she began to think he might be straining to make it. Kate sighed and snuggled closer. "You going to make it?" she questioned.

"Yes," came his curt reply.

Kate ran her lower lip under her teeth and gave a shake of her head. "Don't strain yourself too much, Rick," she clucked her tongue. "You're services are going to be required for the entire night."

"Ah! Damn you, woman!" he groaned, giving her a playful smirked that revealed the truth behind his words.

Oh, he was totally looking forward to this as well. And why shouldn't he? Though, its not like they
hadn't made love before. Yet, this was different, Kate thought. This time, when they made love, it would be as husband and wife.

Her heart rate increased and her breath grew shallow and low. Her body was coming alive, so very much aroused and needy. She wanted him so badly that she was aching for it. They'd snuck in a couple of quick lovemaking sessions before their families had arrived, but since then they hadn't even been alone together. It had only been almost two days since they had connected in that most intimate and special of ways, and she was already chomping at the bit for more. Oh, she was such a goner.

Castle let out a sudden whoop of excitement and triumph, causing Kate to return from her thoughts. He was in the process of kicking the door to the master bedroom open. His head cocked down to look at her, a twinkle in his eyes.

"Ha! And you doubted me, woman?" he scoffed teasingly as he shifted her in his arms, carrying her across the threshold and into the master bedroom.

"I didn't doubt you, Castle," Kate replied with an eye roll. "I just didn't want you to strain yourself."

"I'm fine," he huffed out, blowing out a puff of air and stumbling slightly as he made his way over to the bed.

"Easy now," Kate laughed as Castle swayed, tightening her grip around his neck.

"Almost there," he gritted out, and then, all of a sudden, she was being unceremoniously dropped on the large mattress.

Kate let out a shrill cry, bouncing once or twice before steadying on the mattress. She shifted, sitting up slightly and crossing her arms under her breasts, and then fixing Castle with one of her most heated glares, though the playful sparkle in her eyes belied any hostility she was trying to display. "Oh my god, Castle. You dropped me!"

"Quiet now, my fruit," Castle teased, leaning over her. "You were over the bed, and… really? It wasn't even that far of a fall." He shifted, bringing a hand up to brush back some of her hair that had come loose. She shivered feeling the light touch of his fingertips on her hot skin. "At least I didn't drop you on the floor."

She arched an eyebrow at him, ready to offer a retort, but was unable to stifle the smile that wanted out. Reaching up, she grabbed his tie and pulled him the rest of the way down, capturing his mouth in a deep kiss. Kate swept her tongue out, darting it along his lower lip, causing him to let out a moan of surprise. She took that opening, and shoved her tongue into his warm mouth, claiming him.

Castle sunk down over her, his hands resting at her sides as his fingers played with the fabric of her wedding dress. His fingers skirted up her ribs and brushed past her breasts as her fingers dug into his hair, keeping him close as their tongues dueled for dominance. She loved this… each of them never relenting, never surrendering, each trying to show up the other.

In the end, she won. She didn't always, which was nice, gave her something to look forward to for when he would surprise her and take a more aggressive approach. Kate smiled into his mouth and shifted, hooking her legs around his as they rolled around on the top of the best, hands going everywhere, touching as much exposed skin as possible.

"Too many clothes," she groused, when they broke apart to breathe.
"Let's work on that, shall we?" he quipped back with a cocky grin as his hands dropped down to her toes. He flailed his fingers out along her ankle, gripping it soundly, before lifting her foot up and untying the laces of her sandal.

She looked down at him, smirking, as she watched him remove her sandal and toss it over his shoulder. He quickly repeated the process with her other foot. And then his hands were on her bare skin, pushing under the hem of her dress. His fingertips brushed along the soft skin of her long legs, making her shiver.

Kate laid her head back and closed her eyes, soaking in the magic touch of his fingers as he massaged and rubbed her legs, leisurely moving up, higher and higher, until he scooped his hands under her thighs and was teasing her in such delicious ways that he pulled a mewl from her throat. Her chest was filled with the pounding of her heart. Her breaths came out in sharp pants of air, as her entire body came alive with sensations, a hot pool of simmering desire flooding in her core.

"Clothes, Rick… clothes… too… too many," she reminded him; wanting more skin… more open area to touch, to feel him pressed against her.

He plopped down besides her, the mattress bouncing as he did so, and he smirked at her. "You want me to do a striptease for you, or something?" Castle wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, before sneaking a quick kiss from her, halting her laugh for a second.

But before he could pull away, Kate moved, pushing him onto his back. She brought her nimble fingers up and quickly undid his tie, pulling it from around his neck in a whipping fashion before tossing it over her head, carelessly letting it fall where it would. She then turned her attention to the buttons of his green vest, popping them quickly and then undoing the second layer on his shirt, before parting the fabric open and running her hands up and down his bare chest.

Castle shivered, and let out a very unmanly wanton whimper. "Oh God, Kate…," he hissed through his teeth, arching his neck up to look down at her as she crawled over him.

"Here," she called, grabbing his arms and helping him sit halfway up.

She tugged on his jacket and pushed it off his shoulders, tossing it to the floor before removing him of his vest. Castle took care of his shirt, wiggling out of it before leaning back down as she loomed over him, whispering soft kisses along his pecs and abdomen, exploring every square inch of her husband's bare chest.

Castle was no sculpted Adonis. He didn't have rock hard abs or bulging biceps. But he had strength and power. It was more internal, more reserved and controlled. He had more padding in some places than some of her previous lovers, but she didn't mind. In fact, she found she liked it, even enjoyed it. It was real. He was the kind of man who didn't need to be buff to be sexy. He was fit and healthy, yes, but more importantly to Kate, he was himself with her, and that, as it turned out, was a major turn on for her.

Kate flashed him a wicked grin before teasing him with her tongue, lathering a wet circle around his belly button. His stomach muscles contracted and his hips involuntarily bucked up as he let out a sharp groan.

"Kate."

"Shh," she shushed him, reaching up to cover his mouth with her hand. She felt his lips tug upwards in an amused grin, and he kissed her palm and fingers.
Dropping her hand back down, she worked on his belt, unbuckling it and whipping it out of the pant loops. Tugging it around his waist, she pulled it up in triumph, sitting back on her knees and waving it in front of him.

"Hey," he stopped her before she could unbutton his slacks. "I'm half dressed here and you still haven't removed anything!"

"That's because all I'm wearing under this dress are some barely-there silk panties," Kate baited him with a sly grin. Oh, and it worked. It so worked. His eyes went dark—cobalt blue dark—filled with undisguised want. She could feel that want forming underneath her thighs, all hot and hard.

Castle pushed himself up with his elbows, glancing up with a hopeful expression. She grinned brazenly at him, and helped him up the rest of the way, locking her arms around his neck as she straddled his lap, kissing him hard and desperate. His hands roamed down her bare back, exploring all the exposed skin he'd been denied for what felt like so long… too long.

He broke away from her lips to trail a blazing hot path down the column of her throat, teasing and nipping at her shoulder and pulse point before pushing onwards. One hand moved and cupped her breast through her dress, his hand large and firm, holding her with ease in his palm. He gave a gentle squeeze, causing her to gasp in delight as she felt his thumb flick across the peak of her breast, teasing her nipple through the soft fabric.

"Rick," she whimpered, wanting more… so much more.

His hands moved and he found the straps on her shoulders holding her dress up. A couple of tugs and the taut fabric was loose and flowing down, exposing her bare chest to his greedy eyes.

"Beautiful," he murmured, leaning forward to nuzzle his nose against her collarbone while he planted gentle kisses along the top swell of her newly exposed breasts.

She clutched at his hair, fingers digging into his scalp as she took sharp breaths of air, her skin buzzing and humming. Her mouth dropped and a moan escaped as his lips wrapped around one of her nipples, his hand hoisting up her breast as he teased her mercilessly with his tongue.

All Kate could do was groan and whimper, while slowly grinding her hips against his as he devoured her flesh, giving every inch of her skin equal amounts of attention with his hands and mouth. The coiling of burning need to be filled by him, to have him inside her, was becoming overwhelming. She needed so much more. Needed to feel him everywhere at once.

Pushing back, chest heaving, Kate glanced down at him with large dark eyes. "Still… still too many clothes," she panted out every word, struggling to remain coherent.

Rising up on one knee, she rolled over his lap and laid down on her back as he moved with her, hands caressing her sides, thumbs rubbing against her ribs beneath her breasts. She squirmed her hips around. Castle grinned as their eyes locked, knowing precisely what she wanted.

Dropping his hands down to the fabric bunched around her waist, he gently tugged on her wedding dress, stretching it over the swell of her baby bump as she lifted her hips off the mattress, making it easier for him to pull the material down her long legs. The mattress shifted as Castle rolled over the edge of the bed and gently hung her dress up in the closet before returning to her, kicking off his shoes before shimmying up besides her on top of the comforter.

Castle hovered above her, his hand reaching up to lightly brush along her side, fingers making invisible patterns on her soft flesh. He smiled up at her with a sly grin, pursed lips and sparkling
eyes. She swallowed thickly, watching as his eyes dropped down from her face to gaze upon her nude body, soaking in all of her: From her heavy breasts and swollen belly, to her long slender legs. She chewed on her lower lip, suddenly feeling self-conscious and nervous, which she had no reason to, since he'd seen her naked before, many times, and he'd always called her beautiful and had desire in his eyes.

"Hey," his voice was soft and tender, causing her eyes to snap up from whatever point on the ceiling she'd been staring at. "Kate… you're beautiful, you hear me?"

She gave him a meek smile and hesitant nod, shrugging her shoulders. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears at her own insecurities. Damn her emotions for ruining this wonderful moment.

"Kate, shh," he soothed, brushing a hand down the side of her face—so tender, so loving—tucking some loose strands of her hair behind her ear. "Don't go there, okay? You're breathtaking. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen… and believe me, I've seen some beautiful women in my day."

That did it, her lips tugged up slightly and she laughed softly, shaking her head at him and giving him a playful smack on the shoulder at his audacity. Really? How recklessly ballsy of him, mentioning other women why lying naked in bed with her. He smirked, his eyes dancing with joy at seeing her smile. He'd only done it to make her smile and laugh, and she could never fault him for that, for wanting to make her happy.

"I love you, Kate," he said, dropping his eyes once more to take in her glorious nude form, "and not just for this killer bod, though that is pretty awesome! But really… it's for this," his hand moved to her chest, resting above her heart. His fingers curled slightly into her flesh. "For your heart. You have one of the most beautiful souls I have ever encountered, Kate. You radiate with beauty, both outer and inner."

"Oh, Rick," tears pricked at her eyes. No one had ever said such wonderful things to her. And she knew that he wasn't just seducing her—well, he was, but not like that way. He was sincere, so very sincere, and so full of love for her. It was slightly overwhelming how much he loved her. Often, she found herself questioning whether she deserved it.

Pushing those doubts aside, Kate focused on the present, swallowing past the lump in her throat and clutching his face in her hands, gazing longingly up into his blue eyes. "Oh… I love you, Castle."

She pulled him down, crashing her lips against his, smiling excitedly as she felt his hands work their magic over her pulsating flesh. His fingers skidded down her stomach, caressing the baby bump as he hummed into her mouth. A gasped pushed out of her throat as he played with the fringe of her silk panties.

Kate watched as Castle leaned back, arching his neck to take in the barely-there panties. The white silk shimmered in the moonlight. It was soft and cool against her skin, but warm as well. He grinned suggestively, as he moved his palmed down and cupped her, feeling how wet the silk panties were over her center.

"Kate!" he hissed out in surprise.

She grinned up at him, running her lower lip under her teeth.

"Stop teasing, Castle," she ordered, pushing her hips up and encouraging him to remove the last barrier between her and his talented fingers.
"You know," he seemed serious as he spoke, his hand lazily fingerling the thin waistband of her panties. However, when she looked up at him, the sparkle in his eyes told her he was anything but serious. "I still cannot believe that you've given me permission to see you naked." Castle chuckled lightly as he tugged the silk panties down her legs, tossing them over his shoulder with a dramatic raise of his eyebrows.

Kate shivered when the cool air touched her inner thighs, clashing with the heat radiating out from her center. Castle, noticing her reaction, chuckled slightly, shaking the bed with his mirth. She narrowed her eyes up at him and decided to have some payback. It was only fair.

Shifting, she ran her hand down his chest and cupped him through his pants, making him still. She flicked her eyes up at him in a sultry look and watched as his Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed. "Don't be so cocky, Rick," she tutted. "Especially when I've got such a firm—" she gave him a slight squeeze, watching as his eyes grew wide "—grip on you."

Smirking, she leaned back and raised her eyebrows. "Now, quit stalling, Castle… and make love to your wife."

"I always do what you say," Castle hummed, pecking at her lips in a quick kiss.

"I always do what you say," Kate quoted back, quirking up an eyebrow. "Really? You sure you want to go with that?"

"Fine," he sighed in defeat. "I don't always stay in the car, and I'm pretty bad at following orders, but hey… I'm not that bad, am I?"

Kate paused, wanting to mess with him for a bit, just because she could. She narrowed her eyes and knitted her eyebrows together in mock thought. "No, I guess not, you're not that bad, Castle," she smirked, tilting her hips up to nudge against his straining arousal.

Castle's mouth dropped and he shuddered, before quickly chucking his pants and underwear off, carelessly tossing them to the floor. He shifted back towards her, and Kate's breath hitched up. She could feel the heat of his arousal radiating off of him as he loomed over him. He dipped his head down to kiss her. She moaned into his mouth as his tongue flicked out to run along her upper lip. Opening her mouth, she granted him entrance as his hands ran up and down her legs, asking for another invitation.

Kate squirmed her hips into a more comfortable position before parting her legs and letting his hands inside. She gripped his shoulders as she felt his fingers brush against her, teasing her in ways that only he could. She'd never needed to tell him how or where to touch her; he just always seemed to know without being told.

Castle nestled his head into her shoulder, kissing and sucking on her neck as her lungs expanded and contracted with each singular breath she took. She was trying to control the rising tide, but it was damn near impossible, especially with the way his fingers were skipping along her sensitive nerve bundle. His long thick fingers brushed along her slick folds, becoming coated in her wetness. And before she knew it, one of his fingers was inside her.

"Castle!" she hissed in stunned pleasure, nuzzling the side of his neck as he continued to kiss her neck and jaw. Her hands ran up and down his back, running along the rippling muscles as he shifted over her, slowly pumping his finger in and out of her, his thumb remaining fixated on her sensitive nub, rubbing it with too much vigor.

Kate was having trouble maintaining her focus. His touch was too good, too right. Her hips began
to move with the rhythm he had set, and then she gasped out, feeling the intrusion of yet another finger, and he was spreading her, working her hard with his hand.

"Yes, yes, yes," she canted into him, clutching at his shoulders, digging her nails into his skin. Her eyes flickered and rolled back into her head as she came, hard and hot, clenching at him as she went over the edge. "RICK!"

His mouth clamped over hers, muffling her moan as she rode out the undulating ripples of pleasure as they course through her body. Her eyes closed tightly as she fought to retain control, wanting more… so much more. Wanting him. In her, over her, all around… and everywhere.

Scraping her fingers along his scalp, she encourage him into some soft lazy kisses, before she dropped a hand down between them and ushered his hands away from her pulsating flesh, her legs slick and moist with her release.

"I want you, Castle," she whispered in a breathless voice. He always made her breathless. "I just want you."

"Kate, oh Kate," he mumbled her name, his voice thick and heavy with need as he gripped the side of her face. Castle roughly claimed her mouth as he shifted over her, sliding himself between her parted legs. His other hand rubbed up and down her thigh, riding up just high enough to touch the bottom edge of her ass, his fingers digging into the flesh as he lifted her up slightly, angling her hips to just the right angle for penetration.

"Now," she huskily ordered, gazing up at him with pleasure fogged eyes.

"Now," he agreed, and he bucked his hips up, slamming into her.

Her mouth dropped down and she let out a sharp cry, feeling all of him drive up into her moist center, drilling deep. "God, Castle!" she groaned, curling her fingers tightly around his arms, holding him close.

"Too hard?" he asked, voice filled with concern, as he kissed a single tear away from her cheek. "Did I hurt you?" His hands moved to her sides, his thumbs rubbing along the edges of her baby bump.

"No, no… I'm fine," she reassured him with a shake of her head, heaving in a deep breath as she looked up at him with pleasure-glazed eyes. "You… you just hit… hit the right spot. Don't stop. Don't stop."

He laughed, and then she laughed, and then they were laughing together. They calmed down quickly, their breath heavy and hot, as they shared the same air. Castle was the first to move, nipping at her lips, waiting for her to adjust to his intrusion. When she was relaxed and ready, she kissed him back, and squeezed her legs around his waist to encourage him.

He mumbled her name, peppering her face with kisses as he pulled back, nearly removing himself entirely from her quivering flesh, before ramming back in, causing her to jump back slightly with the intensity of his thrust.

"Oh yeah, like that," she commended his attentions through a breathy sigh.

Castle chuckled and stole a kiss, his first couple of thrust sloppy and disoriented as he was focused more on covering her throat and jaw with warm and wet kisses, before he finally settled down in a slow and languid pattern of long and deep thrusts. Kate panted into his ear, her chest fluttering with rippling sensations that rolled through her with each downward thrust of his hips.
She moaned softly, nibbling at his neck and ear from time to time as his thrusts grew more insistent, more needy with want. Kate clutched at him, running her hands over all of him, feeling every inch of his body that she could, rocking her hips with his, meeting him with everything she had to offer.

Her breath turned to quick pants for air and her flesh hummed with vibrating sensations as her chest and neck flushed from the heat generated by their joined bodies. Castle moved over her, worshiping her body, devouring her in a way no man had. He loved her, with all that he was, and more. And she returned it in full, opening herself to him in a way she never had before with any other.

Castle grunted, and adjusted himself, changing the angle slightly, causing Kate to let out a cry as a wave of ecstasy surged through her veins. She licked her lips and flicked her eyes up to look up at him. Castle's hair flopped down over his forehead, making him look simply adorable as he smiled lovingly down at her, his eyes locked with hers while he continued to love her.

She kept their eyes locked, barely blinking, letting him see everything she felt, everything he did to her. And he returned the gesture, letting her witness the pure euphoria that pulsed through him with being joined with her. Shifting an arm, she slipped a hand down his sweat slicked chest, feeling his rapidly beating heart. Her other arm looped around his neck, encouraging him on, as she pulled him down for another kiss, deep and passionate, fierce and loving.

Moving her hand from her chest, she hooked it around him, slipping it down his back until she grabbed his backside and pushed him forward, quickening his pace. He glanced at her and she smirked, biting her lower lip.

They were all over each other, haphazard and desperate, loving one another with no inhibitions. It was unbelievably wild, hot and steamy. Kate was reminded of their first time together—the night she'd gotten him drunk enough to loosen his restraint and willpower, and when her own self-control and better judgment faltered. She'd offered herself to him, for a night of pleasure, of release from the stress of a difficult case.

But that wasn't the truth.

The truth was she had found herself tired of waiting, tired of hiding from what she wanted. And what she had always wanted had been him. Had been Richard Castle: Stupid, annoying, irritating, childish, adorable, cute, ruggedly handsome, kind, generous, compassionate, considerate, and loving Castle. And she still wanted him. Always would. Always. He was everything she had ever wanted, and she still had trouble coming to terms with the fact that she'd waited so long to have this… to have him.

"Ooh… YES! CASTLE!" Kate's inner thoughts were interrupted when Castle's measured thrusts touched her at just the right spot, flooding her fumbling awareness with pure orgasmic pleasure. She writhed underneath him in a blissful oblivion occupied solely by him and the way he touched her, the way he loved her.

Crying out, Kate clenched at him as Castle's thrusts stinted, sputtering out. A thrill of delight pounded through her veins as she whimpered and quivered in her powerful climax. He grunted, his hands gripped her tightly as he nudged his nose against the column of her throat, his voice raw and coarse as he called her name, heavy with incredible gratification and deep adoration. She shuddered, overwhelmed with the sensations of his hot bursts inside her as he tumbled over the edge, spilling deep within her.

His mouth found hers, muffling her cries of pleasure, as they both rode the waves of euphoria,
soaring above together. He mumbled and groaned, his fingers curling in her brunette tresses. Castle let out a long sigh, kissing her neck. "I love you," he mumbled, going slack, heavy over her. Though he was still conscious enough not to crush her.

Kate smiled at him, taking in a deep breath as she returned from the amazing natural high that she'd never experience before him. And from his gasping breaths, and slacked-jaw, pleased-exhausted expression, she had a feeling it was the same for him. He blinked, gazing at her with deep and fierce love. He shifted, intending to pull away, but she shook her head and tightened her grip around him.

"No, stay," she murmured, rubbing her hands up and down his back, encouraging him to settle back against her. "Just for a little while. Okay?"

He complied, if only reluctantly. Turning his face, he gazed at her, she breathed in his scent, returning his stare, keeping their eyes locked. The room was thick with the scent of their lovemaking. It was heavenly, and glorious. His breathing evened out as he slowly eased down from his release. She hesitantly released her tight grip on him, not wanting to fully lose contact.

When Castle pulled away and slipped out of her, she whimpered in disappointment, still longing to feel that special contact with him. He smiled down at her, and caressed the side of her face, slanting his lips over hers, whispering his love. She gripped his face, lazily devouring him as they cooled down from their post-coital high.

"That…," he panted out, leaning into her as he nipped at her chin, making her giggle, "was amazing."

"Yes," she sighed, contentedly, curling into him. "It was." Kate brushed a kiss along his throat, playfully biting at his skin.

He hummed in approval. "That feels nice."

"Good," she purred, tilting more into him as she continued tasting him, running her tongue along his collarbone, making him shiver. "Because I'm looking forward to besting what we just did with round two."
"How about Hailey?"

"Huh?" Castle grunted, not bothering to turn his head.

"Castle!" Kate hissed out, narrowing her eyes, growing a little annoyed with him. After all, she was trying to have a discussion about names for their unborn children, the least he could do was pretend he was paying attention.

He blinked and looked up from his laptop, smiling shyly in apology. "Sorry, fruit," he gave her his best puppy dog eyes. She tilted her head, unsure yet what she felt of this new endearment that he'd begun using. First time he used it was three days ago, on their wedding night. And at that time it had been used in jest. But, still, she kind of liked it. It was better than some of the other 'endearments' she'd heard over the years from previous lovers. "Can… um… you repeat the question?"

"Hailey?"

Castle frowned, confused. "What about Hailey?" he asked. She opened her mouth to respond, but he interrupted her. "Oh! Wait… finally up for a threesome? After all, I did say I've had dreams of you joining in—Ow!"

Kate struck fast and quick, her fist already pulling away as she leaned back in her lounge chair, shaking her head at him.

"What was that for?" he pouted, rubbing his shoulder where she had punched him, sulking like a little boy.

"Being an idiot."

"Ah, but you're the one who married the idiot," he crooned, giving her a charming smirk, and then grimaced, realizing he'd just called himself an idiot in the process of trying to make a witty comeback.

"Don't make me rethink my decision," Kate teased back, flicking her tongue between her teeth as she grinned back at him, triumphant. "Seriously, though, what about Hailey?"

"For a name?"

She nodded.

Castle shifted in his lounge chair to fully face her. They were relaxing out by the pool, soaking up some sun and taking a breather from all the hot sex they'd been having. They'd spent most of the first two days of their honeymoon in the bedroom, only getting up to eat and use the restrooms. On the first morning, Kate could hardly walk, so Castle gave her breakfast in bed. Afterwards, he feasted on her. But now, they were outside, simply enjoying being in each other's company and regaining the strength to continue where they had left off. Presently, nestled against Kate's chest was a book of baby names. She'd been flipping through it while Castle worked on the finishing touches of Heat Rises before he sent it off to Gina for final editing.

"Are we just thinking of girl names right now?" he asked.
Kate shrugged, adjusting the book in her hands. "Not necessarily," she shrugged. "Just names in general."

"Hailey Castle," he sounded the name out. "Hailey Katherine Castle?"

"God no," she said, shifting up a little higher in her chair.

"Well, for boy names, I… um… I've always been partial to Jackson," he said sheepishly. Was he blushing?

"Jackson? Why?" she quirked up an eyebrow, intrigued.

"Um… no reason, just… er… thought Jackson Castle would sound cool, is all," he mumbled, leaning back and averting his gaze.

Kate smirked and chuckled softly. Castle's eyes flicked up and his eyes grew dark as they dropped down the column of her throat and towards her chest. She raised her eyebrows, and stilled. Oh yeah, he talked me into wearing a bikini. "Castle, eyes up here!" she snapped her fingers in front of his glazed-over eyes.

He glanced up quickly, and gave her a half-smile. "Can't blame me, can you?"

She ducked her head, hiding a rising blush behind her long hair. "No, not really," she replied.

"So, is Jackson good?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "We can put it on the short list, along with my dad's name."

"James," he bobbed his head. "Strong kingly name. James Castle."

She stared at him with a gaped mouth, amused at the excitement in his eyes. "How can you find this so exciting, Castle?" she asked. "Personally, I find picking out a name highly daunting and frustrating."

"Why?" he shrugged.

"Well, it's a big decision, Castle," she tried to explain her logic, confused over why he seemed so nonchalant about it. "Whatever we name our children, they're going to have that name for the rest of their life."

"Not if they do what I did," Castle pointed out with a wink. He leaned back, smirking so proudly, thinking he was so clever.

"Ugh," she gave him a glare. "I really don't know why you changed it. Richard Alexander Rodgers was a nice name."

"But Richard Castle was more marketable," he shrugged. "Plus it's just an awesomely cool name!"

Kate snorted out a laugh and brought her hand up to shield her mouth. Castle arched his neck to look over at her, grinning mischievously.

"Hey now, if you didn't think so, you wouldn't have signed those papers a couple of days ago to make yourself Kate Castle," he asserted.

"Well, you got me there, then," she chuckled. "But I'm still Detective Beckett, just remember that."
"No complaints here, Detective," Castle answered with a suggestive wink. "Just as long as I can call you Mrs. Castle at home."

"Deal," Kate beamed at him, accepting his hand as he extended it. She wrapped her fingers around his and he squeezed her hand as he leaned over the gap between their lounge chairs to slant his lips over hers in a soft and welcoming kiss.

She let out a contented sigh as he slid back down to resume his edits to Heat Rises. Watching him for a moment, she smiled to herself, still feeling the fluttering in her chest as she realized the fact that she, Kate Beckett, was now married to Richard Castle, who had long been one of her favorite authors. He was no Dickens or Huxley, but his stories had always been important to her, helping her through the most difficult parts of her life.

"I love you, Richard Castle," she murmured, feeling the warmth spread throughout her body at being able to say that to him and not worry about not having the sentiment returned. It was something she was still getting used to, despite everything that had happened over the last couple of months. Kate would always be amazed at how much he loved her.

His head tilted up and he glanced over at her, smiling. "Love you, too, Kate Castle," he winked and blew her a kiss before returning back to his writing.

XXX

Later that day found them lying out on the beach, a large towel sprawled underneath them as they rested on their sides, looking at one another, ignoring the wonderful view of the ocean waves lapping at the beach as the sun made its descent after a long day.

When they had ventured out from the private seclusion of his beach house's backyard, Kate had taken a sheer see-through cover-up and draped it over her shoulders, as she was still a little self-conscious about her pregnant appearance. She didn't mind Castle seeing her as she was, but strangers were another story. The cover-up was jade in color, and had a v-neck, so it still showed off the cleavage created by her bikini top, but covered most of her torso, the hem resting on her mid-thigh. It was still sexy, but was modest enough to give Kate more confidence out on the public beach.

It helped that Castle seemed to understand her feelings on the matter, however, he still made it very clear that in his humble opinion, for whatever that mattered to her, she was absolutely smokin' hot… like model hot, and he was still very much stunned that she was his wife and allowed him to touch her in such intimate ways.

"I can't wait until I can divest you of all this clothing and ravish you again… and again… and again," his voice trailed off as he leaned forward, vanishing the distance between them as he planted his lips over hers in a hungry kiss.

Kate closed her eyes, humming in delicious approval as she opened her mouth for him, tasting the unique flavor that was Rick Castle. Her Castle. He was hers, and she was his, and she loved that. A sinfully low keen escaped her throat as he lathered the column of her neck with attention, his tongue darting out and flicking across her pulse point as he canted over her, pushing her onto her back.

She couldn't believe they were doing this—making out on the beach. Normally, she'd be too embarrassed to really do such a thing, but his persistent attentions blocked out everything else. Kate just let it happen, enjoying everything he was doing to her.
One of Castle's hands buried itself in her hair, tugging her closer as the other dropped to her side, his fingers clutching into her hip, rotating her into a more compliant position. She let out a breathy sigh, feeling his hand dropped down to her bare legs.

He grinned against her throat, flicking his tongue out, making her mewl softly as he moved his way down to her collarbone. His lips were soft and velvety, and so very hot. Castle opened his mouth and grazed his teeth across her skin before nipping softly at the top of her breasts. His hand continued to rub and caress her leg, still inching upwards as he, also, directed his attention further north.

Kate opened her mouth and let out a gasp as he latched onto her neck again, this time sucking hard on her pulse point. She squirmed, her breath caught in her throat, his scent overwhelming her as he hovered above her, taking all control of the situation from her.

"Ca—Castle," she panted into him, not the least bit ashamed of the needy quality in her voice. God, she loved him.

"Oh, Kate," her name was whispered with reverence as his open mouth climbed up the slope of her neck and over her jaw.

"Mmm…," she purred, slightly incoherent as he covered her mouth with his, gently prodding at her bottom lip with his tongue.

Kate moved her hands, wrapping her arms around his neck to pull him closer and deepen the kiss, opening her mouth to him and inviting him in. She felt him grin in triumph as his hand began to move up her leg, skidding along the bottom of her knee and shifting to run his fingernails along her inner thigh.

"Ooo!" she yelped, surprised at the direction of his clever fingers. "Castle, no. Not here."

"But Kate," he whined, brushing his lips against her cheek and down her neck while he tried his best to distract her as his fingers began to work the laces on her bikini bottoms.

"No, no, no," she objected, shifting and attempting, with all her might, to ignore the pounding of her heart and the warmth surging down into her belly, pooling between her legs. "Castle! No! I'm not having sex on the beach."

"But isn't that romantic?" he tried again to persuade her. "You know, frolic in the waves like we're in *From Here To Eternity.*"

She shook her head at him. "One, that was a movie. And two, sand, Castle… it gets everywhere." Kate made a point of stressing that last part. "And believe me, Castle, if that happens, I won't be a happy camper." She paused to see if he fully understood what she was saying, attempting to give him a little glare to make her point. "Got it?"

Castle let out a defeated sigh, and dropped his head, resting his forehead against the crook of her neck. His breath was hot against her skin, and she felt him shudder as he took in a ragged breath. Feeling sorry for disrupting the mood, Kate rubbed her hands up and down his back, to comfort and reassure him.

"Let's just take this back inside, okay?" she whispered into his ear as she ran her fingers through his hair. "I very much want to see if that was all talk or not."

"What?"
"About how you couldn't wait to 'divest' me of my clothes and ravish me," Kate smirked playfully at him as he arched his head up to gaze at her. "Really, Castle, who says 'divest' like that?"

"I'm a writer, get used to it," he huffed, before claiming her mouth in a searing kiss, stealing away any retort she might have had.

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Castle didn't disappoint. He proved to her just how real his words had been. There was no doubting his insatiable hunger for her now. Kate, for herself, was stunned at how much she could take from him. Never had she ever been so wanton and needy. She just couldn't get enough of him, no matter how many times he brought her to the edge of her pleasure threshold, before careening pass it, right along with her. What really amazed her, more than her own inexhaustible need for him, was the fact that she even had the energy to keep up.

"Yes, Castle, yes… like that, oh… oh…," she whimpers, her head falling against his shoulder, her chest heaving as his hands gripped her ass, his fingers digging into her skin as he held her to him. Her knees were planted on either side of his hips, dipping into the mattress as she rose up slightly before sinking back down on him.

"Kate," he groaned, his lips brushing along the hollow of her throat as she continued to rock against him, his hands helping her to keep up the rhythm.

Her chest expanded as her breath stilled when she felt the tight coiling of release begin to unwind and let go. She latched onto his shoulders, clutching at him hard, digging her nails into his skin as she shattered around him, screaming his name for the umpteenth time that night. Kate had long ago lost count of the number of times she'd reached that ecstasy with him.

Blanking out for a moment, she dropped herself against him, letting him hold her up as she regained her breath and came down from her release.

They were both covered in sweat, her inner thighs slick and wet from their countless sessions of lovemaking. It had started as soon as they had stumbled back into the beach house. Kate vividly recalled collapsing on the couch in the living room, his hands running up and down her sides as he 'divested' her of her cover-up and bikini.

She closed her eyes and sighed, unable to forget how he had made her come with nothing but his mouth on her. He had made her quiver and quake, falling apart right there on the back of the couch. Really? They were like rabbits. And to think, she'd waited three years to give in to her feelings for him and let them have this.

His lips on her throat pulled her back to the present. She blinked, sucking in a breath, still straddling him as they both came down from their most recent high. He hummed against her neck. One hand kept her close, sliding down to the small of her back, while his other hand reached up to brush her damp hair away from her face.

"So gorgeous," he mumbled, leaning forward to kiss her softly, letting her dictate that pace of the kiss.

Kate moaned into his mouth, pulling one hand up to gently run her fingertips along the side of his jaw, feeling his stubble. Slowly, she pulled back, resting her forehead against his as she opened her eyes to stare at him, smiling brightly at him.

They had no need for words, speaking entirely with their eyes as she canted back into him, sealing
his lips with hers in another long and languid kiss as he slipped back, pulling her down with him. She snuggled into him as he laid back against the mattress, smiling as she sprawled over him, continuing to kiss him at a slow and lazy pace.

Eventually, she shifted off of him and rested down onto the mattress, sighing with contentment, completely satisfied yet never fully sated. Kate turned onto her side and glanced across at the alarm clock on the bedside table. She frowned when she saw the red digital numbers. Was that really the time?

"Castle?"

"Yes?" he leaned into her, wrapping his arms around her slick body, pressing his lips against her bare shoulder.

"It's 3:34," she hissed, still stunned. "In the morning!"

"Huh?" he mumbled against her neck, shifting up to gaze over her at the clock. "Yes, it is. So?"

"It was only 9 when we… started," she bit her lower lip and blushed, completely surprised at herself.

Castle shrugged, slumping back down with a smug grin as he nuzzled his nose against her hair. "Again, I ask… so?"

Kate frowned. Why isn't he as worried about this as I am? She let out a startled gasp as his opened mouth latched onto her neck, sucking hard, his hand drifting down her chest to cup her in his large palm, his thumb flicking out across her nipple. "Castle!"

"Shh," he shushed. "I'm working here."

"But…," she panted, the heat in her body already rising as his hand drifted further south. "But… we just spent the last…," she quickly did the math, "Six! My god, Castle… we've just spent six hours doing nothing but making love."

She could not believe it. They hadn't even had dinner. During the course of the last couple of hours it had never occurred to her to eat. Then again, she had been hungry, but her hunger had been for a different kind. Hell, it wasn't even the same day anymore. How had she lost track of time like that?

Kate shivered, letting out a breathy moan as Castle's questing hand found her between her legs, already slick and wet, so very ready for him. Already? To say that she was stunned would have been a vast understatement. This had never happened to her. Never.

"Castle," she hedged, wanting so much for him to continue, but also wanting to take a break. It wasn't like she didn't enjoy what he was doing to her, but she wanted to take a step back and just… relax. She honestly didn't know how much more she could take. But, oh… she wanted more. So much more.

"One more time," Castle offered.

Kate laughed airily, leaning her head back into the pillows. "That's what you said last time."

"I mean it this time," he murmured, not the least bit convincing as he kissed his way down her throat. "Honest. Scout's honor."

She shook her head at him. "You, Richard Castle, were never a scout."
"Like you care," he said, his teeth grazing against her collarbone as he worked his way further down. He nuzzled into her chest, gently nipping at the soft flesh of her breasts. "You know you want it."

Kate huffed. He was right. Damn him. Giving him a glare she hoped was far more convincing that it was to herself, she pushed him off her and pulled herself up into a sitting position.

"Kate?" he questioned, his brow furrowing in confusion.

When she looked back down at him, she smiled. His confusion was so adorable, yet even his totally boyish cuteness was not enough to tackle her determination to get out of bed. After all, she still wanted to have the ability to walk, and if they kept this up, she'd end up bed ridden for maybe the next few days, and with Castle's... um... appetite, which was insatiable, she'd never see the outside of the bedroom until the end of the week.

"You want to continue this, Castle?" she asked, casting a glance over her shoulder as she heaved herself up and out of the bed. Her legs were a little shaky and unbalanced, but she managed to stay standing, though her center was kind of sore. It was a pleasant kind of soreness, but still... she needed a break... even if she did want to continue.

He bobbed his head and scooted over to sit on the edge of the bed. "How many times do I have to tell you, Kate?" he asked. "I can't get enough of you."

She smiled at him, turning to cup the side of his face in her palm. His eyes were large and so very expressive, so full of love and adoration. Kate was so tempted to just give in, fall back down on the bed and let him continue worshiping her body as they devoured one another all over again. But, honestly, her body really did need some rest.

"I know, I know," she assured him, caressing his face. "But Rick, babe, I can only take so much. And I really do need to eat at some point." Kate patted her baby bump for emphasis.

He sighed, and gave an understanding nod. "Sorry," he mumbled, his shoulders slumping.

"Why?"

"For being selfish," he replied, averting his gaze for a moment. "I... I just don't want to let go of you."

Kate stepped between his legs, hugging him and kissing the top of his head as he leaned against her chest. "I want the same thing, Castle," she admitted softly, running her hands up and down his back. "But we do have two others to think of," she added, smiling as he moved to gently hold her baby bump in his large hands. "So, I really do need to eat... especially if I want the energy to keep up with you for the rest of the week."

He chuckled against her, and leaned back, his eyes twinkling. His hands moved to cradle her hips. "I don't think that will ever be a problem, Kate," Castle asserted, so sure of himself. "You're the leader here. Where you go, I follow. I'll always follow. Always."

"Oh, Castle," Kate felt tears brimming, so she blinked her eyes rapidly as she leaned down, pulling him into a long and tender kiss. She sighed as she backed away to breathe. "Now, why don't you come and help me shower before we go down and have an early breakfast."

Castle beamed widely, winking at her with a suggestive smirk. "Deal."
"So, how was the honeymoon?"

Kate looked up from her desk and the pile of paperwork that had accumulated during her absence. "Good morning to you too, Lanie," she drawled out as she turned her head slowly, giving her friend a tiny glare of feigned annoyance, a skilled art she'd perfected ever since Castle started to follow her around like a little lost lovesick puppy.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Lanie waved it off and plopped down into the chair next to Beckett's desk, a chair that she'd always associate with Castle. She had even caught herself longingly staring at it when he was gone. "Morning. Now… you're not deflecting that question, Mrs. Castle." Kate rolled her eyes. "The honeymoon… how was it? I want details, girlfriend."

She shifted her weight in her chair, hearing the springs and joints groan as she leaned back. Lowering her brow, she tried to ignore the hints her chair was sending her over her weight gain. Thanks to Castle—the man was a glutton sometimes—she'd probably put on more weight than she normally would have. But then again, she wasn't exactly packing on the pounds. Most of her extra weight could be attributed to the fact that she was carrying two little humans inside her.

"It was good," Kate answered at length, hesitant to share too much with her friend at the moment. "You know, it was nice to be alone, just the two of us. We took some time to just relax and milk it all in, absorb the fact that we actually got married and are having twins." She paused and shrugged. "We got back Saturday evening, had a late dinner with Alexis and Martha, and went to bed. And then spent most of Sunday just lazing around the Loft."

"Ugh, girl… I don't want the cliff notes version, but if you must, at least give me some of the highlights and don't gloss over them like you usually try to do… I wanna know about that wedding night."

"Lanie… are you serious?" Kate looked around, a little flustered. Her friend gave her an expectant look. "Jeez, Lanie… I'm not going to give you blow by blow accounts here… in the middle of the bullpen."

"How about later… say lunch?" Lanie questioned, raising her eyebrows conspiratorially. "We'll go to that one café down the street and find someplace secluded to sit. Then you can give me all the juicy details."

Kate squirmed in her seat, not sure how to appease her friend. In the past she wouldn't hesitate to gossip about guys and such. Even if it had to be dragged out of her, she'd always been able to confide in Lanie about her… er… romantic escapades. But now that she was finally with Castle, when she did share, it almost felt like she was taking away something that was special about their time alone together. And when she thought about it that way, Kate realized it was because of just how special it was with Castle.

Unlike any of her previous romantic relationships, it really was special. No one had ever loved her the way Rick Castle did, both emotionally and physically. When they were together, they made love. Even when it was hard and fast, it was still lovemaking. They didn't ever just have sex. That wasn't them. Each time was always special in its own unique way. And that, above all else, was not something Kate was willing to share, even with her best friend.

Coming to this realization was almost like having an epiphany. It was a sudden revelation,
stemming from an inescapable chain of events that could not be denied. It was an irrefutable fact. And Kate would embrace it, both in acknowledging the meaning behind it, and the change it would incur on her friendship with Lanie. It was inevitable, really, that things would change this way once she got married. She'd always known it would happen. It was just difficult to concede to it. Kate Beckett didn't like change.

"Lanie, I don't know about that," she spoke up, lowering her voice as she also ducked her head, cautious of inquiring ears. Fortunately, the nosiest individuals of the bunch—Esposito and Ryan—were currently out picking up a suspect.

"We can eat somewhere else, if your worried about someone overhearing us talk," Lanie gave a knowing wink, not truly understanding what she was trying to say.

"No, Lanie, not that…," Kate almost hissed out. "Lunch… lunch is fine. Just… I just don't think I'm really interested in sharing the juicy details, as you put it, anymore."

"W-What? Kate, I don't understand, we've always traded details," Lanie blinked, startled, furrowing her brow in confusion. Clearly Lanie hadn't given any thought over this potential outcome to the detective and writer boy marrying.

"Lanie," Kate sighed, rolling her chair closer to her friend, knitting her eyebrows together as she worked out how best to verbalize her latest insight into her relationship and ever-changing life. She grimaced slightly at how the shift in her position caused two little ones to kick and squirm inside her, Kate put a hand over her swollen belly and rub soothing patterns into the taut skin through the fabric of her blouse, seeking to calm the twins, before looking up at her friend and speaking. "We both knew that this was going to come… at least, I did. Castle… Lanie, he's different than any other guy I've been with."

"You got that right," Lanie smirked.

"Yeah, well, besides his more colorful character traits," Kate smiled back, "He's a good man. A better man than I probably deserve." Her sassy friend gave her a dubious look. "I mean, Lanie, he waited for me when any other man would have just given up. That's got to say something, right?"

"That's true," Lanie inclined her head in agreement.

"So, you see, the thing is… with Castle, what I have with him, is different," Kate tried to explain. "What we have… is special. It took me a while to realize and accept that, but when I did… God, Lanie… it was amazing—isamazing. No one has loved me like he does."

Lanie's eyes sparkled with a glistening of fresh tears. "Oh sweetie, I'm so happy for you," she said, taking a deep breath, reaching out and squeezing Kate's hand in joy. "Okay… I understand. No juicy details. But don't you think that you're not off the hook for some good old fashion girl talk."

Kate cracked a grin and bobbed her head. "Girl talk, I can handle. Just as long as what Castle and I do together stays off the table."

"Off the table?" Oh no, Lanie had that devious look in her eyes. "What sort of things have you and writer boy been up to… on a table?" Lanie asked with a teasing smirk and raised eyebrows, challenging.

Kate huffed out a nervous feigned laugh and rolled her eyes, before shifting back to her paperwork and mumbling, "I plea the fifth."

"I'll take that as a yes," Lanie said with a triumphant grin as she leaned forward on an elbow. "So…
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tell me, which table should I avoid eating at next time we all go out to the Hamptons?"

Kate slid the key into the lock and turned it, pushing the door open and trudging inside the loft. Due to the fact that she'd now been put on desk duty, as a result of reaching her last trimester, Kate found she was able to come home early today, earlier than she normally would.

She wasn't the first to admit that she could—at times—be a workaholic, but in all honesty, she was. It was just who she was. Recently, however, she had decided to take advantage of all the free time she could get, considering that in three months, she'd suddenly have her hands full with two babies… not to mention Castle… so make that three babies.

So, Kate had no qualms leaving the precinct, still having a massive mound of paperwork to finish. Besides, the paperwork could wait until tomorrow. Right now, she wanted to see her husband.

A broad happy smile overcame her face as Kate shrugged out of her coat, placing it on the coatrack by the front door. Part of her still found it impossible to believe that she'd actually married Richard Castle. But the proof of it sat on her left ring finger. She held up her hand, gazing down at the wedding band as the cool metal sparkled in the dim lighting coming from the kitchen.

Tossing her keys into the bowl on the credenza, Kate stepped further into the loft, resting a hand on her swollen belly, tenderly running circles over the stretched skin through the fabric of her blouse. She paused there, in the entryway, finally taking note of how quiet the loft was. Her brow furrowed with confusion, stepping deeper into the loft, looking around for her writer.

"Castle?" she called out.

No response.

Okay… now she was worried. He never failed to greet her when she returned home ever since she moved in. Usually, when he was not coming back from the precinct with her, he'd rushing out to hug and kiss her when she got back from work. Picking up the pace, Kate half-jogged across the open loft area towards Castle's office.

She slowed down, breathing heavier than she normally would, as she reached the threshold of his office. Kate blinked, stopping suddenly as she glimpse the profile of a naked woman on his flat screen TV. Had he seriously been watching porn while she was at work? At least he has the volume down, she thought, huffing a strand of hair out of her face.

"Castle!" she snapped, seeing him jerk violently. "What the hell is this?"

Castle let out a girly yelp, literally falling out of his chair. He hurriedly reached back for the remote and shut the TV off. With a groan, rubbing his forehead, Castle hesitantly turned around to face her, looking a bit scared for his manhood. Kate narrowed her eyes at him in a glare, crossing her arms over her chest. When she noticed him flinch under her harsh gaze, her lips quirked up in a tight smirk.

"Ah, Kate… you're home," he fumbled, nervously glancing back at the dark screen. Castle spun back to her and raised his hands in a manner to try and soothe her ire. "Um… it's not what it looks like."

"Is that so?" she arched an eyebrow at him, taking another step into the office. "Because it looked to me like you were watching a porno."
Castle's eyes went wide. "I… um… no, no," he shook his head, his cheeks flushing with color. "I told you, I don't need porn anymore. Not now that I got you."

"Sure," she ground out with a touch of sarcasm, working to keep the heat in her glare. It was hard, though. She really felt like rolling her eyes, but she wanted to keep her eyes on him. It was kind of fun to make him squirm.

"No, really," he stressed, gesturing wildly with his hands. "I wasn't watching porn." Castle stepped back and offered her his chair. "Here, sit. Let me show you."

Kate narrowed her eyes. "I don't know, Castle," she hedged, unsure if she really wanted to find out what he had been watching that had him all flushed and skittish. Plus, the brief glimpse she got of the naked woman on the screen made her self-conscious. She didn't exactly feel sexy right now, even if Castle still couldn't keep his hands off her and would constantly reassure her, not just with his words, that he found her sexually desirable.

"Please, Kate," he pleaded. "Trust me."

She sucked in a deep breath and glanced away for a second, before nodding her head in agreement as she ran her lower lip under her teeth. Castle beamed, stepping forward as he brought a hand up to brush her hair back from her face, tucking some loose strands behind her ear. He tilted his head down, his eyes sparkling, and then leaned forward, dipping down to slant his lips softly over hers. His palm cradled her jaw, his thumb affectionately caressing her cheek.

"Welcome home," Castle murmured against her lips as he pulled back, resting his forehead against hers.

Kate closed her eyes and breathed in his scent. Her lips tugged up in a slight smile. "Now that's the welcome home greeting I was expecting," she chuckled lightly before leaning back in for another kiss, slow and languid, letting her tongue probe his bottom lip just enough to make him open for her.

Castle's hand moved up from her jaw, his fingers digging into her hair, pulling her closer, his nose mashed against hers. Kate flicked her tongue along the roof of his mouth, smiling triumphantly when she coaxed a moan from deep within his chest. Dropping her hands to his shoulders, she twined her fingers together behind the nape of his neck, nuzzling into him.

"You're amazing," he breathed out, his voice dark and husky.

"We're amazing," she corrected, giving him another quick kiss, before pushing him back and sliding down into the waiting chair.

Kate smiled up at him, eyeing him from behind her lashes, as he heaved in a deep breath, his fingers running over his lips, looking slightly dazed. Castle licked his lips and glanced down at her with dark aroused eyes. Yep. She was that good.

"You sure you still wanna show me this porno?" she asked, quirking up an eyebrow in challenge. "We could just go into the bedroom and make our own."

Castle coughed, nearly tripping over his own two feet as he bent down to retrieve the remote. Kate brought her hand over her mouth as she laughed, giving him an apologetic look when he glanced back at her with a pout.

"Well?" she pushed, wanting to see what he'd do.
He gulped, his eyes anxiously looking around the office. "You really need to see this," he pressed. A frown creased her brow. Damn it, now her interest was piqued. Folding her arms over her chest as she leaned back in his chair, Kate inclined her head in consent. "Alright, Castle, let's see this porno that's got you all flustered," she said, smirking slightly at his wide eyes.

"First… do I have you're guarantee that you won't hit me?" Castle questioned, sliding up onto the edge of the desk beside her.

"Why? Am I going to have a reason to hit you?" she asked, curious.

He shrugged, chewing on his bottom lip nervously. "Maybe," he tentatively replied with a worried expression.

"Just show it to me, and if I hit you… then I hit you," she asserted, then smirked deviously. "If I hurt you somewhere, then I promise to kiss it and make it better." She added a saucy wink.

Castle let out a nervous laugh, and bobbed his head. Kate bit her lower lip and shook her head.

"Just push play," she commanded.

Castle adjusted the remote in his hand, activating the flat screen, and turning the DVD player back on at the same time. Kate turned her attention away from him and focused on the TV, watching as the playback started.

The image was grainy and blurry, a bit out of focus. It took a few moments for the picture to stabilize, the video still shaky, as if from a handheld camera. Kate knitted her eyebrows together, confused. This didn't look like a porno. She glanced back at Castle, puzzled. He noticed her gaze, and blinked nervously, studiously keeping his eyes pointed ahead at the screen.

Chewing on her lower lip, a habit she adopted when uncertain and confused, Kate let her eyes fall back on the shaky image coming from the TV screen. It blinked in and out of focus until stilling, bringing the glassy planes and hard lines of a building's window into sharp focus. She squinted, still unable to fully make out what she was looking at.

There was some movement. She unconsciously moved forward in the chair. The camera angle changed, and blurred for a moment before finding its focus.

Kate's eyes went wide.

She blinked in stunned shock, watching as her onscreen-self reached behind her back and unhooked her bra, flinging it aside and freeing her breasts. Her hands came up and grabbed the head of the man she was straddling on the couch, pulling him forward, burying his face into her breasts as she ran her fingers lustfully through his hair.

"God… Castle," she choked out, flicking her eyes up to him. "Is… is this what I think it is?"

He swallowed, his eyes big and frightened. "Yes… yes it is," he answered, licking his lips nervously.

Kate felt a hot flash of mortification wash over her as she glanced back at the video, seeing her onscreen-self stripping before Castle, baring all to him. And then, without hesitation, she was
pouncing on Castle, sinking down on him, her long legs wrapped around his waist, his hands roaming through her hair and down her back, grabbing her ass to help guide her hips in that delightfully erotic motion.

Jumping out of the chair, Kate grabbed the remote from a blushing Castle, fumbling as she tried to find the controls to turn the TV off. Growling, she gritted her teeth and punched the button, stopping the playback and returning the DVD player to its stand-by mode.

"Jesus!" she cursed. "What the hell?" Kate spun on Castle, jabbing him in the chest with a finger. "Explain! NOW!"

He held up his hands in surrender. "It wasn't me!" he feebly objected, wincing at the ire flashing in her eyes. He stumbled back from her, still holding his hands up. "Look, Kate, you know famous people get stalkers, right?"

Kate raised an eyebrow, unconvinced.

"Hey, I'm famous enough to warrant a stalker!" he groused, pushing out his bottom lip in a pout.

"Off subject, Castle," she gritted out, steeling her glare.

She wanted answers. And she wanted them now. Most of her was just plain mortified by the fact that there was actually a video of them having sex and it wasn't one that they had made. The fact that someone had watched, let alone filmed, their first time together just disturbed her to no end. She shuddered involuntarily, feeling violated.

"Right," Castle bobbed his head, looking so apologetic, like it was all his fault, which in a way it was… since he was famous. But she already knew that about him. She knew that about him long before she got him drunk and jumped him.

Closing her eyes, Kate shielded herself against his puppy-dog expression. She wasn't going to fall for it. "Just… tell me, Rick."
If any one is interested, I'm LordofKavaka on Twitter. We can chat about fanfic, Castle, or anything else. I also generally tweet about when I'm working on stories and when I post.

Kate waited for Castle to respond. He looked at her with wide eyes, almost like she scared him, which was okay. She didn't mind that she could put the fear of God into him—it's what reassured her that she could keep him in line. Plus, it kind of irritated her that he wasn't as upset as she was at having their private life violated to such a degree. But then again, Castle was still the same guy who had stole—sorry, "borrowed"—a police horse so he could take a ride… in the nude. So maybe this didn't faze him as much as it did her. Still, it was aggravating that he didn't appear to be too worked up over it. If anything, he appeared more concerned with her reaction than with the video itself.

"Castle," she ground out, tempted to raise her fist. "Am I going to have to hit you to make you talk?" She knew they'd joked about it before, but now she was seriously thinking it.

Castle sighed, raking his fingers through his hair, relenting with a slight incline of his head. "Okay, fine… It wasn't a stalker… actually, I probably would have preferred if it had been, then at least we would have caught this sooner." Castle looked up at her, noting her confused expression. He dropped his hands to his sides. "Apparently there was a peeping tom in the apartment building across from yours."

Kate crossed her arms over her chest. "You think," she grumbled sardonically, huffing a little. She was putting up a front, though, using sarcasm to hide her terrified vulnerable side. It didn't help that her hormones were running wild as a result of her pregnancy. Recently she'd discovered that she had to double her efforts to keep her emotions in check. And for someone who didn't like having her emotions put on display, dealing with that was highly frustrating.

"A couple of months ago, a young woman caught him spying through her window with a telescopic camera, and called the cops," Castle explained. "When they arrived at his place, he freaked and made a run for it. Had a bad tumble down the fire escape, and ended up in the hospital with a broken leg and fractured arm."

"Can't say I'm all that sorry for him," Kate interjected.

Castle gave her an amused smile. "Neither can I," he agreed.

They stared at each other for a moment, soaking in each other's slightly amused gaze before he cleared his throat.

"Look, Kate, I'm as upset about this as you are… truly, I am," he asserted, earnest and honest, stepping a little closer. "Firstly, I can safely assure you that none of this has been posted anywhere online and that no member of the media as seen it."

"Okay," she bobbed her head, averting her gaze for a moment. "Just… continue."
Castle gave a nod. "Okay…," he said, "So, after the arrest, they went through his place and found some kiddo porn hidden away in a thick medical book. After that, SVU and Vice were called in and did a thorough search of his apartment, finding a lot more disturbing pictures. Eventually they got to his computer and well… along with some pretty troubling videos, they also found…," he gestured towards the TV. "Turns out he'd been peeping in on you and some of the other female tenants in your building for… um… quite a while. He had loads of videos and pictures."

"From the digitally coded dates stamped on the photos and videos… it seems he started about two weeks after you initially moved in."

Kate shuddered, unconsciously wrapping her arms around herself, feeling exposed and violated. She swallowed and looked away, trying to think back to how often she'd stripped off her clothes while passing through her living room window, unaware that some pervert could be watching her. "How long?" she asked, hating how her voice quivered.

"I… I honestly don't know why they didn't contact you," Castle shrugged, swallowing past a lump in his throat as he looked at her. Damn it, he was telling the truth. She could tell by his wide apologetic eyes.

"I… I honestly don't know why they didn't contact you," Castle shrugged, swallowing past a lump in his throat as he looked at her. Damn it, he was telling the truth. She could tell by his wide apologetic eyes.

"Look, Kate, I may only follow you around, but I do have other sources within the NYPD and District Attorney's office," Castle replied enigmatically, not really answering her question.

Kate scowled, knitting her eyebrows together, but decided to let it slide for now. She slowly turned back to fully face him, still hugging herself. "So, how'd you find out?" she asked, flicking her eyes up to look at him.

He gulped and gazed down at her with nervous eyes, a blush rising up from his neck to stain his cheeks. "Turns out one of the Vice detectives was a fan, recognized me from the video. She called up the legal department at Black Pawn, who then contacted Paula, who contacted me."

"Then what?"

"After the guy was released from the hospital, he was formally charged for the possession of the child pornography," Castle explained. "But before he was officially arraigned, he got shanked in lockup. Seems the other occupants, some gang bangers, weren't too keen on sharing a cell with a guy who dealt in kiddo porn."

Kate gave a stiff nod. Child molesters, and anyone who abused children, were the lowest of the low in society, and even criminals seemed to have standards. She wasn't all too surprised that something like that had happened, but right now she was more concerned with the pictures and videos the guy had had on his computer.

"And how long ago did all this happen?" she asked, unconsciously playing the hem of her blouse.
Castle licked his lips apprehensively, automatically shifting into a defensive stance. "About 3 months ago—Ouch!" He blinked, and stuck out his lower lip in a pout as he rubbed his shoulder. "What was that for? I thought you were only joking about hitting me?"

Kate gave him a tight smirk and shrugged, suppressing the need to roll her eyes. "That's for not telling me about this sooner."

Castle continued to pout, really working on his wounded puppy-dog eyes. "Hey now, you were busy with the wedding plans, and settling in after the move. You were happy… finally happy, and content, and… and I just didn't want to burst that bubble by placing all of this in your lap, especially when I could handled, safely and discreetly."

She chewed on her bottom lip, giving him a steady gaze before sighing and inclining her head in acceptance of the situation. What had been done was done. She couldn't change it. There was no use dwelling on it now. "Fine," she grumbled out. She scrunched up her nose in thought, glancing back at the TV. "What about the—?" she questioned, directing him back on subject.

"Right, the video," he nodded, looking shamefaced. "Luckily for us, the file on the computer was the only copy. Seemed he had his camera hooked up to his computer and recorded all the videos that way."

"And all the other videos and pictures?"

"Still on the hard drive, locked up in evidence," Castle answered her quickly, pursing his lips, an anxious expression written all over his face.

She furrowed her brow, and a creased formed between her eyebrows. "Have… have you seen all the videos, then?" she questioned, clenching her jaw and averting her eyes, feeling utterly exposed and humiliated. She didn't know what she'd do if he'd seen the other videos.

"No," he answered, having the decency to duck his head in embarrassment and blush. "Just… just this one." Again, he gestured towards the TV to make his point.

"Okay," she gave a slight nod. Kate could tell by his expression that Castle was acutely aware of what the other videos would be. And she was eternally grateful that he hadn't watched them. She wouldn't, if the roles had been reversed. "Do you know what they'll do with the… evidence?" It felt better to call it that rather then what it really was.

"As far as I know, they really don't need them anymore, since the pervert's dead," Castle said with a shrug. "I suppose they'll just keep them locked up in storage, right?"

Kate let out a sigh of relief as she inclined her head. "Yes, that's most likely what they'll do," she replied, fully aware of all police procedure with such evidence. She wasn't entirely sure how she felt about Castle seeing the video he had obviously watched, but she definitely didn't want him to see any of the others, especially the ones that would no doubt involve her and Josh. There were just some things a current lover did not need to know, especially when he was the love of her life, not to mention her husband.

He nodded, ducking his head, as he let out a shaky breath. "I got a copy of this video of us thanks to some crafty legal talk by my lawyer. I tried making this the only copy, but they wouldn't allow that. Said they still needed the one on the hard drive. But they assured me that they would be discreet and—"

"Castle," Kate stopped him with a soft and tender gaze. "I'm sorry." She tentatively brought her
hand up and caressed the side of his face, gently leaning into him. "I'm sorry for getting mad at you. This wasn't your fault. I just felt so violated. You did everything right, everything you could to ensure our privacy was protected. And for that, I'm very thankful. What we have between us is so very special to me, and I don't like the idea of someone watching us. I... I just want..." her voice trailed off as she knitted her eyebrows together in thought. "How much is there?"

"Huh?" Castle jumped, having relaxed somewhat with his arms wrapped around her waist.

Kate smiled softly at his reaction. She couldn't blame him, though, since even she was surprised at how her mind wandered and brought the question to the forefront of her mind. "The video," she elaborated, tucking her head against his chest as she sought out the warmth of his embrace. "You know, the duration. How long? How much did he film?"

"Oh," his mouth dropped open slightly. "Pretty much all of it. I mean, we kind of christened your entire living room and kitchen before moving to the bedroom, didn't we?"

Right, she frowned to herself, he didn't remember much about it. She had gotten him drunk and... taken advantaged of his inebriated state and painfully obvious want for her. Okay, so maybe she hadn't completely taken advantaged, since he'd made it clear from day one that he wanted in her pants. But still, Kate had used him that night. It had been wrong of her, yet so very incredible as well.

And so very right.

There was no doubt that they had a connection. Their verbal repartee was unlike any she'd ever had before. What she had never imagined was just how well that connection would be in the physical sense. They literally fit together in a way she'd never imagined, and it wasn't just about how awesomely amazing the sex was—which was great, by the way. It was how everything was just in sync with them.

The way she felt when he touched her... God, the way she felt when he was inside her... it really was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. He could have her undone with just a look. That alone was unbelievable. So when she finally gave in to the physical desire, the want and need, and everything just clicked like it was meant to be... well, it was kind of mind-blowing, to say the least.

So, in the end, she would never regret what she did that night, especially when she factored in how the consequences turned into a catalyst that finally brought them together. Kate just wished he'd been able to remember some of it without the haze of alcohol-fueled memories.

Castle's chest vibrated as he chuckled lightly, pulling her out of her ruminations. She leaned back and glanced up at him, raising an eyebrow in question. "What?"

He sobered quickly, looking sheepish. "I've watched the whole thing, Kate," he informed her in a soft voice, smirking as her eyes went wide. "I... I'm just surprised, is all."

"Surprised?" Kate raised an eyebrow, perplexed. It's not like they hadn't had wild evenings since then. Hell, their honeymoon week alone encompassed some of the best sex she'd ever had in her life, which still amazed her, considering how heavily pregnant she was. "Why... what surprised you?"

Castle blushed slightly, averting his eyes. "We're married, and we've been together—romantically—for months now, and..." his voice trailed off, his cheeks growing redder.

"Just spit it out, Castle," Kate leaned back to give him a little glare for encouragement. Though,
there might have been a little too much bite in her voice, but thankfully he didn't seem to notice.

"Uh," he stuttered, pushing back to reach for the remote. "Here, it'll be easier if I just show you."

"Okay?" she frowned, growing a little worried. Castle was never one to beat around the bushes. She was used to him being confident and sure in himself. He'd never had a problem before when it came to speaking his mind, no matter where they were. He'd embarrassed her quite a few times in the precinct with the innuendos he so casually threw around.

Castle worked the device quickly, turning the TV and DVD player back on. The images of them heaving and going at it like rabbits came back on, causing Kate to blush, watching as the video sped up when Castle pressed the fast forward button. She'd almost forgotten all the various positions and places they'd... *explored* one another. Castle was kidding when he said they had almost christened every surface in her living room and kitchen before heading off to the bedroom.

Kate furrowed her brow, stunned at how flexible she was. Her mouth dropped and she tilted her head slightly, disbelief written all over her face. She seriously did not remember doing that. Hell, before just now, she'd thought such a position was physically impossible. She smirked, flicking her gaze up to Castle. Once she'd delivered and gotten herself back into shape, they were going to have to try doing that again.

Placing her hands on her swollen belly, Kate ran soothing patterns along the taut skin through the fabric of her blouse. She shifted her feet, leaning back against the side of the desk, sneakily watching Castle out of the corner of her eye, taking note of how his breathing was low and heavy, and his eyes fogged and dark. Oh, he was so aroused by this, wasn't he? She grinned, a little aroused herself, if she was being honest, even if she was still a little perturbed at the notion of having been spied on by some sicko pervert.

At least all the videos and pictures that the guy had taken were locked up in police storage. They should be safe there for now, until she could finagle her way in and get them all erased. It's not like they were needed anymore, considering the perp got shanked in lockup.

"Here," Castle said, calling her attention back to the present, and placing the video back on normal playback.

Kate pursed her lips and turned her attention away from him and towards the screen, more than a little curious over what had him all at a lost for words.

On screen she was standing with her back bare towards the camera, and despite the disturbing way this had been filmed, Kate couldn't help but congratulate herself on how toned and firm her ass was. She could understand why Castle never complained about walking behind her—not that she was condoning him staring at her ass all the time. Shaking her head, chuckling softly at her own thoughts, Kate focused on the video, wanting to see what it was Castle was so eager to have her see, especially since he'd said it had surprised him. Considering some of the *unique* positions she'd already seen them try on the video, she was beginning to get curious what it was that had stunned him so.

By the looks of it, they were resting between rounds, Castle leaning back against the doorknob that had led into her bedroom. She was pushing up against him, her arms looped around his neck as they kissed soft and slowly. His hands were draped around her waist, fingers teasing along the soft curve of her ass, as he slipped his mouth from hers to suck on her neck. She was attempting to pull him back for a kiss, but he just kept ignoring her as he lathered the soft flesh along her shoulder in wet kisses.
Kate smiled slyly, as she watched, her bottom lip tugging under her teeth, having no trouble remembering this moment. It had been a brief lull in the activities... a pleasant interval of rest. She had just been about to guide him to her bedroom, so they could fully enjoy the rest of the evening in the comfort of her bed.

She had had fun exploring their connection in the hot and wild ways they'd been doing in the living room, but she'd wanted to slow it down and savor a steady and slow pace that would be more akin to lovemaking than fucking.

Kate watched the image as her on-screen self reacted to his touch, the way his hands swept down her back to grab at her ass, tugging her towards him as his hot wet mouth did delicious things to the spot where her neck met her shoulder. She could feel the trickles of arousal course through her veins just watching them.

"Here it is," he croaked out next to her, his voice dripping with unrestrained desire.

Licking her lips, Kate watched anxiously as her on-screen self gently pushed Castle back, pinning him against the wall. Her eyebrows furrowed as she tried to recall what was going to happen next. Then, the swift naked movement of her past self, brought the memory back. Kate watched as her on-screen self slipped down to her knees in front of Castle, kissing her way down his stomach and... Oh. She'd forgotten about that.

Kate swallowed nervously and glanced over at Castle, not even bothering to watch anymore. She knew what she was doing on screen. Castle blinked, his cobalt eyes dark with desire and lust. Flicking her eyes down, she saw confirmation of his arousal. Licking her lips, Kate heaved in a deep breath and forced herself to move.

Truth was, she'd been wild in her youth, and had done a lot of things she wasn't exactly proud of, and would like to forget about if she could. First time she ever did what her on-screen self was doing was in college. He'd been some upperclassman, and Kate had been curious. She wasn't particularly fond of it, but she was young, inexperienced, and eager to please. And over the years, she'd done it a couple of times with various boyfriends, but only after they'd coaxed her into it. And with Josh, she'd always felt pressured to do it, like he expected it of her.

But Castle... he was unlike any of the others. She never felt pressured, or had any expectations thrust upon her when it came to their intimate activities. Never. Not once. When they were together, Castle always seemed more interested in pleasing her, doing what she wanted. He never asked her for anything, other than to let him love her. Even, if secretly, it was something he clearly wanted.

"Castle," she mumbled softly, pulling his attention away from the screen.

He jerked, his head turning sharply to look at her, his cobalt eyes practically black. She smiled warmly at him, reaching out to caress the side of his face. He closed his eyes, easing into her touch. A quiet sigh left his lips as she leaned into him, taking the remote out of his hands and, once again, stopped the DVD and turned the device off.

She turned into him, leaning up on her toes to kiss his lips, prodding his mouth open with her tongue, deepening the embrace. He moaned, his lips parting, his entire body quivering under her attentions. Kate smiled against his cheek, running her hands down his button-down shirt, tugging it out of the waistband of his slack. He shivered, his head lolling forward, his open mouth seeking out hers.

Rising up, she met his mouth with hers, allowing his tongue in, gently nipping at his lips as he
pulled back to nuzzle his nose into her hair, breathing her in as she slowly unbuttoned his shirt. He let out a deep sigh, his chest heaving as she ran her fingers along his skin. His hands dropped to her hips, cradling her body into his. Their eyes met, and she smiled seductively at him, capturing his lips in another kiss, slow and sensual. Her fingers worked at his belt, deftly unbuckling it and popping the button, tugging the zipper down before reaching a hand inside to stroke his growing arousal.

"Kate," he gasped, dipping his head down on her shoulder. His tongue darted out to lick at the exposed skin of her neck. He shuddered, closing his eyes, before opening his warm mouth and seeking out her pulse point.

Her breath hitched when he found it, and she tilted her head up, giving him more access to her neck. His hands came up to wrap around her waist as she continued to stroke him, soft and slow, teasing him with her fingertips. Kate gave him a few more strokes, squeezing gently, smiling as a groan rumbled through his chest. Pulling her hand back, she gripped his hips, tugging at the waistband of his slacks, pulling them—along with his boxers—down until they bunched at his knees.

Then, she eased away from him, gripping his sides for balance as she slid down onto her knees before him. Castle let out a puff of hot air and followed her with fluid eyes. "Kate… what are you…? God," he gasped, realization hitting him. "Oh, God… Kate… you… you don't have to do —"

She looked up at him, sweeping back her hair with a hand, and gave a slight nod. "I know," she said softly, meeting his eyes. "But I want to… for you."

"Kate...," he whimpered her name as she reached up and took him into her hand, lightly wrapping her delicate fingers around his firm length as she gave him a few more teasing strokes.

She flicked her eyes away from his, turning her gaze to his length in her hand. He wasn't asking her to do this, but she would. She knew that that's what had bugged him when he'd seen the video. Castle had been attempting to explain this to her, talking about how they'd been together, sexually, for a while, and she had yet to offered to perform oral sex on him, despite the numerous times he'd done it for her. It was kind of hard not to appreciate his talented tongue. She wanted to show him that she was just as talented.

Castle told her he'd been surprised when he viewed the video. Now she knew why. At some point during the beginning of the sexual side of their relationship, she must have inadvertently implied she was against doing this, which wasn't necessarily true. It had never been her favorite thing to do, but with Castle, she generally wanted to try.

She wasn't timid or afraid to try new things, and she was no longer the young, inexperienced coed eager to please. No. Far from it. Kate was a grown woman who understood how to please a man, and she had never really needed to rely on anything other than her own alluring sexuality. Far from feeling demeaned and cheapened by this act, Kate felt empowered. She held absolute power here, the power to please the man she loved… the man who loved her with all of his being. And she was going to use that power.

Kate inhaled deeply, and licked her lips. She could do this… for him. On a gentle sigh, she moved closer, pressing her lips against the tip of his length. Castle gasped, his neck arching back as he groaned. Parting her lips, Kate eased forward, slowly taking him into her mouth. She closed her eyes and breathed through her nose, fighting the gag reflex as she took as much of his length as she could.
The last time she'd done anything like this had been that night. In a lot of ways, it felt so long ago, seeing how much had happened since then. And just like him, Kate had been somewhat drunk herself. So, she reveled in the feel and texture of him against her tongue. He was warm and hot in her mouth, and she felt him respond instantly to the hot wetness of her mouth as her tongue darted up to tease. She wrapped her lips around him and pulled back, making a slight sucking noise, before popping him out of her mouth and hungrily running her tongue up along his length, from base to tip, before taking him back in.

"Oh god… Kate!" he groaned, his hands dropping to her head, his fingers dangling in her hair.

Kate set herself into a rhythm, taking him in and out of her mouth, kissing his tip, and then using her tongue to coax soft gasps and moans from him, before taking him back in. She flicked her eyes up at him, seeing him gazing down at her with hooded eyes, watching her as she worked over him, her hands on his hips, holding him steady. She could feel his tight restraint, how he was preventing himself from thrusting into her as she took him in.

She squirmed her head around, taking slow steady breaths through her nose as she took all of him into her mouth, her nose brushing against his lower abdomen. Castle let out a strangled moan, his hands dropping away from her head and fisting at his sides.

"Ah… KATE!" he grunted through clenched teeth.

She slipped him out of her mouth slowly, running her tongue along his entire length as she did so, and for the first time, finding she didn't mind doing this. There was no pressure or expectations. He didn't grab her head, holding her steady as he thrust violently into her mouth. No. He was surrendering completely to her. He let her take control. He was at her mercy. She had complete domination.

Leaning back, Kate licked her lips and stroked him, squeezing her fingers gently as she glanced up at him, flashing him a sultry smirk. "Like that, do you?" she teased, her voice rough and raspy. She'd strained her throat a bit taking him all the way in, but it was worth it, just to see the dark hooded look of pleasure glaze over his eyes. Yet his love still shone through, even bright than his lust and want. It made her breath catch, seeing that. God… the things this man did to her. And she was the one doing all the work!

"Are you always so good at everything you do?" Castle questioned, a little amused tug to his lips.

"Just about, yes," she winked at him, adding a wiggle of her eyebrows—something she picked up from him—as she gave his length a slight squeeze, before flicking her tongue out teasingly through her teeth. She opened her mouth and took him back in.

Castle shuddered, his breath releasing in a long hot sigh. His hands came back to rest lightly on her head. His fingers played with the long strands of her hair as she continued to work over him, losing herself in the erotic nature of what she was doing. She was amazed at his willpower. Most guys would have started to roughly thrust into her mouth, making her gag. But not him. Not her Castle. Her love and husband. Her always.

He was putty in her hand. He went where she directed. And that was not something Kate took for granted. She was honored at his trust and faith, beyond touched that he would let her have so much control. If she was honest, it frightened her a little just how much power she had over him. It have her the power to hurt him, and that was not something Kate ever wanted to do. It was why she'd held back so long on her feelings.
It had had a dual purpose—protecting both their hearts. Because, he had just as much power over her as she had over him. They were in this... together. And that's what made this so important to her... to do this for him, to show him just how much she was willing to do for him without him even asking.

Castle groaned, his hands gripping her hair tighter. "Kate..." he panted, his chest heaving. "Oh, Kate... I'm going to..."

She shushed him with a flick of her fingers across the contracting muscles of his stomach. She knew what he was saying. He was giving her an easy out. But she wanted to. She wanted to taste him, just as he'd tasted her. Slipping a hand up to help urge him along, Kate stroked the based of his throbbing length as she continued to tease and tantalize him with her wet mouth and talented tongue.

Castle let out a grunt, his breath coming in raspy pants. His fingers gripped her hair as his hips bucked slightly forward. Kate prepared herself, taking a deep breath through her nose, but was still a little startled when he came in her mouth, all hot and thick. She grabbed his hips, holding them steady as she waited out his release, letting him spill completely into her mouth before she swallowed, taking the time to savor the unique flavor that was her Castle. Running her hands soothingly along his clenching stomach and bare thighs, Kate licked him clean, gulping down every last drop.

When she finished, Kate stayed down there on her knees, nuzzling his abdomen with her nose, before planting a soft kiss on his hipbone. Castle shivered, letting out a hot sigh, as his hands landed on her shoulders, gently pushing her back as he eased down to join her on the floor.

Now he, too, was on his knees. Castle gazed at her with unfettered love and adoration. He tenderly brushed his fingers through her hair, before cupping her face in his palm and looking deeply into her eyes. The pad of his thumb skidded across her bottom lip.

"I love you, Kate, so very much," he whispered huskily, and then crashed his mouth against hers.

Kate moaned, melting into him. She looped her arms around his neck as she deepened the kiss. Her eyes closed as she felt her heart pound furiously against her ribs. His fingers danced through her hair, pulling her back to press his forehead against hers. They panted, breathing in the same air, before he leaned forward, gently seeking out her lips in a soft and languid kiss.

"You didn't have to do any of that," he murmured, his warm breath tickling across her cheek.

"I know," she whispered back, caressing the side of his face and dropping one hand to his chest. "But I wanted to. You've done so much for me, Castle. So much. I wanted to do something for you. I wanted it to be about you for a change. It's always about me. You're so attentive and caring. I just wanted to return the favor." She paused and licked her lips, still tasting him. "Rick... I... I owe you so much."

Kate began to choke up. Damn her hormones. Tears threatened, and she clenched her eyes shut, willing them away. She would not cry right now. Not after what she'd just done for him. She didn't want him to think she regretted doing what she'd just done, because she didn't. She had actually enjoyed it, not because of the erotic nature of it, but because it was him.

Castle, as he'd done often in their tangled up lives, seemed to understand. He hugged her to his chest, his hands brushing down her sides, soothing her with his gentle touch.

"It's okay, Kate," he said, softly, his voice so tender and loving. "I understand. It's the same way I
feel about you."

She blinked, and shifted back on her knees to look up at him. "What?"

Castle smiled at her, amusement dancing in his eyes. "Why do you think I married you? Because I wanted arm candy?" he snorted out a laugh. "No. Come on, you know better. Though, you are pretty hot. Sizzling. Smoking hot! Like supermodel hot—"

"Castle, you're getting off topic."

"Um, oh yeah, sorry," he blinked, pulling himself back to the moment. "So, why did I marry you? I think that's obvious, Kate. Don't you? I mean, it should be crystal clear by now. I married you because I love you. So much more than I ever thought I could. Before you, Kate, I'd given up on the idea of love. I succumbed to the persona thrust upon me by my fame, happy to settle for cheap flings with no emotional depth other than getting laid."

Kate swallowed, biting her lower lip as she gazed at him from under her eyelashes. "Really?"

He bobbed his head, a little more enthusiastically than he probably needed to. But it made her smile, so maybe that was his plan. "When I met you, I began to realize that it was okay to want more, to deserve more," he replied, smiling down at her as he caressed the side of her face. "That first day, you rejected my overt advances. It made me realize I had to be more subtle… more crafty… if I wanted to get into your pants."

She laughed, rolling her eyes at him, as he grinned at her, adding a wiggle to his eyebrows. "Obviously it became about more than just getting into your pants," he chuckled, his grin goofy and adorable. He tilted his head, nuzzling against her, placing a light kiss against her temple. "You made me want to be a better man. A man more deserving of you. And I thank whatever higher power there is that I eventually got your love in return. You are my everything, Kate. And I'm so very happy to be yours. Always."

"Oh, Rick," Kate mumbled, her bottom lip trembling as her emotions got the better of her. She leaned forward and kissed him hard, letting her actions speak when her words couldn't.

After what seemed like forever, Castle pulled back and rubbed his nose against hers, chuckling softly. "Now, why don't we go to bed, and I can return the favor."

A grin cracked her face, and she matched his amused chuckle with one of her own. "You can return the favor anytime, Mr. Castle. Anytime at all!"

Castle laughed, as well, beaming brightly down at her as he readjusted his pants before he stood, bending down to extend a hand to help her up. Placing a hand on her swollen belly, Kate let out a grunt as he pulled her up. She grimaced, shifting her weight on her feet.

"You okay?" he asked, his voice heavy with concern.

She looked up at him, startled. "Yeah," she smiled warmly as she reached over to caress his face. "I'm okay. Just… my legs kinda fell asleep."

Castle snickered, wrapping his arms around her as he tugged her closer, allowing her to lean against him for support. "We can't have that, now can we?" he grinned, eyes sparkling. "Come on, Mrs. Castle… let's go wake up those long legs of yours." He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, adding in a boyish wink.
Kate grinned, biting her lower lip as she shook her head at him and his antics. But other than that, she made no attempts to stop him as he guided her to their bedroom.
Chapter 36

The sterile white room was unnerving her. There was just something about sitting in a room so austere and spartan that bothered her. Either it was that, or it could have been the unflattering hospital gown she'd been forced to don for her appointment with Dr. Elam. Kate fidgeted, anxious to have it over with. She was never really fond of doctor's appointments, even if she got along really well with her OB-GYN. Julie Elam was almost like a friend, but Kate still hated examination rooms… not to mention hospital gowns.

She sighed in resignation.

At least she had Castle by her side. And he wasn't even snooping around, wanting to touch everything like he had the first time he accompanied her. So there was not going to be a repeat of his fumbling with the jar containing the cotton balls. Though, she could really do with a distraction right about now. Castle was good at distracting her. But he just stood there, remaining silent as they continued to wait.

Kate sighed, partly to relieve her stress and frustration. He noticed, and reached over, squeezing her hand reassuringly and dropping a kiss on the top of her head. Closing her eyes, she welcomed his comfort. However, her overwrought mind still fretted off into tangents and random trajectories.

It had been a couple of weeks since Kate had caught Castle watching that disturbing recording of their first night together, the night the twins had been conceived. She was still irked by the manner of which that video had been made. The following week, she had spoken privately with Captain Montgomery on the matter, and he agreed with her that since the videos weren't needed as evidence anymore, that she could deal with them as she saw fit.

Kate had them erased without a second thought. All videos and photos that the creep had taken of her were now gone. The only video that remained was the DVD in a plastic jewel case that was buried deep in Castle's strongbox back in the loft. He had wondered why she wanted to keep it. She often wondered the same thing.

In the end, she supposed she kept it as a reminder.

Kate recognized that she sometimes needed to be reminded that she could please Castle just as much as he pleased her. It renewed her spirit and gave her the encouragement to be more… creative in the bedroom. As her belly grew, they experimented with different positions, each with their own merits and faults. But they managed to find a nice balance that pleased them both. Kate was amazed at how quickly, on some occasions, she could now reach orgasm, and noticed that it often didn't take that much to arouse her.

Yet despite the abundance of their rather satisfying and sensual lovemaking over the course of the past month, Kate—for beyond her own reasons—still struggled with feeling sexually desirable and attractive. She knew such insecurities were silly, especially considering the amount of evidence to the contrary.

But with the summer nearly at its end, her pregnancy would soon be entering its final trimester, and part of her was growing apprehensive about finally approaching term. She felt huge, and hated having to wear the big baggy maternity clothes. She was used to how her body used to be, and being able to be even more flexible. But now with her belly so large, even the missionary position was somewhat problematic. Though, that didn't stop Castle. He always found a way.
"You okay?" Castle's calm voice pulled her out of her thoughts.

She blinked, immediately pulled out of her thoughts, and flicked her eyes up to him, her fingers playing with the hem of her hospital gown. "Just nervous…," Kate replied in a soft voice, and then huffed in annoyance. "God… I hate feeling so frustrated and… bloated. How can you still find me attractive when I'm as huge as a whale? Not to mention that yesterday I needed your help to shave my legs!"

Castle chuckled, amused, shaking his head at her, which only irritated her more. She frowned up at him, her heated glare sending daggers at him. "Did I complain?" he asked, gently brushing back a loose strand of curled brunette hair from her face and tenderly tucking it behind her ear.

"No," she stubbornly answered, averting her gaze and knitting her eyebrows together. "In fact, you seemed far too eager to help."

"Not often I get to spoil my beautiful wife," Castle crooned besides her, grinning widely.

She shook her head at him. "You really are crazy, you know that?"

"Uh-huh," he hummed in agreement. "So what does that say about you, then? Since you married a crazy man out of your own volition?"

"That I have questionable reasoning skills," she replied with a smirk.

Castle flashed her a beaming smile and winked mischievously at her. All the while, one of his hands disappeared behind her back, slipping between the flaps of the hospital gown and down her bare skin. She shivered, feeling an arousing tingle dance up her spine as he spread his palm wide, sliding his touch down the small of her back and along the curve of her ass. And then, totally him to do so, he pinched her behind.

Kate jumped, startled and shot him an incredulous look. However, his playfulness seemed to have the desired effect of tugging a smile onto her lips. "You're incorrigible," she murmured, shaking her head at him.

"Hey now," he quipped back with a smirk. "Not my fault these hospital gowns are poorly designed to obstruct my curious fingers."

"Curious fingers," she chuckled, low and deep, arching her neck back as she laughed. "That's one thing to call them."

Castle wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "You think they'd let us take it back home with us?"

"What?"

"The hospital gown," he elaborated, baffled at how it was not obvious to her what he was talking about.

"Are you serious?"

"You're extremely hot!" Castle replied, wiggling his eyebrows. "I mean, come on, you could pull off sexy in a burlap sack. I get a generous view of your gorgeous legs, not to mention I have perfect access to your—" His voice trailed off as his hand slid back down to her ass.

Kate bit her lower lip and flicked her eyes up to hit him with a sultry stare. "Maybe…," she indulged him with a slight incline of her head, before adding, "if you behave."
"For some sexy role-play with you, oh, I can behave, I promise you that," Castle replied, rather too quick for her liking.

She narrowed her eyes at him, wondering if he'd just manipulated her into some kinky fetish she'd previously been unaware of. However, before she could call him on it, the door opened, revealing Dr. Julie Elam. Castle swiftly removed his hand from its place inside her hospital gown.

"So, how is everything going with you, Kate?" Elam asked, looking down at her clipboard, which held the notes to Kate's previous pre-natal appointments.

"Good," Kate answered. "We've even felt the twins kicking once in a while."

"Scared the bejesus out of me the first time it happened," Castle confessed with a self-deprecating laugh.

Elam glanced up at the couple with an amused smile. "It can be rather startling the first time, yes," she replied, then turned her attention to Kate. "How did you feel when it happened?"

Kate glanced at Castle, before returning her focus to the doctor. "At first, I thought something was wrong, but then I remembered what we talked about during my last appointment, with regards to the twins moving around. It felt a little similar to that, just a little bit more sharp and jarring. Otherwise, I was fine… though their constant moving around kind of makes me have to pee a lot."

"That's just the added pressure on your bladder due to the space they're taking up," Elam replied with a smile. She placed her clipboard down at reached for some latex gloves. "Anything else?"

She hesitated, unsure how to phrase her question. She'd been curious about this for a while, but had never really gotten up the courage to question her doctor. Kate had made the foolish mistake to look it up on the internet, and hadn't really gotten a straight answer. Tilting her head, Kate eyed Castle, seeking some help. Knowing what she wanted to ask, he opened his mouth, and then shut it, eyes wide. No use.

Dr. Elam looked at her expectantly. "Yes?"

"I… um… when we… um…"

"Have sex?" Elam asked with a bemused expression, clearly aware that this was often a matter of discussion amongst couples when the pregnancy entered its final trimester.

Kate blushed, her cheeks warming and eyes growing wide. "Yes… that," she stammered. "I was just wondering if… um… my sex drive will change?"

Elam looked between her and Castle. "Well, if you're comfortable enough with some personal questions, I can answer that for you."

Kate gave a tentative nod.

"Okay," Elam smiled, reassuringly. "So far, has your pregnancy diminished your sexual activities in anyway?"

"No. Not so far," Kate answered, blushing slightly at speaking so openly about her love life with her husband.

"How about in the beginning, while you still had morning sickness?" Elam questioned.
"Actually, I was surprised by that," Kate replied, glancing over at Castle for confirmation. He nodded. "I've always thought that most women have low sex drive during their first trimester."

"I'm taking it yours was the opposite?" Elam asked.

Castle bobbed his head enthusiastically. "Boy, it sure was… Ow!"

Kate retracted her elbow after jabbing him in the side, giving him a little playful smirk and quick apology with her eyes. Elam was grinning at them.

"No need to be embarrassed, Kate," her doctor assured her. "Every woman is different. There is no real 'normal' out there. There is a general pattern, yes, but not everyone falls under that."

"Oh," Kate said, pursing her lips and gaze over at Castle who was still miffed about her elbow jab, though he was covering it well.

"Kate, you seem to be part of the happy few that are lucky enough to have their revved up sex drive first become pronounced during the first trimester. It is also quite possible that your revved up sex drive can continue right up to delivery," Elam explained. "Look, every woman is different. Embrace what you can and don't be afraid to experiment. And, as always, just practice with safety."

Castle leaned against Kate, his mouth inches from her ear. "We certainly don't have any problem 'experimenting'," he whispered.

Kate blushed, remembering some of their more… creative sessions of lovemaking. She pursed her lips and tried to suppress the wave of arousal that pumped through her veins as she remembered waking up wet and ready, practically pouncing on a surprise Castle. He had no problems rising to the occasion—never did—and she rode him with wild abandon until they both were dripping with the sweet dew of sex and satisfaction.

Though, to be honest, there was nothing new about that position. It had been her complete abandon and wanton lust that had startled her. Most often than not, Castle was usually the one to initiate any intimate activities since her belly had blossomed to the point of getting in the way.

"You should enjoy this time," Elam continued, oblivious to Kate's blissful reverie. "With all the extra endorphins and hormones associated with pregnancy, you should also be having heightened orgasms."

Castle choked out and coughed, turning away slightly, moving a hand to support himself against the examination table she was sitting on. Kate furrowed her brow and looked at him. "Um…," she turned back to her doctor, "that has never really been a problem with us."

"He's that good?" Elam asked sotto voce, a smirk gracing her lips, obviously enjoying Castle's discomfort and embarrassment.

Kate glanced over at him, bewildered to see him blushing. For a man who had once had the reputation of being a player, and threw sexual innuendos about so casually, he was sometimes, as of late, rather sensitive when it came to discussing certain things about their sex life with other people. Not that she could blame him, she had, after all, stopped giving Lanie the 'juicy' details about her alone time with Castle. Though, she did find it oddly perplexing that he wasn't enjoying the stroking of his ego.

"Yes, he is," she confided with a satisfied smile. No man had ever been as attentive to her needs as Rick Castle, and she was proud to confirm that to her physician.
"Well, more power to you," Elam joked as she finished putting on her gloves. "Shall we continue with your check-up?"

"Please, let's do," Castle squeaked out besides her.

Kate chuckled and rolled her eyes at him, before nodding in agreement.

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Kate sat up straight and raised her arms above her head, stretching her back. She dropped a hand to her neck, turning her neck back and forth as she squeezed her fingers. Ruffling her fingers through her hair, she quickly tied her long brunette tresses into a messy ponytail and bit her lower lip as she gazed up at her the room.

"I'm still not sure about the color," she admitted out loud, twirling around to look up at Castle.

He was standing halfway up on a ladder, bending his back to run a roller along the ceiling. "What?" he hooted, pausing in his work. "Kate... you can't do that to me! Not when I'm more than halfway through painting the ceiling."

"I know," she sighed. "It's just that we don't even know the sex of the babies. I know Dr. Elam tried to get a good view with the ultrasounds... especially the fancy 3D one you talked me into doing. But these little ones weren't quite as cooperative as they could have been. So, since we don't know what they are, it seems a little premature to pick a color when we don't yet know."

"I think pine green works for either a boy or a girl," Castle asserted, bringing the roller down and placing it in the small pan on the top of the ladder. He carefully turned in place and stared down at her. "Plus we only have three months left to get ready for them, Kate. Please... don't make a big deal out of it," he pleaded.

Kate shifted her legs and glanced over at the crib she'd just finished putting together. "I guess you're right," she chewed on her lower lip. "After all, we did get mahogany cribs, and having pine green on the walls does fit nicely."

"Yeah... to bad you wouldn't let me paint trees along the walls," he grouched playfully. "The twins could have had an enchanted forest for a nursery."

She laughed, and rolled her eyes at him. "This is what I get for having a creative husband," she feigned irritation.

"You know you love it," he quipped back with a playful smirk.

She flicked her tongue out between her teeth as she beamed at him, all teeth and gum. It was her 'beyond happy' smile, the one she'd never thought would return once her mother had been murdered, yet Castle had managed to coax it out of her.

"Yeah, I do," she sheepishly relented with a bat of her eyelashes. She surveyed the former guest room once again before giving a decisive nod. "It does look good, and will work for whatever sex the twins turn out to be."

"We could even have one of each," Castle pointed out as he turned back to the paint roller and his work on the ceiling. She hummed in agreement.

"Be careful not to get any paint on yourself," Kate called up.
"Don't you fret, milady," Castle tapped into his dramatic heritage. "I shall endeavor to remain paint free."

"Oh… I should cover up the crib," Kate realized, looking around for one of the old bed sheets that her father had given them before they started working on the nursery.

Jim Beckett had been thrilled to loan them some of his tools and equipment. She couldn't blame him for his enthusiasm. He'd almost given up on having grandchildren. So he was enjoying it. Though, she drew the line when he offered to help. This was something she wanted her and Castle to do by themselves.

Finding a paint smeared sheet, Kate quickly tossed it over the completed crib, letting out a sigh of relief that her hard work would be protected from a potential accidental drop of green paint. Pausing, to rub soothing circles over her enlarged belly, Kate glanced over at the elongated cardboard box that held the second crib.

"Hey, Michelangelo! When you're done with the Sistine Chapel, you should help me out with the second crib," she said. "I don't think it's really fair to make the pregnant woman do all the work."

Castle laughed, his aim slipping a little, causing a glob of paint to drop on the side of his face. "Kate… don't make me laugh," he chuckled. "Otherwise I'm going to get paint all over me."

Kate smirked and raised an eyebrow. "Don't worry, you big baby. I'll help you clean up in the shower."

Castle coughed, so obviously affected by her loaded comment. "Dammit, woman… you're going to be the death of me."

She laughed and shook her head, rolling her eyes for added emphasis. "Just don't break your neck, Castle."

He wobbled, and for a moment Kate was worried he'd do just that, until he finally stabilized, resting his free hand on the top of the ladder. She released a sigh of relief, and stepped closer, out of concern. Reaching up, she gripped the side of the ladder to help steady it as Castle stretched out to reach the last unpainted portion of the ceiling.

"There!" he cheered. "All done… well, with the first coat, that is."

He climbed down, and ran his paint-stained fingers through his dark brown locks. "Pretty rugged for a metrosexual, eh?"

Her hand went to her mouth as she laughed, eyes sparkling with amusement. She bit her lower lip and lowered her hand, nodding slightly. "Yeah, you're pretty rugged, Mr. Castle."

Castle wiggled his eyebrow suggestively, scooting closer to her. "Ruggedly handsome?"

Kate narrowed her eyes as she pretended to think about it. She shrugged, unconvinced. "I don't know if I'd go that far," she teased, grinning up at him as he slinked his arm around her waist and tugged her over, a hand on her hip.

"Is that so?"

"Yep."

Castle closed the distance between them, dipping his head down to capture her lips with his. He
kissed her softly, warm and tender. Her hands came to rest on his shoulders as she eased into him, deepening the kiss, warm and eager. He groaned in approval, opening his mouth to let her tongue in. Her hands moved up into his hair, tangling at the back of his head, keeping him close.

She pressed into his body, feeling the uncoiling of desire spread rapidly through her veins, bursting like fireworks in her loins. She hummed, and kissed him harder, letting her hands move to cup his face, when suddenly she felt something sticky and wet touch her cheek.

Opening her eyes, she pushed back and glared at him. Castle was grinning mischievously, watching with delightful boyish amusement as she brought hand up to touch the side of her face. Glancing at her fingers for confirmation, she scowled and shot him a glare.

"I suppose you think this is funny," she declared, holding up her hand so he could see the evidence of his crime.

"Oh, yes, most definitely," he chuckled, eyes crinkling with mirth.

She shook her head at him. "Just for that, we're taking separate showers."

"Ah, come on," he whined. "That's a little harsh, don't you think? You're not just depriving me of a wickedly good time, but yourself as well. After all, don't you want to feel my talented fingers skimming all over your luscious body?" For added effect, he wiggled said talented fingers in front of her.

Kate let out a huff of annoyance. He just had to play that card, didn't he? Especially since he was quite aware of how easily she could be turned on during her pregnancy. "Damn you, Richard Castle," she growled, grabbing his arm and shoving him towards the door, directing him out of the nursery-in-progress and towards the master bedroom and its delicious luxurious ensuite bathroom. "You're lucky I need you for sex."

"Is that all you need me for?" he grinned. "Not that I'm complaining."

She growled, rolling her eyes, and pushed him down the hall. "Do you ever shut up?"

"Only when my mouth is otherwise engaged," he quipped back with a saucy smirk.

Kate drew her lower lip under her teeth and shook her head at his antics. "Is that a promise?"

"Start the shower and you'll find out."

They quickly made their way to the bathroom, taking their time to strip each other of their dirty clothes. Castle caressed her bare skin, teasing her breasts with the pads of his thumbs as his hand glided down her sides.

"Ah, Castle…" she gasped, her nipples more sensitive than ever.

His broad chest loomed before her as he backed her into the large shower. "You're gorgeous," he murmured, letting his hand drop lower to dance down the curve of her backside. "I really don't deserve you."

Kate leaned into him, gently nibbling at his neck, determined to leave her mark. She heaved in deep breaths, gasping as the initial cold spray of the water hit her when Castle turned the shower on. Her ears throbbed with the blood rushing through her as her heart pounded within her chest. Her hands ran over his wet skin, relishing all the places she could touch him, basking in the affect she caused.
He growled with an animalistic need that she encouraged, dropping her hands below his waist to stroke his length. She nipped at his lips as he pushed into her, his hands all over the place, touching her in all the right places that made her weak in the knees. He gripped her hips and spun her around, his large palm encompassing her blossomed baby bump. She whimpered in wanton need, placing her hand over his.

Kate pressed her back into his chest as he pulled them under the spray of hot water, soaking their hair and bodies. His hot mouth latched onto her pulse point as he sucked hard, grazing his teeth against her skin. He lathered his tongue over the red mark, to soothe away the pain, and Kate squirmed, feeling the hard press of his arousal against her back.

Castle nuzzled his nose against the side of her face, his chin resting on her shoulder. She arched her neck, her mouth opening and closing as she sought out his. He tilted his head, bringing his lips to hers in a fierce and passionate kiss. Breaking away for air, Kate stretched her arms behind her back to run them down his sides.

"Rick," she leaned back into him, tilting her ass up to meet his throbbing length. "Stop stalling, and just fuck me already."

"God, I love it when you talk dirty," he hissed out through his clenched teeth.

"What did I say about stalling?" she nudged her ass into him.

He groaned and dropped his head against her shoulder.

"Rick," she coaxed.

He gritted his teeth, and gripped her hips, angling them for perfect penetration. Raising a hand back up, he spat on his finger and then slid them between her spread legs, letting out a moan when he felt just how wet and ready she was. Kate shuddered and wiggled her hips, almost losing herself in the feel of his fingers skidding across her dripping folds.

Castle nuzzled his nose against the column of her throat, nibbling at her skin as he used a free hand to maneuver himself to her opening. She tilted her hips, giving him better access as she planted her hands on the tiled wall of the shower. He opened his mouth and gently bit down on her shoulder. And without further preamble, bucked his hips, pushing up into her from behind.

Kate gasped in elated surprise to finally feel him filling her. She rocked her hips back against him as he ran a hand along her collar and over her breasts, moving his hips in a strong powerful motion, pounding into her with unrestrained force.

"Oh God, Castle… YES!"

She began to pant his name, like a mantra, egging him on, encouraging him to go hard, deeper. He slid his hand up her undulating body, gently gripping the side of her face to direct her parted lips towards his. Castle seized her quivering lips, kissing her deeply as he stilled in her, his hips pressed flush against her backside. His other hand danced down her baby bump and slipped between her legs, finding her sensitive nerve bundle with ease. He worked her, delighting in the soft moans and whimpers he pulled from her throat.

Kate let herself get lost in his ministrations. No man could affect her the way he did. She brought a hand up to cup his cheek, keeping him close to her as they continued to suck face—that was the only phrase she could think of to describe what they were doing to each other's mouths.

He broke away and nibbled his way down her throat, as she leaned back into him, encouraging him
to continue with his mighty thrusts. Castle grinned against her neck, and moved his hands down her body until he had a secure hold of her hips.

"Ah! YES! Right there, Castle… oh… oh… YES!" Kate screamed out, feeling him intensify his thrusts, pounding into her harder than before. She moaned, her whole body flush with arousal and sexual pleasure.

He pulled nearly all the way out of her before thrusting back in, causing her to jump and let out a yelp of surprise. As he kissed her neck, she hummed in approval, pleading with him to do it again. Castle pulled away and then pounded back in, nearly lifting her off the floor. She groaned and arched into him, feeling her inner muscles tighten around him.

"So close," she mumbled, almost incoherent. "So very close, Castle."

Castle picked up his pace, pulling back and ramming forward with increased speed. His fingers dug into her flesh, close to being painful, but not enough for her to comment. He slowed for a moment, moving at a gentle pace, letting her feel every inch of his length as he moved and stretched her. Kate sucked in a deep breath and shifted her hands against the tiled wall, seeking better leverage to hold herself up.

With a grunt, he quickened the pace, nearly pulling all the way out of her before pounding back in, sending sparks of pleasure to burst throughout her. She moaned, not at all embarrassed at the echo of her own sounds of pleasure resounding through the ensuite. She was too lost in the orgasmic bliss Castle was bringing her towards to care about such things.

He pulled all the way out and moved to thrust back in, when her eyes went wide with a startling realization. Her muscles tightened and her back went ramrod straight.

"Whoa there, Castle!" she groaned, gritting her teeth and letting out a grunt of suppressed pain.

Castle quickly pulled away from her, his hands fumbling all over her, searching. "What? Did I hurt you?" he asked, genuine concern dripping from his lips.

"No… no… just… um…," she panted, catching her breath, stammering as she stalled to find a way to say it without blushing, "er… the wrong hole."

"Uh?" he puffed out, confused. She glanced over her shoulder at him, eyes still wide with the sudden surprise of feeling him nearly shoving his length all the way up her ass.

He looked at her with narrowed eyes, brow furrowed as he tried to work out what she was saying. She arched an eyebrow at him. Really? Out of all people, she'd thought he'd get what she was saying almost immediately.

"Oh… OH!" Castle gasped, suddenly realizing what she meant. He shifted, and she sighed, letting her muscles relaxed. "Sorry about that, I guess I just got caught up in the moment."

She chuckled, throatily. "No doubt," she replied, gracing him with a sultry look as she shifted and arched her ass back into his hard length. "Just try to keep your aim straight, Writer Boy."

Castle smirked and leaned into her, resting his forehead against hers as he nuzzled into her. She closed her eyes and felt him press his lips to hers. She returned the kiss, sharing her air with him.

Moving with caution, Castle redirected himself to her opening—the right one, this time—and slowly pushed up into her. Kate sighed with relief, feeling their intimate connection returned to blessed normality. He held her against him as he moved gently, pacing his thrusts at a more
languid clip. She hummed low, in approval of the change in pace, still feeling the passion without
the frenzy.

Her body warmed with delicious heat as his strides grew bolder, every inch of him touching her
just right. Kate closed her eyes and eased back into him, letting him take control. His hands moved
over her pleasure quaking body, pausing to tease her sensitive nipples with just the right amount of
pressure, before sweeping down her sides to grip her hips as he resolved to quicken the pace just
enough to pull them over the edge.

Kate rocked with him, sending her hips up into him as he thrust forward. He groaned and grunted,
his fingers squeezing hard as he shoved up into her with a singularly powerful stroke that sent her
over the threshold. Her inner muscles tightened as she came, hard… harder than she thought she
would have. Then again, Dr. Elam did tell her she'd have more intense orgasms. His release burst
within her, and she relished the warm feeling it created in her insides.

Tilting her head, letting him hold her up, she sought out his mouth. Castle met her with a glide of
his hand along the side of her face, brushing her damp hair out of her eyes.

"The waters getting cold," she shivered, loathed to break them from the moment, but it really was
starting to get chilly.

Castle let out a rough chuckle and hugged her tight, nipping at her neck playfully, as she let out a
breathy laugh. He nuzzled against her hair. "Not my fault we got distracted," he murmured into her
ear, before grazing his teeth against the fleshy lobe.

Kate bit her lower lip and turned around in his arms, resting her hands against his chest. "True," she
admitted. "I can hardly resist when you're so ruggedly handsome."

He grinned at her, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "I knew I'd get you to say it!" he proclaimed
with an exaggerated fist pump.

"Crazy man," Kate rolled her eyes and pushed him away, turning to grab the shampoo bottle.

Boy, Dr. Elam sure had been right about her sex drive increasing. Kate could already feel her own
desire building up again. Biting her lower lip, she glanced over at Castle, wondering how soon he'd
be ready for another go. But first, they really did need to wash all this paint off them—seriously he
was like a child sometimes when it came to sticky things that could stain his clothes.

"Come on, we should hurry and wash up before we completely lose the heat…," Kate said at
length. "And then maybe, once we finish… and if you behave yourself, we can go back into the
bedroom and… generate some more heat." She added a saucy wink and reached around him for
the cherry scented shampoo.
Chapter 37

She squinted her eyes tightly, fighting the urge to open them, not yet ready to get up despite the irritating sunlight that was filtering through the curtains. Castle! Damn that man. Did he forget to shut the curtains again? Shifting slightly, Kate let out a soft sigh, snuggling deeper into the warmth of the covers. That was when she felt it—nimble fingers dancing up and down her bare legs, leaving gooseflesh in their wake. She shivered, and hesitantly blinked her eyes open.

The bedroom was cast in a rich morning light, giving the place a warm orange glow. If it were not for the presence of the fingers climbing up her leg, she would have gone back to sleep. Slowly arching her neck to peer down, Kate smiled lazily when she spied Castle affectionately running his fingers up and down her bare leg. His brow furrowed in deep concentration as he begun marking out random patterns along her thigh, slowly skipping closer to her inner thigh. He looked so cute, with his hair muffled and unruly from last night. She loathed to disturb him, but with the direction his fingers were heading, Kate wanted to be an active participant.

"Castle… what are you doing?" she mumbled, still half groggy from her sleep. She moved more onto her back, casually slipping her legs further apart to provide him with more room to work with, as a coy smile slowly worked its way across her face. Now this was definitely a good way to wake up in the morning.

"Ah… you're awake," he chuckled softly, his voice as smooth as honey. He moved a hand up her inner thigh, so very close to where she wanted him.

Kate released a laugh, all throaty and aroused. "With what you've been doing to me, you shouldn't really be surprised!"

Castle tilted his head to look up at her. "Well, I was trying to be all sly," he smirked, impishly, adding a waggle of his eyebrows for effect. "I wanted to see how long it would take you to wake up and notice what I was doing."

"Oh really?" she turned her neck and arched an eyebrow up in feigned disbelief. She brought a hand up to brush back her tousled hair so she could see him more clearly. "And?"

Castle grinned wickedly at her, moving his hand up to cup her core. She shivered as tingles of arousal burst through her body. He pressed his palm into her and let out a soft groan as he felt the pooling of her desire bleed through the soft fabric of her panties. Kate let out a whimpering moan as he flicked his thumb over her sensitive nerve bundle, arching into his touch.

"You're pretty wet."

Kate groaned softly, grinding her hips into his hand. "I think I need a change of underwear," she breathed out huskily, tilting her hips up as she arched an eyebrow in challenge. "Care to assist me?"

Castle leaned over her, running his other hand up the slope of her neck and grasping her jaw with his fingers to tilt her head to the perfect angle as he slanted his lips over hers. He kissed her slow and deep, coaxing a low moan of approval from her throat. His thumb caressed her cheek as he nuzzled his nose into her hair, his breath warm against her ear. "With pleasure," he answered her plea.

He moved his hands to her squirming hips, and held her steady. Hooking his fingers under the waistband of her panties, he tugged them down at a torturously slow rate. He skimmed his
fingertips along her legs and rubbed the soles of her feet as he divested her of her damp panties, casually tossing them over his shoulder and onto the floor.

Kate giggled—something she still was surprised that she did now—as Castle flashed a playful wink at her before he dipped his head down between her open legs, planting warm kisses up her thighs as he ran one hand under her leg until his fingers were kneading the soft flesh of her backside.

She groaned and arched her back, tilting her hips up eagerly as Castle's warm mouth got closer and closer to where she wanted him most. His right hand gripped her hip, holding her steady as his other continued to tease her ass with soft playful squeezes. Her breath grew hot and heavy, turning to pants. Her chest heaved, rising up and down, as her cheeks flamed out red hot with arousal. And he hadn't even touched her yet. It was all about the anticipation, the tease.

"Castle…," she called out his name, soft and pleading, wishing he'd stop tormenting her like this.

He hummed against her inner thigh, causing her to react with a buck of her hips. Chuckling softly, he ran his hand up under the hem of the oversized purple t-shirt she was wearing, smoothing his palm over her swollen belly and down into the valley between her breasts, letting his hand come to rest in the middle of her chest as she heaved in deep breaths, trying to calm her rapidly beating heart.

"Damn it, Castle, stop teasing me!" she growled, tilting her hips up to offer him the best vantage point of her dripping wetness. "Just… just… god, Castle… I just want you to eat me!"

Castle let out a deep chuckle at her choice of words, before flicking his eyes back down to look upon her, releasing a low groan of approval at the sight. He shifted his hand, moving it out of the valley of her breasts to encompass one of the soft mounds of flesh in his palm, teasing her nipple with his thumb. "You're stunning, you know that?"

"Rick!" she hissed out in a warning, arching her back.

The use of his first name was enough to get him moving. He lowered his head and Kate let out a sharp cry of euphoria as his hot mouth latched onto her, his tongue sliding over her wet folds and twirling around her sensitive nub. Kate's hands dropped to his head, raking her fingers through his already unruly hair.

Castle hummed into her as her thighs tightened around him. Her hips undulated up towards him as he teased her with quick flicks of his talented tongue. His hands gripped at her hips as she writhed under his attentions. Kate gasped, calling his name as she came, hard… harder than she expected for so early in the morning. Her fingers dug into his scalp as she held on during her release, riding the waves of orgasmic pleasure.

When she came too, Castle was still resting between her legs, gently nuzzling against her, his tongue languidly licking her sweet wetness. His teeth grazed her sensitive nub and she let out a sharp hiss of pleasure. God, she'd just come down from one high and he was already coaxing her towards the threshold all over again. But she wanted him… all of him, but just his tongue. She wanted him buried deep inside her.

"I need you," she whimpered, unashamed of the desperate tint of her voice.

Castle pulled back, rubbing his hands soothingly along her opened legs. "Roll over," he instructed in breathy voice, rich with deep arousal.
Grabbing pillows, strategically placing them under her to help support her baby bump, Kate shifted until she was able to plant her knees on the mattress and arch her backside up into the air, no doubt giving Castle an enticing view of her femininity. He heard him groan, his hand coming up to sprawl across the small of her back, pushing the edge of her purple nightshirt up so he could feel and see more of her delicious skin.

The mattress dipped as Castle got himself into position, his hands gripping her hips firmly as he moved up behind her. Kate arched her neck to look over her shoulder, watching as Castle slipped one hand between her legs to rub her thrumming heat, coating his fingers in her slick wetness. Kate moaned, her mouth dropping as her bottom lip quivered with anticipation.

"Please, Castle…"

Castle retracted his hand, and Kate unashamedly wiggled her hips back, missing his touch. He grinned and leaned down over her, pressing a wet kiss against her back. She shivered, and flicked her eyes back up to lock with his.

He moved his hands over her backside, cupping and squeezing her buttocks, as he spread them wide, giving him ample room as he shifted his hips forward. Kate let out a whimper when she felt his tip brush against her. Castle grinned, and moved one hand to guide the head of his length up and down her moist folds, coating himself in her slick wetness.

"Castle, god… please?" she groaned, bucking her hips involuntarily as she searched for completion.

Smirking, Castle guided himself to her entrance, and nudged forward, pushing his tip just past her folds, teasing her. Kate wiggled her hips in a rolling motion, urging him on. Castle groaned and moved his hands up to grab her sides, his fingers digging slightly into her flesh as, with one powerful stroke, he rammed all the way into her.

Kate let out a sharp cry and arched her back, her body thrumming with intense elation at having him buried deep inside her. Castle ran his hands up her bare back, pushing her shirt further up, exposing more of her smooth skin. He hovered over her, rolling his hips against her ass as he waited for her to adjust to his intrusion. She moaned, and moved her hips with his, sparks of pleasure bouncing around inside her at the feel of him stretching and touching every inch of her.

The pillows underneath her cushioned her pregnant body as Castle began to pump his hips back and forth with strong and measured strokes. Every fiber of her being came a live with bursts of pleasure as their body melded together. His hands cradled her hips, holding her up as her knees gave out and she just wanted to sink into the soft mattress and melt with the feelings his actions were generating throughout her body. Kate's skin flushed with intense pleasure as her mouth dropped on a quivering moan.

Castle snaked a hand around her thigh, finding her between her legs. He brushed his fingers across her clit, teasing her, causing her to buck her hips back into him as he pulled out of her. He laughed and caressed the small of her back, his thumb rubbing against her left butt cheek as he dipped his head down to press a kiss to her shoulder as he leaned over her, running his hands up and down her thighs and hips, leaving her skin scorching with his touch.

Kate's legs quaked as his strokes intensified. Castle was reaching a part of her that only he ever had. Her entire body was vibrating with sensations as he pulled back and then returned. His hands roamed her back and sides, occasionally slipping around and under her shirt to cup her breasts, cradling the soft mounds of flesh in his palms as he rolled into her, their flesh slapping together in a deliciously intoxicating sound that sent tingles up and down her spine.
"Castle… god, yes!" Kate screamed, feeling the tight coiling of her impending release begin to reach its peak. She was so close. So very close.

"You feel so good," Castle rumbled against her back as he leaned over her, holding her to him as he sped up his strokes. "I love you."

"Love… you… too," she panted out, arching her neck, her mouth seeking out his. Castle moved a hand to help, holding her to him as he found her mouth with his, devouring her moan as she shattered around him, tightening and squeezing with fluttering grasps.

Castle groaned into her mouth, their tongues swirling together, as his strokes stuttered, and he flexed his muscles, pounding into her from behind with two more powerful thrusts before he came undone. He still, buried deep inside her, riding out his release. Kate moaned, shuddering with exhilaration at feeling his intense climax burst hot within her. She'd never get used to this, feeling him inside her.

It was exciting and euphoric… and not just because they were so good at it. If she had to guess, she'd say that it was the knowledge that he loved her, every inch of her—her complete being—that made each time so intense and wonderful. No one had worshiped her body or soul the way Rick Castle did. When he touched her, it was like he was doing it for the first time, mesmerized by her beauty and the way her body responded to him.

"I've said it before, and I'll say it again," Castle hummed into her neck. "You, Katherine Houghton Castle, are extraordinary." His hot breath on her nape of her neck sent a shiver through her body. He leaned forward nuzzling her neck, planting kisses against her shoulder as he ran his hands over her body, remaining inside her as he coaxed her back down from her blissful high. His body was pressed close to hers, his bare chest heaving against her shirt covered back, yet he used his arms, out-stretched on either side of her, to hold up his weight, so that he wasn't crushing her.

Kate allowed herself to snuggle into the pillows, relishing the feel of his body resting above hers. She could literally feel each breath he took as he, too, came down from his release. Castle ran his hands leisurely up and down her body with loving affection, so tender and caring, making sure she was comfortable and relaxed. She let out a whimpering groan of displeasure when he slipped out of her, rolling with him as he collapsed back down onto the mattress.

She sprawled out over him, smiling slightly at the feel of their slick skin touching. Resting her head against his heaving chest, she listened to the beating of his heart as it slowly paced itself back to normal. Kate draped one leg over his, burrowing into him as best she could. She brought one hand up to cradle her swollen belly, rubbing soft smoothing circles with her fingers.

Castle glanced down at her, and smiled happily, bringing his hand up to join hers, dancing his fingers over the stretched skin of her swollen belly.

"I take it you're excited about today?" she asked, arching her neck up to look at him as he spread his fingers wide to palm her baby bump.

He chuckled, his chest shaking with his amusement. "What gave me away?"

Kate smiled, and pushed up on an elbow to gaze down at him, eyes sparkling. "Could have been the way you woke me up to make love," she said, beaming. "Thank you, by the way… that was a wonderful way to start the day."

"I wouldn't have it any other way, Kate," Castle replied, his eyes sincere and loving despite the teasing lilt in his voice. "Waking up and seeing you lying there, all gorgeous and beautiful, I
simply cannot not make love to you."

Her heart fluttered as if on butterfly wings. The things this man says. Kate leaned down to press a lingering kiss to his lips, slow and thorough. Sighing in awe as she pulled back, she nestled further into him, almost finding it hard to comprehend just how wonderful it was with him. They still argued and fought at times, but through it all, their love endured. After all this time, it was still amazing.

Castle curled an arm around her, letting his fingers run up and down her spine. "We should probably shower and eat breakfast before we go," he suggested, yet made no move to get up.

"Can we just cuddle for a while?" she asked, not ashamed admit that she relished their post-lovemaking cuddling.

He grinned and planted a quick kiss into her hair. "Sure," he replied, tugging her closer and smoothing his large hand over her belly.

Kate moved her hand over his, lacing their fingers together. She nestled into him, pressing a soft kiss into his chest as she breathed in his scent, all masculine and him… with just a hint of a woody fragrance from his cologne. This was heaven. She never could have imagined she'd be so happy. But she was. A large smile spread across her face as she thought about what their day held in store for them.

XXX

Castle was still in the shower, needing a little more time, as she had kind of distracted him with her devious hands… and wicked mouth. Kate smirked at the memory, amazed that she could still surprise him with how strong her own desire to touch him was. She had wanted to return the favor, from earlier. So she'd slipped her hands down his chest and grabbed a hold of him in her fingers, stroking him with confidence and ease until he was firm and hard.

Turning into the hot cascading water, she had shoved him up against the tiled shower wall, pushing up on her tiptoes to kiss him lazily as she continued to run her fingers up and down his engorged length. Kate had squeezed and enticed him with a skill learned from experience at exploring his body. And when he thought he'd reached his limit, she had pulled back and left him wanting.

But not for long.

Kate smiled as she remembered the look of surprise on his face as she had eased herself down onto her knees, running her hands along his abdomen before grabbing him firmly in her hand as she took him into her mouth and finished him off, sucking him dry with the expert use of her tongue and throat muscles.

Castle had been so breathless and overwhelmed at her persistent dominance. As she had pulled back, licking her lips as she relished the unique flavor that was him, she locked eyes with him and gave him a saucy wink. Kate could only smile in smug triumph when he had remained speechless while she stood and finished washing up, lathering her hair in and body in cherry-scented shampoo and aloe soap, before she rinsed off and stepped out of the shower.

Now she was waiting for him to snap out of his pleasure induced daze and join her out in the kitchen for breakfast. She'd taken the opportunity to start frying up some pancakes—an edible thank you for his chosen method of waking her up. She contemplated adding chocolate chips to the batter, knowing Castle always loved something sweet with breakfast, but ultimately she decided to go with the tried and true Beckett family original.
It was early, but she wasn't at all surprised when Alexis padded down the stairs, yawning and rubbing the sleep from her eyes. The teen glanced up and smiled when she spotted Kate behind the counter cooking breakfast.

"Morning, Kate," she said, coming up to sit at one of the barstools, pulling back her long fiery hair into a messy ponytail.

"Good morning, Alexis," Kate replied with a warm smile. "Want some pancakes?"

"Yes, please," Alexis beamed, watching as Kate dished out three fluffy hotcakes onto a plate. "So… today's the big day?"

Kate inclined her head as she added some more pancake batter to the pan, carefully watching it as if formed into a circle. "Yeah," she let out an anxious reply.

"Nervous?" her stepdaughter picked up on the signs easily, while Kate poured some syrup on her pancakes.

"To be honest, yes… a little," she answered, placing on hand on her baby bump. "I just… I'm carrying two of them, and I can't help wondering which your father would prefer."

"I don't think Dad really has a preference," Alexis said, cutting into her pancake and taking a small bite. She grinned widely. "These are delicious, Kate."

"Thanks," Kate flashed an appreciative smile.

"Don't tell Dad, but these are actually better than his," Alexis said, slowly chewing another bit. "Is that… cinnamon I'm tasting?"

Kate nodded. "Yeah, and a little bit of brown sugar. The secret is knowing when to mix it into the batter. It's something my mom used to do. Figured that now that I'm starting a family of my own, I might as well start up some old traditions," she added the last part while she ran a hand over her protruding belly, making a face when one of the twins kicked.

"You okay?" Alexis questioned, her brow scrunched up in concern as she noticed Kate grimace.

"Oh, I'm fine… the twins are just moving," she said, smoothing her hand over the taut skin. "Sometimes I worried their going to be just like me. I was quite the wild child." She smiled toothily as she recalled her childhood. "Sometimes my Dad still gives me grief about my terrible twos."

Alexis laughed, shaking her head in amusement. "Well, it could be worse," she said, pausing to take a sip of her orange juice. When Kate looked at her with a puzzled expression, the teen smiled and elaborated, leaning forward conspiratorially. "They could be like my Dad."

Kate chuckled, and reached out to pat Alexis's hand. "If it comes to that, I might need your help, seeing as you help raise him."

They both laugh at that. Alexis smiled and continued to eat her breakfast, as Kate went back to cooking. After a little while, Castle came shuffling out of their bedroom, wrapped up in his robe, his hair still wet.

"Hey there, Writer Boy," Kate smiled as his eyes flirted up to lock with hers. "Feeling better?" She raised a knowing eyebrow, smirking slightly as she thought about the state she'd left him in.

Castle blushed a little, swallowing heavily before bobbing his head. "Much better," his voice
squeaked, almost giving them away. She shook her head at him as he gave her a mischievous wink, before proceeding around the island countertop to his daughter, casually draping an arm over her shoulder and kissing her cheek. "Morning, Pumpkin," he hummed, and then gave her a half hug.

"Morning, Dad," Alexis chirped, and gave him a cheery grin. "We were just talking about you."

"Oh really?" Castle raised his eyebrows and turned to stare at Kate. "Good things, I hope."

Alexis gave a noncommittal shrug. He frowned at her, then walked around the countertop and snagged Kate by the waist and gave her a quick kiss. She smiled, and playfully shoved him back. He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively as she rolled her eyes at him and his antics.

"Want some pancakes?"

He leaned against the counter, watching her as she took the spatula and flipped said pancake. "Can I have chocolate chips in them?" he asked.

She gave him a look and chuckled. "You, Richard Castle, already had something sweet this morning," her lips tugged upwards in a satisfied smile as she suggestively batted her eyelashes at him. Castle let out a low groan, his jaw dropping as his eyes went dark with the memory of their early morning activities.

"Um… eww… gross," Alexis spoke up, catching them both off guard. "Child present."

Kate blushed bright pink, embarrassed that she'd gotten so distracted with teasing Castle that she had forgotten they had an audience. She quickly apologized as Castle merely grinned and shot her a wink before he turned towards his daughter with a contrite expression. He was milking his puppy dog look for all it was worth.

"So, Pumpkin," he began. "You leaning towards baby sisters or baby brothers?"

Thankful for the change in topic, Alexis knitted her eyebrows together in thought. "I don't really have a preference," she admitted. "Though, it would be kind of cool to have both."

"Oh, yeah… totally," Castle grinned, gushing like a schoolgirl. Kate gave him an odd look and shook her head. He was way too excited for this appointment. She, on the other hand, was rather anxious. "How about you, Kate?"

"Uh… oh… we've talk about this, Castle," she said, stifling the worried flutters in her chest. "As long as they are healthy, I'm fine with either girls or boys… or one of each." She focused her attention on the pancakes, needing some distraction.

Moving with ease about the kitchen, she prepared a plate for Castle and herself, and was just about to place them on the counter and sit down next to Alexis, when Castle slipped in behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his large hands on her baby bump. His fingers stroked up and down her middle, and she sighed, easing back into his chest.

"I'm with you, Kate," Castle whispered into her ear, his breath hot and moist against her skin. "Whatever they turn out to be, they'll be perfect. Because they'll be a combination of you and me. And we'll simply love them to pieces." He chuckled softly. "And if they're girls, I want them to be just like their amazing mother. And if they're boys… well, then I still want them to be like their mother, because she is extraordinary. And I'm just so very lucky to be sharing this moment with her."

An emotional lump filled up her throat as she blinked her eyes, wishing away the sudden tears.
With shaky hands, Kate put the plates down and turned around in his arms. "Oh, Rick," she mumbled. "You certainly have a way with words."

"I know," he grinned, cocky as ever, and dipped his head down to kiss her. Pulling back, he rested his forehead against hers. "Now, let's eat so we can find out what kinds of terrors will be dealing with."

"Terrors?" Kate frowned, now completely confused.

"Um… yeah," he bobbed his head, smiling goofily. "From what Jim's told me, you were quite a handful during the terrible twos. He said something about calling you the 'Terror of Apartment 3B'."

Kate laughed, shaking her head as she thought back to that tiny little apartment they used to live in before they finally got that larger townhouse in SoHo. Castle grinned, rubbing a hand up and down her back as she sat down. "Remind me to have words with my father," she said jokingly to Castle, sotto voce.

Alexis smirked at them. "By the way," she said, catching both their attention with her adorably befuddled expression. "I was wondering... what should I call your dad? I know he's not really my grandfather, but, of course, now we're all family. And during the wedding reception, he said anything was fine as long as I didn't call him 'Gramps'."

"Oh… that's a tough one," Kate mused, leaning into Castle's side as he stood besides her, one arm wrapped around her waist, as he used his other hand to cut his pancake with his fork. "Well, I always called my grandfather 'Papa', 'Pop', or just 'Pa'."

"Well, what do you think the twins will call him?" Alexis questioned, looking worried. "I mean… I'd want to call him the same thing they do."

"Hmmm…." Kate thought at length, furrowing her brow in concentration. "Papa will probably work for now," Kate assured her. "Since it's what I used with his dad, I'm sure he won't mind you and the twins using the same."

Castle nodded thoughtfully, thinking about his father-in-law. "I think Jim would like that," he said to Alexis.

"Thanks," Kate added, reaching over to squeeze Alexis's hand.

"For what?" her stepdaughter asked, confused. She glanced up at her father, but he shrugged, just ticking his head back down to Kate.

"For including my dad in the family."

"Of course he's family," Alexis replied as if it was obvious. "You're not some wicked stepmother." And then she added, with a teasing tone to her voice. "Right?"

Kate chuckled and shook her head. "No… I certainly hope not."

"Then, see," Alexis smiled brightly, lighting up the whole world. "You might not be my mother by blood, Kate, but during the past couple of years, you've been more of a mother to me than my own mom. You listen to me, care about my opinions, and are there for me when I need advice. And you love my Dad, truly love him, like he deserves… and you love me, and Grams, too. We might not be the ideal family unit, but all of us together… we're like different puzzles pieces, and together, I think we make a pretty great family."
"Oh, Alexis," Kate was tearing up again. What was with these Castles? They were just so sweet all the time. She looked up at Castle, seeing that he too was moved by Alexis's words. With his help, she slipped off the barstool and went over to the young teen, wrapping her up in a quick hug.
"Thank you. It means so much to hear you say that. And yes, I do love you and Martha. You guys, all of you, are my family. And I just love you guys so much."

Alexis choked up and hugged Kate back. "You'll make a wonderful mom, Kate," she said. "The twins are going to be so lucky. In just the short time that you've been living with us, you've done more for me than my own mom."

"Alexis," Castle sighed sadly, standing behind Kate. "You're mother loves you, granted, not like most parents do... but she does, in her own way. She may not show it all the time, but she does."

Kate nodded, squeezing the teary eyed teen tightly. "That's right," she reaffirmed her husband's words to her stepdaughter. "Who can't love you? You're just an amazing girl—correction—young woman. I'm so proud to have you as my stepdaughter."

"Thank you, Kate," Alexis said, her bright eyes watering up. "That... that means a lot. Thank you."

Kate pulled Alexis in for another hug, feeling a strange sense of pride at that moment, like the teen really was her daughter. It was an odd feeling, but one that wasn't all that uncomfortable. If anything, it made that warm family feeling grow stronger, leaving Kate astounded. And, of course, Castle couldn't resist for long and had to get into the action, wrapping his arms around them as he dropped a kiss on both of their heads.

"This might all be kind of excessively sentimental," he mumbled, his voice thick with emotion. "But I don't care. I just love you both, so much."

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"Here, let's try this again, shall we?" Dr. Julie Elam said as she rolled her chair back to the side of the examination bed, snapping her gloves on. The nurse positioned the equipment next to them, switching and flipping the buttons and knobs until the screen lit up.

Kate shifted, uncomfortably, her sweats tugged down and her blouse rolled up to just below her breasts to expose her large swollen belly. Castle was at her side, sitting on the other side of the examination bed as Dr. Elam. He reached over and grabbed her hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze as he flashed a quick smile in her direction. She returned his gesture, though her smile was meek and anxious.

"Kate?" Dr. Elam questioned, accepting the tube of gel the nurse was handing over.

Snapping her head back to her doctor, Kate inhaled sharply and bobbed her head. "Yes, I'm ready." She swallowed and forced herself to relax, easing back into the pillow propping up her back. Elam uncapped the tube and warned her that it would be cold, before squirting the cool gel out across Kate's middle. She shivered, and grimaced at the chill, but was otherwise undisturbed.

"Let's hope the twins are more cooperative today," Castle murmured in her ear. "It'll be nice to announce what we're having at the baby shower."

Kate flicked her eyes up to his grinning face and smiled, nodding in agreement.

Elam was rubbing the gel out, smoothing it over her stretched belly as the two of them talked with their eyes, simply staring at each other with silly grins. The doctor noticed, and smirked, having seen lots of couples, but none as in sync as these two.
"Okay, here we go," she spoke up, breaking the eye lock between them.

Kate blushed slightly, somewhat embarrassed that she'd lost herself in the loving gaze of her husband. It was still overwhelming, the link she shared with Castle. She'd never had such a connection with another, and it still amazed her.

Elam retrieved the electronic wand from the nurse and ran it over Kate's stretched middle, smoothening it along in a pattern until the ultrasound image on the screen focused enough that they could see the images of two growing beings. Elam narrowed her eyes, and moved the device to the side until a clearer image could be seen.

Castle stood up in his chair, leaning over Kate to squint at the screen and the grainy black and white image. "Well?"

"Be patient, Rick," Elam smirked, glancing up at him before turning her attention back to the ultrasound equipment. "Any preferences, you two?"

"Either would be fine with me," Castle said. "As long as they are both healthy."

"Kate?" Elam inquired.

Kate hesitated, biting her lower lip in thought. She glanced up at Castle before returning her gaze to the doctor. "The same," she finally answered. "Though, we seem to have had an easier time coming up with boy names."

"Really?" she asked.

"Yeah," Kate nodded, interlacing her fingers with Castle's, tightening her hold. He smiled down at her, bringing a hand up to affectionately caress the side of her face.

"Great, they're moving," Elam declared, pulling the couple out of their absorption in each other.

"I know," Kate chuckled, clenching Castle's hand tighter as he pulled back to squint at the ultrasound image.

Elam worked the machine, reaching over to pause the image. Kate shifted, narrowing her eyes at the grainy image in front of her. She was unsure exactly what it was that she was looking at. It was all just a jumble of blurry white and gray images to her.

"Julie?" Kate questioned, licking her lips anxiously, letting out a silent prayer that the twins were cooperating today. She really was growing tired of not knowing their sex, especially with being in her last trimester. People were beginning to ask more and more, and she was frustrated with lacking any answers to such questions.

"One is definitely a boy," Elam announced, saving the image and unfreezing the screen.

Kate beamed and looked up at Castle, seeing the same happy expression on his face. He tilted his head down to look at her, and smiled widely. He squeezed her hand, and then directed his attention back to the blurry motions on the screen as Dr. Elam shifted the ultrasound wand over Kate's stomach.

"Let's see about number two," Elam said.

Breathing out a long exhale of air, Kate closed her eyes and pictured her baby boy. He'd look just like Castle, and be just as mischievous and curious. She couldn't wait to meet him.
Kate felt Castle squeeze her hand, signaling that Dr. Elam had once again frozen an image for examination. She opened her eyes and cautiously glanced towards the screen. She filled her lungs with air and breathed calmly, wondering if she would be able to handle two rambunctious Castle boys.

"Doctor?"

"Well, you two seem to have lucked out," Elam said, spinning around in her chair. "It seems you're having one of each."

"A girl?" Kate questioned, leaning up slightly to get a look at the image. "A girl and a boy?"

"Yes," Elam confirmed with a nod. "You're having fraternal twins. One girl and one boy."

"Wow," Castle said, slumping down into his chair besides Kate. He glanced down at her, his eyes smiling through his stunned face. "I was kind of expecting identical twins."

"Actually, male-female twins are the most common result, believe it or not," Elam said. "This gender pairing occurs fifty percent of the time during cases such as this. Identical twins are actually less common, even amongst same gender offspring."

"Well, Kate? What do you think?" Castle asked.

She was still in shock. Kate had actually been preparing herself for the chance of having two boys very much similar to Castle in disposition. But now it appeared she'd have a little girl, as well. And all she could do was smile. She was going to have a little girl… and a little boy. She was going to have both. For the longest time, Kate had worried about her chances of having children, not because of her age, she was still young and healthy, but because of her line of work, and her lack of a stable love life. However all that had been changed when Rick Castle walked into her life. He gave her the hope of having the family she'd always secretly dreamed of, and now she'd be having the girl and boy she'd always dreamed of having as well.

"Kate?"

His voice pulled her from her thoughts. She glanced up at him and smiled, tears welling up in her eyes. "Oh, Rick… I'm so happy. We're going to have a boy and girl," she choked out. "Thank you."

She reached up and snagged his collar, pulling him down for a quick kiss. Blinking, she laughed slightly as he leaned back, blushing as she noticed the grinning faces of her doctor and the nurse.

"Congratulations," Dr. Elam said with a smile.

"Thank you, Julie," Kate said, holding out a hand in gratitude. Her doctor took it and squeezed, returning the sentiment. Kate inhaled and glanced up at Castle with a teasing glint in her eye. "Let's just hope they both aren't as mischievous as you."

"Me?" he scoffed and smirked at her. "What about you, my dear detective? From what your father's told me about little Katie—I once again refer to the 'Terror of Apartment 3B'. And I'm sure the twins are going to get into just as much trouble as you did… and you know what? That won't be my fault. They'd have gotten that from their mother."

"Oh no," she countered, giving him a lighthearted glare. "They'll be getting that from both of us… but mostly from you."

"Uh-huh," Castle inclined his head, the sparkle in his eyes betraying his true happiness. "Either
way, Kate… I can't wait to meet them!"

"Neither can I, Rick," she smiled at him, before shifting to turn her gaze back upon the ultrasound image on the screen of her babies… her little boy and girl.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the lack in updates. I’ve been focusing on other projects. But I still managed to work this chapter out. Hope you all like it.

It had been a week since they finally found out the sex of the twins, and Kate was still trying to process it. She was going to have a little girl and a little boy. Wow! She was going to have both… at the same time. It was still so startling that at times she found it hard to believe. If it had not been for the ultrasound pictures posted up on the refrigerator she would have wondered if she'd imagined the entire thing.

Sometimes, during the middle of the day, when she was just doing some mundane activity, it would hit her and she'd just start laughing. Castle would invariably look over at her with raised eyebrows, his face adorably scrunched up in confusion. He'd ask her what was so funny, and she'd tell him that she kind of felt like the universe was trying to make up for lost time.

"How so?" he'd asked.

Kate would always then point out that since they had wasted so much time fighting their mutual feelings—maybe her more than him, but he'd interrupt saying they were both at fault, since he never got the courage to tell her how he felt—that now with them finally married and working at building a family together, the universe then decided to give them two children on their first go to make up for all that wasted time in denial and waiting.

"If that's the case, then I'd say the universe has a weird sense of humor," Castle had replied.

"Is that so?" she had countered, arching an eyebrow in challenge. "This coming from the man who once told me to, and I quote, 'trust the universe'."

"That was different," he had defended. "That was about the universe pulling us together."

"And how is having children… together… any different?" she had questioned, enjoying herself immensely.

She had got him there. Castle's mouth had then opened and closed for several seconds before he shook his head, conceding to her wisdom. "Fine," he had surrendered, pouting slightly as he wrapped his arms around her waist, tugging her back into his chest. "Not that I'm complaining… but it would have been nice if I could have had you all to myself for a little longer."

"I know the feeling," she had agreed with that, sighing into his embrace, her hands sweeping over her swollen belly. "We'll have to wait like 20 more years to be completely alone again."

"Completely alone?" he had scoffed. "Kate, I don't really think we've had the chance to be completely alone yet. Alexis still lives here, as does Mother… and I have a feeling that Mother is here to stay."

"Well, Rick, then we'll just have to take advantage of the times we do get to be alone," she had purred out seductively, twisting around in his arms until they were face-to-face. "So shut-up and
kiss me, Writer Boy."

Castle had smirked mischievously, delighted by her suggestive and commanding tone. His eyes twinkled with that magical spark that she always seemed to bring out in him when she was the instigator. She snaked her arms around his middle, letting her hands glide down his back until she grasped his firm backside in one swift motion. Castle had wiggled his eyebrows and 'oohed' at her aggressiveness, before relenting to her will and dipping his head down to slant his lips over hers.

Kate smiled back on the memory of how they'd then quickly divested each other of the necessary clothing so they could connect in that most wonderful of ways. She was still amazed at her wanton appetite as of late. Kate had originally thought that her desire would decrease the larger her belly got, but she'd been wrong. It took very little to turn her on nowadays… and she noticed that she received no complaints from Castle. Though, Kate still believed that when she got closer to her due date, her desire would wane, and then they'd have to wait a little while for her to recover from the natural trauma of childbirth before they could continue having their wickedly delicious fun with one another.

Presently, Kate Castle laid completely nude on their bed, her head propped up on numerous pillows as Castle's deft and knowledgeable hands worked their way all over her tingling body. However, there was nothing really sexual going on… even if it was kind of sensual—Castle's touch would always make her crazy wet. But no, they weren't up to any orgasmic inducing frivolity. Though, it was still very intimate and sweet.

She'd just returned from a half-day at work, and they were killing time before the big event they'd be attending later that afternoon.

"How's that feel?" Castle asked, pulling her out of her thoughts.

"Hmm, good," she hummed in approval as his hands swept down her sides, applying the lotion Dr. Elam had suggested would help her skin deal with the inevitable stretch marks that appeared during pregnancy. This wasn't the first time Castle had rubbed her down with the lotions, and each time, Kate relished the way he reverently worshiped her body with his hands. Besides their frequent sessions of lovemaking, this was always one of the highlights of the day, especially when she'd had a long boring day of paperwork at the precinct.

His hands moved up and around her swollen belly, so gentle and tender. The mattress shifted as Castle moved, planting his knees on either side of her legs, almost like he was straddling her lap. She arched her neck to look down and watch him massage the stretched skin over her belly. His hands were magic. He knew just how to touch her and soothe away any ache she had. She'd learned early on just how good he was at back and foot rubs.

And what was even more amazing, was that unlike other guys she'd been with, Castle never expected her to pay him back for his services. Though, she was more than happy to do so. Just the fact that he didn't expect it of her had made her want to do all the more. But she could tell that he understood she wasn't rewarding him with sex for the massages. He understood her, like no one else, and it was just more amazing that they hardly needed to use any words to express this.

"So, I was thinking about names this morning," Castle said as his hands continued to rub the lotions into her skin.

"Yeah?"

"How about George and Gracie?" he asked with a bemused smirk.
"Are you serious?"

"No," he chuckled as she rolled her eyes. She should have known. "Though, that would be funny, right? George Burns Castle and Gracie Allen Castle?"

Kate lifted her head up to give him a slight glare. "I don't think so."

"Right," he chuckled. "So… names… seriously, I'm still liking Jackson… so maybe something like Jackson James Castle?"

"James? You… you'd name our son after my dad?" she questioned, uncertain why she was even surprised. Her father and husband got along really well together. Sometimes it appeared like they were old college chums, with how they joked and jested one another. She'd been really pleased with how they'd bonded, especially since Castle didn't have a father of his own. And it served to bring Jim further into their new growing family, which couldn't have made Kate happier.

"Sure, why not?" he looked up, knitting his eyebrows together. "Unless you have a problem with that?"

"No… no, I don't," a small smile stretched across her mouth. "It's kind of sweet, actually. We could call him JJ for short."

"Then it can go on the shortlist?" Castle asked.

"Yes," she nodded, smiling lovingly at the man who looked so excited and happy as he shifted on his knees, backing up a little so he could work his hands down her thighs.

Kate grimaced and hissed out a breath, making him freeze. His eyes darted up to her face, wide and worried. "What'd I do!? Did I hurt you?"

"No… no," she chuckled, feeling her cheeks flush. "Just… you… having your hands down there kind of… does things for me, Rick." She bit her lower lip and gave him a heated look.

"Ooh," he smirked, pleased. "Glad I still have that effect on you."

"You'll always had that effect on me," she replied brazenly, flicking her tongue out between her teeth as she beamed at him, letting the love shine through.

"Same here," Castle said, gazing down at her with undisguised devotion and love.

His fingers sensually kneaded the soft flesh of her thighs as he leaned over her and pressed his forehead against hers. They stayed like that for a moment, sharing the same air, before he tilted his head and brushed his lips against hers in a sweet loving kiss. Pulling back, Castle brushed his hand down the side of her face. Kate closed her eyes and eased into his touch. She opened them again and looked up at him with dilated eyes, her breath coming in shallow pants.

"Rick," she asked, her voice husky.

She watched his eyebrows rise ever so slightly as he looked down at her. Kate squirmed underneath him and moved her hands from his shoulders, skimming her fingers down his broad chest until she reach the waistline of his jeans. She began playing with the button she found there. She bit her lower lip and flicked her eyes back up at him.

He tilted his head to look between them, just in time to see her pop the button and unzip his jeans, and then wiggle her hand inside.
"I… I think I should get your special pillow," he choked out, his pulse quickening as she snaked her fingers around his flaccid length, already beginning to stiffen with her ministrations.

Kate smirked naughtily and inclined her head in agreement as she began stroking him. "Yes… I think you should… big boy."

XXX

"Castle, hurry up, or we're going to be late!" Kate shouted as she hurriedly finished putting her things in her clutch. She paused before the wall length mirror and adjusted the skirt of her black dress.

Before she got pregnant, she'd originally planned on wearing a sexy little silvery brown dress that had really been intended to make Castle's mouth drop in awe at her alluring and subtle beauty. Which in a whole was a rather odd way for her to think back then, considering Kate had bought that dress when she had thought she'd be attending this afternoon's event with Josh.

But everything had changed… for the better, in her opinion. Josh had always been a distraction, an excuse to avoid and deny her feelings for Castle. Then that fateful day happened, and changed everything. Despite some of the awkwardness and drama, not to mention the guilt over what she'd done, Kate wouldn't change a thing. Because now she was married to the love of her life, and pregnant with twins.

Looking back at her reflection, Kate tugged at the conservative neckline, wishing she could show off more cleavage. She'd never had particularly big breasts, and had always required a pushup bra when she intended to display some cleavage. As a result, the dresses Kate bought in the past had been geared towards highlighting what she'd always thought of her best attractive feature—her long and lean legs. But now she didn't need a pushup bra to show off cleavage. Her breasts had swelled up, preparing nourishment for the hungry little mouths that would soon be latching on and suckling.

She adjusted the neckline some more and smiled, enjoying the creamy swell of flesh that was now on display. Lanie had helped her pick out this dress, since she had needed something that wasn't as form fitting as the original dress had been. It was hard finding dresses that fit when you were a heavily pregnant woman.

"Castle! Hurry up!" she hollered again, smiling at her reflection as she turned around to inspect the fabric dipping low down her back. He'd enjoy stroking his fingers up and down her spine tonight. Just the thought of his touch rekindled memories of their early afternoon delights.

After his sinfully delicious full body massage, they'd gotten a little—alright, very—frisky, and neglected to keep track of the time. Her legs still felt like jelly, and she walked a little funny, but that could be covered up by the fact she was heavily pregnant and just kind of waddled all over the place nowadays. And also, since she was carrying twins inside her enlarged belly, no one would then think twice when she immediately headed for her seat once they arrived.

"I think we're already late, hotcakes," Castle countered, his voice light and airy, appearing out of nowhere and giving her behind a playful slap. Kate yelped and jumped a little, completely startled by both his sudden appearance and the rascally smack on her posterior.

"I thought I told you never to call me that again!" she growled threateningly after him, crossing her arms under her breasts and gracing him with a scaled down version of her infamous glare.

Castle chuckled facetiously. "You weren't complaining twenty minutes ago."
"Twenty minutes ago you could've called me the Queen of England if you wanted to and I wouldn't have noticed or cared," she replied, feeling her cheeks flush as she recalled their activities of twenty minutes prior.

Using her special pillow, Kate had rolled over and supported the weight of her enlarged belly as Castle's talented hands ran up and down her back, stroking the curve of her backside, before scooting up behind her and nudging her legs further apart.

As her belly grew, making love in the traditional missionary position had become somewhat problematic. They'd managed it a few times, but they never really got the mutual satisfaction that they'd have derived from it when her belly wasn't so large. And Kate had found it hard to straddle his lap like she used to. Her swollen belly made her feel cumbersome and slow, and she was never able to get the lift she so desired. The best she could do was to lower herself on him and rhythmically sway her hips at a languid pace as his hands roamed her body and stimulated her until she came undone.

Riding him just wasn't the same anymore. It was too much of an effort. She missed it, though. She always liked being on top, being in control. Kate longed for the days she could pounce him like some feral cat and literally jump his bones as she bucked her hips wildly and pulled up just enough to almost free him from her before sinking back down and relishing the feel of him filling her so deep and completely. Now, when she tried climbing on top of him, she felt like an elephant lumbering along at hardly any speed.

Kate had to give it to Castle, though. Never once had he complained when she told him she wasn't up for a certain position. He worked around what she was comfortable doing. He made love to her in whatever way she asked, and she loved him all the more for his patience and understanding. But most of all, for his continued and insatiable desire for her. When she felt fat and ugly, he'd drag her to bed and prove to her just how wrong she was. He was so dedicated to pleasing her that it her needs were his first thought before his own sexual gratification. And using all his natural skills and talents, Castle always made sure she came at least twice during each round.

Yet, Kate still craved the simple joy of lying on her back, beneath him, her legs cradling his hips as he stroked in and out of her at a steady accelerated rate until her inner muscles seized up as her mouth fused with his in a long and passionate kiss, and they both quaked and trembled with pleasure while they rode the waves of euphoric physical bliss.

"Maybe we should call and tell them we can't make it… that we'll be to busy… coming," Castle laughed blatantly at his lascivious innuendo as his lust-filled eyes dropped to her bustline. Kate snapped out of her reverie and snapped her fingers. "Eyes are up here, Rick!" she said.

He let out a low chuckle as he challenged her heated gaze. "If you didn't want my eyes there, then you shouldn't be tugging your neckline down until you're popping out."

"They are not popping out!" she objected. "My boobs aren't that big."

"No… they're not," he concurred with a serious nod. Her mouth dropped as she stared at him with an offended expression. She couldn't believe he'd just implied her breasts were small. Castle stepped closer and one of his hands ran up her side until he was palming her left breast through the material of her dress. "They're just right."

Her breath stilled and her eyes briefly flicked down to his lips as he gently fondled her with knowing fingers. "Castle," she said, all breathy and hot.
"If I wanted some buxom bimbo, I would have gotten one," he said. "But did I want that? Did I?"
He looked at her and waited until she shook her head in the negative. "That's right. I wanted you. All perfectly proportioned and natural. Nothing about you is fake. It's all real… and beautiful."
Castle punctuated his declaration by pressing his lips to hers in a short but sweet kiss.

And then he was stepping back, walking into the closet to pull his tuxedo jacket from the hanger. He quickly rolled his shoulders, tugging it on, and returning to stand in front of her, his hands slowly slinking down her sides until he was cradling her hips in his palms, his fingertips digging slightly into the curve of her backside.

"We should go," he said softly.

"Yes… we should," she inclined her head, reaching up to adjust his lapels. "You look good in a tuxedo, Mr. Castle."

"And you look ravishing in black silk, Mrs. Castle," he replied, stealing another quick kiss, before stepping back and holding out his arm for her.

"Alright," Kate bit her lower lip, smiling at him, as she slipped her arm through his. "Let's go see Kevin get married."
Chapter 39

As it turned out, they weren't really late at all. It appeared that other circumstances had delayed the ceremony. Kate gripped Castle's hand as he helped her up the stairs and past some of the confused guest idling outside the church. She shared a puzzled look with her husband, before he reached forward and opened the door for her. Placing her hands on her swollen belly, soothing the little ones inside, Kate crossed the threshold, Castle not far behind.

They found Ryan in the lobby of the church, nervously pacing back and forth. Esposito was standing off to the side, his eyes following his partner as he continued to wear a hole in the floor, looking very much uncomfortable and uncertain what to do. Kate handed her clutch to Castle, and stepped up to Ryan, placing a hand on his arm to stop him from pacing.

"Kevin? What's going on? Why aren't you in the chapel?"

Ryan jerked, letting out a panicked breath and raked his fingers through his once finely combed hair. "She's not coming," he exclaimed frantically. "She's changed her mind. I knew it was too good to be true. I'm such a fool!"

Before Kate could say anything in response, he was off pacing again, shaking his hands apprehensively. She flicked her gaze up to lock eyes with Esposito. He shrugged. Kate knitted her eyebrows together and turned back to Castle, who eyed her curiously.

"He thinks Jenny is going to stand him up," she informed him, voice low and doubting.

Castle shook his head in disbelief. "He can't really believe that, can he?" he asked, glancing over at the pacing Kevin Ryan with a dubious expression.

"Apparently so," Kate responded, frowning. She folded her arms across her chest and tapped her foot as she thought, worrying her bottom lip. Castle stood by her side, watching her with his usual attentiveness. Suddenly an idea popped into her mind. She glanced up at Castle and snapped her fingers. "Here, give me my phone."

He obediently opened her clutch and dug inside for her cell phone. She snatched it out of his fingers and flicked through her contacts. Typing out a rapid text message, she pressed send and bit her lip, hoping for an immediate reply. A smile spread across her lips as she got one. Turning around, she waddled back over to Ryan, placing a hand on her swollen belly to calm the tumbling little ones inside—really, they just had to start doing somersaults now of all times.

"Ryan, Jenny's not having cold feet," she declared, thrusting her phone into his face so he could see the text message from Lanie. "They're just stuck in traffic. They should be here in twenty minutes."

"Really!?" Ryan's face lit up hopefully as his eyes scanned Lanie's text message. He let out a sigh and his shoulders relaxed in relief.

Esposito came over and gave his friend a pat on the back. "Come on, bro, let's get you a glass of water," he said, tugging his friend away, while adding under his breath, "Or maybe something a little stronger."

Kate released a breath and spun around to find Castle standing behind her, smiling proudly. She smiled back and pressed a quick kiss to the corner of his mouth. "Disaster averted," she declared cheerily.
Castle grinned at her and rewarded her with a lingering kiss on her lips. "Well done, Mrs. Castle," he said, giving her a wink. He slinked his arm around her waist, letting his hand rest on her hip, and gestured towards the large double doors that stood open. "Shall we take our seats?" he asked placing his other hand on her swollen belly. "And get you off your feet."

Kate bobbed her head. "Yes, that sounds nice," she rubbed her hand over her belly, smoothing out the wrinkles in her dress. "How do I look?" she asked, self-consciously, her heart pumping uncertainly in her chest. She'd been asking him that a lot lately. It was just that it was difficult for her when almost all her clothes just didn't seem to fit the way they should. Granted, she was mostly wearing maternity clothes now, but still… Kate Castle was a woman of style, and she liked to be fashionable.

"You're glowing," he crooned with sparkling eyes, gazing at her with undisguised love and desire. She rolled her eyes at him and slipped her arm around his. "You sure about that?" she questioned, narrowing her eyes as she looked up at him.

"Of course I am," hooted Castle, grinning broadly. "I love you."

"Maybe love has blinded you," she asserted, averting her gaze bashfully. "I'm huge. When I first found out I was pregnant, I didn't expect to get this big… but then when Dr. Elam told us that we were having twins… I just didn't realize just how… huge I'd get."

"More of you for me to love," Castle murmured into her ear, brushing his lips down the slope of her neck as his hand dropped down to her ass, causing her to giggle and blush.

"Stop it, we're in a church," she reprimanded him, shaking her head at his antics, and returning his hand to the small of her back.

"Sorry," he batted his eyelashes, sheepishly. "I can't help it when you're so gorgeous."

Kate shook her head at him, biting her lower lip. "You don't have to patronize me, Castle," she assured him. "I'm a big girl—literally," she scowled glancing down at her enlarged belly. "I can take the truth. No need to sugarcoat things."

"I'm not," he asserted, his voice firm, holding no lie. She flirted her eyes up to his and saw the unrelenting conviction in the truth of his words. "You're beautiful, Kate. Always will be, even when you're old and gray, sagging in places that shouldn't sag."

She shuddered and gave him a little look while jabbing his side with her elbow, grinning victoriously when she heard him huff a startled 'oof'. "You're not exactly painting a pretty picture there, Castle," she retorted with a stern expression.

He shrugged. "It's the truth though," he said. "Gravity eventually takes a toll on all of us." He paused, weighing his next words before continuing. "Look at me, I'm no prized stallion anymore."

"Uh-huh," she agreed, reaching over to pat his little soft belly through his tuxedo vest. He narrowed his eyes and feigned a pout. Kate chuckled and bit her lower lip. "Just teasing, Rick. You're still a stud." He grinned happily as she pressed a quick kiss to his lips. "You're not exactly painting a pretty picture there, Castle," she retorted with a stern expression.

He shrugged. "It's the truth though," he said. "Gravity eventually takes a toll on all of us." He paused, weighing his next words before continuing. "Look at me, I'm no prized stallion anymore."

"Castle inclined his head. "I was kind of hoping they'd be easy going like Alexis," he said. "She was just a good baby. Never too demanding. But, considering the parentage of the dynamic duo—part you, part me—I don't know about that. They'll probably be just as stubborn and strong-willed as
"Ha-ha," she laughed. "What about their father? He's pretty annoying sometimes."

Castle's eyebrows quirked up in mirth and delight. "I know, right!? And don't you just love him."

She pressed her lips together and smiled warmly, her eyes glistening with tender affection as she glanced up at her husband. She still got a little thrill when she was able to think of him as that. "Yes, I do," she confirmed in a serious voice, soft and loving. "Very much." Kate slanted into him and pressed a lazy kiss to his lips. "Now... how about you get me to a seat?"

"With pleasure, mademoiselle," Castle smiled widely, bobbing his head. He held her close and guided her through the double doors into the chapel, leading her down the aisle until they came to the third row of pews, just behind Ryan's parents, siblings, and extended family.

XXX

Once Jenny and the bridal party arrived, the ceremony went off without a hitch. When the pastor asked Ryan and Jenny to say their vows, Kate's eyes got all watery and she slipped her hand into Castle's and entwined their fingers together. He squeezed her hand in return and she glanced at him for a moment, sharing a happy look, remembering their own wedding. All too soon the pastor was announcing them husband and wife, introducing the large gathering to Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Patrick Ryan.

Kate stood up with everyone else, clutching her husband's arm for support. Recently, she had begun to have trouble getting up after long stretches of sitting down, but it was a discomfort she was willing to live with as it was more uncomfortable to stand for long periods of time.

"Oh gosh, he looks so happy!" Kate commented, digging her camera out of her clutch to snap a quick picture of the newlyweds as they faced their friends and families for the first time as husband and wife.

"Yes, he does," Castle replied, whispering into her ear. "They both do."

They applauded and cheered as Jenny looped her arm around Ryan's and the two stepped down from the altar and walked down the aisle, smiling and waving to everyone. Kate wrapped her arm around Castle's, mimicking Jenny. She eased into him and rested her head against his shoulder, watching as her friend and colleague took his first steps as a married man.

Castle tilted his head and pressed a brief kiss against her temple, dropping his mouth to her ear. "Now we just need to find a way to get Espo and Lanie down the aisle," he said as they watched the groomsmen and bridesmaids follow the newlyweds down the aisle.

Kate shook her head, casting an uncertain glance his way. That might be easier said than done. Kate knew that her best friend and her other partner were having problems. They almost didn't come to the wedding as each other's plus one. She hadn't shared this with Castle yet, hoping that the matter would resolve itself and her friends would soon work things out by themselves.

"Come," Castle grabbed her hand, tugging her out of the row to follow him down the aisle once it had been cleared by the bridal party.

"Castle?" she questioned, raising her eyebrows in confusion as to his haste.

"If we hurry, we'll be able to get out of the parking lot before everything becomes gridlocked," he explained swiftly. "Need I remind you that we're attending a wedding with two large Irish
families."

Kate dropped her mouth and inclined her head in agreement. "Then don't waste time talking, get us out of here!"

XXX

After he deposited her at their table, Kate sent Castle to the bar to get her a ginger ale and some crackers. She heaved in a deep breath and leaned back against the chair, running her hands soothingly over her swollen belly, attempting to settle the twins. They just wouldn't stop moving around. It was like they could sense all the excitement and celebration around them. They were definitely little Castle babies… no question there.

"Kate! There you are!"

She looked up and smiled, receiving a quick hug from her best friend as Lanie Parish arrived at their assigned table. Esposito was still waiting outside with the rest of the bridal party. The DJ was already getting things started with some smooth tunes to keep people entertained as they waited for the newly married couple to arrive.

"Hey, Lanie," Kate replied, squeezing her friend's hands in return as Lanie sat down beside her.

"Where's Castle?"

"I sent him to get me some crackers and a ginger ale," Kate replied, patting her belly. "The twins are restless."

Lanie shook her head and beamed, tentatively extending her hand. "May I?"

"Sure."

Her friend smiled as she placed her palm over her stomach, feeling exactly what Kate had described. "It's almost like those two are wrestling or something," Lanie said. "Are you sure you can handle them?"

Kate chuckled and shook her head, glancing across the room to spot Castle collecting her order from the bar. "I've spent the last three years herding around a hyper man-child on a constant sugar rush," she declared with a twinkle in her eyes. "I think I can handle these two little rascals. Besides, I have Alexis to help me out with the three of them."

Lanie threw her head back and laughed heartedly, causing a few heads from other tables to look their way. Kate ducked her head, slightly embarrassed. She rolled her eyes and averted her gaze, spotting Castle making his way over to them. Turning back to Lanie, Kate sighed happily.

"I'm happy, Lanie," she announced. "I mean, really happy… for the first time in my life since…" her voice trailed off.

"Since your mom died," Lanie inclined her head in understanding, reaching out to clutch Kate's hand. "If anyone deserves to be happy, it is you, Kate."

"Thanks, Lanie," she smiled, rubbing a hand over her belly, again. "Oh, by the way… that Lamaze class you recommended has been going well. We've been attending for a month now." She chuckled. "Castle's the class clown, of course. But even with that, he's probably also the star pupil. He's very eager to learn."

"Wow," Lanie raised her eyebrows in surprise. "I would have thought he'd be bored or something,
since he's gone through this already when Alexis was born."

"That's the thing," Kate said, leaning in closer. "Meredith didn't want to do any of those things. Hell, I don't even think she was fully aware of what she was going to have to do until her first contraction hit." She shook her head, still baffled at how the woman could have been so blasé about giving birth to such an amazing child as Alexis. "Apparently Meredith didn't let him participate as much as I am. He told me that once her whole attitude about it made him feel like he was just a sperm donor and nothing more."

Kate shook her head. "The woman must be crazy or something, because there is no way in hell I could have done this on my own," she smiled, glancing over at Castle as he maneuvered around the other guests. "He's so attentive and supportive, Lanie. I couldn't have asked for a better partner in this."

"Now aren't you glad I pushed you into fessing up, and telling him what happened all those months ago," Lanie asserted with a smug look, referring to their conversations after Kate found out she was pregnant.

She rolled her eyes, but inclined her head. "Yeah, I am. Thanks for giving me a proper kick in the butt."

"Don't mention it," Lanie replied with a smirk. "That's what friends are for."

"Speaking of which... what's up with you and Esposito?" Kate asked.

Lanie's mood soured and she frowned. "I don't want to talk about it," she tersely replied. "I barely agreed to be his date for the evening as it is."

"Lanie," Kate whined. It was kind of unfair how they'd gossip about her and Castle and then she'd clam up when the tables turned on her.

Her friend sighed, relenting. She cast her an irritated glare, before elaborately. "We went on a double date with Jenny and Ryan a couple of months back. Let's just say it sort of imploded at the end. Bless Jenny, she's a peach, but she just couldn't not ask when Javier was going to give me a ring and make an honest woman of me."

"No... she didn't?" Kate gasped, inwardly groaning.

"Yes, she did," Lanie said. "After that, the evening tanked and when we got back to my place, we got into a massive argument. We decided to take a break and cool off."

"So did you make him beg?" Kate asked, smirking at the image of tough-guy Javier Esposito on his knees begging Lanie to take him back.

Lanie hummed in the affirmative. "You bet," she said. "I don't know what we are right now. I'm just going to go with the flow, and see where the evening takes me."

"Well, good luck with that," Kate said.

"Girl, I never needed luck," Lanie laughed, with her trademark sass returning.

"Hey girls," chirped Castle, materializing on Kate's left side with her ginger ale and crackers. "What are you talking about?"

"Girl stuff, Castle, never you mind," Lanie asserted, giving him a mild form of her own patented
glare.

He shrugged and bent down, kissing the top of Kate's head as he handed her the tall glass. She closed her eyes and eased into his touch, accepting the glass and taking a delicate sip.


"You talking about the kiss or the ginger ale?" he asked.

She narrowed her eyes in thought. "Can I get back to you on that?"

Castle smirked and plopped down into the chair beside her, casually slipping his arm over her shoulder. She eyed him for a moment, and smiled, tilting her head just enough for him to see what she wanted. He grinned, and leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers in a quick chaste kiss. Kate hummed in approval as he leaned back into his chair.

"You two are adorably gross, you know that?" Lanie deadpanned, giving them a feigned glare of disgust.

"You're just green with envy," was Castle's rejoinder.

Lanie scoffed and crossed her arms over her chest. "If I wanted marriage and kids, I'd have them," she answered his challenge. "You two may be all freakishly cute, but that doesn't mean everyone else wants the same."

Castle laughed and canted into Kate's side conspiratorially. "Someone seems to be sexually constipated right now," he said, just loud enough for Lanie to hear.

Kate gritted her teeth and elbowed his ribs, causing him to cough and lean back, casting her a hurt expression as he rubbed his side. "If you want any later, then you keep your mouth shut!" she hissed out softly, waiting for his head to bob in understanding. She then turned to Lanie and rolled her eyes. "Ignore the man-child to my left," she said.

Just then, the DJ cut the music and announced the arrival of Kevin and Jenny Ryan. Castle helped Kate stand, and the whole room erupted into applause as the happy couple made their appearance with beaming smiles and hands clasped tightly. Castle chuckled and wrapped his arms around Kate's middle. She brought her hands up to rest over his and eased into his hold.

"I couldn't take my eyes off you at our wedding," he said, staring off at the newlyweds. "You looked so beautiful. Still do. I remember thinking that I was the luckiest guy in the world."

"Ryan's probably feeling the exact same at this moment," Kate replied. Tilting her head to press a kiss to the side of Castle's mouth. "I felt pretty lucky too. I never thought I'd be here."

"In some luxury ballroom celebrating a colleague's recent nuptials?" Castle questioned, pretending to misinterpret her words.

"No, silly man," she shook her head, but couldn't keep back the smile at his infectious grin. "Married… and expecting." She sighed. "Before you, Castle, I'd given up on the idea of settling down and having a family. You changed that for me. So thank you."

He stared at her with a tender smile and affectionate eyes. "No, thank you, Kate," he asserted. And then added, with his trademark humor, "Not just for allowing me to knock you up, but for not shooting me after I did so."
Kate bit her lower lip and flicked her eyes up to his. "Funny," she said, her voice hitching up slightly in amusement. "That's not how I remember it."

Castle grinned, his eyes sparkling mischievously. "Yeah. True. I do kind of like it better how you lured me to your place with the offer of a drink, all the while intending to seduce me and have your wicked way with me," he feigned an outraged gasp. "Oh my god! That's it! You just wanted me for my body!"

She threw back her head and laughed, throatily. "Yeah, that's right," she agreed, the sarcasm dripping from her lips. "I wanted you for your Greek god-like physique."

"So you admit I'm god-like?" he questioned with a quick quirk of his lips. "You hear that, Lanie? Kate says I'm god-like."

Lanie let out an exasperated groan and shook her head at them. "You two are unbelievable," she grumbled under her breath and marched off to join Esposito as he entered the room.


XXX

"Thank you so much for coming," Jenny said, easing into Kate's hug. Backing away, the bride gestured to her stomach and Kate inclined her head, granting Jenny permission to touch.

She was fine with her friends and family feeling her baby bump, but she'd gotten annoyed at all the women—married and otherwise—who'd come up to her wanting to cop a feel, so to speak. There had been quite a few of those this evening, but she'd managed to restrain herself from snapping at them when they asked to touch. Plus it helped that Castle had hardly left her side.

Kate had felt guilty about keeping them seated, but Castle dismissed her apologies with a wave of his hand, telling her that he was just saving up his energy for some evening activities back in the privacy of their own bed. Though, she could still tell by his bouncing knee that he would have liked to dance. Truth was, she felt the same. She loved dancing, especially with Castle. They'd always been in sync, and never had it been clearer to her than when they'd first danced together all those years ago at that charity auction. Of course, nowadays, they did a different kind of dance, one which was much more satisfying.

"Wow!" Jenny exclaimed, pulling her hand back in surprise when one of the twins kicked. Kate grimaced, and rubbed the spot. "They've been active all evening," she told her. "I think they can sense all the excitement."

"When are you due?" Jenny asked, smiling excitedly. Kate narrowed her eyes, wondering if she should warn Ryan that Jenny had baby-fever.

"Um…," she frowned, amazed she didn't have that answer on the tip of her tongue. "Castle?"

"Huh?" he turned to look at her, eyebrows raised in question.

"Babies… due?"

"A month, more or less," he said with a nonchalant shrug of his shoulders, adding a slight shake of his hand in a 'so-so' gesture.

"Oh," she laughed, turning back to Jenny. "That kind of snuck up on me. Though, to be honest, I
kind of feel ready to pop already." Kate wasn't lying. Especially with the twins moving about like some crazy gymnasts, she really was ready for them to just get out of her already. She was looking forward to getting back into her workout regimens. The yoga classes she'd been attending for pregnant women were all well and good, but she missed her normal routines.

Jenny joined her, laughing brightly. Kate heaved in a deep breath and calmed down, placing a hand on her chest and one on her belly.

"Well, thanks again for coming," the bride said, looking between Kate and Castle.

"Yeah," Ryan agreed with a smile as he appeared besides Jenny, ensnaring her with his arm and beaming up at his friends.

"Congratulations, Kev," Castle said, firmly shaking the younger man's hand and clapping him on the shoulder. "Welcome to the wonderful world of marriage. I liked it so much; I did it thrice! OUCH! What!? Too soon?" He glanced up at Kate with a feigned expression of hurt as he rubbed his arm. "Beware of pregnancy hormones...," he smirked, and then added sotto voce, "when the time comes."

Ryan gulped and Jenny beamed with delight. Kate bit her lower lip and shook her head, grabbing Castle's arm. "Congratulations, again," she said, dragging her insane husband away. "Have a safe and fun honeymoon."

"Don't have too much fun, you hear!" Castle quickly quipped with a suggestive waggle of his eyebrows before Kate could pull him fully away from the newlyweds. He sighed, happily, and turned to her, slipping his arm around her waist. "Why did you do that? I was having fun."

"Too much fun," she interjected, giving him one of her patented glares. He stuck out his lower lip in a feigned pout, and she chuckled, thoroughly kissing the sulky expression off his face. "Don't fret, Rick. I'll make it up to you later..." and then she lowered her voice to a husky quality she knew drove him wild, "in bed."
Chapter Notes

*A/N: Major thanks to Ky3elk on twitter for helping get some of the details right.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She followed him into the loft after he'd unlocked the door, watching as his feet dragged, languidly removing his coat and tossing it up on the coat rack. He turned in place, eyes tired and exhausted, making her feel even more guilty.

"I'm sorry, Castle," she murmured, dropping her eyes as he placed his arms on her shoulders and gently spun her around, pulling her coat off in the process. Kate swallowed, tugging her lower lip under her teeth, and put her hands on her enlarged belly, frowning as she rubbed little circles into the taut round flesh. This was the third time this week, and every single time it had occurred during the middle of the night, disturbing their sleep.

Castle returned to her side, giving her a sleepy smile. "It happens, Kate," he reassured her, a hand soothingly dancing up and down her back. "Not your fault."

Kate closed her eyes and eased into his touch, feeling just as tired as him. "I'm still sorry," she asserted, resting her head against his as he caressed her arm. He tilted his head and brushed his nose against her hair, planting a soft kiss against her temple.

"Don't worry about it, Kate," Castle mumbled, letting his fingers skim down her arm until they find her hand. "I wasn't trying to be insulting or anything," Castle sighed, rubbing the back of his head, eyes still droopy from lack of sleep. "I just wanted to let you know that you're doing a far, far better job that Meredith did."

"Again… Meredith," she hissed out, growing annoyed with his lack of understanding in this matter. She pulled their hands apart and jabbed him in the shoulder with a fist. He let out a grunt of surprise and stepped back a bit. "I know you have a past—we both do—but that doesn't mean I want to hear all about Meredith when she was pregnant with Alexis." She paused and softened her gaze at him, reaching out to soothe the spot she'd punched. "I'm not above admitting that I can get quite possessive when it comes to you."

"Ditto," Castle purred, stepping back in and slipping an arm around her middle, resting his hand on the side of her belly, fingers sprawled wide, encompassing as much of the round swell of flesh as he could. "You're mine, Mrs. Castle."

"And you belong to me, no one else, Mr. Castle," Kate replied with a grin. Castle returned it with a boyish smirk and slanted closer, resting his forehead against hers. They sighed, sharing space and air. He rubbed gentle patterns along her belly.
"Next time," she murmured. "I promise you that next time, it'll be real."

"I told you I don't mind," Castle chuckled out quietly, moving his hand around her back to tighten his hold of her in his embrace. "We're in this together, Kate. That's my promise. Always." He dropped a kiss on the top of her head, and she smiled, nuzzling into his embrace, resting her head on his shoulder. Down below one of the twins shifted around inside her, ending their moment.

Pulling back, they grinned goofily and giggled softly. Castle dropped his hands to her belly and soothed the little ones inside with his large palms. He scrunched up his face, trying to suppress a yawn, but despite his best efforts, it still broke through.

Kate pursed her lips and smiled warmly at him, reaching up to brush back the flop of hair that had fallen down across his forehead. His hair was still all unruly from their interrupted sleep, but, in her opinion, it just made him all the more adorable. Caressing the side of his face, feeling the gentle scrape of his stubble, Kate leaned in and kissed him softly on the lips. Interlacing their linked hands together, she then tugged him towards their bedroom.

"Come on, sleepyhead, let's get you back to bed," she murmured, still feeling guilty for disturbing their sleep with another bout of false labor.

"But what if I don't want to sleep," he managed to suggestively waggle his eyebrows at her, leering at her in a way the only he could. His hand fell down her back and he cupped her ass, giving it a playful squeeze.

Kate let out a soft gasp, startled by the sudden groping from her half-awake husband. She turned to him and rolled her eyes. "No offense, but I don't think you're awake enough to get it up, Castle."

He stuck out his bottom lip on a pout, looking adorable. "It can just be a quickie. Trust me. I'll be in and out before you know it."

She pursed her lips, trying to stifle her laugh, but it bubbled out anyways. "Not exactly inspiring there, Rick."

"Huh?" he fumbled, blinking his eyes tiredly as he gaze at her with a mix of confusion and utter adoration.

"Oh, Castle, you really are sleepy, aren't you?" she chuckled, smiling warmly as she shook her head and affectionately caressed the side of his face. He clearly had no idea what he'd just said, or how amusing it was considering that even their quickies weren't really that quick. Castle gave her a befuddled look, oblivious to what was so funny. She gave him a reassuring smile, and reached up to pat his cheek. "We could always just cuddle."

His lips spread into a lopsided grin as he moved forward, wrapping her up in his arms. "I guess I can make do with that… for now. But later, when we're both not so exhausted and tired, we're definitely fooling around," Castle asserted, using the last bit of his energy to wiggle his eyebrows and pinch her ass, like the tease he was.

"Deal," Kate beamed, blinking her eyes and fighting the yawn breaking through. She shook her head and leaned into his embrace. And together, they strolled the rest of the way through the loft and into their bedroom. They stripped off each other's clothes until nothing remained but bare skin, before collapsing down onto the soft bed and snuggling up close.

XXX

Her dreams were sensual and erotic, and involved a certain ruggedly handsome author doing
decidedly wicked things to her with nothing but his tongue. There was nothing new about that. She'd had such dreams for over three years. Heck, she'd even fantasized about straddling and jumping Richard *freaking* Castle before she'd even met him. But those dreams and fantasies had become much more intense once she'd actually met the man and stood toe to toe with him, seeing just how blue his eyes were.

Now that he was hers, and she his, she could fully admit that she'd been so very tempted to take him up on his offer of "debriefing" after their first case. It would have been great… *amazing*… but not lasting. Kate might have been disappointed with the long path they'd took to get to each other, but she wouldn't have changed too much of it, since they probably both needed the time to prepare for one another, and fully embrace that thing called love that hung between them, uniting them in common purpose.

A warmth infused her at the mere thought of Castle's love for her. It burned brighter than a thousand stars. She would never tire of his love or his touch. He brought so much joy into her life that she could no longer imagine a life without him in it as her friend, husband, and lover… especially lover. No man had ever made love to her the way Castle did. He was attentive and considerate, passionate and loving, tender and gentle. He worshiped her body like she was something special and magical, unique. Others had, too, but never to the same degree of intensity as Castle did.

She may have been self-conscious, but Kate knew she was attractive and that men loved gazing at and touching her body, bringing her to the edge and over. Some had been very good at that, others not so much. Kate wasn't ashamed to admit that she liked sex—no loved it—and she was not some sweet angel when it came do getting what she desired. She enjoyed sex, and the distractions it brought. And that's what it had been… until Castle. It wasn't until she finally took that dive, that Kate realized that for the majority of her adult life, that that's what sex had been to her—a distraction.

Kate would use sex to distract herself and forget her troubles. After her mother died, she'd never allowed herself to open her heart up to the possibility of love, that sex was anything more than a form of physical release. It wasn't until Castle that she began to view sex differently, and also understand the meaning of the phrase "making love". She thought she had made love before, having felt the touch of many different men, and how her body responded to that touch. She had thought that that had been some sort of love.

But it hadn't. It had just been lust and the euphoria of sexual release, a relief from the somber troubling world she lived in. It was just sex, with no emotion involved, no feeling. That's how it had been like for her with most of her boyfriends. She had hid in those relationships, with men she didn't love. It was her way of coping, of surviving. And Kate had continued to do it, hiding in a relationship, even when she was in love with another man, denying it, not wanting to trust herself—or him, for that matter—to take a chance and risk her heart.

And then, one night, after a particularly difficult case—and no small degree of help from alcohol—Kate had given in to her desires and suppressed feelings, and had had sex with Castle. And though it had been drunk and sloppy, it had been the best sex of her life, igniting within her the spark that had been missing for so many years. Since then, the idea of love and sex were no longer separate, but unified, together, entwined as one single thing. And always… always with one man… with Castle.

Because with Castle, it was different than any other man. It was more than just her physical form he was loving. Kate felt kind of sappy for it, but she believed that when Castle touched her, made love to her, he also touched her soul. It was all of her that he loved, not just her body. Which, now,
being heavily pregnant, feeling about the burst, was very comforting. Not once, during her long months of growing and changing had his desire for her waned. To him, no matter how big or gross she felt, she was always beautiful, sexy, and hot as hell.

Kate blinked her eyes slowly, smiling warmly at those thoughts and the memories attached to them. If she was honest with herself, the sex during these last few months of pregnancy had been some of the best she'd ever had, which was not what she'd expected. Her eyelids fluttered at a jolt of arousal danced up her spine, remnants of her erotic dream still tugging at her. But then she felt it… fingers, skilled and knowledgeable fingers, sliding along the apex of her legs, touching her growing wetness and spreading it along her folds and around her sensitive nerve bundle.

Arching her neck up and brushing back her sleep-matted hair, Kate glanced down to find Castle wide wake, his hand between her legs, touching her most intimately, as only he could.

"Castle…," she croaked out, voice still rough from sleep and the hint of growing arousal from his skilled ministrations. "What are you doing?"

His eyes flicked up once she'd spoken and a loving smile touched his lips. "Helping you relax."

She raised her eyebrows at him in surprise. "Relax? Castle, I was sleeping. How much more relaxing could I get?"

He bobbed his head, humming softly as he leaned down over her and pressed a kiss to her lips. Kate returned the kiss, closing her eyes and basking in the sweet intimacy of the moment, before flirting her eyes open and gazing back at him in confusion.

"Well, fingering me down there is not making me relaxed," she declared, breathily. "It's making me horny."

"It will help release your stress," he asserted, giving her a look that just about dared her to disagree.

"Castle…," she sighed his name, prepared to do just that. Kate felt like a sluggish elephant, and ready to pop at any moment. It's not that she didn't want this to continue to its logical conclusion, she just wasn't sure she was up for it so early in the morning. "Look, I know I sort of promised you last night that we could fool around this morning… but Castle… I'm not sure I have—"

"Kate," Castle cut her off, leaning down over her, his fingers continuing their slow and erotic movements between her legs. "Stop it, please. This is about you. Only you. Let me please you, Kate. Let me. You've pleased me so much, in more ways than I can say, and I'm an amazing wordsmith with numerous bestsellers to his name."

"But Castle…," her protestations was cut off and turned into a whimper when he slipped a finger inside her, curling it just right to touch her where she was most sensitive.

"No," he shushed. "Let me. Just lay back and enjoy, Kate." He dipped his head down and kissed her tenderly, with so much love and adoration that she had to blinked back tears from the depth of affection that was on display. "Besides," he added, his breath hot and moist against her neck. "Didn't Dr. Elam say something about sex helping to encourage labor?"

"Not exactly," she panted, her mouth stuttering as little moans escaped her throat. Castle had slipped another finger inside her while he'd been talking and was now pumping his hand a little harder. "But I don't care… don't stop." She gritted her teeth, and willed her hips not to move, but she couldn't help it. She was so wet and the tremors of sexual pleasure were rippling throughout her body with such intensity, that her hips wouldn't obey her. Kate swayed her hips, matching the
Castle grinned down at her, flicking his thumb over her clit as he drove his fingers deeper. Kate squirmed and moaned, feeling her body come alive with glorious sensations. It didn't take long for that tight coil to unwind and release. He pressed a wet kiss to her neck, flirting his tongue out across that sensitive spot behind her ear, pushing her over the edge. She shattered around his pumping fingers, squeezing at them as they moved back and forth inside her.

He moved his mouth over hers, stifling her moan as he continued to work her wetness with his hand. His tongue slipped between her parted lips and Kate felt herself tightening again. Her out of control hormones made it easy to have multiple orgasms in one session, not that that had ever been a problem with Castle, but this was getting a little ridiculous.

"So beautiful, you're so beautiful," Castle chanted against her gasping mouth, nibbling at her quivering lips.

She shattered again, her entire body rippling with the delights that came with sexual release as a result of his skilled touch. "God, Castle," she moaned, moving one hand to clutch his arm as he slipped his fingers out her, cupping her thrumming heat in his palm. "That… oh… that was amazing," she purred, dancing her fingers up and down his forearm. She smiled up at him, dreamily. "You certainly have a way with fingers."

Castle grinned mischievously at her, bringing his hand up in front of him, and wiggled his fingers, still slick and dripping with her arousal. "Writer's touch," he explained. She hummed in agreement, watching with hooded eyes as he brought his fingers to his mouth and slowly licked his fingers clean.

Kate shuddered, her mouth dropping down as she groaned in want. She arched her neck and glared down at her enlarged belly. "God, I can't wait until these two vacate the premises so we can fuck like wild animals again."

Castle let out a low chuckle. "We can still fuck, Kate," he said, pressing against her side, letting her feel just how aroused he was.

She pouted, "But not like we did before I got so big." She sighed, biting her lower lip. "I just want to go wild, take it hard up against a wall, wrapped around you until there is no space between us and it's like we're just one body moving together in fluid motion."

"I know, Kate," he assured her, caressing her thigh, and dipping his head down to drop a kiss on her bare shoulder. "And we will."

"Promise?" she asked, gazing up at him with large pleading eyes.

"Promise," Castle said, moving a hand to cup her sensitive breast and tease her nipple. His grip on her hip tightened. "No roll over onto your side."

"Why?" she asked, though she went willingly, shifting over onto her side with her back to him.

Castle hummed in thought, playfully slapping her ass. "If you have to ask, maybe we should just get up and have breakfast—"

"No… no," she shook her head, moving fully onto her side, cradling her belly in her arms, and wiggling her backside up into his hips, feeling his erection press against her buttocks. "I'm not hungry." Kate arched her neck over her shoulder and gave him a salacious grin. "You wanted to please your wife, didn't you, Mr. Castle? You're off to a good start, don't stop now."
He chuckled, and wrapped his arms around her, melding his chest and hips to her back and the curve of her ass and legs. Kate groaned, pushing back into him as he swayed his hips against her, rubbing his throbbing erection against her soft backside. He dropped a kiss on her shoulder, moving one hand down between their heated bodies.

Kate eased her legs open for him, and he gripped his length in his hands and guided it to her. He rubbed himself against her wetness, coating him in her slickness, before he pushed past her folds, filling her like only he could. She groaned, and arched back into him, clutching her belly as Castle gripped her hips, pushing all the way inside her, pelvis smashed up against her ass. He paused, smoothing his hands up and down her arms and legs she settled, adjusting to his quick intrusion into her slippery core. Then slowly, ever so slowly, he began to thrust back and forth, in and out. Her eyelids fluttered as the sparks of euphoria began to ignite within her.

"Yes, yes, yes…," she panted. It felt like it had been ages since she'd felt him inside her, even if it hadn't been that long ago. It was not exactly easy to find positions to make love in now that she was in her final weeks of her pregnancy. Kate was pleased that the rapid approach of the end hadn't dimmed her sex drive, as she had feared. She did feel sluggish and slow, but Castle never once complained. He loved her anyway she allowed, and he was very willing to experiment at finding just the right ways to make her lose control.

Castle moved a hand down the swell of her belly, slipping it down between her parted thighs, finding her wet and slick. He touched her, feeling her stretch and quiver with each one of his thrusts. Moving his fingers around, he easily found her most sensitive spot. He rubbed his thumb in circles around her as he continued to rock his hips against her ass. Kate shuddered, feeling beautiful and loved.

Kate tilted her head, lips quivering, panting breaths coming out as she called for him. Castle scooted closer, tightening his hold around her as he pressed deeper into her, sealing her mouth with his in a passionate and fierce kiss as she fell over the edge, taking him with her.

XXX

Kate woke up with a start. Her eyes flicked across to the other side of the bed, surprised when she found it empty. After their morning lovemaking, she had fallen asleep in Castle's arms. She had expected to wake up again still in them, warm and safe in his embrace. But he was gone, and the sheets on his side of the bed were cold.

Pushing up on her elbows, Kate rubbed a hand over her face, attempting to scrub away the cobwebs of dreamland. Tossing the duvet aside, she heaved up to a sitting position, groaning slightly at the soreness between her legs. Still, it brought a smile to her lips. She missed the feeling. Putting her hands on the curve of her swollen belly, Kate smoothed out soft patterns into the taut skin as she felt another Braxton Hicks contraction hit her.

"Sorry, little ones," Kate cooed, taking it as a sign that the twins had been disturbed. "Mommy and Daddy got a little carried away. But it's okay. It's only because they love one another so much." She brushed back her tousled hair, and glanced at the digital alarm clock, noting that it was midday. Okay, so their early morning delight had worn her out more than she'd expected. Not that she was complaining.

Puffing out a breath, she pushed herself up off the edge of the mattress and shuffled over to the chest of drawers. Rummaging through them, she pulled on some back boy shorts and matching bra, before finding some dark gray leggings and a oversized navy blue NYPD gym t-shirt. Dressed, Kate tied her hair into a loose ponytail and padded out of the bedroom in search of her missing husband.
The office was empty, and his laptop closed and cold, nothing to indicate he'd gotten up to write. Kate furrowed her brow, uncertain where to look next. Normally when she'd wake up alone in bed, especially after they'd made love, it was inspiration that had struck and Castle just had to write it down before it floated away. Biting her lower lip, she slipped out into the open living space, and glanced towards the kitchen. Nope. Not there either. He wasn't in the living room, or in the lounge.

Okay. Now she was confused. If he wasn't writing, the next best place to find him would have been the lounge, as that's where she'd made him move his Xbox. He'd accidently woken her up when she'd been taking a nap, and she was none too happy about that. He had apologized profusely, giving her a nice quickie to make up for it (the man did have a talented tongue), and then she made him move the accursed gaming console to the lounge, which was gratefully located on the other side of the loft, the farthest away from the bedroom as one could get on the first floor.

First floor.

That got her thinking. The loft had two stories. If Castle wasn't on the first floor, then he could very well be upstairs. Turning in place, she made her way across the living room and gripped the handles along the staircase as she climbed up each step, taking her time. It had gotten harder going up stairs now that she was in her final weeks. Kate had thought having one baby growing inside her would have been difficult, but two was much worse.

Reaching the landing, she heaved in a deep breath, feeling her heart pound with the exertion. It made her feel weak and pathetic, feeling so exhausted after simply climbing up the stairs to the second floor of her home. It shouldn't be like this, but it was. Sighing in frustration, Kate put her hands over her belly, caressing the round swell as the twins made their protestation. God, it felt like she was cramping, similar to her time of the month, but different. Ignoring it, she arched her neck, glancing down the hall, and smiled in relief, spying the ray of light coming from a door standing ajar halfway down the hallway.

The nursery.

Kate gently eased the door open and slipped inside, not wanting to startle her husband. She found him sitting cross-legged in the center of the room, gazing up at the painted wall and twin cribs, looking lost in thought. She slowly drew her lower lip under her teeth, wondering if maybe she should just leave him alone to his contemplation, but then he turned his head and spotted her.

"Kate," he gasped out in surprise, jumping up to his feet and in a flash joining her by the doorway. "Sorry," she dropped her head bashfully. "I didn't mean to interrupt. I… I just… I woke up and you weren't there."

He gave her a contrite expression and brushed a hand down the side of her face before dipping his head down and giving her a quick kiss. She slipped her arms around his torso and buried her head in his chest, closing her eyes as she basked in his presence, once again feeling that warmth and security she so missed when she had woken up to an empty bed.

"I was just thinking of Alexis," he explained. "I was so terrified of being a father. But then the doctor handed her to me. There she was, this tiny little human in my hands, looking so beautiful… I fell in love immediately. I knew then that I wouldn't change anything, not when I got her."

"I can't wait for that feeling when I finally get to see the twins," Kate said, leaning back to look at him. She smiled softly and caressed the side of his face. "You are an amazing father to Alexis."

"It wasn't easy," he admitted, lowering his brow in memory of those early days, when Alexis was
still an infant. "Meredith freaked out the first time Alexis cried when she was holding her. She just
couldn't handle it. She kept saying how her body had been ruined and that she'd never be the
woman she was before. She wouldn't even breastfeed our little girl. I had to do it all on my own,
feed, change, bathe. Mother helped out where she could. It was the most difficult challenge in my
life, and I'm still not sure if I'm ready to do it again."

"Oh, Castle," Kate sighed, soothing him with a quick embrace and a brief kiss. "Don't sell yourself
so short. You did great with Alexis. But this time it'll be different. I promise you."

"How will it be different?" he questioned, appearing to be quite genuine in his confusion over how
such a thing was possible.

"Because this time you won't be alone," Kate asserted, voice firm and confident, squeezing his
hand in reassurance. "There's no way I'm letting you raise our babies alone, Castle."

His face brightened, and he gazed down at her with such love that her heart clenched with joy.
Castle gripped her face in his large hands and kissed her, slow and deeply. She could feel the
tension from before fading away, and she eased into him, reciprocating the kiss.

She felt a curious sensation in her lower abdomen, and then suddenly her leggings started to soak
with something warm and wet emanating from between her legs. And it wasn't like she'd accidently
peed in her pants, but caught herself before it was too late, oh no… it was like a flood. Oh God…
did… did her water just break? How the hell did she not notice that she was going into labor? In
retrospect, she could see the signs. But with all her false alarms recently, she'd chosen to ignore the
warnings.

"Kate?" Castle questioned, stepping back to look at her oddly.

Her face flushed with mortification as he noticed the gush of wetness soaking her leggings. He
furrowed his brow and looked up at her.

"What is it?"

"God… I… I think it might have worked," was all she could say, stumbling over her words, still
trying to wrap her head around what had just happened.

"What?" he was confused, no doubt about that. Castle stared at her with a mixture of puzzlement
and concern. "What worked?"

"The sex," she grunted out. "It worked!"

"How did it work?"

God, he really was a dolt sometimes. She grabbed his arm, squeezing his bicep tightly. "Castle…
oh… god, Rick… I think it's time."

But yet again, he seemed unclear as to her meaning. "Time? Time for what!?" he grabbed her
shoulders, staring into her eyes with an intensity and concern that made her want to sob. *Stupid
hormones!* He rubbed his thumbs affectionately against her shoulders. "Kate, honey, you're not
making any sense."

"Damn it, Castle! How stupid can you be?" she shouted at him, all but growling in frustration. "My
water just broke, you jerk, and you're just babbling on about not understanding what's going on.
Well, buddy, get it together, because this isn't a false alarm!"
"So you're sure it's not Braxton Hicks?" Castle asked slowly, as if he was talking to a child. She narrowed her eyes and fixed him with a glare that nearly had him cowering back in fear. "I wouldn't be standing in wet leggings if it was, Castle!" she growled out.

He gulped. "Okay. Definitely not Braxton Hicks," he bobbed his head in agreement. "We… we should get to the hospital… like… like now!"

Looking panicky, Castle rushed past her and bolted out the door. She stood there, stunned, shifting uncomfortably in her soaked leggings. It only took a moment for Castle to reappear, looking apologetic.

"Forgot something?"

"Sorry," he mumbled out, as he came up beside her and offered his hand.

She took it, gripping it harder than was required, just to reprimand him for his minor transgression of leaving the room without her. To be honest, Kate was kind of surprised he was so panicky. She would have thought that after going through Alexis's birth and then all her false alarms, this would have been old hat to him. Apparently, she was mistaken.

By the time they reached the stairs, she could already feel the contractions—the real contractions—start in. She fell back onto the breathing lessons from the Lamaze classes. Castle helped her down the stairs and back into their bedroom. He nudged her into the bathroom. She went numbly, focusing on her breathing and counting the seconds between each contraction. By her count, they didn't have to rush, but Kate was more than willing to indulge Castle on that. There was no way she was going to risk giving birth in anyplace other than the hospital under the supervision of Dr. Elam.

Castle returned with an old pair of sweatpants she'd picked out exactly for this reason. In his other hand was her cell phone. He handed it to her. She quickly dialed Dr. Elam and told her the news. Castle stripped her of her ruined leggings and boy shorts, and she just stood there, listening to Dr. Elam's instructions, letting him handle the process of cleaning her up and redressing her in clean clothes.

The rest was sort of a blur. Somehow she got a pair of ballet flats on, and then they were out the door, riding down the elevator, with Castle tapping his foot impatiently, like he was the one about to explode. She'd have to admit, the drive to the hospital was a little terrifying. Kate was looking forward to when she was behind the wheel again. Not that she was saying Castle was a bad driver, far from it. She just liked being in control. And he wasn't helping his case with his crazy driving right now.

Dr. Julie Elam met them at the nurse's station, having arrived a few minutes before them, and soon Kate was in a room being prepped for the final show. Castle dumped their duffel bag in the chair, and Kate let out a sigh of relief that in his panicked rush, he hadn't forgotten it. She'd spent months preparing that duffel bag. It would have been so very vexing if it had got left behind. She was just being eased down onto the bed, when Castle came up beside her and squeezed her hand.

"I'm just going to pop out for a moment and call everyone, let them know it's happening," he breathed out, looking both nervous and excited.

She gave him a smile and squeezed his hand. "Hurry back," she said.

"I will," he asserted, leaning down to kiss her, before darting out of the room, phone pressed to his
"I look ridiculous," he huffed, standing next to her, covered in the same protective surgical clothing that all the doctors and nurses were.

The time had come. The twins had kept them up all night, and Kate had been struggling with the labor. It was close to four in the morning, and it was finally time. God, she couldn't wait. She just wanted them out of her already.

"Nah," Kate shook her head, and smiled through the contraction. "You look kind of cute, Rick."

"Makes you want me, doesn't it?" he leaned close, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

She pursed her lips together, trying not to laugh. He grabbed her hand and laced theirs fingers together. Kate licked her lips and glanced down, noticing the gesture.

"You're sure you want to do that?" she asked. Castle nodded. "Okay. But don't say I didn't warn you."

"Considered me warned," he murmured, leaning over to press a kiss to her lips. She closed her eyes and thought of the feeling of his silken lips against hers, ignoring the pain of the contraction. Her face was drenched in sweat, and Castle kept insisting how beautiful she was.

"Stop, you'll make me blush," she forced out a chuckle, trying to focus on their banter and not on all the people currently looking between her legs. There was something inherently embarrassing about giving birth. It was the one time, other than her regular gynecology visits, that someone other than her husband got to view her intimate bits.

"Well, it's the truth," Castle asserted, caressing the side of her face with his free hand.

"I'll take you're word for it, Mr. Castle," she grunted, squeezing her eyes shut as a more intense contraction hit her. It rippled throughout her body, and she couldn't help but let out a tiny cry.

Castle tugged on her hand. "Look at me," he said softly, voice low and commanding. "Focus on me."

"I am," she huffed, tilting her head against the pillow and glaring at him.

"I love you," he said. "You're so fierce and brave."

Tears threatened her eyes as his words had the opposite effect than he had obviously intended. A sob broke out of her throat, and she clutched his hand tighter. "Oh, God, Castle…," she cried. "I wish she was here."

"I know," he soothed, moving his hand down her face, the pad of his thumb caressing her cheek. "I know. She'd be so proud of you. Like I am. She may not be here physically, but she's here in spirit."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so," Castle asserted, firm in his conviction. "She's always been with you, Kate. She never left you. As long as you carry her in your heart and remember her love, then she'll always be with you."
Kate sobbed, fighting through both her grief and the pains of childbirth. She glanced into the sincere and loving eyes of her husband, searching for any traces of deception. But she found none. She believed him. She believed him with her whole heart. And then, at that moment, she could feel her. She wasn't really there, but Kate could swear that she felt her mother's presence, soothing and reassuring her.

You can do it, baby girl. Your Mommy believes in you.

Long lost words from her childhood floated through her mind. She recalled her mother encouraging her younger self as she cautiously pushed the pedals on her brand new tricycle, learning to steer the new toy down the sidewalk for the first time, her mom and dad walking briskly behind her, never far or out of reach. It was a balm to her soul, that memory. And Kate let the feeling flow through her as she prepared herself for the moment she'd once given up on… becoming a mother.

Dr. Elam was calling her name, and Kate blinked her eyes, returning to the present. She felt a rippling sensation course through her body, and knew that it was time.

"Alright, Kate… it's time," Dr. Elam said, leaning down between her legs. "I need you to push for me. Push."

Kate gritted her teeth and clutched Castle's hand. Her back arched as she pushed with all her might. She wanted to scream so badly, but it was clogged up in her throat, strangled by the pain. I thought that damn epidural was supposed to help with that! she thought.

"Good, Kate," Dr. Elam called out. "You're doing great."

Kate bobbed her head absently, closing her eyes as she tried to envision her mother there, standing on her other side, encouraging her on, just as she had when she was a little girl. Castle squeezed her hand and murmured soothing words. His hand brushed across her brow, and was enough to pull her away from her fantasy. Kate gulped down a lungful of air, and gave him a weak smile.

Dr. Elam's firm voice broke through her fogged mind, and Kate clenched her jaw, obeying the instructions given to her. She cried out, the sound seeming to roar throughout the delivery room as her body rocked with the effort. She squeezed Castle's hand tighter as she felt a pain like no other, and she screamed, pushing with all her might. But then Dr. Elam was shouting for her to push again, and she did. And the pain was gone. Then, very faintly, she heard the cries of her firstborn.

The child wailed with gusto, and for a moment, a solitarily wonderful moment, Kate was a tease, cast adrift in an instant of bliss. She was a mother. She had a child, born of the love she shared with Castle, and from the strength of those screams, the first of the twins was healthy and strong. Kate breathed deeply, chest heaving as she glanced towards Castle. His eyes were averted, looking down towards her legs.

"Oh, Kate… she's beautiful," came Castle's voice, answering her unspoken question.

"Rebecca?" she gasped out the name they'd selected for their daughter.

"Yes," Castle bobbed his head, turning back to her, tears in his eyes. "And she's perfect, Kate. She's so perfect."

Kate propped herself up and gazed down at the foot of the birthing bed, watching as Dr. Elam held up a wrinkly red-faced newborn, mouth wide, a high pitch scream emanating from her tiny, yet powerful, lungs. The nurse swooped in, assisting with severing the umbilical cord. The task had been offered to Castle, but he'd declined, saying something along the lines that it was "too messy"
and that "once was enough."

And then, before she knew it, the nurse was coming around with the little pink thing in her arms, all wiggly and slick. Kate gazed upon the little creature with awe and wonder. The nurse smiled and placed the squirming baby on Kate's chest, giving her a moment to bond with her daughter.

"She's so beautiful, Castle," Kate cried, unable to take her eyes off the gorgeous little human wailing against her chest. She couldn't believe it. She'd done it. She'd made this little being with Castle. Rebecca was a mixture of her and Castle. And she was perfect. Kate smiled, her heart swelling with joy. She didn't know she could ever be this happy.

All too soon the nurse was lifting the wiggling newborn off her chest.

"What!? No," she strangled out, wanting her baby back.

"It's okay, Kate, I can see her," Castle assured her, squeezing her hand. "They're just washing her."

Kate bobbed her head, feeling overwhelmed by the experience. She had expected a little bit more time than that. A scowl formed over her face as she arched her neck to search for her daughter, wanting Rebecca back. She hadn't even been able to touch her yet. But before she could even look around, Kate felt a shift down below, and grimaced, figuring it must be her son turning into position. Castle brought up a cool washcloth and wiped away the sweat that was dripping down her forehead and stinging her eyes.

"Alright, Kate, here we go again," Dr. Elam said, taking a deep breath before shifting back down between Kate's legs. "Push."

Kate's head fell back into the cushions as she screamed, focusing all her energy on bringing her second child into the world.

"You're amazing, Kate," Castle reassured her, a soothing hand rubbing up and down her arm, helping to calm her. She honestly did not know what she'd do without him by her side.

"Okay, Kate. Again… push," Dr. Elam instructed.

Kate cried, tears running down her face as she tensed her muscles and pushed, willing her son to come.

"He's crowning," Dr. Elam said. "Now the shoulders. One more big push, Kate. You can do it."

Clenching Castle's hand in hers, Kate pushed, her heart hammering in her chest, breath clogged in her throat. There was but a moment's pause after her final push before the powerful burst of screams filled the room. Castle let out a cry of joy and turned towards her.

"You did it, Kate. He's here, and he's beautiful," he said, tears of happiness running down his face.

Kate breathed deeply, blinking her eyes and taking a moment to collect herself. Castle dabbed the cool washcloth against her forehead again, and she sighed with gratitude. She knew a nurse could have done that, but she was pleased he'd taken the job himself. No one could soothe or comfort her the way Castle could. And without her mother there, she only wanted it to be Castle.

Rebecca was already bundled into some swaddling cloth, and enjoying the comfort of her father's arms, when the nurse presented them with their son. Kate laid back against the pillows, exhausted, but in rapturous awe of the little wrinkly-faced boy being placed on her chest. He was small, smaller than his twin sister, but that was to be expected. But his lungs were powerful. She smiled,
bringing a shaky hand up to palm his little back, feeling the warmth of his brand new skin.

"Oh," tears leaked out of her eyes. "He's gorgeous, Castle. And he looks just like you."

"Handsome devil, isn't he," Castle smirked, gazing at her and his son with complete adoration. He scooted closer, holding Rebecca up so she could see her brother. "I know you two have spent nine months bumping heads, but you've yet to be formally introduced." Kate bit her lower lip at his proper and prim dictation, enjoying the show of Castle the father. "Rebecca Johanna Castle… meet Jonathan James Castle."

"Hi, Johnny, Mommy loves you." Kate said, smiling down at her son. She glanced back at Rebecca, who was squirming in Castle's arms. "And Mommy loves you too, Rebecca." Her eyes flicked up to Castle and she gave him a tired smile. "They're both so beautiful. Thank you."

"Thank you?" Castle repeated, giving her questioning look. "Why are you thanking me? I should be thanking you. You did all the work."

Kate chuckled softly, rubbing Johnny's back. "Well, I wouldn't have been able to without you, Castle." She swallowed down the rising emotions as she glanced up at him. "I love you. Thank you for loving me."

"I couldn't stop, even if I tried… and I won't," he grinned, waggling his eyebrows. "You're stuck with me, Detective. I'm completely and utterly in love with you and these two beautiful babies."

She smiled at him, and beckoned him with her eyes to come closer. He obeyed, leaning over to kiss her. When he pulled back, he dropped a kiss on Johnny's head and then Rebecca's, not leaving her out of the kisses.

A nurse came over to take Johnny away to be cleaned and weighed, and Kate nodded, letting her do her job. She rested her head back against the cushions and gazed up at Castle, watching as he cradled Rebecca close to his chest. The little girl was mewling softly and nuzzling into him.

"I felt it," Kate blurted out, pulling Castle's eyes away from their daughter. When he hummed in question, she continued. "That instant love you told me about. When the nurse placed Rebecca and Jonathan on my chest for the first time, I felt it. I love them, Castle. I love them so much."

Castle smiled at her. "I knew you would." He leaned over and pressed a kiss to her lips, lingering a little longer than before.

Kate sighed, feeling the exhaustion begin to sink it. "Told you," she murmured.

"Huh?" he blinked, confused.

She smiled lazily up at him. "I told you that next time it would be for real."

"That you did, Kate," Castle agreed, his smile warm and loving. "That you did."

Later, when it was all done, and Kate had been cleaned and given some time to rest, she woke to find Castle sitting in the chair beside her bed, a babe tucked in each arm. Kate shifted up into a sitting position and held out her arms, wanting to hold her babies. Castle pursed his lips, and gently deposited the twins into her waiting embrace.

Kate cradled them to her chest, lost for words. Castle stood next to her bedside, beaming with sheer joy. She looked up at him and smiled wide, all teeth and gum, so happy. So very happy. He brought a hand up and brushed back her arm, and she closed her eyes, easing into his touch.
"We have some visitors," he announced. "Everyone is dying to meet the new arrivals. Want me to let them in?"

"In just a moment," she said, turning to look back down at her babies, Rebecca and Jonathan. "But first I want to spend some time with just us. Join me."

He grinned, as she carefully scooted over, providing him with room to join her on the bed. Castle crawled in beside her and she handed him Jonathan. He held his son and smiled at Kate as she held Rebecca. She returned his smile and gaze, feeling her heart swell with all the love she had for this man and the children he gave her. She tilted her head up and captured his lips in a sweet kiss, relishing every second of this moment of just the four of them. Their little family.

Three years ago, Kate would never have imagined that she would one day find herself married to, yet alone bearing the children of her favorite mystery novelist. But here she was, happily married with two beautiful babies. She felt loved and blessed. Her life had seemed so dark and depressing that she would never have guessed that it was all just a minor part, a step along the road to what truly mattered. Castle had been a completely unexpected element, one she had never saw coming. But she wouldn't change any of it.

Kate felt whole and complete for maybe the first time in her adult life. And she owed so much of that to him… to his enduring and steadfast love. He had proven to be worth the risk she'd so feared he'd be. Her heart was so full of love for him that it was almost unreal, like a dream. But he was still there, after all they been through, he never left, never gave up. Throughout it all, he stood by her side and supported her, gave her courage to be more.

Life was made up of moments. In one, she was alone and desolate, lost. In the next, she was happy and complete, loved.

It was a funny thing, how fate worked. It never did as expected.

*) The End

Chapter End Notes

*A/N: First off, just wow. I seriously had some doubts there as to whether or not I’d ever finish this story. This was my first ever multi-chapter Castle fanfic and it was an amazing ride, which I thank you all for joining and supporting. I started this story back in June 2011, and finish it now in January 2014… that’s a long time. I could have kept going, extending and dragging everything out, but this just felt right. And I needed to give it an end before it became a long neglected story. I thank you for all the alerts, favs, and reviews encouraging me to keep going at it. It has been a pleasure.

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