Stolen Moments: Rollins & Carisi

by AvenuePotter

Summary

A filler fic series focusing on Rollins & Carisi.

Notes

Thanks to Emploding & Katben08 for the beta on Chapter 6 and to Katben08 for the beta from 6 -17 and 39 - 41 and SarahInColour for 18-38, parts of 41 & 42, and from 43 on. :-)
Carisi and Rollins are sitting at their desks, each working on paperwork detailing their actions from earlier that day. They had taken out the human trafficker Angel Perez along with the rest of the SVU team.

"Hey Carisi," Rollins says, looking up from her desk.

"Yeah?"

"You're not looking so good over there. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." He waves it away.

She knows he's full of it. Even though he's the new guy and she's known him for less than a week, he's pretty easy to read.

"Well, if you ever need to talk to someone . . ."

"You know what?" he says slamming down his pen. "Yeah, I'm not fine. I wish this whole undercover pervert thing wasn't part of the job. The look in that girl's eyes . . . even after she made
me as a cop... that's not who I am."

He sighs deeply and continues, "This time it was particularly bad – having to be rough with her like that. I feel like I'm one of them now." He shivers.

"Hey, look. You may have to act the pervert, but we all know you're not. Even you know that. You did your job and it helped get that girl off the street. You're the good guy here."

"Yeah, but I'm tired of always being chosen to play the pervert."

"Always?"

"Yeah, every precinct: Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, here. Anyone needs a pervert it's always 'Hey, Carisi'."

"Why do you think that is?"

"I don't know," he says resigned, hanging his head.

"I think I do."

"You do?" he asks, not looking her in the eye.

"Yeah," Rollins says, leaning forward on her desk with a wicked smile that he doesn't yet see. "It's that mustache. It makes you look like a porn star."

He reaches up and thoughtfully strokes it. Then he sees the smile on her face and grins back. They both dissolve into chuckles.

End Note: This chapter is dedicated to my husband's "pornstache" that he was sporting when we first met. I made him shave it off. LOL

Note on this work: For all of you Rollisi shippers out there please bear with me (I'm one, too). I'm starting this fic with Season 16 when Carisi first comes on the scene. Carisi and Rollins are just "bros" for quite a while so I will be writing them that way at first. I am not comfortable writing them romantically until it feels right to me – which won't be until a point in the show where I think this aspect of their relationship starts manifesting itself. Please be patient.
"Want me to talk to this girl?" An eager Carisi asks his Sergeant.

"Where are Fin and Rollins?"

"At a working lunch."

"Get them back in here."

Carisi sighs and picks up the phone and reaches Detective Rollins.

"Yeah."

"Hey, it's Carisi. Sergeant Benson wants you and Fin back here."

"What for?"

"There's this girl . . . on TV right now . . . she's accusing Shakir Wilkins of rape."
"Oh, no. Not him."

"Yeah, him. I offered the Sarge to check it out myself, but she wants you guys in here." He grumbles. "As usual."

She understood his frustration. "Carisi, you're the low man on the totem pole – it's going to take some time for Benson to think you can do any of this on your own."

"Yeah, I guess. But I really wanted to – " he almost whines.

Rollins interrupts him, "Carisi, let me give you some advice – don't be so eager. Just let it go and eventually Benson will trust you. Right now, I think you're freaking her out."

"Yeah, she doesn't trust me." He knows she doesn't.

"You want some more advice Carisi? Stop being such a goofball. You're beginning to freak me out."

"Yeah, right." He smiles into the receiver. "You like it."

Eventually, after an excruciatingly long wait Carisi finally gets sent out into the field. He and Rollins are heading out to Sharkwear's flagship store in Times Square to interview Tiana, a girl who had told Mr. Baur, the head of Orion sportswear, that she had also been raped by Shakir.

Rollins says something to the girl that makes Carisi think.

"From personal experience, pretending something didn't happen doesn't make it go away," she says. The girl starts crying.

What Rollins had said earlier bothers him as they leave the store and he is curious.

"Hey, Rollins – what you said back there . . . your personal experience – "

"Mind your own business, Carisi," she says, irritated and begins to brush past him in order to walk in front. He suspects it's so he can't see her expression.

As she passes him she says dismissively, "It's nothing. Just a way to empathize with the vics – get them to open up."

"Okay," he feigns an amiable, casual attitude. But he knows she's lying and wonders what happened to her.

The goofball brings in a pizza for everyone as they are mulling over the Shakir Wilkins case back at the precinct. It's goat cheese and sun-dried tomato. And he's proud of it.

Carisi grins at Rollins as he tells them, "I'm full of surprises."

She groans inwardly. This guy obviously does not know how to take advice.

Then he proceeds to make an insensitive comment about how things could have played out – a man, a woman, alone in a room . . . he doesn't believe the girls are telling the truth about Shakir and has no qualms about letting his team know it.
"Carisi, remind me why you're SVU again?" a frustrated Benson asks. She's been unhappy that this tactless clown has been assigned to her department and everyone knows it.

But then in all seriousness he tells him about his experience working Homicide. It becomes obvious to everyone listening that he couldn't handle it emotionally when he starts talking about the women who had been murdered. He says it was always the husband or the boyfriend and that, "It's like they knew - they knew it was coming."

And then he says quietly, hauntingly, "They don't even look surprised. Just finished."

Amanda begins to get uncomfortable at his display of intense emotion and looks down. She doesn't want to see any man like this.

And then he shrugs it off saying, "It doesn't make me treasure every moment or any of that crap."

She knows he's lying, but now she also knows that despite his brash exterior, he's more than just some uncouth lout from Staten Island.

He's not just some uncouth lout from Staten Island.
A filler fic series focusing on Rollins & Carisi. This chapter takes place during Season 16 Episode 3.

"I liked you better with the 'stache," Rollins sneers at him and walks off.

Carisi strokes his bare upper lip. When did Rollins turn into such a bitch? Was it something he said? He groaned. It was always something he said.

This is when she starts getting irritated with him.

And now this?
"Get a statement from Durant. And take Carisi with you," Sergeant Benson commands her.

That's it. This is when it becomes too much.

"Yeah, about that – when do we get Nick back?"

Benson tells her she doesn't know. As they head out of her office she tells Amanda, "Keep showing Carisi the ropes – It's really helping."

Bullshit.

"Nick, this guy . . . Oh, I don't know."

"What? He can't be that bad," Nick smiles and relaxes back on her couch.

Amanda gives him a stern look.

"You know, Benson was looking for someone to fill in for you – someone good with the vics. We've been so short staffed." She shakes her head. "But then this guy blows in here with a bag of zeppole – whatever those are – and tells us to call him Sonny."

"Friendly guy."

"He's annoying," she says sharply.

Nick just grins and says nothing.

She shrugs, gives out a little laugh, and then settles back on the couch with him.

"Benson didn't like him at first. When she told him she was expecting an experienced empathetic detective can you believe he told her that he's sensitive and moody and that he can do that whole 'empathy thing'? This guy was so unreal I was trying not to laugh. Unfortunately, now Benson seems to think I'm a good influence on him." She groans.

"I can't wait to meet the guy."

"Oh, yeah. You'll get along real well. Two peas in a pod." She rolls her eyes.

"How 'bout I take a run at Brubeck? See if he wets his pants?" Carisi says like an overeager puppy as they are discussing how best to go after this producer with pedophilic predilections. Amanda was not wrong about this guy.

"Were you sick when they went over statutes of limitations in law school?" she sputters at him.

She is so frustrated with him it's cute. Nick can't help but smile.

All three of them "drop in" on Adam Brubeck's pool party with a contingent of Unis. Amaro and Rollins head over to the cabanas to have a word with Brubeck while Carisi checks the ID's of a bunch of underage girls. Then he heads back to the cabana where he last saw Brubeck. As he ducks into it to give Rollins and Amaro an update on what he's found, he notices that they are standing close together. It is subtle, but they are still a little bit closer than one would expect.

But Carisi is not subtle, "Uh, sorry am I interrupting?"
Rollins takes a second and then says almost guiltily, "No. No. We were just leaving."

"Uh yeah. It just looked like something else," Carisi says uncomfortably.

Amaro gives him an annoyed look as he brushes past him.

Amaro and Rollins? What the fuck? Carisi slowly follows them out of the cabana, more than one step behind, still contemplating. How the hell did those two get together?

But at least now he knows why she was such a bitch to him the other day. He had called Nick a "disaster magnet" just before she snapped at him. He shook his head. His big mouth always got him in trouble.

Later that night while he's trying to catch up on some reading for school, Carisi is still pondering how two hotheads like Rollins and Amaro could even function as a couple without imploding. And that makes him think of Valerie.

"Yo Valerie! How's my girl?" Carisi bellows in to the phone.

"I'm not your girl anymore," she laughs.

"Yeah, but you miss me."

"Maybe I do," she says in a non-committal, but friendly voice. "So what's up?"

"Well, I'm trying to do good at my job here . . ."

"Of course you are."

"Yeah, you know me . . . Hey listen, I was wondering if you knew anything about this slime ball producer Brubeck."

"A producer, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Sonny, you do realize that everyone who lives in LA is not necessarily connected to the movie industry?"

"Yeah, but I know you've got some dirt on this guy – so spill."

She does.

Later as they are wrapping up their conversation he says to her, "Hey look, Valerie. I'm sorry for the way things ended between us."

"Yeah, me too."

"Goodnight."

As the SVU team meets in Barba's office the next day Carisi is eager to give them the information he's uncovered from Valerie.

"I made a few calls," he tells the group.
Amanda cuts him off rudely, "Yeah, you know what? So did I."

He stands back, irritated while she presents the research she's done on Brubeck. Stuff you could find online.

After she's done, Barba asks Rollins if any of the likely victims have pressed charges. She doesn't answer.

Carisi sees the opportunity to jump in so he does. He relays to them the information he had just learned last night and without really thinking about it he casually mentions that he got this information from an ex of his that works for the LAPD.

"He has an ex?" Amanda says as she's walking her dog with Nick later that night.

"What, you got a problem with that?"

"No – it's just . . . Who would date that guy?" she looks up at him with a slight squint in her eyes.

"Some people have the strangest bedfellows."

"I guess."
Carisi hears them arguing by the vending machine. Actually he thought he saw Rollins give Amaro a good shove out of the corner of his eye – that’s what caught his attention in the first place. And he was a curious guy – figured he could just stroll over there and “accidentally” walk in on whatever they were arguing about, just “innocently” overhear at least a part of it.

He goes over there as slowly, quietly, and unobtrusively as he can.

“And again, I’m asking you why couldn’t you stop them?” Rollins was demanding of Amaro.

“I’ve told you over and over the decision wasn’t ours to make,” he says with frustration, throwing up
his hands.

“And you’ve never really given me a straight answer – did you even try? Didn’t you trust that I could handle the situation? That boy didn’t need to die.”

Neither of them noticed that Carisi had joined them. He had just slipped in under the radar.

“Amanda, just let it go. We’ve been arguing about this all week – “

“Ugh guys?” Carisi is feeling uncomfortable enough that despite his earlier desire to eavesdrop he now feels that he should make his presence known.

“Yeah?” they both say sharply tilting their heads towards him.

“Uh . . .” now that he had gotten their attention he didn’t know how to proceed. “Uh . . .”

“Yeah, whatever,” Nick says and leaves.

Rollins stands there, arms crossed just shaking her head at Amaro’s retreating back.

“Uh, yeah, um, I’m gonna leave now,” Carisi says, slowly backing away.

“Sure,” Rollins says, distracted.

Benson comes out of her office and looks around at her squad, evaluating. She needs some surveillance done and finally calls out to Rollins, “Hey I need you and Carisi to go – “

“Wait, Sergeant, it’s my first day back after passing my psych eval and you’re sticking me with HIM?”

“Hey, it’s no picnic for me, either.” Carisi shoots back.

Rollins rolls her eyes.

“No,” Benson says. “It will be good for you guys. Give you a chance to bond.”

And then she smirks.

They are sitting in an unmarked car in a fairly rundown neighborhood. Carisi had a tendency to drone on and on in an attempt to be entertaining but it only annoyed the hell out of Rollins given the mood she was in, so she had asked him to keep his trap shut quite a while ago. He is trying to comply, but the act of attempting to stay quiet for so long just makes him squirm and sigh. His fidgeting is almost comical. She is thinking of giving him a reprieve when suddenly there is a loud pop and a quiet tinkling of broken glass outside of their vehicle.

Instantly she raises her hands to her face.

He startles a bit at the noise of a young kid breaking an empty Snapple bottle on the ground too close to their car. Carisi rolls down the window.

"Hey, what'd you do that for?” he admonishes the kid and he runs off. Then he turns back to Rollins. Something’s wrong.
“Rollins, hey Rollins – are you okay?”

She is frozen, her hands almost to her cheeks.

“I had him. It was done.”

What is she talking about? “Amanda?”

She wipes her hands down her dry cheeks and studies her palms, her fingers. “Oh my god, the blood! It’s all over me!”

There is no blood.

“Hey,” Carisi takes her by the wrists. “Stay with me, Amanda.”

She roughly pulls her hands away and rubs furiously at her cheeks and over her brow. “The blood! Get it off me!”

“Amanda – “

“Get it off me!” she screams, her eyes frantic.

“Okay,” Carisi says reasonably, pulling one of her hands from her face and patting it. “We’ll get you cleaned up.”

He reaches into his suit pocket for a handkerchief. His sisters always give him a hard time for having one – they consider it so old-fashioned. But hey, it often came in handy – like right now.

He holds it out to her but she just stares at it blankly.

“Here, let me,” he says softly and folds the hanky in a way so that he can use a corner of it to wipe at her face. Her bloodless face.

She starts crying. “There’s so much. There’s too much. It won’t work.”

“Sure it will,” he says comfortingly and continues.

She continues touching her face and looking at her hands, interfering with the handkerchief. And then in a sudden wave of panic she says, “It’s still everywhere! Please get it off me.”

“Hey, Amanda.” He takes the side of her head and makes her look at him even through her sobbing. “The blood will all go away. You’ll be clean. You gotta trust me on this. Can you do that?”

She trembles, her hands still pulling at her face. “I had him. They didn’t trust me.”

“I know,” he said.

“He died because he got too close. To me. Because I drew him in.” Her hands stop pulling at her face and her startling blue eyes bore into his, looking almost green from all of the tears. “He trusted me.”

Silence passes between them. Silence and understanding. Until Carisi breaks it.

“It’s all gone now,” Carisi says softly and pulls down the visor to reveal the mirror. “Look.”
Chapter End Notes

I noticed that between Episode 3 and Episode 5 Carisi and Rollins went from total annoyance with each other to something softer. And I imagined something like this may have happened anyway - that kind of trauma changes you.
Carisi grabs her elbow to stop her as she calls out to the girl.

"Amanda, walk away," he says sternly.

The two of them stand there watching Evie Banks slip back into the world of RoXXXanne Demay as she takes her position on a mattress surrounded by more than a dozen glistening, muscular men. During her rape trial when asked why she chose to work in this particular type of porn she had replied succinctly, "The specialty genres pay more."

She is about to get beaten and gang raped for the camera again – her specialty.

Carisi lets go of Amanda's elbow and instead touches the side of her arm to turn her away from the scene, "It's not our choice."
His palm rests gently on her back as they walk away.

Olivia and Amanda could only watch in horror as Evie's mother played the video she had left behind in her college dorm room earlier that day. Evie had silently held up an iPad to her chin, text scrolling upon it, tears swimming in dark brown eyes that were too ashamed to look directly at the camera:

"Because I chose to work in porn, two boys raped me."

"Because the judge didn't believe me, one of my rapists was set free."

"I didn't choose any of that. My choices were taken away."

"And now I only have one left. Goodbye."

Benson had sent Carisi and Rollins out to find Evie Banks. They had found RoXXXanne Demay in her place.

And then they walked away.

"I can't believe we left her like that," Amanda says to Carisi, dejectedly dropping her straw back into her glass as they sit together at a diner. They had stopped there for a bite to eat during their long drive back from New Hampshire and it was the first thing she had said to him since they left.

"Amanda, we had no choice. She had already made hers. Like it or not, we have to respect that."

"But what kind of a choice is that, Carisi?"

"Hers," he says firmly.

"She got sucked into porn to pay for college in the first place. Now she won't go back? After everything this has cost her? Are you telling me she went through all of this for nothing?"

"Let me ask you something, Amanda," Carisi says carefully, "Did you ever think that perhaps this isn't just a career choice? Her decision to leave college behind for porn?"

"What are you saying?"

"Remember how she told us that at least on set when she tells the guys to stop, they do?"

"Yeah."

"Well, perhaps she's choosing not to be a victim."

Amanda stiffens at Carisi's words. This hits way too close to home for her and now she fully understands Evie's choice. She wonders if Carisi notices the change in her.

He does.

Note: This is the first time he calls her Amanda. *squee*

Chapter End Notes
This is the first time he calls her Amanda. *squee*
She wakes up in the night drenched in sweat – it feels like blood.

"Amanda? Hey, Amanda!" Nick bolts upright in bed, alarmed because she is screaming. And then with an abrupt halt she stops and covers her face with her hands.

"The blood. The blood."

After her screaming ceases, she begins whimpering this phrase over and over again. She doesn't even know he's there – her hands are on her face and she won't remove them even as he tries to pry them off.

"Amanda? Hey – Amanda, it's not real." Then Nick says firmly, "Amanda, stop."

She stares at him through the fingers on her face. Her whimpering stops.

"Hey, it's okay," he says softly.

"No, it's not. Get it off, Nick. Get it off of me!"

"It's not there," he says, the firmness back in his voice.

"Get away from me!" she screams and runs into the bathroom. She slaps water onto her face over and over again, leaning over the sink, shaking with the effort. She can't get the blood off.

Nick is pounding on the door, demanding that she let him in. She barely hears him – he is just a din
in the background of ick that is all over her.

Eventually she feels the defeat – her absolute inability to cleanse herself. To get Holden's blood off of her. Right now she resents the man on the other side of the door – he didn't trust her to handle the situation and now that boy was dead. All over her face.

She slumps against the wall across from the toilet, tilting her head back, letting the blood drip off of her face, onto her shoulders and then down to the floor.

What feels like hours pass before she comes back to reality and feels sheepish, embarrassed for having to be this mess Nick tries to take care of.

When she crawls back to bed with him she gives him a quick, quiet, "Sorry."

"It's okay," he mumbles, pulling her back into him. "You can't help it."

Nick and Amanda get into it a little while searching a missing girl's bedroom for clues to where thirteen-year-old best friends, Perry and Mia might have gone. Mia's younger sister Zoe had been found within the woods of Inwood Hill Park, stabbed. Originally, the other two had been with her, but now were nowhere to be found.

"Liv's on the way to the hospital, I told her you'd join. Take Perry's mom." Nick instructs her.

"No, you know what? You take her, I'm going to go to the park."

"Hey, we don't know what we're dealing with – "

" Seriously, you don't think I can handle myself?"

"No, that's not what I meant." He says, voice raised.

"Good."

She tells him he's better at handling Olivia anyway and hears his loud frustrated sigh as she brushes past him. Unbelievable. He still doesn't trust that she can take care of herself.

They have a crazy man in custody fitting the description of "The Glasgowman" that Zoe had described as the man she saw in the park, possibly her attacker. His real name is Charlie Dorsey. Sergeant Olivia Benson is trying to figure out who would be best to interrogate him given his flimsy state of mind. The truth of what had really happened to the girls was going to be difficult to ascertain.

Olivia asks her team, "Did he say anything about Perry or Mia?"

Carisi is quick to answer, "No, he clammed up. He claims he has no idea."

"Okay, why don't I take a run at him?" Nick volunteers.

"No disrespect, Nick," Carisi jumps in, and then addresses Olivia. "But I think I think he trusts me, Sarge."

"But you just said he clammed up," Nick disagrees, smiling unbelievably.

The two men stare each other down for a bit. Olivia's eyes look from one man to the other. Then she asks for Amanda's opinion.
Amanda is a bit startled at being put in this uncomfortable position, but thinks back to when she and Carisi had come upon "Glasgowman" hiding inside a small cave within a mound of boulders in the park. The inexperienced police officer who was with them was shaking as he shot the homeless man with a tazer, panicking that he wasn't going down. It was her and Carisi that were finally able to subdue him. Carisi had been able to talk him down, allowing Amanda to cuff him. He seems to have the magic touch with crazy people. Herself included.

She thinks Carisi would be better with him than Nick and tells Olivia that.

As Carisi follows Olivia into the interrogation room he gives Amanda a small smile and a brief nod. She can tell that Nick is pissed and he still has that unbelieving smile on his face, but this time it is directed at her. Then the two of them stand together in silence and watch the interrogation. He may be pissed at her for choosing Carisi over him, not trusting his competence in this matter, but she's still a little mad at him too. For basically the same reason.

Amanda has been carefully observing the way Carisi has interacted with Charlie the whole day. Something about his way with Charlie fascinates her.

Carisi had been able to get him to agree to take them to where he lived in the woods. They were hoping to find "the device" he had mentioned. It sounded like some kind of video recorder that might provide clues as to what may have happened to the still missing girls.

When they reach the entrance to his dwelling, Charlie asks him to move his eye patch to the other side.

"So you can see in the dark?" Carisi asks.

When Charlie nods Carisi replies, "I get it."

And then he moves it over for him.

Unexpectedly, Amanda's heart lurches at the sight and she takes in a sharp breath. Carisi looks back at her and she looks down. She can't help but think how gentle and understanding he's being with Charlie and it causes a flutter of uncomfortable feelings in her that she needs to bury. Now.

After they find "the device" Carisi lets Charlie know that they need to return to the station even though he protests that he wants to stay there.

Earlier she had tried to bury those uncomfortable feelings, which she has partially succeeded at, but her mind doesn't stop trying to figure out how Carisi is reaching Charlie, succeeding at getting his cooperation. It can't just be his gentleness towards the man . . .

Suddenly she understands.

Amanda joins Carisi in Charlie's world - assisting him in convincing the homeless man to leave his only dwelling behind.

"You know what? It's okay, you guys go on ahead and I'll stay and make sure nobody comes in, alright?" She is pretending that she will be standing guard to reassure a paranoid Charlie, yet has every intention of getting the Crime Scenes Unit in to investigate. ASAP.

Charlie turns to Carisi and says with a little panic in his voice, "Okay. I need you to switch my eye patch to the other side. I don't want the sun to blind me."
Amanda watches as Carisi carefully moves Charlie's eye patch over to his other eye. Carisi has been treating the crazy man with dignity and respect the whole time – like a real human being. He looks back at her as they leave and she remembers how he had been with her.

With the blood.

Whether it had really been there or not it didn’t matter. To her it had been splattered all over her face - it was her reality in that moment. When she had slipped into that place in front of Carisi, he had entered into her world too. Just like he was doing with Charlie. The world of the mad.

He had gently wiped the non-existent blood from her face, talking her down from her panic. She had been able to come back to reality and come to grips with not only her anger at Nick, but at the root of the problem - the guilt that had been gnawing away at her and still did. That boy wouldn't have died if she hadn't . . .

She sighs and forces herself to come back to the present and do her job. She is still in the world of the sane after all – for now.
Amanda's Reality

Chapter Summary

A filler fic series focusing on Rollins & Carisi. Amanda' Reality. This chapter takes place during Season 16 Episode 6.

Carisi and Rollins are listening to Mia give her statement about their trip to Inwood Hill Park, their disappearance, and her little sister getting stabbed and being left for dead in the middle of the woods. She is now claiming that it was all orchestrated by her best friend Perry.

At one point, one of Mia's mothers breaks in and says, "Do you see this? Perry has made a victim out of both of my daughters. There was always something off about that girl."

He notices that Rollins can barely contain a roll of her eyes. Why?

"We understand," she says with forced patience towards the mother and then looks back at the girl, "Keep going Mia."

Carisi is confused. Why isn't Rollins buying this?

Benson and Amaro interview Perry along with a court psychiatrist while Rollins and Carisi observe. Perry tells a fanciful tale about how she is under the control of Glasgowman who had communicated his wishes to her telepathically – instructing her to find him, follow him to the gatehouse, and do the horrific things that she is now admitting to. Stabbing Zoe . . . stabbing herself. She sounds mentally ill. When they come out Benson asks the court psychiatrist for her opinion on Perry. She tells them that her first impression is that Perry is not competent to stand trial.

"For what it's worth, there was no sign of this behavior before she knew that we were on to her," Benson says. The detectives had confronted the girls earlier, letting them know that the timelines they had given for the events of the previous night didn't match up with known facts.

They had both abruptly changed their stories.
But the psychiatrist holds her ground – she insists that Perry's actions alone prove that something is off.

Amanda asks incredulously, "And we don't think Mia's involved?"

"Nah," Carisi answers her, shrugging her off. "I have an easier time believing that she's under Perry's spell – she's scared to death – than believing that she stabbed her own sister and left her for dead."

He gives a dismissive shake of his head.

_What a naïve fool._ Even Benson can see it – there's way more to this story. Amanda walks away.

"Hey!" Carisi calls out to her, following her.

"Yeah?" she says, turning back a little.

He catches up to her. "You're not buying it?"

"Nope."

"Why?"

"Carisi look, you weren't with Olivia and me when Zoe was giving her statement. That girl is terrified of her sister and Perry."

"Perry, I get. But why would she be scared of her own sister?"

"Look, if you had been in there with us, you might get it." She studies him carefully. _Or actually, maybe you might not._

Later Rollins and Carisi are sitting at their desks and she feels like she should try to explain all of this to him. Sometimes he just needs a little help understanding things – he's still a little green.

"Do you have any sisters, Carisi?"

He grins, "Three of them, yes."

"They always get along?"

"Well . . . not always. They fought you, know, when we were kids. Who didn't?"

"And it never got ugly?"

"Ugly? Are you kidding me? No, we're family. We love each other. They always kissed and made up."

"You sound as trusting and naïve as Zoe."

His brow furrows, "How so?"

"You know, we asked Zoe if Mia had ever hurt her accidentally," she emphasizes the word 'accidentally.'

"And?"

"She said that yes, it happened sometimes. But she couldn't believe that it was ever anything more
"Yeah, and neither can I."

She sighs, frustrated that Carisi cannot make this leap. Now it's her turn to shake her head dismissively. "You just don't understand sisters."

"I understand MY sisters," he says defensively. "And they would never ever do something like that – leave their own flesh and blood behind in the woods like that? Cut open to die?"

"You know they did more than just leave her behind, Carisi."

"No, I don't. Families . . . no . . . sisters don't do that," he replies, shaking his head adamantly, refusing to believe something so horrific.

"Yeah, you and your fluffy bunny family . . . " Amanda mutters under her breath, shaking her head and looking away.

"What did you just say?"

"Nothing." She looks back and him and gives him a hard smile that is almost condescending. "Look, it's just that you don't understand what's truly going on here – you can't. You're blind."

"A sister would not stab her own sister and leave her to die." Carisi responds firmly. "Of that I have no doubt."

"Nice world you live in." She stands up, grabs her purse, and leaves for the day.

*And what world do you live in, Amanda? It's a pretty freakin' dark place.*

Carisi sits with Rollins in family court listening to Perry's testimony; about how since the police have entered Glasgowman's realm and saved the girls the world itself is now an unbalanced place. Mishmash and mumbo jumbo that you'd hear coming from a troubled mind. Even though it's obvious she's crazy, Rollins still looks over at him with a 'can you believe this?' look on her face. He looks back at her, troubled.

When the judge declares that Mia is not responsible and that Perry is to be sent to a psychiatric facility until it is determined that she is no longer a threat to herself or others, Rollins agitatedly tugs each side of her jacket together. She does not look happy at this verdict. As they walk to the elevator she expresses just how upset she is that Mia got off and Perry basically got soft time.

"Rollins, justice was served, alright? Perry is Looney Tunes and Mia and Zoe would never hurt each other."

"If you say so," she says with doubt as she steps into the elevator ahead of him.

*What is wrong with her? Why does she doubt him?*

Mia and her mothers step in after them. And then Perry, escorted in handcuffs by a bailiff, joins them. As Carisi stands behind them he notices that Mia and Perry covertly join pinkies and exchange secretive looks.

*What the hell?*

With a sick twist in his stomach he realizes that the world is a much darker place than he had
imagined. A place where families aren't always sanctuaries from the outside world.

*Amanda knew this. But how?*

Disturbed, he looks over at her. She is staring straight ahead, ignoring him.
This chapter takes place during Season 16 Episode 8.

There is banging on his door. Loud, insistent banging.

"Go away!" Carisi shouts. He had already let himself get distracted enough when he accidentally caught Paula Martin's broadcast on television. Ever since, thinking about it had only made it difficult for him to stay focused. He really needed to get back to studying since he was taking time off from work to prepare for exams.

But when he saw Paula onscreen, he had been conflicted. He knew his precinct had caught the case and wanted to be there with them. Women like Paula were the whole reason he had switched from Homicide to SVU.

People were perplexed as to why she was standing by A.J. when the video that had recently been leaked showed him clearly punching her in the face – so hard that she had passed out. Paula had adamantly told the crowd of reporters, "There are people invested in me playing the victim here. That's not going to happen. I take full responsibility for provoking the unfortunate events of six weeks ago."

Carisi shook his head in frustration while he had been watching – it sickened him. He had seen this over and over again. Paula knew exactly what A.J. was doing to her – he could have killed her with that punch. Sure, she may not have wanted to be seen as a victim by others, but unfortunately, that only meant that she had to just accept it – that this was the way she would be treated. Like all of those dead women he had seen. It was depressing as hell.

The banging continues.

"What?" he shouts in frustration, finally getting out of his chair, tossing his pen on his desk, and slamming one of his law books closed. If it was important, whoever it was should have called. He begrudgingly goes to the door and opens it with a sigh.
"Nick is such a pussy," she grumbles as she brushes past him. Her arm clumsily bangs into his as she passes. He can feel her sweat beneath the sheer fabric of her blouse as it seeps through.

"Amanda?"

Once she's in his apartment she turns around and gives him a big smile and an odd laugh.

"Are you drunk?" he demands.

"Are you studying?" she looks around. "If you're going to law school I think you'd be smart enough to figure that out on your own."

"What do you want?" he crosses his arms and purses his lips. This is really cutting in to his study time.

"I thought you might understand," she says coyly and prances up to him walking her fingers up his chest.

He grabs her hand to stop her.

"Understand what?"

"That not all of us want to be saved."

His eyebrows come together as he contemplates this.

And then she jerks her hand out of his and shoves him.

"Hey!" he yells, taken aback.

"Nick couldn't take it, can you?" she says and shoves him again. Hard.

"He walked away. Just walked away." She throws her hands into the air. "What a pussy. He didn't even give me a chance to defend myself."

She starts pushing him again, "Are you a pussy, too?"

"Amanda, stop." he says forcefully and restrains her by holding her arms to her sides.

"Ah hah! Got a little fire here. A little anger," she hisses into his face and then jerks herself free.

"Is this what you did to Nick tonight?" he demands.

She snorts, turning away with a strange smile on her face. She is so drunk.

"Huh?" he asks when she doesn't answer him.

She just shakes her head, still facing away.

"You shouldn't be doing that to him."

She turns back around. "What about you?"

"Amanda, I don't have as much invested in you as he does. I can take it. I'm not sure he can."

"Yeah, he's invested alright. Saint Nick – savior of broken women." She harrumphs. "What did you call him – a disaster magnet?"
"Yeah, something like that."

"Boy were you right. He's out to save everybody."

"Including you?"

She lets out a huff and turns around again.

"You know, you can't save someone who doesn't want to be saved." Carisi says to her back.

Quickly she turns back around again, her balance off, almost losing it. As her arms flail, he grabs them - grabs her, and prevents her from falling.

"And you don't want to be saved," he says quietly looking down at her, still holding her. It is not a question. It is a statement.

"I AM NOT A VICTIM!" she screams at the top of her lungs, getting spittle all over his face. It reeks of alcohol.

They stare each other down for a while. Her face is a mask of pure anger and his a mask of sympathy.

And then she throws up all over him.

She is passed out now and he had laid her out on his couch quite a while ago. He keeps trying to study but it is even harder now. What the hell happened to her?

It is obvious that she is damaged. Someone broke her.
"Dig the socks," Carisi says as he gives Barba the once over.

"Thanks," Barba says briskly, keeping his feet up on his desk, revealing his bright red and yellow socks.

"Never seen you look so casual before."

"Today's my lucky day. I'm enjoying it," he says sardonically.

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"I've got a light case load and thanks to me graciously agreeing to help you out with your little problem with the university any tedious work I was planning to do to today will be handled by you.” Barba takes his feet off of his desk, tips forwards in his chair, grabs a huge stack of briefs, papers, and folders, and slams it down in front of Carisi.

Carisi, instead of being overwhelmed, actually looks excited. It figures.

With that, Barba propels himself out of the chair, grabs his suit jacket, and heads for the door. He stops at the door jam, and looks back at Carisi who has already started digging his way through the work. Carisi looks back up at him.

"Thanks," he says with a wide grin. "Thank you so much."

Barba just shakes his head and leaves.
It's been a few hours and Carisi is still working through the stuff that Barba had left him. He's halfway through, but he needs to get up and stretch.

As he makes his way to the window he notices a peculiar thing on one of Barba's bookshelves. He hasn't seen one of these in years. He picks up the black box and rolls it around in his hands – it's heavier than it looks. He pops open the case to find a mini-cassette inside. Who uses these things anymore?

He takes the cassette to the window to get a better look at the tiny, meticulous writing on its label.

"Rollins. January 7th."

He blinks, perplexed.

Carisi thinks back to when he had first returned to the precinct after missing a lot of work and school while dealing with a personal crisis. His Uncle Sal had had another psychotic break over the holidays and Carisi had needed to help his mother to get him institutionalized. Which means that now he needs to do a ton of make-up work for school. The only good thing that had come from all of it was that it allowed him to do this mini-internship with Barbra.

He had noticed that Amanda had been gone upon his return. Amaro had told Carisi that Amanda was taking some time off because the last case had been rough on her. But he had no idea that she had actually testified. His curiosity is piqued.

He goes to the door and notices that the office is mostly deserted. Even so, he carefully and quietly shuts the door for privacy.

He settles back in at the desk and puts the tape back into the recorder. When he hits the play button the recording just kind of ends so he rewinds it. When he hits play again, Amanda's startlingly clear voice comes through.

"My sister was facing felony charges and Deputy Chief Patton called me into his office, said we could fix the problem."

"What did you infer he meant by that?" he heard Barba ask her.

"That if I had sex with him my sister would not be prosecuted."

Wait. What?

She asks Barba, "Is this necessary? It's not like I've never testified before."

She has interrupted her own testimony – and he can hear through the hesitation in her words that she is getting very uncomfortable.

"I know you've testified before - not about your own assault," Barba says reasonably. "If the judge allows this, we need to be ready. Okay?"

Carisi presses the stop button. Her own assault? Oh. My. God. He stands up and paces the room, one hand on his hip, thinking.

No wonder she hadn't wanted to go back to Georgia. He had heard it in her voice on the phone, speaking to her former captain before she left to gather evidence from the Atlanta PD on the Pattern 17 case. He had picked up on something . . . he knew something had been wrong and he had offered
to go with her . . . but was it this?

He stops pacing and places his hand on the back of his head, looking down at the floor. Damn. Did she actually testify? He goes back and shuffles through the papers on Barba's desk and finds a transcript of her testimony. It looks like it had been submitted to the judge, but she had denied Barba's request for Amanda to testify because it was determined to be more prejudicial than probative. He goes back to the recorder and starts playing it again.

". . . we need to be ready. Okay?"

"Yeah."

"Alright."

Carisi sits down and listens to Amanda continue.

"Detective Rollins, did you consent to sex with Deputy Chief Patton?"

There is a very long silence and even though Carisi was not present to hear her disclose this information, he can feel the waves of trepidation rolling off of her. She really doesn't want to do this. He wonders why she is.

"At first yes. We met at a motel and . . . and I laid down on the bed. He was drunk, grabbing at me, and pulling off my clothes, and I asked him to slow down."

Shit.

"And he got rough with me. Bit me. Slapped me. Banged my head against the headboard."

He really doesn't want to hear this – to know this happened to her of all people. She's so strong. But still, he listens.

"I ... I was bleeding. And – "

Tears pinch at his eyes.

There is long pause as she works hard to continue.

"I tried to get up, but he said . . ."

Pause.

"Amanda, you know I don't take no for an answer."

"Then what happened, detective Rollins?"

Pause.

"Deputy Chief Patton pinned my wrists above my head . . ."

Another long pause. This was excruciating to listen to.

"And he told me I wasn't going anywhere and that no one would believe me anyway."

Pause.

"I gave up."
Oh god no.

"He raped me."

Carisi buries his head within his folded arms on the desk. The tape clicks to a stop.

Barba returns to his office and finds him that way.

"Hey, are you alright?"

Carisi startles.

"Uh, yeah. Yeah I'm fine here." He stands up, sniffing. Barba can't see his face. "Just some allergies, you know – giving me a headache."

He sniffs again and wipes at his nose, brushing past Barba, not meeting his eyes. "I'll be right back."

Barba looks down at the desk and sees the transcript of Detective Rollins' testimony and the mini-tape recorder beside it.

"Damn," he whispers.
"Carisi – You're here?!" Amanda is a little startled as she opens her door on a bright sunny morning. Sun piercing into your eyes after a red-eye flight is brutal. And it's February – the sun has no right to be this bright today.

"Yes, I am," he exclaims as bright as the sun himself. "May I come in? I've got breakfast."

She smiles tiredly, "I was just unpacking. . ."

"Oh, that's right. Nick said you'd be coming home on the red-eye. Somehow I forgot that part and only remembered that you'd be home today." He grins sheepishly. "Sorry about that. Can I still come in?"

"Sure," she said. She didn't want to make the effort to fight off this ball of enthusiasm right now.

He comes in and looks around, checking out her place. This is the first time he's been here.

She thinks a little, "Wait? How did you know where I live?"

"I'm a detective you know," he winks at her. "I know how to figure things out."

He walks into her kitchen like he owns the place and pulls some white bottles out of a Whole Foods bag.

"Yum. Looks good." Amanda says, her voice dripping with sarcasm, picking up one of the bottles,
studying the label. "What the hell is it?"

"It's filmjolk," Carisi says excitedly. "It's this fermented milk product. Kinda like thin yogurt, but it tastes more like sour cream. Some Vikings came up with it or something."

"Sounds delicious."

"It is," he says pretending that her sarcasm is lost on him. "Seriously, try it. It's made with milk from local dairy farms."

"We live New York City."

"You gotta think bigger than that. Think New York State." He shrugs. "It's still local."

"If you say so." She is still eyeing the bottle suspiciously, turning it over in her hands.

"Look if it's too much for you we can always dilute it with some cereal, some granola or something."

"Do I look like I have any granola?"

He studies her kitchen. "Shit, Rollins, you don't have any food here."

"Nope."

That's extremely odd. He wonders how she feeds herself. It can't be healthy. "Uh, okay."

Groaning she sits down in one of her kitchen chairs, slumping from fatigue, and sets her bottle of filmjolk down on the table. Carisi and his weird food. She waves him over. "Here, let's give this stuff a whirl."

He joins her. Enthusiastically he twists the top off his bottle and gulps the stuff down. It's so thick she doesn't know how he drinks it as if it's as thin as milk. His bottle is drained in a matter of seconds.

"Not bad, Carisi," she says and then she gives her bottle a swig herself. "Not bad at all."

He sits back and notices just how tired she looks. It may not be the best time … but he figures her fatigue might make him able to take her off-guard. Maybe she'll be willing to be more open, more honest than she normally would be. So he leans forward and starts the conversation he came here to have.

"Hey Rollins, that last case you know . . . the last one you were on – when I was taking time off? Before you left for your sabbatical . . ."

Now she shifts her body into itself, shoulders hunched forward, suddenly guarded. Damn, he was hoping to avoid that. He feels that he needs to continue anyway though. "Well the word around the precinct is that it was a little rough on you."

"What did they say?" she says defensively.

"Oh, no. It's nothing like that," he says backpedaling, not meaning to get anyone in trouble. No one had said much of anything to him . . . It was just that tape – what he had heard on the tape. He wanted to make sure she was better now. Now that she'd had some time away.

"No one said anything directly to me. I . . . I overheard some stuff and just wanted to check in with you – see how you're doing."
"First thing in the morning?" she says, irritation seeping into her voice now too.

He hadn't thought about that. "Oh, yeah. That's a little obnoxious, eh?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Well, I just wanted to be the first one to welcome you back." He smiles broadly but inside he's a little worried that he's dragging her down - back to that place. Which is the very opposite of what he had intended. He had been hoping to come here and bring a little cheer to her life.

He knows it's going to be difficult for her to face everyone back at work, despite having taken this respite for herself. It had been obvious that they all knew. At least bits and pieces of it. Yet, he suspected that Barba was the only one who knew the whole story. And himself.

"Look, Carisi, I know why you're here."

He doesn't say anything.

She leans forward. "You're nosing around trying to find out what's going on. You're still the new guy, trying to fit in. No one tells you anything, right? But can do me a favor?"

"Anything."

"Can you be the one person who doesn't know about this?"

She sighs and leans back. "I'd like to have at least one. One person who can see me as I am now and not pity me for my past."

"I can do that," he says softly. He already knows what happened to her. But he will pretend he doesn't. It is clear how much she needs this. Just one person she can be normal with. One person who doesn't see her as a victim.

"So, you'll stop digging around?"

"Absolutely." He says firmly and she gives him a warm smile.

The seconds pass.

"So, this yoga camp of yours - "

"Retreat," she interrupts.

"Hey, I thought it was some kind of a boot camp."

"Hardly."

...
Haunted

Chapter Summary

A filler fic series focusing on Rollins and Carisi. This chapter takes place immediately after Season 16 Episode 14.

Haunted

Staring down the barrel of a loaded gun. Pointing at him. Held by a man barely out of his teens who is living in another world. The digital world of Kill or Be Slaughtered.

"... Isn't being a whore a crime? You should arrest HER!" He jerks the gun.

Instinctively his eyes close. Waiting for the bullet to end his life.

That's how Amanda finds him in the break room. Eyes squeezed shut, sweating. She can see his entire body jerk.

She approaches him very slowly and says his name softly in an attempt to not startle him, "Carisi?"

He jolts back to the present and then starts to shake violently beginning with an uncontrollable tremor in his hands. She takes his hands in an attempt to steady them, to ground him in the present.

"Hey, it's okay," she says to him.

He can only nod and continues to shake fiercely. Eventually he says, "I can't shake it off."

"I know," she says gently, continuing to hold his hands tight. "I know."

"I shouldn't be this way," he shutters so much his teeth chatter. "It's Fin who has it worse."
"The gun was pointed at you," she says reasonably. "We were both disarmed. Anything could have happened in that moment."

"They say your life flashes before your eyes. It didn't."

"Then what did?"

"Regret."

Amanda leads him to a table and they sit. "Tell me about it."

He places his hands flat on the table, still trying to steady himself. His teeth chatter again. "This has happened to me before, you know. Back in Homicide. More than once."

She leans forward and waits for him to continue. She knows there's more. Much more.

"I have nightmares, you know."

"That's expected. Believe me."

He smiles a little sadly at her.

"Yeah. But I don't have flashbacks. Not like . . ." he pauses, realizing that he's overstepped his bounds.

"Not like me," she finishes for him. "It's okay Carisi, it's the truth. You know what I go through."

"Yeah, well I'm lucky. I only have nightmares. And it was Fin who made the kill. He's the one you should be worried about. Not me."

"Carisi, just because you went through something terrible and you think someone else went through something worse does not mean that you don't have a right to feel the way you do. To react the way you do." She stares pointedly at his still shaking hands, pressing on the table. "You have no control over this."

"I wish I had control over my nightmares." He looks down so she won't see the panic in his eyes. The panic that surfaces every time he thinks about it. "Now I'll just have one more place, one more scene to add to them. One more place that haunts me."

"Listen to me. Hey, look at me."

After a beat he does.

"I want you to know that I am here for you," she says firmly. "If you wake up in the middle of the night haunted by this I want you to call me, no matter the time."

"It's no big deal - just nightmares." He tries to shrug nonchalantly but it just comes off kind of pathetically. "Why would you offer me that?"

"Because you did it for me."

"Oh." He momentarily forgotten that – and didn't even equate their two experiences. Her flashbacks and his nightmares. But now he can see their similarities startlingly clear.

"And they're not just nightmares," she continues. "I want you to reach out to me, okay?"
"Yeah, okay."

They sit in silence for a while. After his shaking steadies he lets out a long breath.

"Carisi?"

"Yeah."

"I'm curious. What are your regrets?"

For some reason he finds it very easy to share the intimate details of what weighs on his psyche with Amanda.

"For one, I'm 35 and I've never even been close to starting my own family. That's something I really want for my life. It's important to me."

Before she can even say anything about that, he rushes on.

"But I know that I don't have total control over that happening - there'd be more than just me involved. So my big regret really is that I'm not a lawyer yet. To die when I'm so close to achieving that? . . . All that work, all that time and then to never be what I wanted to be – to never have done what I really wanted to do with my life."

She had never understood his desire to be a lawyer – and she never realized that it was so strong. It was obviously not just about career advancement or better pay as she'd thought. She could tell by the way he talked it that there was something deeper here. Some driving force – like it was his calling.

"Carisi, why is it so important to you? To be a lawyer?"

"Because they are the real heroes."

She sits back and cocks her head to the side, listening.

"You know Rollins, we as cops, as detectives, we're part of the process of bringing healing to those who have been wronged, those who have been hurt. We catch the bad guys, we restrain them from doing more harm if we can – at least while they're in our custody. But we don't bring justice. Lawyers do that. And feeling that justice has been served is what helps people to heal – it starts them on the path to rebuilding their lives."

"Damn, I never thought about it that way."

"Well, yeah." He grins a little sheepishly. "I'm a little passionate about it."

"I can tell."

"At least here, working this job, I can be partially responsible for helping these people out."

"And you do," she insists.

"But even though I'm part of the process it's still not enough. Not enough for me." He sighs. "Every time something like this happens – I'm worried that I'll never be able to finish school and become a lawyer. That I'll never be able to work towards justice."

"But you will Carisi," she says with confidence. "You're persistent, you're smart, and you're dedicated to achieving this goal. It will happen."
"I don't know about that."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"Because this job? Being a cop? It's too dangerous."

He stares at her for a long time. She can still see the fear in his eyes. And she knows he is haunted.
Amanda rolls away from the man who's kept her company, kept her warm from the snow outside. They've been stuck over the weekend with no power. It's too dark to see the snow falling past the window this late at night, but she hears the eerie silence that only a thick blanket of snow can bring to the city.

They hadn't been careful and she feels like she needs a shower now. She's trying to get up enough motivation to leave the warm bed, abandon it for the cold bathroom where she will have to wait for the shower to get warm. But she suspects that the water will only be lukewarm. The power had been out for quite a while and water heaters don't retain heat indefinitely. She shivers at the prospect.

Then a startling ring pierces the silence. The red haired man lying next to her jolts awake even though he had been fast asleep. But it's just her cell phone.

"Carisi."

"I've gotta get this," Amanda tells Declan, brushing his lips with a quick kiss.

"Mmm," he mumbles and falls quickly back to sleep.

"Carisi, hold on," she says as she answers, not waiting for him to speak. Phone in hand, she hurriedly puts her pair of panties back on and finds the thickest blanket she can, wrapping it around her shivering body. She pads to the sofa in the other room, her bare feet ice cold on the floor. She sets the cell phone down on the coffee table briefly in order to tuck her feet into the blanket and wrap herself up as warmly as she can. But, damn, it's still so cold. She picks the phone back up.

"Okay, I'm back. What's wrong?"

"You said I could call you . . . if . . . if. . . " he stammers.

"Nightmare?"

"Yes," she can hear his deep sigh of relief.

"It's okay. Tell me about it."
She can hear him shivering through the breath he takes. She wonders if it's from the cold or from raw emotion.

"This time I died, Amanda. That's never happened before." He sounded so somber.

"How did it happen?"

"Well, after having my usual nightmare sequence of places and scenes it all started changing when I got to that rooftop – where we were that day, remember?"

"I do," she says softly.

"It wasn't like it was that day. Some parts were the same. You were still there with me, and still he disarmed you. But so much was different."

She can hear a chatter take over his teeth.

"There was a girl this time. A little girl. We were trying to protect her. I think she was your daughter. I know you don't have one, but in my nightmare you did. She seemed so real, everything seemed so real."

"It does, Carisi, it does."

She hears him expel a deep shuddering breath, remembering herself how real everything can seem - especially in the early stages.

"Look, we took down those gamer guys not very long ago. It is still very fresh." Even for me.

"Was this the first nightmare you've had since then?" she continues.

"Yes," he said. "And my face hurts. So much. My face hurts."

That's quite an odd thing to say.

"Why does your face hurt, Carisi?"

"Because he shot me. He shot my head off and I couldn't get to her in time. I couldn't save your little girl. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." It sounds like he might have started crying, and at the very least, he is starting to panic.

She realizes he has re-entered the reality of his nightmare. So she joins him, like he had joined her.

"It's not your fault. I was there too. No one could have stopped this from happening. We were both disarmed, remember?"

Now he is crying - she knows it for sure.

"But your little girl . . . your little girl. You finally had a family of your own. And then it was gone. In the blink of an eye it was all gone. All my fault. I should have done more . . . "

"It's okay, Carisi. It's okay. There was nothing more you could have done."

"My face. It hurts so much."

"I know." And then catching a glimpse of Declan peacefully asleep in the other room she realizes just why his face hurts so much - how reality can infiltrate dreams. She thinks that maybe she can
pull him out of this nightmare state and back to the present with a little information. Maybe. "Carisi, do you remember when you first met Lieutenant Murphy?"

Her question is such a non-sequitur that he immediately stops crying. He is confused.

"You two were both undercover . . . arguing? He didn't know who you were . . . "

"Yeah!" he says adamantly. "He pistol whipped me. What a dick!"

She smirks. Interesting choice of words given the bed she had just been in. But then she tells him solemnly, "That's why your face hurts."

There is a very long silence.

"Carisi?"

There is another small pause before he answers.

"Yeah, I'm here."

"You okay?"

She hears that long ragged breath again.

"Yeah," he says. "I'm okay now. I think I'm going to go put some ice on my face."

"In this weather? Aren't you without power, too? Won't that make you even colder?"

"Hey, you just gave me an idea!"

"What?"

"There's plenty of free snow outside - I'm gonna go get me some of that."

"You're crazy."

"I know." Then he hesitates for a bit before saying, "Thanks Rollins. For being there for me tonight, you know."

"You would have done the same for me."

"Yeah."

"Bye," she says softly.

"Bye," he says.

He hangs up the phone and trods outside. Squatting down, he puts his freezing cold hand into the even colder snow on the stoop. He brings some up, cupping it to his face. It burns and soothes at the same time, and bites into him nonetheless.

Despite the pain he knows he's not alone with his nightmares any more - that she will be there with him like he is for her - and he is comforted.
"No, I don't think so," Judith says to Carisi and walks out of the precinct.

"Whoa! Ho!" Amaro exclaims, smirking. "Someone just got shot down."

Rollins joins in the fun and chuckles from her desk.

Carisi points at Rollins. "Hey, what are you laughing at?"

She just raises her eyebrows and smiles. Then she continues to chuckle along with Amaro's belly laugh as she turns back to sorting through the paperwork on her desk.

"Hey man, don't make fun of a guy's game." Carisi says pointing at Amaro now.

"Your 'game'?" Looking back up from her desk Amanda snorts. "That was your 'game'?"

Carisi throws his arms wide. "What?"

"Man, that was sad," Amaro says, just shaking his head.

"Oh forget it," Carisi says and leaves for the break room to get away from their teasing.
"My game," he mutters under his breath. "There's nothing wrong with my game. It was just bad timing. Yeah, bad timing."

"What was?" Rollins had somehow snuck up behind him without him noticing and he startles at the sound of her voice.

"Bad timing, you know. With Judith."

"Judith, huh?" Rollins asks. "Don't you think it's a little weird . . . asking a vic out on a date? What did you expect?"

He crosses his arms and purses his lips. "She's not a vic. Her dad is."

Rollins is a bit surprised at that. "Her dad?"

"Yeah. And he's this great author, I've read all his books and everything. To be that close to greatness . . ."

"So, are you interested in Judith or her father?" Rollins asks wryly.

"Hey, Judith's no slouch. She's in law school, you know." He beams. "Just like me. While we were back in Sarge's office she whipped out this statute --"

"I see the attraction." Rollins interrupts.

"No seriously, Rollins. She's a nice lady."

"Good for you." Rollins says, but then pauses and puts her finger up in the air. "Except not so good for you . . . She's not interested."

"We'll see about that."

"You never give up, do you?"

"Not really." He grins and heads back to his desk.

Walter Briggs, Judith's father, lies on a stretcher. He looks tired and worn out, even for a man in his eighties. He confides to Carisi, "I had six wives you know."

"I know sir," Carisi says, looking down at the man with empathy.

Briggs continues, "And hundreds of lovers. I penetrated their bodies and I penetrated their minds. Because I was a man - that's what I was supposed to be."

Lamenting the loss of what he once was, he asks Carisi, "How does this happen?"

Carisi just shakes his head, troubled. Is this what all men are reduced to in the end? No matter how successful they are in life?

He feels the pressure of time running out.

"Man, that guy has no sense of timing," Amaro says as he watches Carisi's retreating back. "Chasing after a woman right after her father dies? Geez."
"Hey, maybe it's innocent." Amanda defends Carisi. "Maybe he's just going over there because he wants to let her know how much he will miss her father too – give her some comfort."

Amaro snorts, "Yeah, right."

"How'd it go?" Amaro asks Carisi as soon as he's returned, ready to tease him mercilessly.

Carisi beats him to the punch however, staggering around with his hand on his chest, "Shot through the heart, man, shot through the heart."

Rollins and Amaro exchange a look and then all three of them laugh. Carisi pulls a book out to show them.


"Uh, cool." Amaro says doubtfully, not completely understanding Carisi's enthusiasm.

Rollins shoots him a look and then turns to Carisi, "It is cool, Carisi. Never mind Nick. It is."

Carisi smiles back at her. "She's a good woman."

"But she still shot you down, no?" There goes Amaro with another dig.

"Well, yeah. But I think it was just bad timing." Carisi shrugs, trying to convince himself, too.

Later in the day when Rollins steps into the break room she sees Carisi forlornly staring at the picture of Walter Briggs on the back cover of The Fifth Assailant that Judith had given him. The picture is from many years back, when he was in the prime of his life.

"You sad?" she asks him.

"Yeah," he admits, stretching back a bit. "It's sad how he was at the end of his life. Really sad you know? And for someone who had accomplished so much. . ."

"Yeah."

"God," he says shaking his head. "And I haven't even accomplished anywhere near what he did by my age. He had many books published by then, a wife, kids . . . And I'm still in law school. I haven't really even started my life. Not the one I want anyway."

"You have plenty of time."

"No, I don't. That's what this whole thing with Briggs has taught me. You gotta do the things you want to do with your life – while you're still able to. Because no matter how you slice it, the end of your life is going to suck. Royally. You want to make sure you have the time to enjoy what you have accomplished - well before the end."

She just nods.

"Man, this stuff with Judith . . ."

"What about it?"
"How am I ever going to have kids someday if I can't even get a gal to have coffee with me?" he says with a touch of irony, although she can tell he's just plain exasperated.

Amanda lets out a soft chuckle. "Carisi, maybe you're just too . . ."

He puts up a finger. "Let me stop you right there. Look Amanda, I'll take your advice on the job, since you're still 'showing me the ropes' and all. But I will not take your advice on my game."

She grins. "Okay."

"I'm serious. This is it." He pulls a Vanna White and showcases himself from head to toe. "If a gal can't handle all of this, then she doesn't get to. And that includes my game."

"That's a lot to handle," she smiles wryly, trying not to laugh too hard.

"Hey, I'm serious. Even though I get frustrated from time to time I know I just have to wait for the right girl to come around. One who can appreciate all of this."

"It might be a long wait," she says and tilts her head, smiling at him.

"It might. But it will be worth it."
Rollins: So Tommy was a dealer?

Carisi: That was pot, not oxy. He's put that all behind him, he's been working his program –

Rollins: He was in a bar fight, though.

Carisi: Yeah, after she assaulted him. He was decompensating.

Rollins: Maybe, but people do – you know – slip up. Sometimes you have to let them hit bottom.

Carisi: Yeah, I know. It's just – things were going really well for Tommy.

Rollins: Well you know what? Some people can't handle that. They need the drama.

Carisi: Hey, I was there – alright? His PO was in and out of that room in half a minute. Tops. [Planting the drugs].
Rollins: Well you know somebody's lying then. We have to figure out who.

Rollins leaves.

Carisi turns to Amaro: She's kind of big on tough love, isn't she?

Amaro: Look, her sister played her so many times she taught herself to expect the worst from family.

Carisi: Yeah, well her family isn't my family.

The others are still trying to work out the details of Tommy's rape case because Sonny is not allowed to get involved, but he knows Tommy didn't cheat on his sister Bella – he had been forced, raped by his parole officer. He is heading back to work after just having spent some time with his sister.

What's gotten into her? He understands that she will not tolerate being cheated on, that's where she draws the line. But unfortunately she refuses to believe Tommy and is now ready to leave him. He keeps replaying parts of their conversation in his mind:

Sonny: Tommy's had his fair share of screw ups but this isn't one of them, Bella. Not to mention, you're having this guy's kid.

Bella: Maybe, we'll see.

Sonny: We'll see? What does that mean?

Bella: I'm only ten weeks, I've got options.

Sonny (choking up): Don't say things like that.

Bella (almost crying): It's too much. Sonny. I don't think I could do it. I don't think I could raise a kid on my own.

Her utter fear was palpable. This was a bad situation getting worse. He hoped his sister wouldn't do anything rash – something she'd regret. As he walks back to the precinct, he's so upset that he's trying not to cry.

Was it really that scary to raise a kid on your own? He knows women who had done just that. But it really seems like Bella wouldn't be able to handle it - she wouldn't even be considering this option if she thought that she could. He knows that her fear comes from a very real place.

His heart ached. For his sister. For her unborn child.

He is not in the mood to deal with Rollins when he returns.

"Hey, Donna Marshall, Tommy's parole officer is coming in soon. Benson and I are going to be handling the interview. She's coming in as a courtesy – "

"Yeah, that's nice." Carisi says and brushes past her.

"I think it's interesting that she's coming in like she's got nothing to hide." When Carisi just tosses some papers around his desk and doesn't respond she says, "What's gotten into you?

"What's gotten into me?"
"Yeah."

"Let me tell you what. That bitch raped Tommy and has basically ruined my sister's life. That's what's gotten into me," he almost yells at her.

"Hey, take it easy."

"I'm not going to take it easy. You still believe that Tommy's some kind of junkie – a dealer – that he's not credible. That he's lying."

"We don't know that for sure."

"Yeah, that's right. You don't. But I know for sure what that woman did to him."

"You know? Or you want to think you know?"

"I know."

She just gives him a hard look. A disbelieving look. He shakes his head and starts to walk away from her.

"You know maybe you need to just let him hit rock bottom – so your sister can see it, so you can see it."

Her statement pisses him off and he turns on her.

"There's no rock bottom to hit," he snarls. "My sister believes he screwed up already and it's destroying her. She's ready to give up because of this."

"Give up what? Tommy?"

He just shakes his head, not answering at first. "Look neither of them need 'tough love' right now. They need support. But maybe you can't see that because of your fucked up family."

"What did you just say?"

"You heard me, Rollins. My family's not like yours. We don't automatically assume the worst of each other - that everyone is an addict that needs 'tough love.' With that mindset I wonder how you're going to treat your own kids someday."

"I'm never having kids."

"Huh. Sounds about right." Carisi storms out.

Later on Amanda looks for Carisi – she needs to update him on Tommy's case. Also, she feels terrible about how their previous conversation had gone down, so she needs to talk to him about that, too. She finds him in the lobby, just sitting there, nursing a cup of coffee. She stands back for a while and watches him. He looks like he's trying to hold back tears. Even from this angle she can see the raw emotion that lines his face. No wonder he's been avoiding them – all of them. This case has been rougher on him than she thought.

She walks up to him and says, "Carisi, mind if I join you?"

"Sure," he says without much emotion, a total contradiction to the expression on his face.
"I just wanted to let you know that Donna Marshall is good for this. We found enough evidence – "

"Even enough for you?" he says sarcastically.

She ignores the barb. "Look, I was wrong about Tommy. We're going to need him as a witness against Donna Marshall."

"That's all you've got to say?"

As if admitting that she was wrong wasn't hard enough, now she knows he wants an apology too. So she sucks it up and gives him one.

"Look, I was wrong and I am sorry, okay?" After a bit of a pause she asks, "Are we good?"

He lets out a breath he had long been holding. "Something's been bothering me Rollins. Let me ask you – "

"Sure."

"If you became a single mom – "

"Never going to happen. Like I said, I'm not having kids."

"Awww, come on. Everyone wants kids."

"With a family like mine? Are you serious? You yourself said they were fucked up."

"I was a little harsh. I didn't mean it." He tilts his head towards hers. "I don't really know anything about your family."

"Well, you obviously know enough. Turns out you were right. They are pretty fucked up - makes you not want to have kids."

"Really? Are you serious?"

"Well it makes you wonder. Are you going to be a good mom? Would you even know how to be?"

"Yeah, but you can be different. You don't have to be like her."

"Yeah, I can be tough."

He just smirks and lets that one go. They've already been over that territory. He returns to his original question. "Okay, let's just say that you're going to have a kid – "

She starts to protest, but he puts up a finger to silence her. "Hypothetically."

"Okay, hypothetically."

"Would you be able to raise her on your own? With no man in your life?"

He takes a good look at her as he asks and she looks stricken by the question alone, just from thinking about it. This worries him.

But then she answers slowly. "I know I'm supposed to say yes, I can handle it. But I know that isn't the truth."

"What is then?"
"Honestly, I'd be scared to death having a baby on my own. I'm not sure I could do it."

"Shit," he says and leans back against the bench, looking up at the ceiling.

"Why do you care?" she asks, noticing how oddly devastated he looks. His eyes have now shut and the planes of his face have just gone limp.

"I just do," he says softly. "I just do."
Rollins and Carisi head back to their desks shortly after Benson had showed them the footage of "Jane" detailing her rape at Hudson University on America's Worst Crimes - a show she had admitted to watching the night before. Carisi had challenged the Sergeant on her television viewing choices.

Once they get settled in, Carisi asks, "Hey, Rollins. Can you believe that Sarge watches that crap?"

Amanda mutters under her breath, "You should see what I watch."

"What did you say?" he asks.

"Oh, nothing." She tries to brush it off.

He comes up to her desk all smiles, "What do you watch, Amanda?"
"Oh, nothing," she says again, but looks down and smiles to herself. If only he knew.

"Ah, come on," he whines.

"I'll never tell," she sing-songs and gets up to refill her coffee.

Carisi just shakes his head at her retreating form. Someday he'll figure it out.

That day comes sooner than he thought. Carisi shows up at her place on the weekend. They both have the day off, but something has developed in "Jane's" case. He knocks insistently.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," Amanda yells and then hits the pause button on her remote before throwing it on the couch.

She opens the door to find Carisi, who just lets himself in. Walking into the living room he sees what's on her TV and smiles wickedly.

"The Jersey Shore, eh?"

"Never mind that." She searches frantically for her remote so she can turn the TV off.

"Hey, wasn't the show over a few years back? Aren't they in reruns now?"

"Yeah." She still can't find it.

"That's what I call commitment."

She groans in annoyance.

He ignores her and continues, "Hey, which guy is your favorite?"

"I don't like any of them," she says blushing a bit. She has stopped looking for her remote and has her hands on her hips now, trying to look serious. She doesn't realize that she's even blushing, but Carisi can tell. He calls her bluff.

"Oh, really? You sound pretty defensive there, Rollins. I bet you have a crush on at least one of these fine gents."

She snorts.

He easily finds the remote that she couldn't find and hits play. "Now, come on – do you like this guy?"

"No."

He believes her. She reaches for the remote, but he's playing keep-away, his eyes still on the screen.

Now an Italian guy who looks like he spends way too much time at the gym is on. "Hey, I think I know that guy!"

"You do?"

"Yeah, he's from Staten Island."

Amanda feels the heat on her cheeks now and Carisi is trying not to laugh. She is incredibly flushed and he suddenly knows the reason she watches The Jersey Shore.
"You know him in real life?" She has to ask.

"Nah, I've just heard about him. The Situation. You like him."

"Well, I don't know . . ."

"Come on, Rollins, admit it. You're beet red."

"He's funny okay?" she says defensively.

"I thought you liked his accent." Carisi is smiling wide now. He is really getting under her skin – he never realized how fun it is to tease her.

Amanda says, "Look, I saw him on this talk show once. He pulled up his shirt to show off his abs and said something like 'Somebody call a vet. These puppies are sick!' See – funny."

They both share a deep laugh together and the redness begins receding from her cheeks.

Then Carisi starts pulling up his shirt.

"What are you doing?" She says in alarm.

"I've gotta represent."

"Keep your shirt on."

"Awww . . ."

"I don't wanna see that."

"I thought you liked Staten Island guys."

"Not all of them," she says sarcastically.

"Really?" he looks down at her with a knowing look, trying to be serious. But then he just cracks up. "Okay, Rollins."

"Okay, Carisi." She smiles at him. "Why are you here?"

As they head out to Hudson University Amanda turns towards him and says, "Look, Carisi – Can you do me a favor?"

"Maybe . . . " he says with a slow drawl.

"I don't want anyone back at the precinct to know I watch The Jersey Shore, okay? Especially Nick."

"I wonder why?" he says.

She punches him in the arm, "Come on."

"Okay, okay. I'll just keep that little tidbit of information up my sleeve – in order to blackmail you later."

"You wouldn't," she says with feigned shock.
"Oh, yes I would."
"So you've been to a Rainbow Party then?" Nick asks him right after the elevator closes on the entire group of SVU detectives who had just gotten in. Amanda has just declared that she's never having kids and Carisi had given him a smile. Poor guy.

"Yup," Carisi says with feigned confidence.

"They seem pretty wild," Nick counters.

"Yeah, well I'm from Staten Island . . . " he leans into him and nods his head. "So, you know."

"No I don't know. How many colors did you get?"

"Nick, knock it off," Amanda says as the doors open on the ground floor and they get out.

"Thanks," Carisi whispers to her as he passes.
The squad arrives at Tribeca Academy where some freshman and sophomores had thrown a Rainbow Party. Someone had posted pictures of it online that were basically child pornography. The girls had each put on a different color lipstick and the goal was for each guy to collect as many colors as he could on his member. They had taken a lot of close-ups of their shenanigans and there was no denying what had transpired – and which kids had been involved.

But none of these kids had thought that they had done anything wrong and it was getting frustrating – especially knowing that internet sites specializing in child porn were likely spreading these pictures right now. And teenagers in general weren't very careful – the pictures were likely geotagged – which put them all in danger of being stalked by pedophiles. Even worse, the parents weren't taking it very seriously either.

Except for one – Arlene Heller, who had been one of the lawyers from Walter Briggs' case. Rollins and Carisi had gone with her to the school to find her son Larry's cell phone. It had turned out that he had been the one dumb enough to distribute the pictures.

As Rollins and Carisi head back to the precinct, phone in hand she says to him, "Man, I really thought those parties were a myth."

"Not on Staten Island."

"So it seems."

"So how many colors did you get?" she inquires lightly.

"Truthfully? None."

"Really? Why? Were you a loser kid like Larry?"

"Hey, even Larry got some action with Chloe. You saw those pictures."

"Yeah, those kids really don't know what they've gotten themselves into. Really dumb taking pictures like that - even worse posting them online. But I guess that's what kids do nowadays - nothing is private anymore."

"Well, we didn't take pictures at ours. We knew better. If our parents had seen those . . . "

"Yeah, but most of these parents don't seem to care. They're more concerned with 'civil rights violations' than protecting their kids."

"That's for sure. Hey look, despite outward appearances, I wasn't a loser kid."

"No?"

"No, I was the class clown. Keep 'em laughing, you know? But poor Larry - that guy is at the bottom of the pecking order, I tell you." He chuckles a little. "No wonder he posted those pictures online. He wanted everyone to see he wasn't that much of a loser."

"Okay, so you weren't a loser like Larry. Why didn't you get any colors?"

He doesn't say anything and they keep walking.

"Carisi?"

"Look," he says and stops walking. "I just didn't want to, okay?"
"Okay." The look he gives her tells her not to pry. But she is so very curious.

They start walking again.

"Hey Rollins?"

"Yeah?"

"Can you do me a favor and not let on about this to the guys?"

"They giving you a hard time?"

"Yeah, you know that - you've seen it."

"I know Nick is."

"Yeah, he is." He smirks. "He's like a dog with a bone."

"Interesting choice of words." She grins back. "Carisi - let me ask you something."

"Sure."

"Why would I help you out with this? Your sex life - "

He frowns at her.

"... or lack of one - is not my problem."

"Uh, let's see . . . I could spill the beans about your little crush on The Situation."

"You wouldn't."

He smiles mischievously, "Not if you have my back on this one."

A few days later Nick is back at it about the Rainbow Party Carisi attended as a youth on Staten Island. Why won't this guy leave him alone? Joking around with the guys was supposed to build camaraderie, but this is getting ridiculous.

"Look, Nick - " he starts.

"Nick," Amanda says getting out of her chair and walking over to him. "You really think a guy like Carisi wouldn't get much action at a Rainbow Party?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know," she says and walks over to Carisi, studying him. Then she pats his cheek. "That accent might drive the women wild."

"Hey!" Nick protests. "You saying you like that?"

She raises an eyebrow at him, smiles, and walks away.

Carisi gives Nick a smug smile.

Later when all three of them are working quietly at their desks, Carisi pulls out a post-it note and
scribbles something on it. Then, just like passing notes in class, he surreptitiously drops it on her desk, out of sight of Nick, and winks at her.

She picks it up carefully, making sure Nick doesn't see her either.

You love the situation. No caps – just in case it gets confiscated.

She rolls her eyes at him and he pulls out another post-it note from his desk.

This time it says:

j/k thank you

They share a secret smile across the room.
Carisi gives a little snort of surprise when stumbles upon her.  
"What are you still doing here, Rollins?"

He had just finished celebrating with the rest of the SVU detectives and their new friends from the Chicago PD and had gone back to the precinct to find Amanda still at her desk. He had left one of his law books behind and returned to pick it up, figuring he hadn't drunk too much to get some studying done that night.

He continues. "And why weren't you out celebrating with us? We locked Yates away."

"I know," she says absently, looking through some papers on her desk.

"Are those the files on Yates?"

"Yeah."

"Why are you still interested in all this stuff?"
"You wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

She finally looks up and gives him a withering stare and repeats herself. "You wouldn't understand."

"Fine, be that way," he throws up his hands in defeat and goes back to his own desk. His picks up his law book and pulls out a legal pad.

Amanda looks over at him suspiciously. "And what are you doing?"

"Studying," he says nonchalantly.

"I can see that. Here?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"You're here."

She rolls her eyes. "Oh, like I'm such a big draw."

"You'd be surprised." He gives her a little lopsided, teasing smile.

"Please." Amanda rolls her eyes again, sighs and goes back to reviewing the papers on her desk. He digs into his studying.

"Fascinating," Carisi hears Rollins whisper to herself at least three times before he's had enough.

"He's not fascinating," he says grumpily from his desk.

"Says who?"

"Me."

"You worked homicide didn't you?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Aren't some of the detectives working there because they are fascinated by this stuff, too?"

"It's sick, is what it is." He throws his pen down angrily on his desk. "And those guys who are working homicide because they get off on that? They're twisted – real oddballs."

She grins. That's saying a lot coming from him. But still . . .

"But wouldn't you find it fascinating to get into the mind of a serial killer? Figure out what makes him tick?"

"You don't want to go there. Believe me."

She thinks about that for a minute. Carisi had always been so good at sympathizing with perps – getting them to open up because he would act like one of them, act like he understood their motives and believed that they were totally reasonable.
"You've had to do that before, haven't you? With serials."

He crosses his fingers and looks down at them. "Yeah."

"What was it like?" Now she's fascinated by him – his experience with this.

He doesn't say anything, so she presses. "Carisi, I want to be good at this – like you. Especially with this guy, Yates. I want to get into his mind. How do you do it?"

_Is this an interrogation or a date?_ Carisi vividly remembers the visiting Sergeant from the Chicago PD saying this in disgust while watching Rollins interview Yates.

"You seemed to do pretty well all on your own with him – like you were a natural," he says and frowns disapprovingly at her. "You don't need me."

"Fine, don't help me," she says with a frustrated sigh.

"Look, trust me – you don't want to go there. This stuff gets really dark."

"I can handle it."

"Rollins, most serial killers target women. Women – just like you. And lot of them are raped. Do you really want to know what makes you a target? Do you really want to go there?"

She blanches.

"Didn't think so."

She doesn't say anything, just looks away.

Oh crap, now he's gone too far. He shouldn't have said that. He knows she had been a victim of rape herself . . .

She stretches back in her chair, looking sad and grumpy at the same time. And obviously troubled by her thoughts. He wants to reach out a hand to her, say he's sorry. But he doesn't.

Instead he says, "Look, let's put this all behind us, okay? We can go out and do something. Clear the air."

"What's open right now besides bars?"

"Bowling alleys," he says matter-of-factly. Like everyone knows this.

She gives him an odd, disbelieving look.

"Bowling alleys?" She scoffs. "Like there's no serial killers there."

"I'll protect you." He grins.

She grins back. "I have a feeling I'll be protecting you. Let's go."
"I get it. I'm Catholic," Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah's baptism.

"No kidding," Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.

Monday

"Hey Rollins," Carisi says to her from the unmarked car they are heading back to the precinct in.
"Yeah?"

"I need to stop by my church on the way back. You don't mind, do you?"

"What for?"

"There's this food drive we're having – and one of the nuns, you know – her back went out during Easter church services yesterday and they need someone to lug around boxes of cans."

"That was her job?"

"Yeah, she's pretty burly – that Sister Sara. And feisty." He shakes his head and grins. "With her around those sisters don't need a man at all, I tell you – not even for heavy lifting."

"You sure you're up for the task?"

"What does that mean?"

"You're looking pretty scrawny there Carisi..." she says, squeezing one of his forearms.

"Ah, come on. Don't be like that Rollins." He shakes his arm out of her grasp.

"Sure, we can stop along the way."

"Thanks for your beneficence." He takes his eyes off of the road for a second to give her a wry grin.

She rolls her eyes back at him. "Why don't you cut it out with the million dollar words and keep your eyes on the road?"

"Yes ma'am."

She groans. She hates it when he calls her that. But it seems to give him some kind of satisfaction.

They arrive at the church and two little kids run up to Carisi exclaiming, "Uncle Sonny!"

They each grab onto one of his legs and smile up at him. He ruffles their hair and points to Rollins. "Hey guys, this is Amanda. You wanna say hi?"

"Hi!" they both say and run up to her pulling on the bottom of her short coat.

Before she can say anything the little boy tells her his name.

"I'm Frankie!" he exclaims proudly.

"Yeah, and I'm Frannie," the girl says, pushing the little boy out of the way a bit to make sure she has Amanda's full attention.

But then in unison they practically scream, "We're twins!"

A priest near the front of the church turns toward them and puts a finger over his lips, shushing them.

"Sorry, Father," they both whisper so quietly he can't even hear them.

"Francesco and Francesca," Carisi elaborates. He leans into Rollins and says quietly, "They're really my cousins, but don't tell them that. It would burst their bubble."
Rollins nods conspiratorially at Carisi and makes the universal sign of zipping her mouth and throwing away the key. Then she squats down to the twins' level.

"You know what, Frannie?"

"What?" she says.

"Yeah, what?" Frankie joins in.

"I have a sweet little dog named Frannie."

"You do?" the little girl stares at Rollins wide-eyed.

But the little boy is suddenly jealous. "I bet you don't have a dog named after me." He pouts.

"You know what, Frankie?"

"What?"

"If I get a boy dog I just might name him after you."

Now he is all smiles. "That would be so cool!"

"Yeah," she answers. "Would you two like to see a picture of Frannie?" She pulls her wallet out of her purse, takes out a small photo, and hands it to the kids.

"Oh wow!" Frankie exclaims.

"She's so cute!" Frannie squeals with delight and hugs herself.

"Can we play with her?" Frankie asks.

"Yeah!" Frannie joins in.

"Now now, you two," Carisi jumps into the conversation to save Rollins from having to promise these kids anything – or disappoint them by telling them no. "Why don't you go ask Father DeFranco if he needs any help, okay?"

"Okay!" they exclaim a little too loudly and take off running towards the priest who had shushed them earlier.

She smiles back at Carisi. "I see where you get it."

"Get what?"

"All that enthusiasm. It must be genetic."

He smiles at her, kinda happy that she notices. "Yeah, I think so."

"They're adorable."

"You sure you don't want any?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

He changes the subject. "So, I noticed you keep Frannie with you."
"Yeah. So?" she says a little defensively. She knows it's a little odd to keep a picture of your dog in your wallet instead of pictures of your family. But with her family... 

"Oh, I didn't mean anything by it, I just think it's cute. She really is family to you, huh?"

"Yeah," Rollins admits.

"Hello Sonny!" A clear voice interrupts them. They hadn't noticed that a nun had come up to them while they were talking. They both turn to face her as she says to Carisi, "Oh, I didn't know you had a lady friend."

"I don't -"

"We're not -"

"Oh sorry," the nun says and blushes a little at her mistake. "Just hopeful for you, Sonny."

The nun pats him on the shoulder. "Come along then. We've gotta put you to work."

"You wanna come?" Carisi asks Rollins, completely forgetting to introduce her to the nun because he's still a little unnerved by her assumption about them.

"No, I'll be fine here – I wanna take a look around. This church really is pretty."

"We sure think so," the nun says and smiles. "You go ahead and do that."

She and Carisi head back to the church kitchen and Rollins begins walking around, admiring all of the stained glass. It's very peaceful in here – she sees why people refer to churches as 'sanctuaries.'

A little girl timidly approaches her from behind and reaches up to tug at the bottom of her coat. She turns around and notices that she is even shorter than the twins but she still has that Carisi look. She wonders if...

"M'am?" she asks.

"Yes, sweetheart? What do you need?"

"Are you Uncle Sonny's friend?"

"Yes I am." She crouches down to get to her level. "My name's Amanda. What's yours?"

"Emma," she says and shyly turns away a little bit.

"That's a pretty name," Rollins says.

"I like you," the little girl says with a smile and turns back to meet her eyes. "Does Uncle Sonny like you?"

"Yes, I believe he does," Rollins replies. "We work together."

"Are you going to get married?"

Rollins chuckles at the audacity of this seemingly shy little girl.

"No, sweetheart."

"Why not?"
"Well, because we're just friends. And friends don't get married."

Emma looks perplexed. So Rollins takes her little hand and shakes it a bit.

"Boys and girls can be just friends, you know."

Rollins hears someone clear their throat behind her and stands up. It's Carisi carrying a box of cans – she hadn't even heard him approach and wonders how much of her and Emma's conversation he heard. His face is bright red. He might have heard some of it. Or he might have just exerted himself too much carrying that cumbersome box.

"Ready to go?" he asks. "I gotta put this in the car and take it over to the shelter."

"That was fast."

"Well, it turned out they only had one box."

She grins wryly at him. "Wasted trip?"

"Nah, you got to meet some of my cousins."

"I'm not your cousin, Uncle Sonny!" Emma protests and stamps her foot.

"Sure you're not, Emma," he says lovingly to her. She grabs his leg briefly before yelling "Bye!" and running towards the back of the church where her mother has been waiting.

"Cute family you've got there, Carisi," Rollins remarks.

"You haven't even seen the half of them." He smiles at her over the box of the cans.

She can tell he's proud of being from such a large family. If only she was proud of hers...
"I get it. I'm Catholic." Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah's baptism.

"No kidding," Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.
"Hey Rollins," Carisi says to her as they are walking back to the precinct.

"Yeah?"

"I need to stop by my church on the way back. You don't mind, do you?"

"Again?"

"Yeah. I gotta pick up some new robes for the men's choir."

"What are you? Are you the church's errand boy or something?"

"Nah. I just like doing service for the church. You know, I like paying them back for all the things they did for me growing up."

"Didn't you go to church on Staten Island? This wasn't your church."

"Yeah, that's true, but still. . . Man, Father De Santis, out at my church on Staten Island – he was a life saver really – you should meet him someday. A solid guy – good at keeping us kids out of trouble if you know what I mean." He winks at her.

"No I don't know what you mean. What kind of trouble did you get up to Carisi? I can't even imagine." She gives him a wide smile.

"You know, teenage stuff. The usual." But then he gets quiet as they walk, as if he's lost in a memory.

"Okay, let's stop by your church," she says finally, breaking the silence.

He turns to her and smiles. "But first to pick up those robes."

"Ugh. And how far is that?"

"Just an extra three blocks."

"Lead the way," she says and sighs, resigned to do this task with him.

Rollins and Carisi arrive at the church, maroon robes in hand. Thank goodness the choir was so small – there weren't too many robes to carry. But still, they had to share the burden.

They are barely through the church doors when Carisi points toward the choir and says to Rollins, "That's Marco."

He waves excitedly at the man leading the choir, who waves back just as enthusiastically and pauses the rehearsal to head on over to them.

When Marco comes up to them, he gives Sonny a big hug with lots of slapping on the back. "Good to see you, man. You got our robes?"

Carisi replies, "Yeah, but I'd like to introduce someone to you before we fork them over. This is Amanda Rollins – we work together at SVU."

"Good to meet you," Marco says and instinctively holds out his hand for her to shake before noticing the robes draped over her arm. "Ooops, sorry. Let me take those from you."
She hands them over and says, "Good to meet you too."

"Sonny here is my aunt's grand nephew. We grew up together. Amazing we're living off Staten Island and in the City now, eh? Never thought that would happen," he says turning towards Carisi.

"Yeah, but the rent's a killer when you're not living back there."

"You're telling me! But hey, you've got all those student loans to pay off once you're out of law school, eh? It's only going to get worse."

"Yeah, tell me about it. I'm still paying off my college loans."

"Bummer."

"But that shouldn't be too hard once I start working as an attorney – I hope. This ADA guy we work with – man you should see what he wears to work every day. He must spend a – "

"Uncle Sonny!" two sharp little kid voices interrupt the men's complaining.

_Good_, Rollins thinks. It was starting to get tiresome. Her rent was high too. It was just the reality of living in New York City.

She sees Frannie and Frankie. But this time the twins run toward her and wrap their arms around her legs instead of Carisi's.

"Amanda!" they squeal in unison.

"Um, okay you two," she says as she starts to pry their arms off of her. This is a little too close for comfort – she barely knows these kids.

Carisi looks down at her sympathetically. She just wasn't used to that kind of affection, he could tell. He could see that it made her uncomfortable.

"Hey guys," Carisi says as he crouches down to the twins. "We've talked about this. You can't be so friendly to strangers. They could hurt you, okay?"

"But Amanda's your friend," Frankie whines.

"Yeah," Frannie pipes up. "She wouldn't hurt us. She's nice! Emma said so."

"You don't know that," he says and takes their arms. "You only met her yesterday. You guys need to be more careful, okay?"

"But she's okay, isn't she Uncle Sonny? You've known her longer than one day, right?" Frankie pouts.

"Yeah, I bet you've known her lots of days," Frannie chimes in.

"Yeah, she's okay – she's a cop, just like me. She won't hurt you guys. But you gotta be more careful from now on. Promise?"

"Yeah," they say in unison again.

"We love you Amanda!" they shout and run back to wherever they came from. Carisi shakes his head at their retreating forms.
"There's that Carisi enthusiasm again," Amanda says looking up at Carisi with a sparkle in her eyes.
He really shouldn't be noticing that. She's not his – she's Nick's. He shakes his head to clear it.

"Yeah, but they have good taste. Who wouldn't get excited to see you again?" Damn, he shouldn't have said that either. What was he thinking? His mouth always got him into trouble it seemed. But thankfully she doesn't even acknowledge his slip.

"Didn't you just lecture them about not being too friendly with strangers?"

"Sure. But you're good people. They know that."

"They're too young to know that."

"Yeah, you're right," he says grinning, back in the mood to tease her again. "Next time I see them I'll tell them you're really a dog-napper and Frannie is your latest victim. They won't like you then."

She just rolls her eyes at him. "Come on, let's go."
Chapter Summary

A filler fic series about Rollins & Carisi. The majority of this chapter takes place the week before the opening scene of Chapter 16 Episode 21.

"I get it. I'm Catholic." Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah's baptism.

"No kidding," Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.

Wednesday
"Hey Rollins," Carisi says to her as they are driving the van containing surveillance equipment back to 1PP's garage. They had just been on a successful stake out and Benson and Fin were booking the perps they had arrested back at the precinct.

"Yeah?"

"I need to stop by my church on the way back. You don't mind, do you?"

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"Ugh. Again? Seriously? What is it this time?"

"Well, I gotta pick up some of my cousins and nieces from CCD. I think they'd get a kick out of riding in this van."

"You sure they won't destroy the equipment?"

"Come on, they're good kids."

"If you say so. You know there's no such thing as 'good kids'."

"Hey, they are related to me – how much trouble could they be?"

She just groans as she lets herself be led on another adventure with this crazy man beside her. But she has to admit she kinda likes it – getting to see Carisi's world, so different from her own.

"So which Carisis are we picking up today?"

"Let's see, there's Frankie and Frannie of course. But Emma goes to Catholic school so she won't be here. . . ."

"Why not? Don't all Catholic children go to CCD?"

"Yeah, but if you go to Catholic school, you get it there. These little munchkins have to go every week, here at the church."

"Little munchkins?"

"Yeah, but some of them aren't so little. We've got Leo – he's a 'big, tough highschooler.' He thinks he's a badass."

"Is he?"

"Come on, he's a Carisi. He's a marshmallow."

"Just like you?"

Carisi just laughs in response. She knows him too well.

He pulls up to the church and parks the van.

"Who else are we picking up?" she asks.

"You'll see," he says mischievously.
"How many kids?" she asks firmly. She wants to know what he's getting her into.

"You'll see," he repeats, non-noncommittally.

"Ugh. I think I'll stay here. Maybe stretch my legs. But I'm sure you're capable of retrieving all those Carisi kids all by yourself."

"Sure thing," he says. "You do realize that we're early though, right? You might have to wait a bit."

"I'll stay here. I don't want to be attacked by Frannie and Frankie's overwhelming love for me," she says wryly.

"You know, they're sweet kids. They're really not that bad."

"I know," she says smiling a bit, but she's looking at him forlornly. He wonders why she looks that way. What about the twins makes her so sad?

"Okay, I'll go in. You stay here."

"Sure, but let me get out of this cramped vehicle."

She hangs out on the church steps as he goes around the back – to a classroom she supposes.

What is taking him so long? Rollins muses. She feels like she needs to go get him at this point, so she makes her way down the path that she saw him on last. The one that took him behind the church.

She looks into a little schoolroom where she sees Carisi in front of a class of kids. He's making all of them laugh. What is going on? Once she catches his eye she gives him a quizzical look and he shrugs back apologetically.

Then she hears the twins yell, "Amanda!"

She waves at them, a little apprehensive. She's surprised that they actually don't jump out of their seats and run over to her enthusiastically like before. Surprised and relieved. They turn their attention back to Carisi fairly quickly. She must admit, he does have a way with kids. . .

"What was that all about?" Rollins asks him when he dismisses the class.

Carisi puts up a finger to let her know to wait a moment. "Hey! Elizabeth, Frankie, Frannie, Giuliana! You stay here with Amanda while I go round up your older cousins."

"Yes, Uncle Sonny," some of them respond obediently. But not Elizabeth. She just pouts and turns away in a huff, looking put out.

He touches Amanda's arm before walking out and says to her quietly, "When I got here their regular teacher was throwing up. Food poisoning or something. I had to step in."

"Really? Are you a Catholic jack-of-all-trades?"

"Something like that." He looks anxiously down the hallway. "Now, I'm going to go get the older kids. Their class let out earlier than this one. I had to go over time to finish the lesson here. I hope they aren't getting into too much trouble."

"I thought you said Carisi kids were well behaved."
"That's not exactly what I said." He groans. "I'd better go. Leo can really stir up the others."

Rollins just smiles. She was right. Even Carisi kids weren't model citizens.

Carisi comes back with four other kids in tow. How many relatives does he have? These are only the children. And not even the ones that go to Catholic school. She is sure there's a bunch of them, too.

"Yo, Leo. Knock it off," she hears Carisi say loudly to the oldest boy in the group as they are coming down the hallway.

"Wow! Who is she?" she hears Leo ask, pointing at her. "She's pretty."

"She's off-limits." Carisi says sternly.

"Says who?"

"Me. She's more than twice your age – come on now, Leo. Think with your head, not your. . ." he looks down at him and nods.

Rollins just chuckles at this little exchange.

"Hey, Amanda," Carisi says as they draw closer. He introduces the older kids. "This is Victoria, Elizabeth's sister. And this is Lorenzo." He introduces an awkward pre-teen boy who looks so much like Carisi she can't believe it. This must be what he looked like when he was younger. "Ma'am," the boy politely says in greeting and holds out his hand. She shakes it.

Victoria just blew her off. Guess they couldn't all be nice kids.

"And this is Luca and his brother Leo." Carisi resists the urge to smack Leo in the back of the head as he leers at Amanda. Hormones.

But they both say "Ma'am," respectfully in greeting.

"Are you the nice lady Emma told us about?" Lorenzo asks shyly.

"Yes she is!" Frannie exclaims and Frankie follows this with, "We love her!"

"I can see why," Leo says obnoxiously, looking Rollins up and down.

"Leo!" Carisi admonishes him sternly.

Rollins smirks. Carisi points at her and says, "Hey, don't lead him on."

"I'm not doing anything. Just standing here looking pretty. . ." She gives him a teasing smile.

Now he gives her a 'knock it off' look. She just raises her eyebrows, challenging him.

"Ooooh! I think Uncle Sonny has a thing for Amanda!" Leo exclaims.

"Please," Carisi retorts. "Now get moving."

He gathers up all the kids and they head to the parking lot. How he can herd them all so effectively is beyond her comprehension. Frankie and Frannie are chattering away while Elizabeth and Victoria just look bored and a little pissed. What is up with those two?

Carisi notices Rollins looking at them in contemplation and leans in to speak to her quietly so the
sisters can't overhear them., "Hey, those two are my sister Theresa's kids. She's a bit of a snob. Wouldn't even give them proper Italian names like the rest of the family does. But we love her anyway. Unfortunately, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree if you know what I mean. Those two can be real snots."

"Why does she have to give her kids Italian names? Is she married to an Italian guy?"

"Well, no – "

"There you go," Amanda says before he can finish.

"She's divorced, Amanda," he says with an edge to his voice.

"Oh."

"Yeah. It's kinda a sore subject. Those kids are growing up without a father."

They have arrived at the van.

"Okay you guys, listen up," Carisi tells all of the kids. "This is a surveillance van. I use this for work. We catch bad guys with the stuff inside of this."

Lorenzo's mouth forms a little "O" and it's clear that most of the kids are really excited.

"I want you all to not touch anything when you're in there. You can look all you want, but no touching."

He pulls Leo aside, "You're in charge, man. You got it?"

"Yeah," Leo puffs up his chest.

"Him?" Rollins asks after Leo has started herding the younger kids into the van.

"You'll see."

"Okay," she shrugs. She seriously doubts they will be able to return the van to 1PP unscathed.

"How did that happen?" Rollins asks him as they pull into the garage. It is starting to get dark.

"What?"

"Leo actually prevented those kids from doing any damage."

"Yeah, I told you so."

"But. . ."

"Hey, he's a little hormonal – going through a weird stage right now. But he's a good kid. They all are."

"Even your sister Theresa's kids?"

"They have their moments. You just have to give them a chance."

She laughs to herself thinking about their after work adventures. "How in the hell did we get eight kids into this van?"
"Magic," Carisi says and smiles at her.

She notices that he looks a little charming in the fading light. Maybe he isn't as bad with the ladies as he seems. His 'game' as he calls it though is really annoying.

"Carisi?"

"Yeah?"

"Oh, never mind."
Errands: Thursday

Chapter Summary

A filler fic about Rollins & Carisi. The majority of this chapter takes place the week before the opening scene of Chapter 16 Episode 21.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I get it. I'm Catholic." Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah’s baptism.

"No kidding." Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.
Amanda's phone rings. She has just gotten home from work and is the middle of feeding Frannie.

"This better not be work," she groans.

She looks at who's calling. Damn. Carisi. It probably is.

"Hello."

"Hey Rollins," she hears him say through the phone.

"Yeah?"

"I need to stop by my church tonight. You don't mind coming along, do you?"

"Are you kidding me with this? Right now?"

Carisi has to pull the phone away from his face and bend over to stifle a big belly laugh. He hasn't prank called anyone since high school. But this is so much fun. He absolutely loves teasing Amanda – it has become his favorite past-time.

He grins to himself. He's pretty sure she must be tired of all of the church errands he's dragged her to this week. This must be bugging the hell out of her by now.

"Carisi? Are you there?"

Okay, time to make a serious face in order to maintain a serious voice. He brings the phone back up to his ear. He can do this.

"Yeah, I'm here. Looks like I've got to go to the church again tonight and I need you to come with me."

Impatiently she says, "Why?"

"Ah, come on. Don't be that way. It will be fun."

"What errand have you signed up for tonight?"

He finds himself trying to formulate a reasonable answer. He hadn't prepared enough before calling her because he was expecting an immediate rejection. He's still in thought when she interrupts him.

"You know what Carisi? I'm walking my dog. That's all I'm doing tonight."

Frannie's ears perk up and she lifts her head from her food bowl when she hears the word 'walk.'

"Okay," he relents. It was his plan all along to have her reject his invitation. He really didn't have anything he needed to do that night that required her presence. Hell, he barely had anything planned that required his own presence. It was all a joke.

But still, he wants to twist the knife in just a little bit, make her feel sorry she'd rejected him and his plans. "Well you know, there's this little girl who's heart you're breaking right now."

"Who?"

"Giuliana. It's her birthday."
Rollins sighs. "And what does she want from us, Carisi?"

"She wants me to leave you alone." He giggles and then hangs up on her abruptly.

"Ugh!" Rollins exclaims so loudly that she startles Frannie.

"Sorry girl." Rollins goes over to soothe her. "Your mom's just frustrated by this incredibly annoying man right now."

Then she thinks to herself, *You know what? He needs a taste of his own medicine.*

She calls him back.

He is still laughing when he answers. "Sorry about that Rollins. It's just – "

"Listen to me, Carisi. You're going to walk Frannie with me tonight."

"What?" he says incredulously.

"Yeah, you have one hour to get over here."

She ends the call.

"What the . . .?"

His little cousin Giuliana didn't actually want him to leave Amanda alone at all. Quite the opposite. And she had been quite adamant about it.

Giuliana just might get her birthday wish after all.

He smiles.

Chapter End Notes

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The date this story took place was my birthday last year – and YES, I want Carisi & Rollins together – it would make such a great birthday gift. :-)

Sorry for the self-insertion, but I just had to throw cousin Giuliana in here because of the date - I couldn't resist.
"I get it. I'm Catholic." Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, titling his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah's baptism.

"No kidding," Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.

Friday

"Hey Rollins," Carisi says to her as they are driving to work together that morning. He had picked her up at her place earlier and is in charge of driving the car.
"Yeah?"

Rollins has no idea why Benson wanted him to be the one driving – she thinks it was a poor choice. And it looks like it will just be the two of them together all day. She just hopes they don't get killed because he's behind the wheel.

Ironically, Carisi is relieved she's not driving – for exactly the same reason. "Can we stop by my church on the way back? You don't mind, do you?"

"Do we have to?"

"Yeah, you're kinda stuck with me – since I'm driving the car and all."

"No one drives in New York. Why are we?"

"Come on. You know why."

"Right, undercover couple, rich enough to own a car in this city – "

"Undercover married couple," he corrects.

She mutters, "Yeah, like they're going to buy that."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Come on Carisi . . . You and me? I don't think so."

He's trying not to be insulted by that. But he is.

"Look Rollins," he says harshly, "I don't like pretending that we're husband and wife any more than you do, but we have to suck it up and make it look good or our cover is blown. You got me?"

"Yeah, I got you," she sighs and looks out the window. The last time she had gone undercover as a wife was with Declan. Sometimes she missed him – even though she had Nick. It had been fun "playing house" with him that way. But with Carisi? She wasn't expecting this to be a fun day.

Boy, had she been wrong. On their way to his church once their day as undercover spouses is officially over they are in hysterics.

"Remember when you – "

"And he – "

"Oh my God!"

Peals of laughter escape from both of them.

Rollins tries to catch her breath.

"And what about – " she gestures. The words are beyond her.

"I know, huh?"

Then Carisi is laughing so hard his hand almost slips from the wheel as he attempts to gesture back with the other one.
"Watch it!" Rollins cautions.

And then they both lose it again.

"Watch it!"

"Watch it?"

"Ooooh, my tummy's hurting."

"Poor baby."

"Oh my god we have to stop."

"Yes . . . " They are both gasping for breath. "We do."

"Okay."

"Okay."

They are both trying to be serious – quiet and serious. But giggles still erupt from time to time as Carisi continues to drive.

Once she thinks she can contain herself Rollins manages to say, "I didn't know you were such a goofball. Well I did but . . . not that way."

"You're no slouch yourself."

"Am I supposed to take that as a compliment?"

"You should." He looks over at her – she's just smiling back at him. He loves her smile . . .

"Carisi!" she suddenly shouts in alarm.

He jolts and brings his attention back to the road. They roll over a curb.

"Ooof!"

He straightens the car back onto the road, tips his head towards her without taking his eyes off of it, and states nonchalantly. "Well, at least no one was hurt."

"Really, Carisi? That's it?"

"What am I supposed to say?"

"I don't know. Maybe 'I'm sorry for driving like shit?""

He laughs. "Why would I say that? I don't. It was just a little slip."

She rolls her eyes. "If you say so."

"Okay, here we are," he says as they pull into the church parking lot.

"Try not to hit any kids," she says sarcastically.

"How about I just try not to hit any you might like?"
"Yeah, you can start by not hitting Frannie and Frankie." She points them out to him.

He slows down in his approach to them and rolls down the window, "Hey kids! What are you doing here? It's Friday. Where's your mom?"

The twins each look at each other as if they are deciding what to say – or what not to say.

"Spill," he commands.

"Uh . . . Uh," Frankie stammers.

"We don't know," Frannie finishes for him.

"You don't know?" he says, his eyebrows raised.

"Don't get mad at her, Uncle Sonny," Frankie begs.

"It's too late for that," Carisi mumbles under his breath so the kids can't hear and reaches for his cell phone. "Rollins, I gotta make a call. I'll be back."

He gets out of the car and shuffles the kids into the church, pointing at something they should go look at inside. He dials his cousin and waits for her to pick up, pacing in front of the door.

From the car, Rollins sees him agitatedly talking into the phone. His hand gestures are out of control. She gets out of the car and heads toward the church but tries to keep a respectful distance, still allowing him some privacy. That is, until he shouts.

"You can't expect the rest of the family to take care of your kids for you! Come down here and pick them up. NOW!"

He presses the hang up button on the phone, but keeps it in his hand, shaking it. He is still fuming. Rollins slowly approaches.

"Hey, are you okay?"

"Hardly," he answers. "My cousin . . ."

She watches him just shake his head.

"Come on, let's go inside and you can tell me why we're actually here today. Okay?"

He nods and they head into the church.

Frannie and Frankie's mom shows up at the church to take them home – and quite quickly. Rollins thinks this is probably due to Carisi's insistence. She was expecting him to yell at his cousin or at least lecture her when she arrived. But instead he does something that takes her totally by surprise.

"Rollins, can you entertain these two munchkins?"

"Uh, sure."

"YAY!" they exclaim and then find a way to entertain themselves immediately. They had found a string lying around and were doing variations of cat's cradle with it, sitting quietly in one of the pews. She admires the ability of kids to get excited by the simplest things. But not having to engage fully with the twins herself gives her time to watch Carisi with his cousin.
He had led her over to a pew and they were talking quietly. He was listening to her – and comforting her. How he went from anger to that so adeptly was beyond her comprehension. She watched as they prayed together and then stood up.

Carisi notices that Rollins had been watching them. She looks away, feeling guilty for intruding on their private moment like that.

With the twins all sorted and taken back home Rollins and Carisi finally have a chance to get down to business. There was to be a wedding at the church the next day and Easter decorations were still up. The priest had asked Carisi to help take them down and he had wanted Rollins along with him. Which is the whole reason he asked her to stop by the church with him in the first place instead of taking her directly home after work.

So they find themselves removing various decorations and placing them carefully into their storage boxes, working side-by-side.

When they are done, Rollins stretches and looks up. "It's really pretty in here."

"Yeah," Carisi says looking up too.

She looks back at the altar. "It looks a little weird though, all stripped down like this."

"Yeah, but the wedding planner will be in here in the morning to spruce the place up. You wouldn't even recognize it when she's done."

"Hmm," she mumbles.

"Come on, we've had a busy day – let me take you home."

"Sure."
Errands: Saturday

Chapter Summary

A filler fic series about Rollins & Carisi. The majority of this chapter takes place the week before the opening scene of Chapter 16 Episode 21.

"I get it. I'm Catholic." Carisi says and turns back to Benson and Rollins, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows at them as they leave the church following baby Noah's baptism.

"No kidding," Rollins says remembering the previous week.

He smiles back at her. He is remembering the previous week too.

Saturday

"Hey Rollins,"
"Yeah?"

"I need to stop by my church on the way back. You don't mind, do you?"

She smiles to herself as she runs in the park and remembers hanging with Carisi for the past few days. Frannie keeps up with her stride for stride.

She comes around the bend and sees a small child sitting oddly on one of the park benches. He's in an orange coat and has his knees drawn up to his chest, hunching over them. But they are pressed up against the back of the bench – he's turned around in the seat.

"Hey," she says softly as she carefully approaches. Her 'cop' mode is instantly activated. This kid does not seem to be okay.

She goes behind the bench, commanding Frannie to sit and stay beside it. She crouches down to try to get to the kid's eye level, but the bench itself and his ducked head prevent her from being able to make any type of eye contact. He does not want to be seen.

"Sweetheart, was there an adult here with you today?" This kid is way too young to be here unsupervised.

"No, just my sister."

She goes stone cold.

"Frankie?"

The boy jerks his head up and bursts into deep sobs.

"Amanda?" he manages to get out. And then he practically jumps over the bench and into her arms.

As she holds him and rocks him back and forth in an attempt to soothe him he just clings to her, gulping and practically choking on his tears.

Eventually when he can get out a few words, her stomach tightens with dread at what he says. "Frannie! Where is she? I lost her. She's gone. I lost my sister."

Rollins' dog perks up at hearing her name, but notices that her owner does nothing and puts her head back down over her paws.

"Frankie, now listen to me, okay?" Rollins says as she pulls him back a bit from his tight hug so she can look him in the eyes. "This is serious now. Does your mom give you a phone so you can contact her?"

"Yeah," he says between sobs. "But it never works."

"Is it broken?"

He looks down, embarrassed. "No it just never works."

Rollins sighs and starts to get pissed at this woman she doesn't even know – the twins' mother. "Does your sister have a phone? Can you call her so we can find out where she is?"

Frankie just shakes his head vigorously and starts crying hard again, burying his face in her shoulder. "No, I was in charge of the phone today. I was supposed to take care of her and I lost her. It's all my fault."
Rollins strokes his head for a bit and then sets him down on the ground. "Now this is important, Frankie. Can you take me to where you last saw her?"

He nods his head and tries to sniff back his tears.

"Okay, we'll do our best to find her."

He leads Rollins to the edge of the park. There's an alleyway there. Her heart sinks – this could end very badly.

"I was sitting here. On this horsey." He points to one of the rocking horses in a playground area in the park – it was held into the sand by a large spring. "And I closed my eyes just for a minute I swear. We were playing hide and seek – but when I opened them I couldn't find her."

He's gulping and breathing hard in an effort not to cry.

"Did you look for her in that alley over there?"

"No. Oh no. I would never do that." He looks her straight in the eye with something akin to fear. "Uncle Sonny told me never to go into alleyways like that without an adult. He would be so upset with me if I had gone in there to look for her."

"Okay." She takes his hand. "Your Uncle Sonny was right, Frankie. You're a good boy for obeying him."

Frankie smiles the first smile that she's seen since finding him on the park bench.

"Did he tell you and your sister that too? Does Frannie know not to go in there?"

"I don't know. She wasn't around when he told me cause he stopped me when I was really little and tried to explore one on my own. I was little, but I didn't forget sometimes like babies do. Like Emma."

Amanda smiles a little at that one. Emma wasn't that much younger than Frankie, who is now looking up at her with soulful eyes. "Uncle Sonny takes care of us."

"Good, I'm glad someone does," Rollins mutters to herself. Frankie doesn't hear her.

"Are we going to go look for her in there?" he asks pointing down the alleyway.

"I think that's a good idea. Now you hold onto my hand okay? Don't let go."

"Okay."

Rollins had found little Frannie alright. Almost as soon as they entered the alleyway and Frankie saw her he broke from Rollins' grasp and ran up to hug his sister. She had been talking to a wino, playing cards with him. Rollins questioned the man. It sounded like he hadn't hurt her – that she had just come up to talk with him and he had kept her occupied playing cards – and Frannie did seem unharmed and corroborated his story. Now Frannie was consoling her brother who still felt so guilty for not finding her right away.

"That little girl shouldn't come up to strangers like that," the wino told Rollins and burped, bringing up some liquid and dribbling it all over his shirt. "It might not have been someone as nice as me that found her."
"I know, believe me I know."

"Come on kids, we're going back to the church." She waves them over.

On the way she calls Carisi. It goes directly to voicemail. Damn.

"Carisi, get down to the church right away. Your useless cousin abandoned the twins in Central Park. I've got them with me and I'm heading over there right now."

She hangs up, furious with the woman who would do something like this to her children.

She brings the twins into the church and finds Father DeFranco outside.

"We're having a wedding tonight," he says in greeting.

"So I've heard," Rollins say grumpily and tells her dog to sit.

His brow furrows. "What's wrong?"

"Carisi's cousin left these kids all alone in Central Park. We need to call her to come and get them."

"She isn't always available by phone."

"Yeah, I've heard that. Where is Carisi? I left him a message before heading over here."

"I think Sonny has classes on Saturday."

"Are you kidding me?" she says loudly and points to the twins. "What are we going to do with these kids?"

"Are we in trouble?" they both look up at her.

"No you guys," she says and crouches down to them. "You're not the ones in trouble."

She looks up at the priest, "Can we sit inside and wait?"

"I'm afraid not," he says. "The wedding planner is still in there setting everything up. She's a bit of a control freak. If we disturb her, it probably won't end well."

Rollins sighs, stands up, and takes one hand of each kid into her own, wrapping Frannie's leash around her wrist. "How would you like to sit over there while we wait for your mommy? On the steps?"

"Sure!" they both say excitedly and break from her grasp, running to get a coveted place on the steps.

There's a little bit of shoving, but they both eventually work it out and find a place to sit.

"Amanda! Come over!" They wave.

She walks over and sits on the step just above them, Frannie by her side.

They've been there for quite a while, the kids petting Frannie excitedly – they just love dogs - when her phone finally rings. Carisi.
"It's me, I'm almost there." He sounds out of breath.

"You'd better get your cousin over here."

"I'm trying to reach her, but I'm stopping by the church first. It's on the way to her place."

He hangs up.

Rollins doesn't see Carisi approach so he hangs back a bit, listening to her talk to the twins. Father DeFranco, who'd been lingering outside of the church the whole time, joins him.

"You know, my daddy used to take my sister and me to the track." Carisi hears her say.

"The track?"

"Yes, there's horse races there."

"Oooh, I love horses," Frankie exclaims.

"Me too!" Frannie says, not wanting to be left out.

"Yeah, well my daddy used to leave me and Kimmy – that's my sister – alone in the car. He told us to wait there for him. But he'd be gone for hours."

"Really?" Frankie says.

"Just like Mommy," Frannie points out and nods.

"We would sometimes get worried about him and wonder where he was, so we would leave the car to look for him."

"Did you ever find him?"

"No, but we shouldn't have left the car because we found dangerous people along the way. Bad people. People kids shouldn't talk to because they could hurt them. Your Uncle Sonny was right – you need to be really careful with strangers, okay?"

"Okay Amanda," they both say together.

And then Frankie says so innocently, "Not everyone will love us like you do Amanda, right?"

"I – I" she stammers.

They both jump on her for a big hug and she gets knocked back onto the step behind her, which alarms Frannie. She barks at them.

"Hey now," she hears Carisi come up behind them and take Frannie's leash from her hand.

"It's okay, girl," he says, petting her to calm her down. "She's not in any danger."

At that point the kids are laughing and squealing and poking at Amanda, who they have pressed back against the stair behind her. It seems that they like to tease her as much at their "uncle" does. But she just smiles and tickles them back.

Frannie gives Carisi a confused look, not understanding what's going on. She hasn't had much experience with children and doesn't know what to make of it.
"It's okay," Carisi says again to Frannie and continues to pet her until she calms down enough to sit by his feet.

"Finally," Rollins hears Carisi mutter and looks over to see what he's looking at.

"Mommy!" the twins yell, pull themselves off of her, and run towards a woman who is approaching the church.

Rollins looks up at Carisi who is just standing there with his arms crossed, looking pissed. Somehow he must have gotten a hold of the twin's mother.

Rollins becomes suddenly furious and launches herself at Carisi's cousin.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

The twins back away from both of them, giving their Uncle Sonny a worried look. He has one too and starts down the steps towards the arguing women.

"Who are you?" demands the woman angrily.

"I'm the one who found your kids. You know, the ones you abandoned in Central Park?"

"Who are you to judge me?"

"Someone who cares a lot more about your kids than you do." Rollins is up in the woman's face by now.

"Hey, break it up," Carisi says, coming up to them.

"I bet you don't even have kids. Who are you to stand in judgment of me?"

Rollins looks like she's going to jump her so Carisi dives in and separates them physically. "Hey! Stop it!"

Rollins isn't listening, instead she is still lunging toward his cousin, almost free of his grasp. But thankfully his cousin has already backed away a bit.

"Rollins," he says and grasps her more firmly. This still doesn't get her attention.

"Amanda!" he shouts. That does.

He looks down at her sternly. "It's not your problem."

She still struggles a bit against him.

"It's not your problem. This is my family," he says again. "Back off."

Rollins breaks free from his grasp and huffs. She backs off, but gives one parting shot, saying to Carisi's cousin, "You don't deserve those kids."

She turns away angry, and finds the priest holding her dog. Frannie is straining at her leash, concerned by what she has just witnessed. She nods to him in thanks.

"It's okay Frannie," she says as she takes the leash from him. "Back down, girl. It's okay."

She turns back to look at Carisi talking with his cousin. The two little kids are watching the
Amanda is on the stairs petting Frannie as that woman takes her children home. She just shakes her head in disgust. Carisi comes up to her and says, "Wait for me, okay? I want to talk to Father DeFranco for a minute."

"Sure," she has no idea why she agrees. She should go home now that all the drama has played out with the twins and their mother, but she's worn out.

Carisi and Father DeFranco have gone around the side of the church to get a little privacy.

"Father, can you do anything to help her?"

"We all can," he says wisely. "She needs the support of her family and the church."

"Yeah, but we're all stepping in and being guardians to those children because she can't seem to take care of them. It's not right – she needs to step up and take responsibility now. It's been such a long time – why can't she pull it together?" He lets out a frustrated sigh.

"Yes she does need to take responsibility, but she's still going through a hard time. She's having trouble managing it – you know that."

"Boy do I ever. She had trouble managing things even before he was gone."

"Yes, that's true. But we can all do our part to teach her how to manage herself and her kids. We need to help out until she finds her way. And you need to have faith that she will – she needs our support, our assurance that she can get through this. You've gotta have patience with her."

"I suppose so. But it's just not fair to those kids," Carisi grumbles.

"She doesn't need your anger right now, son. She needs your patience and your support. So do they."

"Yeah, I get it. But not everyone has problems managing things like her." He jerks a hand toward the front of the church. "Rollins out there is pretty self-sufficient. She would never fall apart like this and burden everyone else. She's tough and she can handle things herself."

"She's a good woman."

"Yes she is," Carisi sighs and looks back towards the front of the church. "Rollins has been more of a mother to those kids than their own mother has over the past few days."

Then he looks down at the walkway and adds, "It's just too bad . . ."

"What is?"

"That she doesn't want kids." He shakes his head. "It's a crying shame."

"Well, you're right that she's been good with the twins, but motherhood isn't for everyone."

"Yeah, especially not for some." He gives the priest a knowing look.

Father DeFranco switches gears, hoping to get Carisi out of his angry mental state. "Is she married?"
"Who, Rollins?"

"Yeah, you seem rather fond of her."

"Nah," Carisi denies it and waves it away as if it's nothing. "Besides, she's with someone. Not married, but still. . . "

The priest just looks at him. Carisi can tell he doesn't believe him.

"All right, all right. I'm kinda sweet on her," he admits. "But that not wanting to have kids thing? It's a deal breaker."

The priest just nods and they stand there in silence for a while before the wedding planner comes out of one of the side entrances and brushes past them muttering to herself.

"She's a bit high strung." Carisi observes.

"Yep."

Carisi finds Rollins still waiting for him on the church steps. He half expected her to take off.

He sits down next to her, but doesn't say a word.

"Those kids . . . " she says.

He waits for her to continue. There's something here. Something powerful.

"They just love, you know. Out of the blue. Unconditionally."

"And that makes you sad." It's not a question.

"Someone's going to hurt them." She sniffs and looks away.

"Come on," he says standing up and offering her his hand. "I want to show you something."

She takes it and stands up, Frannie following her.

"Sorry, Rollins, we can't take Frannie in," he says as they approach the doorway to the church. "But we'll only be a minute."

Rollins ties Frannie's leash to a nearby bicycle rack and tells her, "I won't be long, honey. Be a good dog."

Frannie licks her hand as she pets her.

Carisi holds the door open to the church for Rollins and she steps inside.

"Wow!" she says in a whisper, looking at the place all decked out for that evening's wedding. It is astoundingly beautiful. "It's gorgeous."

She just stands there, taking it all in. And then it hits her.

With wonder she says, "People get married here."

Carisi is standing beside her.
"Yes, they do," he answers softly.
Heartache

Chapter Summary

A filler fic series about Rollins & Carisi. This chapter takes place at the end of Season 16's finale.

Carisi had been talking to Olivia right before they arrived. So far, everyone but Nick and Amanda were assembled at Olivia's place to celebrate Noah's adoption. Olivia was throwing a casual party, so he had dressed down for the evening.

But then she comes through the door looking more beautiful than he had ever seen her, wearing a summery dress with her hair set in loose waves. He had never seen it that way before – usually her smooth hair was tucked up into some sort of bun or worn loosely around her shoulders, always looking perfectly professional. But now it just looks . . . nice.

It takes him a while to notice Amaro on crutches beside her, but when he does he greets them both.
They come as a package.

It isn't long before Amaro hobbles his way into the kitchen to talk to Olivia, and Carisi finds himself on the floor playing with Noah. Amanda joins him. She's just as just as good with Noah as she had been with the twins.

"You sure you don't want kids?" he asks her yet again.

"How many times do I have to say no, Carisi?"

"Until you change your mind," he says jovially.

They both laugh good-naturedly. This was turning into a recurring joke between them. But when he really lets himself think about it, it makes him sad. She would be missing out on so much – on a life he thinks she would enjoy – and the kids who would never be born would miss out on having a great mom.

But he knows it isn't his decision – he isn't even part of the picture.

He takes a break and heads toward the kitchen where Olivia and Nick are talking. He pauses when he's about halfway there and holds back to listen when he overhears Nick saying, "Look, I could retire now, put in for three-quarters pay and start over again in California."

"Nick, are you sure?"

"Zara's in LA. Gill's in San Diego. I am sure."

Oh no. Carisi looks back at Amanda still sitting on the living room floor playing with Noah. He knows she's in the dark about this – that Nick hasn't told her yet. She is too happy, too content.

He remembers her declaring loudly enough that the whole squad room could hear, "My life is perfect as is."

She had smiled back at Nick as she said it.

He knows this is going to devastate her. And he finds himself quite angry at Nick for telling Olivia first – and not Amanda, the woman he was supposed to love. It is obvious he hadn't even involved her in this decision.

He turns back from the kitchen without even going in and rejoins Amanda on the floor.

"Weren't you getting another beer?" she asks, looking at his empty hands.

"No. Too much heartache in there for me," he says, briefly glancing back at the kitchen.

She tilts her head and squints – giving him the typical odd look that she always has when she's in disbelief.

"Really?"

"Yeah," he says quietly.

"So who's breaking your heart, Carisi?" she says jokingly. "Nick?"

He just stares seriously into her sparkling aqua eyes feeling somber, but unable to express it. And she just can't comprehend why he's looking at her that way. She can't quite grasp that he's sad – sad for
her. Even though she would have no idea why.

"You're an odd one, Carisi," she states and then turns her attention back to Noah.
Olivia walks into the squad room and announces that Amaro will be leaving them and to wish him well in California. She comes up to him, shakes his hand, and pats him on the back. Then they both turn to smile at everyone.

Carisi's attention is immediately drawn to Amanda. She's sitting at her desk, both palms pressed flat against it, pushing her shoulders back. Her eyes down, darting back and forth. She is turning as white as a sheet.

*Oh my God.* His stomach flip-flops. Nick hadn't told her. In that moment, he suddenly understands the term "white hot rage."

She stays in that position even as Nick hobbles around, still on crutches, to shake hands with everyone and say goodbye. When he comes up to Carisi, he shrugs him off and instead points at Amanda silently. He stands there, arms crossed, glaring at Nick until he has the decency to approach her.

"Uh, Amanda . . ." Nick says, kinda leaning down over her as much as he can, trying to make eye contact.

She doesn't say anything so he continues, "Look, I can understand if you're a little pissed right now . . ."
Carisi rolls his eyes just watching this – Nick is unbelievable. Amanda must be feeling so humiliated right now. They should be having this conversation in private. Heck, they should have had this conversation in private long before Benson's announcement.

She slams both hands on her desk. Hard.

Then she stands up, glares at Nick fiercely and shakes her head in disgust. She walks out.

Nick is able to catch up to her by the elevators. Carisi can't hear what Nick says to her, but everyone in the squad room can hear her answer loud and clear. She is practically shouting.

"I can't believe you're leaving me for your wife and kids in California."

Carisi looks down over his still folded arms. He feels really bad for Amanda, especially when he hears her putting it that way. He realizes just how hopeless Nick and Amanda's relationship must have been from the start. Had she?

He sighs deeply. Her life is far from perfect. It never was.

As Nick and Amanda continue to stand in front of the elevators arguing loudly, Carisi finds that he just can't bear to listen anymore. Even though it is their choice to have it out in public he still feels like he is intruding on something he shouldn't. He wants to leave but would have to pass them on his way out of the building – he would have to go to the elevator banks where they are currently melting down. This could be all shades of awkward. He paces indecisively.

Fin sees him move forward, hesitate, move forward, turn back. He looks very uncomfortable.

"Carisi."

"Yeah?" Carisi turns back to look at him.

"They'll be fine."

"They will?" Carisi asks incredulously waving his hand towards the elevator banks. "How can they be fine? With him leaving and all?"

Fin leans back a little, studying him. Why is Carisi of all people taking this so personally? He's like an agitated child, worried that his parents are going to split up when they fight.

Fin tips forward in his chair. "Look man, they're adults. They'll work it out. They always do."

"If you say so," Carisi says doubtfully.

They had eventually taken their fight elsewhere and Amaro nods to Carisi when he returns to the squad room. Amanda's not with him, so Carisi asks, "Where's Rollins?"

"Uh, she went home for the day," Nick says and fiddles with some stuff on his desk.

"She did?"

"Yeah, needed to take a little personal time. To process some stuff."

He sounds smug. Carisi wants to punch him. But instead he grabs his jacket and briskly heads
towards the elevators.

"Hey, where you going?" Nick calls after him.

"To process some stuff," Carisi mutters as he presses the elevator button to go down.

"Amanda! Amanda open up!" Carisi is banging on her door. He knows she's in there. She had shushed Frannie after his first knock.

"Carisi, go away!" he finally hears her shout from the other side.

"I wanna make sure you're okay," he calls back at her through the door.

He can hear Frannie's claws skitter against the floor and then there's a little noise indicating motion on the other side of door. She's opening it.

"And what makes you think I'm not okay?" she says, pulling the door wide, and giving him a forced yet somehow ironic smile and a shrug.

"Come on," he says, tilting his head.

"Oh, so you think just because my lover for oh, I don't know more than a year now is leaving me to be with his wife and kids – yet not actually be with his wife," she chokes on that one and nods, "if you know what I mean – that I might not be okay? Is that it?"

"Nick said you were taking personal time . . . To process things."

Her eyes narrow fiercely. He's not sure he should have said that.

"Did Nick send you to check in on me? Or are you here to rescue the damsel in distress yourself?"

"You're no damsel."

"You've got that right!" she points an angry finger at him.

"Look," Carisi takes a step forward. "I think what he did to you today was really shitty Rollins."

Her face gives a little twitch.

"I just wanted to tell you that, is all," he says quietly.

They stare at each other for a while before she sighs and says, "Come on in."

Somehow she finds herself talking to this man, her goofy co-worker, about things she never really shares with anybody. Thoughts she's kept to herself. He's deceptively easy to talk to.

". . . so yeah, him, Declan, Nick. None of them ever stick around." She shrugs like it's no big deal but doesn't look up to meet his eyes for a while.

"Guess it's all cause of my daddy, huh?" she says when she finally does.

"How so?"

"My own father didn't even want me." She shakes her head. "He couldn't even stand to stay around for the good times – left for the track every chance he got. An escape he said . . . Was I really that
bad?"

He quietly takes her hand.

Her chin quivers, but she presses her lips together to stop it.

He looks down in case she cries, in case she doesn't want him to see.

"One day he just didn't come back."

He continues to hold her hand in silence for a while before breaking it to say, "Amanda?"

"Yeah?" Her voice is steadier than he thought it would be. She is even stronger than she seems.

He looks up to meet her sorrowful yet clear aqua eyes.

"Someday somebody won't leave you."
"You talk to him?" Carisi overhears Fin ask someone in the break room. He had gone back to the squad room briefly to fetch his suit jacket.

His heart sinks when he hears Amanda answer. He hangs back and covertly listens to her talk to Fin about how Amaro is happy and about all of the things he's been up to since he left New York. *And left her behind*, Carisi thinks bitterly.

When she's finished he hears Fin say knowingly, "You miss him."

It was not a question. Carisi doesn't stick around to hear her response. He brusquely grabs his jacket, whips it on, and heads to the elevators.

He hadn't wanted to hear that – any of it. He knows it's going to bug him all day and he realizes that he's gotta say something. Unfortunately, right now he's gotta go interview this woman with Benson. He sighs, resigned to do his duty, and takes the elevator down to the parking lot where Benson's been waiting for him.

"Hey Sarge, I gotta make a pit stop on the way back, you mind?" he asks as they drive back to the
"Where to, Carisi?"

"Ah, just this little pizza joint that's on the way . . . my sister's friend Juno runs it. Decent guy."

"So do you suddenly have a hankering for pizza or you just want to hang out for a few with a decent guy named Juno?" Benson teases him.

"Nah, it's not for me."

Benson quirks an eyebrow, but keeps her eyes on the road.

"Look, Sarge," he tries to explain. "It's Rollins. She doesn't feed herself right, ya know?"

"I hadn't noticed."

"Well, she doesn't. And I feel like I need to look out for her . . . From time to time." He tips his head towards Benson. "You know."

She smiles a little and thinks about that. "You're a good friend, Carisi."

"Yeah, I know." He smiles a small smile.

As they drive past a hole-in-the-wall pizza place Carisi suddenly bursts out, "Oh, pull over here. There's Juno!"

He waves excitedly.

"Amanda?" Carisi is standing just outside the break room with a bag from Juno's.

She looks up from her desk.

"Wanna join me?" he asks enticingly, shaking the bag. "I've got Stromboli."

"Stromboli, huh?"

"Yeah."

"I like Stromboli."

"I know," he says and nods.

"Is that from Juno's?"

"Yeah."

"I love that place. Your cousin runs it or something, right?"

"Close enough." He heads into the break room and gives her a little wave. "Come on."

"So, have you heard from Nick lately?" Carisi asks her when they are no more than two bites into their Stromboli. He can't let this go any longer.

She looks away from him, a little guarded, pretending to evaluate her soda options from across the precinct.
room. "Well, yeah."

"Why are you doing that?"

Now her eyes are back on his. They are hard. "Doing what?"

"Talking to him."

She just shakes her head and makes a 'sheesh' sound, looking away once again.

"Look Rollins, that ain't good for you."

"What do you care?"

"I'm your friend, Amanda," he says firmly. "I don't like to see you get hurt."

"Yeah, well I can take care of myself!" she snaps, gets up, and throws the Stromboli she had been eating into the trash.

"Hey!" He stands up, and waves an arm toward the trash can. "What did you do that for?"

She just glares at him.

"Look," he says, sternly pointing a finger at her. "I know you can take care of yourself, but – "

Pointing a finger at him in return, she interrupts him. "Yeah, I'm a big girl. How dare – "

But he just interrupts her right back. "Look, I'm not trying to save you or protect you or anything. You don't need that. It's just . . . your head's not on straight about Nick."

She just crosses her arms defiantly, glaring back at him.

He throws up his hands in frustration and practically yells at her, "He left you, Amanda. He left you!"

Her shoulders slump as she deflate at his words and now he feels bad for yelling. She looks down and murmurs quietly, "I'm just talking to him."

"Yeah, and where will that get you?" He tries to say this like a concerned friend – he is a concerned friend – but instead he comes off sounding like a parent – one who's chastising her.

"Huh?" he prods when she doesn't say anything, kicking himself for still sounding that way. But at this point he feels like it's almost what the situation warrants. He can't believe Amanda thinks it's okay to stay in touch with Nick after how everything went down. He's trying to knock some sense into her.

"I miss him, okay? I miss . . . " she looks up at Carisi but then starts to turn away in embarrassment, a flush crawling up the back of her neck.

"Hey," he catches her arm and looks down at her with gentleness in his eyes now. "I didn't mean to be so harsh. I know you must still be going through a hard time and I'm just worried about you, okay?"

She looks back at him but the flush has reached her entire face now and she gulps, embarrassed that she might actually cry and look weak to him. Over this. So she holds it in.
Carisi continues softly, stroking her arm a bit before releasing it. "What is it that you miss about him? You can talk to me."

"I miss having someone, you know? Having someone to share things with outside of work, but yet someone who still understands what's going on here, you know? Cause things do get rough for us. This isn't exactly a job you can't take home – try as you might."

He nods in understanding.

"I don't know – and I miss having someone that turns me on – who's fun to be with."

"There aren't plenty of guys right here in New York who can turn you on? Like those beefcakes over at 1PP that spend all their free time at the gym?" he jokes.

"Please."

"Yeah, alright Rollins, but as I recall Nick wasn't exactly a cream puff and you do like The Situation . . . That guy spends an awful lot of time at the gym you know."

"He owns one."

"Yeah, see."

"It's not his muscles that I like."

"Oh, yeah, that's right. It's his accent." Carisi smiles smugly.

"No . . . " she says patiently. "He's funny. Remember?"

"Yeah I do, Rollins." He pauses, thinking very carefully about what he's going to say next. "And there's nothing funny about Nick Amaro."

She sighs and looks down. "Yeah, I know."

"You might want to remember that for next time."

"Remember what?"

"What you might want from a guy outside of a physical relationship."

"What?" She's looks a little ticked off all of a sudden. "Is that what you think of me? That all I'm interested in is sex?"

"What? No." This conversation is suddenly going the wrong way. Damn. His mouth always gets him into trouble. He tries to backpedal. "Look, all I'm saying is, make sure the next guy is good enough for you."

"And Nick wasn't?"

"Ugh." He still isn't getting it right. Frustrated, he runs his hands through his hair, scratches the back of his head, and tries again. "Just don't settle – for a guy who turns you on but may not have much else that works for you – just 'cause you're lonely."

That was an even worse thing for him to say. She is livid now.

"I'm not lonely," she says in a low voice, a dangerous voice. "I don't need anyone."
He sees the lie in her eyes. He doesn't know why, but he finds himself doing something really really stupid. Even though her stance is like a viper ready to strike . . .

He envelops her in a hug.

And she doesn't resist.

But then he whispers to her, "It's not a cardinal sin to not want to be alone."

It was meant to be a comfort, yet she stiffens at his well-meaning words.

"That's not what this is." She pushes him away roughly. "Look, I'll figure this out on my own. I'm fine. I don't need your support or whatever this is supposed to be."

"I'm not –"

"Save it. If I find myself in need of a post-break up therapy session, I'll go find me some ice cream and some girlfriends, okay?"

She storms out.

He's picking up strawberry ice cream at the store. Taking a guess. Hoping he's right.

A stout middle aged woman dressed in head-to-toe black who is helping him at the check-out counter evaluates his choice. "Strawberry ice cream, eh?"

"Yeah."

"That was our ice cream back in the day," she muses. "Back before we all got tied into our marriages. Back when hanging out with your girls and eating this stuff like it was going out of style could mend a broken heart and you could move on."

"So it will work then?"

"Work?" She gives him a strange look. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh never mind," he says and pays her.

Two days later, Carisi and Amanda are standing outside of a DOC trailer awaiting the conjugal visit between Yates and his fiancé Susie to be over. The two aren't exactly quiet and Benson keeps looking back at them and Fin with looks of disbelief on her face from time to time.

Yet Carisi still hears Amanda's phone vibrate over the noise of the two lovers in the trailer. He watches her pull it out of her pocket and look at it. He can see the screen easily.

Nick.

She looks up at him briefly and presses the 'dismiss call' button. They share a small, quiet smile, both of them remembering the time they had recently spent together just talking – with heaping bowls of strawberry ice cream in their hands.

He knows the call won't be returned.
He had been getting on her last nerve. All night. As Carisi himself had told the officers at Syracuse PD that it had been a long day. And at that point it had only been getting started. After that they had spent around two more hours in a borrowed squad car together in hot pursuit of Rudnick, trying to make it to Buffalo before his Meta Bus did.

Carisi had kept telling her to slow down during the drive.

'You're going to get pulled over,' he had kept saying nervously.

'I'm driving a squad car.'

'Still. You're driving too fast.'
This conversation had repeated itself over and over in one form or another for a good portion of the drive.

Once he had resigned himself to the fact that she was going to drive 'dangerously fast' in order not to lose Rudnick, he started pestering her about something else – about why she wouldn't call him Sonny.

'What's the big deal?'

'I call you Amanda.'

'So?'

'That's your first name. Carisi's my last name.'

'Sonny's a weird name.'

'Weird, huh?'

'Yeah.'

Amanda had relished the calm as he had stewed over that one for a while. But then he had broken the silence.

'You know, I need to start calling you by a weird name. Screw 'Amanda.' I won't call you that anymore.'

'So what are you going to call me then?'

'You'll see,' he had said cryptically and grinned to himself.

She had just groaned in response.

'Do whatever you want.'

It hadn't been long before she found out what he was planning on calling her in place of Amanda. He had introduced her to Bob Hencamp of the Buffalo PD as 'Sonny.' And it hadn't stopped there.

Now they are standing at the front desk of a hotel, trying to check in for the night after leaving Rudnick behind in lockup at the Buffalo precinct.

"Yeah, Sonny Rollins. Check again. We're from NYPD."

"It's Am – " she starts to interrupt him but he holds up a finger.

"Uh uh. I'm going to handle this."

Exhausted and not thinking straight she finds a couch in the lobby to collapse in. In what seems like seconds she feels a nudge on her shoulder.

"Hey Sonny, wake up."

"I'm awake. And stop calling me that," she protests.

"Okay, I've got good news and bad news."
He looks way too cheerful to have any bad news. But her assessment is wrong. He does.

"So they've only got one room left."

"Carisi, come on," she whines in protest. "There's gotta be other options. Maybe we can try another hotel?"

"Are you going to start calling me Sonny now?"

"No."

"Then like I said, there's only one room left. And there are no other options."

"So you're really going to do this to me then aren't you?" she groans.

"You gonna call me Sonny?"

"Answer's still no."

"Okay then, let me show you the good news."

She huffs and takes the hand he offers and uses it to pull herself off of the couch. She is so sleepy she doesn't have any fight left. If he wants to play this ridiculous game over his name . . .

"The honeymoon suite? Are you kidding me right now?"

"Well, we are right near Niagara Falls – prime honeymoon territory – so they've got a lot more than just one of these rooms . . . And it was all they had available 'cause we got here so late and all. Same price th – " He interrupts himself, distracted. "Hey look, they've got some cool amenities here. . . "

She just puts her hand on her hip, tilts her head, and glares at him as he walks around the suite, taking everything in.

"Check out this heart-shaped bathtub! It's like a Jacuzzi and everything. Look at the jets!"

He's like a kid on Christmas morning. And way too cheerful for her current energy level.

She sighs. "I'm going to go to b – "

She turns and stops.

"One bed?!"

"Well it IS the honeymoon suite. They expect the bride and groom to sleep together and all." He shrugs and gives her a sideways grin.

She is seriously pissed off now. "You're sleeping on the floor."

"Are you going to call me Sonny?"

"Not on your life."

"Well then I'm not sleeping on the floor."

"So you're not going to be a gentleman about it?"
"Are you going to call me Sonny?"

"What is WITH you?"

"I'll take that as a no. I'm sleeping in the bed. 'Sonny' is nice enough to sleep on the floor. 'Carisi'? Not so much."

"Well, I'm not sleeping on the floor."

"Fine, you can join me."

"What?"

"It's your choice, Sonny Rollins. The floor or the bed."

"Well, this 'Sonny' ain't so nice herself. I'll see you in bed."

"Fine."

"Fine."

They stand off with their hands on their hips for a while, just glaring at each other.

"I'm going to bed," Amanda says finally, giving in to her tiredness.

He looks over at the tub, grins, and rubs his hands together. "I'm taking a bath."

"You'd better not get naked over there. I can see you from the bed, you know."

"I know. I'll keep it decent."

She drifts off to the sound of jets bubbling through warm water and Carisi's exaggerated sighs from across the room. Damn, he sure is annoying. But she's too tired to care anymore.

At some point he crawls into bed with her, which wakes her up.

"Hey there, you awake?" he says quietly.

"Yeah," she moans a little. "I am now."

"I'm starving. What about you?"

"Does it matter? We can't get any food this time of night."

"Yeah, you're right. We'll have to get a big breakfast tomorrow. Bacon, eggs — "

"— eggs, pancakes," she chimes in and finishes for him. "Lots of syrup."

"Yeah, sounds good."

"Mmmm . . . "

"So you gonna call me Sonny or what?"

She groans and rolls over to face him fully, "Carisi — "
"C'mon, Rollins. Just call me Sonny. Humor me."

"Okay okay, Sonny," she sighs and finally gives in. "But just for tonight."

"Hey, no fair. The night's almost over."

"I know. We have to head back so early." She groans and stretches. "But seriously, just for tonight, Sonny. Take it or leave it."

"Okay, I'll take what I can get." He pauses. "Amanda."

They both smile a bit at each other but can barely see it through the darkness.

"Hey Car– " she stops and corrects herself. "Sonny?"

"Yeah."

"You wanna know the craziest thing Yates said to me?"

"Huh?"

"He said he thought that Susie had been pregnant."

"What's weird about that? They were engaged – they had sex. We heard it, in case you don't remember. People get pregnant doing that, you know."

"I know, but . . . " she pauses. The whole thing had weirded her out. "He said he could sense her ovulating one of the last times they were together. That's weird, right? Guys can't do that. Sense things like that . . . can they?"

He stares through the darkness at her. Her pupils have grown so wide they look like they take up almost all of her eyes and he just blinks at her, silent. Something about the direction this is going . . .

"Sonny?"

"Uh, yeah, uh no I don't think they can." But he wonders just when does intuition cross the line into knowing. . . He had a feeling Amanda was actually . . . But no, she couldn't be – he had only seen her vomit that one time. It was strange that his mind kept going there from just that incident. But still, her denial that anything was wrong . . .

Amanda interrupts his thoughts. "God, I hope she wasn't really pregnant. Rudnick wouldn't have killed just her then. He would have killed her baby, too."

Her eyes get a little moist – she doesn't understand why just vocalizing that would make her so emotional.

"Yeah, it would be a real tragedy," she hears Sonny say softly through the darkness. "Even though it would mean that Yates' line probably wouldn't continue. We don't need any more of his type in the world."

"How do you know his baby would turn out like him?"

"I don't. But sometimes the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Yeah, but sometimes it may hit the ground nearby and then decide to roll away."
They both chuckle a bit.

"Yeah, you're right. A baby can be a fresh start. Children don't always have to turn out like their parents."

"No, they really don't."

Sometime in the middle of the brief night Rollins wakes up, restless. Her feet are tangled in . . .

Yikes! She pulls them away quickly. That is Carisi in bed with her. She's disoriented for a second. But then she calms down. He's still asleep. Couldn't have noticed. Good.

She falls back asleep.

He's dreaming. Touching her stomach. Their baby. . .

His eyes open with a start but something tells him to lay still. As he takes in his surroundings he notices his head is resting on golden hair. His breath moves the strands softly. Too close.

And his arm . . .

He slowly retracts it, in an effort not to wake her.

How the hell did he end up spooning her? He very slowly withdraws and turns over.

Facing away from her, breathing shallowly, he tries to go back to sleep. It is futile.

But then unexpectedly her feet reach out for his. He feels them slowly entwine themselves with his own. He doesn't want to wake her and so he stays very still and waits for morning, letting her feet remain tangled up in his until dawn.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Piperholmes, who is a great writer of Rollisi fan fic. I highly recommend that you check out her stuff if you haven't already. I wrote this a while back on her birthday and she and I both have a thing for names . . . Like what might it mean when Amanda calls Carisi by a name other than his last one . . .

Pondering this inspired the direction this chapter ended up taking.
He stands near the vending machine and watches her as she walks out. She is unnerved – unnerved by him and his ability to see what's within her without being told.

But in that moment . . .

That precise moment . . .

When he asks her – *What are you going to do?*

And she replies – *I'm not going to do anything.*

It happens.

He falls.
"Make a night of it, Rollins?" Carisi asks her as they leave the courthouse.

She nods in agreement and they head back to the precinct to review tapes of Rudnick's autopsy recordings. It is grueling and tedious.

They decide to take a break about four hours in.

Amanda stretches her back and groans. Carisi notices that she looks to be in a bit of pain.

"Is that good for the baby?"

"What?"

"Sitting so long like that."

"No, I'm sure it's fine."

"Well if it's not we can – "
"Ugh. Look, Carisi. It's way too early for you to start worrying about stuff like that, okay?"

"Okay, but my sister – "

"Stop, okay?"

"Okay," he says but grins to himself, turning away from her to pour himself some coffee. He is so excited that Amanda is having a baby he can barely contain himself. The one thing that had given him pause – the one barrier that had made him feel the need to squelch his feelings for her – had been lifted. And it felt great.

Later in the evening . . .

"I think I got something."

Carisi is glad that Rudnick is a talker. It had been grueling work, but he finally found it – Rudnick's admission of guilt. The incriminating evidence hadn't been found where they were expecting it – it was on the video taken at the courthouse after Barba and Benson had left him alone in a room, awaiting his lawyer. And now it was over. Finally.

He hands the laptop and headphones over to Rollins to see for herself. Carisi claps his hands together as Rollins checks it out and agrees with him. They've got 'em!

"Hey, you up for a little bowling?" He asks her as they walk out of the precinct together.

"Bowling? Are you serious, Carisi?"

"Yeah, we got our guy. I'm a little jazzed now."

"But you look exhausted."

"But yeah, that's the thing, I'm really not."

She checks him out from head to toe while he's walking. He does the same.

"I notice a little spring in your step, Rollins."

"You too, Carisi."

They smile at each other.

But then she stops and thinks. "Wouldn't bowling be bad for the baby?"

"I don't know, probably. Sorry about that. I can look it up. How far along are you? It's early yet, right?" He reaches for his smartphone. "There's this site, you see. Bella and I would – "

Amanda reaches out and covers his hand – the one that had just pulled his phone out of his pocket. "It's okay, Carisi. I don't think we'll be doing any more after work late-night bowling for a while."

"Guess not, huh?" he shrugs, a little disappointed, and puts his phone away.

As they continue to walk he thinks about how he's going to miss teasing her for always getting gutter balls right after strikes, and how, oddly, her clothes always seem to match the rental shoes. He's also going to miss how she almost always winks at him right before throwing a strike – like she somehow
knows she's going to do it. And now that he's thinking about it, he already misses how she likes to
 tease him back – about almost anything, and then basically everything as the night goes on.

He puts his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket and looks down.

_Hell, he was going to miss it all . . .

Except . . .

_It was all for a really good reason._

He looks up and smiles.
Chief Dodds leaves Benson's office at the end of the day and stops by to greet Amanda.

"Detective Rollins, how are you feeling?"

"I'm okay. That was a tough case."

"Yeah well, we can't save them all."

"Yeah, I know."

After he leaves she looks down at her belly and strokes it, breathing out slowly to calm herself and the baby growing inside her. The last couple of cases she's worked had been really difficult for her. Two dead children and a boy torn from his mother to serve out a sentence in juvie followed by time in an adult prison for the murder of another child.

Carisi arrives back at the office and finds Amanda in silent contemplation, looking a bit somber. He doesn't want to disturb her so he sits down at his desk as unobtrusively as possible and pulls one of his law books out of a drawer.
But it doesn't matter how quiet he is, Amanda still notices him. "Whatcha doing back here, Carisi?"

"Ah, just trying to get some studying done – in the quiet."

"It's not quiet enough at your place?"

"Nah, Bella and Tommy and have been crashing at my place the last couple of nights. Their place is being fumigated."

"Not a conducive place to study, huh?"

"Nah, not really. You think I talk a lot? You should see my sister Bella." He gives her a knowing nod.

Amanda smiles a bit before turning away from him to go back to her paperwork. Carisi takes out a yellow legal pad and dives into his studying.

Sometime later Carisi gets up to take a break and grab some coffee. He notices Rollins is still at her desk, but she's not working on anything. She's just staring off into space.

"Hey Rollins," he says to get her attention.

"Yeah?"

"You're still here? Isn't a little late for you? There can't be that much paperwork."

She clears her throat. "Yeah. No there isn't. I just . . . I don't know what I'm still doing here. Lost in thought I guess."

"I'm going to grab some coffee. Want me to get you anything?"

"No, it's okay. I'll come with you though." She stands up from her desk and stretches.

They walk into the break room together and while he's filling his coffee cup he asks her, "What's got ya thinking?"

"God, it's just these last two cases." She puts her hand up to her forehead and then flicks it away. "Keisha didn't have to die. Her mother . . ."

". . . is a piece of work," he says nodding, echoing her words from the day he broke the news to the rest of the squad that Keisha was gone. His voice had cracked as he told them all - and he and Amanda had exchanged sorrowful looks. But now her face displays more anger than devastation.

"No," Amanda says adamantly. "She is a piece of shit. A total piece of shit."

He's a bit taken aback by her forceful response, but realizes that Amanda probably just needs someone to listen to her talk through this stuff – so she can process it. He's needed that himself on certain cases. So he settles in, leaning back on a table, and takes a sip of his coffee, waiting for her to continue.

"I mean, she just leaves her kids alone like that? For days? To go on a bender?" Amanda spurts.

"You know, it's unfortunate, but sometimes these parents do that."

"Yeah, they do. And they don't deserve to have kids. Keisha and Bruno were left alone in that
apartment, without even any air conditioning or fans – for days. Days! It's August. And Bruno, what is he, three? How can his mother expect him to take care of himself? It's not right." She pauses and waves her hand in frustration.

"And don't even get me started on how she abandoned Keisha. Locked away in a cage? No food or water and a baby brother who can barely feed himself, let alone her? No wonder she died after you found her. That woman is a monster. A total piece of shit. No child should have to go through that. Ever."

She starts to tear up.

"Hey Amanda, you okay?" He makes a move toward her but she puts up her hand.

"I'll be fine, Carisi. It's just . . ."

He settles back against the table and waits for her to go on.

"Compare that to Darius' mother . . ."

"Yeah," he agrees with her right away, before she can even finish. "She's busting her butt to provide for her children. By herself."

"Exactly, and she has her shit together – she makes no excuses. You should have seen her when I had to arrest Darius for Avery's murder. She was devastated . . . just devastated when I had to take him away. She actually gives a shit about her kids and what happens to them . . ." she trails off.

But then she just looks down and says quietly, "Like a mother should."

"Hey," Carisi says and moves toward her again, reaching an arm out to her as she starts to cry.

She moves out of his reach and wipes her eyes quickly.

"It's hormones, just hormones," she offers as an excuse. "I'm fine, really. I'd better get going."

She leaves Carisi behind in the breakroom. He puts his head down and thinks. Amanda was taking this really hard. It had been rough on all of them, but still . . . it wasn't just hormones. Something about these two cases had hit too close to home for her.

He goes to the doorway of the breakroom and just listens as she packs up her things in preparation to go home. He hears her keys dangle in her hands as she slowly walks to the elevator bank and starts up a conversation on her phone.

"Mom, you are coming right?"

. . .

"Yeah, yeah. You know I don't want to do this alone."

. . .

"I know I know, I'm a big girl. But still, I'd like for you to be here. It's my first time and all. You've been through this before – you know what to expect."

. . .

"Okay, see you soon. I love you too, Mom."
Carisi steps out of the doorway and catches a glimpse of her ending the call. He's relieved to hear that Amanda will have someone with her, have family by her side to help her bring her new baby into the world. He had been starting to get worried that she'd have to go through it all alone.

But then he hears Amanda mutter to herself, almost in desperation, "Come on, Mom. I really need you to come through for me. Please don't let me down this time."

The elevator dings and Amanda steps into it. Carisi's brow furrows at her last comment and now he's not so relieved. He doesn't want her to have to worry, to wonder if she'll have someone with her along the way.

So right then and there he decides that he's going to make sure she knows he's there for her, should she need him. He vows to himself to do at least one thing every day to demonstrate this because the words 'I'll be there for you' can be dismissed so easily. And often in practice they are more of a letdown than a promise – and that's the last thing Amanda needs right now.

His brain starts working as he heads back to his desk . . .
"Carisi, stop, just stop." Amanda puts her hand up in protest, while her other one cradles her sore back. Her protruding stomach has grown much faster than her back muscles can adapt to it comfortably.

"Stop what?" he asks in all innocence.

"All your incessant buzzing."

"Buzzing? Wha – "

"Look," her eyes lock with his, "I know you're sweet on me and all . . . "

"Uh . . . uh," he begins to stammer and looks down, shuffling his feet. He brings his hand up to rub the back of his neck as a deep flush crawls over it. He has no idea how to respond to such a direct confrontation about his feelings for her in this moment.

"Carisi! Rollins!" Benson barks at them from the doorway of the breakroom. "Come on, we've got something."
Saved.

Carisi follows Rollins out, grateful not to have to make eye contact with her for a while as they dive back into their work for the day.

"He was sweet on her, yeah," Fin answers Carisi.

"I figured as much," Carisi says with a wry grin. "You should have seen him when Rollins turned around and he saw how far along she is – right after telling me how well they hit it off a few years back while working a case. I'd bet dollars to donuts he's not interested in her now."

They exchange a brief chuckle. They are all at the 27th precinct getting ready to patrol the streets after a briefing. Both SVU and the 27th were working together to track down the latest push-in rapist.

"Who's not interested in who?" An enthusiastic Doom comes up behind Fin and Carisi and claps them on their backs. The red headed detective from the 2-7 had just been the subject of their conversation.

"Rollins," Fin says sarcastically with a jerk of his head. "Now that she's seen your ugly mug again she ain't interested."

Carisi looks down, hiding a smile of amusement while Doom just laughs. "You think so, eh?"

Silence from Fin.

"We'll see about that," Doom says and turns away to head out.

"That guy was always overly confident." Fin grumbles. "Overly confident and wrong."

"Oh yeah?" Carisi asks him.

"Yeah," Fin says.

They both head out themselves.

"So, Rollins must be happy that Amaro's gone, eh?" Doom later asks Carisi.

"Huh?" Carisi is taken aback by the question.

"Yeah, she really hated that guy."

Oh, Carisi thinks, figuring out the situation quickly. This guy must have known Rollins from way back. Before she was with Nick.

Doom continues, "Yeah, he was always second guessing her, trying to control the situation – every situation. Drove her nuts. He treated her like she didn't know how to do her job."

"Uh huh," Carisi says.

"That doesn't work for her, you know," he nods conspiratorially.

"Uh yeah, I think I've figured that one out." Carisi smiles wryly.
“Just thought you should know about that – you know . . . since you're sweet on her and all.”

Seriously? This guy too?

Carisi just rolls his eyes, "Come on, Doom, let's go do our job."

Amanda is getting ready for the baby shower with her mother, who had just started her first drink of the day.

"Come on, Mom. You don't need that. They're will be plenty to drink at the party."

"Nonsense. I want to be in the party mood when I get there."

"Well then, you certainly will be." Amanda gives up and shakes her head.

Her mom sets her glass down on the counter and they both lean into the mirror, putting on their almost matching earrings together. Amanda would wear these when she wanted to feel close to her mother. Like now. Too bad the drinking had already started.

As she sinks the first hook into her ear, she thinks about Carisi and his recent, more obvious displays of affection. She wants to be close to her mother right now, but she doesn't want to share that. Doesn't want her mother to know about him for some reason.

She hopes and prays that he will tone it down at the baby shower – and that her mother will be drunk enough not to notice if he doesn't. But she also hopes that her mother won't be so drunk that everyone else will see it. In reality it is too fine of a balance to ask for.

She looks over at her mom putting the hook of her second earring in and sighs, preparing herself for the damage control that would obviously need to be done since her mother had already decided to start drinking that day.

Fin watches the exchange between Amanda and Carisi as he gushes on about the heated diaper wipes caddy he had given her at the baby shower and realizes . . . Damn.

How had he missed this?

"Amanda," Fin catches her later that day.

"Yeah, Fin."

"Look, I saw you and Carisi talking . . . about that shower gift and all."

"And?"

"Well, you do realize he's sweet on you, right?"

Neither of them notice that Carisi had almost walked in on their conversation. He hangs back a bit and waits.

"Yeah I do, Fin."

"Well, whatcha going to do about it?"

"I'm not going to do anything."
"Come on, Amanda. You can't leave a guy hanging like that. I've seen the long-suffering looks you give him."

She just gives Fin one of those long-suffering looks in return.

"Look, I know you don't like the guy – "

She starts to interrupt him, but he doesn't let her.

" – not like that. Just be nice and let him off the hook, Amanda. Don't let him hope for something he's never going to get."

"I'll take care of it Fin," she says firmly. "In my own way."

Carisi waits and waits for the ax to fall, but Amanda never says a word to him.

He doesn't give up hope. She's given him no reason to.
Carisi sits down on an end table after pacing yet once again. He refuses to sit in those tiny hospital waiting room chairs. He's too tall - and they confine his legs.

Fin is off getting them some coffee. Like Carisi needs any more – he's so restless as it is. He scratches the back of his neck, looks down at the floor, and thinks. Snippets of memory come back.

"My sister, the gift that keeps on giving."

Carisi had noticed right away that Kim was a piece of work. She'd been working her defense lawyer since he and Benson had interviewed her.

"He just barged through and started beating on me," Kim says and turns her head to point out her bruised cheek to Carisi, trying to muster his sympathy. He sees right through her. It's so obvious she's full of crap and has been lying through her teeth the entire time, yet her attorney is easily falling for her helpless victim routine.

Kim is the polar opposite of Amanda, who would never be caught dead looking like a victim, let alone even attempt to use it to her advantage.

Later, they are in court for Kim's arraignment on a number of charges, including manslaughter.
Amanda and Carisi sit beside each other the whole time. He wants to take her hand when she bows her head upon hearing Kim's change in plea from guilty to not guilty on the manslaughter charge – making it so that she will be unable to take a plea deal, making it more likely she'll serve out a long sentence in prison.

But he doesn't dare. He wouldn't do that. Not at work. Even though his first instinct is to comfort her in some way, he just sits there, useless, feeling a twinge in his chest witnessing her obvious distress.

From there it gets worse.

He remembers her falling into his arms and the arms of the others after –

"Hey, there Staten Island," Fin interrupts his thoughts by putting a cup of coffee into his hands.

"Hey," Carisi says softly, takes a swig of the coffee and then lets out a little, "Agh." It is too hot and too chalky.

"Yeah, it's hospital coffee," Fin grumbles, admitting it tastes like shit, too. "Best I could do, man."


They sit in silence for a while. Just waiting.

But then Carisi can't take it anymore and stands up to continue pacing.

"Hey man," Fin tells him. "It'll be alright. She'll be alright."

"Are you kidding me? She's pregnant and she fainted on us back there. She's lucky we were all around to catch her. How do we even know that she'll be okay? Something serious could be going on."

"We don't," Fin says in all honesty. "But you gotta calm down, man. We don't know anything."

"That's right, they won't tell us anything. We're not next of kin," Carisi says bitterly and shakes his head once again thinking about her family as he paces.

"She's leaving? Now?" he had exclaimed in exasperation as Amanda's mother walked away from her, leaving her standing there in the hallway of the courthouse. Carisi had been shocked and appalled at her behavior. And he remembers her nasty words to Amanda. All of them. It makes his blood boil just to think about it.

"Let's not do this at all."

"Why? What do you mean?" Amanda calls out to her mother as she walks away. She is a bit too fast for Amanda to effectively keep up with her given how far along she is. Yet Amanda still tries to wobble after her. "Huh?"

Carisi has never heard a note of desperation in her voice like that before. Ever. Her mother turns back to face her.

With false sweetness dripping from her mouth she says, "I'm sorry darling, I just came up here to help you. But it's quite clear you know what you're doing. I'd just be in the way."

As she turns away again Amanda says to her, "So what, you're going to leave?"

That tone in her voice breaks Carisi's heart. Because the sound of desperation is still there, yet now
It's stronger. She has let down her guard in public – he can't even imagine how she feels inside.

*Her mother starts in on her – in front of all of them – lecturing her on family values. And then . . . she turns and leaves her daughter behind, completely abandoning her when she needs her the most. Watching this breaks Carisi's heart even further.*

As Amanda slowly heads over to the wall near the windows of the courthouse Carisi can still hear her mother's abrasive voice stinging his ears.

"You chose your work over your family . . . Just like you always have . . . I'll be back for your sister's trial . . . and maybe by then you'll have finally learned the value of family."

And then before he knows it, she's falling . . .

He is so angry at Amanda's stupid family. Angry for her. For what she's had to endure. And he's still pacing in the waiting room because he has too much of this anger flowing through him, and too much anxiety over what may be happening with Amanda right now. He just can't sit still.

He can tell that Fin is getting tired of his restless pacing. Yet he remains chill, like he always does. Carisi is quite aware that Fin knows how he feels about Amanda and appreciates his consideration in not giving him a hard time about all his worrying tonight.

But when finally even he has had enough of his own pacing, he goes to the window and looks out, remembering Nick Amaro's words to him from what seemed like ages ago:

"Her sister played her so many times she taught herself to expect the worst from family."

He finally understood why.

But now all he feels is sadness. He wonders just what kind of family Amanda is going to be bringing her baby into . . .
Amanda had just finished interviewing Mrs. Baker of Baker's Dozen fame and found herself in the breakroom agitatedly picking up discarded pizza boxes, plates, and napkins that her gaggle of children had left behind. Carisi comes in and starts helping her. She is muttering to herself and hasn't even looked up to say hi to him yet.

"Something wrong, Rollins?"

"Yeah, Carisi. Yeah there is." She tosses the plates she had been holding roughly into an open pizza box. "You know how you said that those people were entitled to their beliefs earlier?"

"Yeah," he says, crossing his arms over his chest. "And they are."

"Does that entitle them to judge me? Is that very Christian of them? Is that what you believe?"

"Hey hey hey. Slow down here a second." He puts up his hands. "Amanda, tell me what happened."

"That Mrs. Baker? A real peach."

"Uh huh . . ."
"She asked me if my husband was okay with me working here – around 'all of these men.'"

"Well –"

"And then she noticed I wasn't wearing a wedding ring even though I'm obviously pregnant and just had to point it out to me." She just shakes her head and looks away from him.

"What did she say exactly?"

She looks back at him. "Oh, she played it off like it was something else. Like I wasn't wearing one because of water retention or something. But I saw the judgment in her eyes. Bitch."

"Amanda . . ."

"What gives her the right, Carisi? Huh?"

"Nothing. She shouldn't be standing in judgement of you."

She hadn't expected that from him because of his beliefs – because she assumed that they were similar to hers.

He continues, "Look, you're doing something very brave here, Amanda. Many women make different choices. Bella almost did."

She's stunned at that. Carisi's sister? "Bella?"

"Yeah," he looks down. "She was having a rough time of it when all that stuff went down with Tommy's parole officer. You know, when he was raped by her?"

Amanda nods. "Yeah, I remember."

"Yeah, well she had just recently found out that she'd be having my niece. And she didn't exactly believe Tommy's story about all of that."

"I didn't either at first."

"Yeah, I remember that." He grins wryly. "Well, anyway, she was considering other options – because it was early yet. Because she could. Despite how we were raised – despite what the church told us was right or wrong. She was afraid, Amanda – very afraid of doing this alone."

Amanda gulps at that but stays silent as he continues.

"I'm really glad she made the choice she did though because it means I have my little niece now. But just so you know, I never stood in judgment of her for considering an alternative. I was worried, and I didn't want her to go that route, of course – I really didn't want her to. But I would never have judged her for it if she had made a different choice - I just would have been sad for her. She's my sister. I love her."

"Yeah well, lucky for her she's not doing it alone now," Amanda replies, hoping the tinge of jealousy she feels doesn't come across in her voice.

"No, she's not. But you are." He looks at her pointedly. "Deciding to keep your baby must have been a really tough decision – given your circumstances. You're super strong, Amanda."

Amanda looks down, fiddles with some garbage on a table – balling up and stretching out a discarded paper straw cover over and over again.
Noticing her silence, Carisi's knows it's the wrong time to ask her what's been on his mind for quite a while now. But . . . the subject has been broached and he realizes that this is the first opportunity he's had to ask her. And he's been dying to know.

"Why did you decide to do that, Amanda? I know you didn't want to have kids."

Without answering him, she places the paper straw cover into a pizza box, tosses some plates into it as well, and closes the lid.

"Can you get the rest of this?" she asks him. "Since you were the one who got all these kids pizza in the first place? I've got somewhere I've gotta be."

"Sure, Rollins," he says as she brushes past him on her way out of the breakroom. "Sure."

Once she's gone he nods to himself. He shouldn't have asked – his ears are burning in shame. He has to accept that she's not going to tell him something like that. They just aren't that close. Yet.

He asks God to help him be patient and to help Amanda know that it's okay to finally let down her walls with him. Admittedly, there had been times when he had caught glimpses of what she hid from the outside world, but no sooner did he see something than the walls would go right back up again.

He longs for the day when she will let him in and prays that someday she'll be able to trust him enough to tell him everything - without fear.
"It's my decision," she had told Declan. "Don't worry. It's not your responsibility."

"But it is," he had argued. "I'm not just going to walk away – you know that."

But he did – he had a job to do. In Serbia. Intentions were nice but the reality was he couldn't stay and help her raise their child. Like she had told him, that was the reason she had kept him in the dark for seven months.

And at this point he is long gone.

She swims to consciousness and sees Carisi still at her bedside. He had taken her to the hospital that day – much earlier that day – when a sharp debilitating pain had struck in her back. She is surprised to see him still sticking around. "Why are you still here?"
"You KNOW why I'm here," he says adamantly. And then he proceeds to jumble on about her slowing down, taking care of herself, etc. She's not really listening. Because yes, she does know why he's still here – why he's really here. And why he's always around, hovering.

"I'm fine," she dismisses it.

But then they start to talk about work – about how she's worried that she's going to disappoint Liv because the doctors want her on bedrest. And then suddenly she realizes just how much her life is going to change and starts panicking.

"What am I doing? What was I thinking? Having a baby on my own?"

Again she finds herself opening up to him, confiding in this man. But why? Why does she even admit to him that being on her own scares her right now?

It's very late at night and way past visiting hours when she awakens. He's still there, asleep in the chair beside her bed. He hasn't left. Somehow she finds this comforting. Like a best friend that you know will always have your back. A friend like Fin.

Carisi's face is listed to one side and drool has dripped from his mouth and pooled onto his shoulder leaving wet stains on his striped dress shirt – the one that he's been wearing all day. She looks at him and wonders why she trusts this man. It confounds her.

Amanda can't believe she has allowed him in like she has. Fin may have speculated from time to time about how she felt about raising a kid on her own. They'd even talked about it a bit. But she never ever confided her deep fear of having to do this all on her own before – to anyone.

But tonight? She had somehow found Carisi to be a safe haven. She hadn't been afraid to talk about this with him, even cry a bit – and he didn't seem think any less of her for admitting her weakness to him either. Amazing.

She's still looking at him, studying him, when his eyes slowly open. He blinks sleepily a few times, but just stares at her through the dimmed lighting without really moving as she stares back.

"You okay, Amanda?" he finally asks.

"Yeah," she answers.

"I've been thinking," he says as he slowly sits up in the chair and shakes his head a little bit. "I've been meaning to tell you something."

He runs his hands through his hair and looks back up at her. "If you're ready to hear it."

She stiffens a bit as he knew she would.

"Look, I know it's really none of my business, but I've noticed something. Something I think may help you out if you can see what I see. From the outside."

"Go ahead," she tells him carefully, wondering where he's going with this. But at least she knows it's not going where she thought it had been, and she is relieved. She's not even remotely ready to handle the conversation she thought was coming after hearing him say the words 'I've been meaning to tell you something – if you're ready to hear it.'

"Okay, I couldn't help but notice that your mom has a bit of trouble with the alcohol, you know."
With perhaps a bit too much drink?"

"You can go ahead and say it, Carisi." She smiles indulgently, thinking about how much he's worked on softening his demeanor since coming to work with the squad last year. The Carisi who had first walked into Manhattan SVU and brought a bag of zeppole to share with co-workers he hadn't even met yet would have just blurted it out.

"Your mom's an alcoholic, right?"

There it was. Out in the open.

"Yes."

"Okay," he reaches forward and takes her hand. "I want you to listen to me very carefully."

She nods.

"I mean it now. You told me that Kim only hears what she wants to hear – that no one can make her think differently, right? I need you to not be like her right now."

"I'm not like her at all, Carisi," she says a bit defensively, and starts to withdraw her hand.

"I know, I know," he says and grasps her hand a little tighter, not wanting to let it go. "But it's just . . . it's just really important that you . . . I don't know, let go of some stuff I guess?"

"Let go? Of what?"

"Of what your family has put into your head." He takes the hand that isn't holding hers and touches her temple lightly before withdrawing it. "You need to let go of some of that stuff so you can truly hear what I'm going to tell you. Can you do that?"

She shifts a little uncomfortably. "I'll try."

"Good. Okay." He takes a deep breath. "I heard everything your mom said to you that day during Kim's arraignment."

Oh God, she's so embarrassed – who hadn't heard all of that?

"And what she said about Kim? Being able to take care of herself with that pimp?"

"Yeah?"

"That's not right, Amanda."

"Yeah, I know he could have killed – "

"No, that's not what I'm saying here."

"Then what?"

"The fact that your mom obviously put so much value on self-reliance . . . for you and Kim? That she raised you both with that virtue, probably above all else?" He pauses before continuing, knowing this is where she most likely will resist him. "It wasn't right."

"Carisi, there's nothing wrong with being able to take care of yourself."
"No there's not, you're right," he admits, putting up a hand. "When it's reasonable."

"What do you mean? When would it not be reasonable?"

"When you're a child."

As those words escape his lips an icy cold settles deep in her stomach. He nods, noticing the change in the expression on her face, the shift in her demeanor.

"Amanda, your mom didn't beat that virtue into you and Kim for your own good. Don't you see? She did it for herself – she was too drunk to take care of you guys. How many times did she leave you to your own devices when you were growing up?"

Amanda just blinks back at him and opens her mouth.

"She didn't want the responsibility, so she passed the buck. Can't you see that?"

Silence.

He leans forward. "I think it would really help if you could see that."

Carisi's still there as the sun rises and she can hear him softly snoring in the chair beside her bed.

It's safe to sit with her thoughts and feelings now – now that he's not watching. To process what he's told her. Could he be right? Had her mother never even been looking out for her and Kim at all? One of the only useful things that she had taught both of her daughters – to stand on their own two feet and to never depend on anyone – had she only taught them that for her own benefit? Not theirs?

She turns her face fully away from him as the tears slip down it and she begins to cry in earnest. At one point she takes a gasping breath. It is too loud.

She freezes as she hears the legs of a chair scrape the floor behind her.

"Amanda?"

His hand is on the top of her head in an instant. His thumb is stroking her forehead, trying to soothe her.

"Hey, it's okay. It's okay," she hears him say gently.

"No it's not. It will never be okay," she bites back.

"Why not?"

"You'll never understand." She brings her hands up to her face, to hide her shame, and pushes his hand away. She tries to curl up but can't because her belly's in the way. She cries even harder in frustration.

Even though she's crying right there in front of him, her walls are definitely back up, so he lets the subject drop. But he stays with her and keeps her company in silence as she continues to cry, never leaving her side, only occasionally reaching out to lay a comforting hand on her back when she sobs the hardest.
"Stay up there, okay?" Benson had said to him when he told her the hospital would be putting Amanda through a battery of tests before releasing her.

"Copy that. . . copy that . . . copy that . . . "

There was another press against his shoulder. "Copy that. . ."

And another.

"Hey!" he says, startling awake.

"Ready to go?" Amanda asks him, barely suppressing a chuckle. "Or should I leave you alone with your Xerox machine?"

"What?" he says, totally confused. He looks around. It is super bright. "Huh? My Xerox machine?"

"Well, you were copying something in your sleep," she says sardonically.

"Oh shit, Rollins," he exclaims, sitting up quickly when he notices she's in a wheelchair. "Are you alright?"
"Yeah, it's just time for me to go home – they've finished running all the tests they wanted to run. I didn't call Fin, though. Figured you could do the honors of wheeling me out since you're already here."

"Oh sure, yeah." He stands up and looks for his jacket, his keys, making sure he has his wallet, finding the tie he had eventually taken off once he realized they would be there overnight and then some. He runs his hands through his hair a bit, trying to put it back into place.

"It's hopeless." Amanda grins up at him.

"What?"

"Your hair."

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's a total mess. I didn't realize you had such outrageous cowlicks."

"Well, now you know." He grins one of his goofiest grins – it matches his hair - and takes her home.

While she's on bed rest he comes over every day. There's always some excuse.

He's always buzzing about, hovering. She's starting to feel smothered even though if she's honest with herself she does like the attention, the companionship he gives her. It certainly beats going it alone.

And besides, she's beyond bored during the "between" times. Reality shows are just not as entertaining as he is. Her mind always wanders, wondering what ray of sunshine he'll be bringing her that day.

Yesterday they had discovered a bath octopus online . . .

"Yeah, babies gotta have a regulated temperature for their bathwater, like Goldilocks, you know? Not too hot – "

" – not too cold," she finishes the sentence he had started. "Yeah I got you. That thing is cute!"

"We should get you one of those."

"What's this 'we' business?"

He just shrugs in reply. She turns back to the screen.

"I really like this light blue one here – it's adorable. I wonder how it works? Does it just give you a number? Or an indicator for 'too hot'?"

Carisi leans over her, reaching for the mouse, eager to do more than just stand back. "May I?"

"Sure." She relinquishes it and they find themselves checking out specs, finding various pictures of it from different angles, reading reviews. . .

Today he bursts in all excited about something at work as soon as she opens the door for him.

"Slow down," she says. "Let me get settled back down and you can tell me all about working with Barba and on this case."
He notices her discomfort.

"Are you okay?" he reaches out a hand that she waves away.

"No, I just need to get comfortable so I can listen."

With a lot of moaning and groaning, and refusing his help, she gets herself into position on the couch while his face carries a worried expression the entire time.

"Be honest with me, how much of a production was it for you to get up just now and answer the door for me?"

"Honestly?"

"Yeah, honestly."

"Well, it was no picnic."

"Okay, that's it." He shakes his head and makes a stopping motion with his hand. "There's gotta be another way. I don't want you to go through that every time Fin or I stop by."

"It doesn't happen with Fin. He's got a key."

That stops him up short. "Oh."

Carisi would never ask her for a key.

She sees the stricken look on his face and laughs. "It's okay. I can give you one, too."

"You sure?"

"I trust you."

"Oh," he says, taken aback.

"Don't look so surprised. Why do you look surprised?"

"I don't know, Rollins. Just something about how you always like to keep me at a distance . . . "

"At a distance? Are you kidding?"

"No."

"Well, despite what you may think, I do not keep you at a distance."

"Uh huh," he says. "You keep telling yourself that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"This? . . . This is your definition of letting someone in? Are you kidding me?"

"I'm letting you into my house."

"That's not what I'm talking about and you know it."

Now she's getting a little peeved. "What more do you want?"
And there's the problem. He waves dismissively, pushing air out through his teeth and looking away but not answering.

"Huh?"

Still no answer.

"If you want more than this, you're not going to get it."

"Yeah, I know," he says sadly. Somehow this conversation has turned into something else. He didn't want to hear that. It doesn't mean he actually believes her - not deep down – but it still hurts to hear it.

"Look," she says softly. "Take the key. I've got an extra one in the drawer over there – you can take the one with the green ribbon on it. It's the one I keep for my mom. It's not like she's going to need it."

"Okay."

He fetches the key and sits down on the couch with her. Frannie comes up and licks his hand and he pets her back. The exciting news from work is forgotten as he stares blankly at the TV screen, replaying her words in his mind. The words he hadn't wanted to hear.

If you want more than this, you're not going to get it.

He doesn't want to believe her, but what if that's the truth?

"You've been awfully quiet," she says as he's getting ready to leave.

"Yeah, well . . ."

She knows what this is about. He's not the only perceptive one in the room.

"Carisi," she stops him by putting her hand on his forearm. "I didn't mean it."

His brow furrows and he lets the hurt swim into his eyes. The hurt he was trying to keep down.

"I know you want more, more from me."

He looks down.

"Hey," she says softly, trying to get him to look back up, but it doesn't work. "I don't mean to close the door so harshly on you, but you've got to stop pushing, okay?"

He nods.

"Give me some time."

He looks up hopeful. Does this mean . . . ?

But he can't read her face and she doesn't make it any easier for him by not continuing the conversation.

Feeling all kinds of awkward now, he looks back down at his feet, shuffles them a bit, and then pulls his lips back and then scrunches them together a few times while he thinks. In the end he decides to
just leave, only saying a cursory goodbye on his way out.
"Hello? . . . Hello?"

Distantly, she hears . . . "I'm going to take this care package up to Rollins. She is still on bedrest and she is going shacky whacky."

What the?

Amanda throws her cell phone back down onto the bed. "Fuck you, Carisi!"

But then she immediately calls him back. It goes to voice mail – she's assuming it's because he's still on butt-dial.

"Carisi, you can forget about coming over here tonight. I don't want to see you or this cake you keep raving about. Nothing!" she seethes. "You are such an unbelievable ass!"
She hangs up the phone again. There — she feels better now.

And then she starts crying.

No, she doesn't feel better after all. She calls him back. Voice mail again.

"Hey there. I'm sorry — I didn't mean it. It's just . . . well . . ." She thinks to herself for a bit about what he had said, changing her mind. "You know what? How DARE you! I'm still pissed at you. Don't you dare come over here tonight."

She hangs up again. More tears. Alternating with anger.

The anxiety she's been feeling is absolutely killing her. The baby is due in one day. She really wishes Carisi was here so she could talk to him, but he thinks she's going 'shacky whacky'? And tells someone else about it? That won't stand.

But then she misses him again. Unbelievably, she finds herself picking up her phone and calling him.

"Carisi?" she practically whispers into the phone. I need you, she almost says, but won't let herself do that. She hangs up before she admits something she'll regret.

So she just lays there in the dark instead, letting her anxiety consume her. Alone. She's supposed to do this all alone, right?

Carisi notices he's got three messages from Rollins. Must be important. Well, he's on his way now. He promised he'd bring her a treat from the bakery on Staten Island. Unfortunately, or fortunately, he's got limited time because he plans to stop by her place on the way to speak with Dolores Rodriguez — to help bolster her confidence in preparation for testifying the next day.

He's glad he has been shadowing Barba on the Hodda case and keeping his mind so busy. He's been feeling really weird since Amanda basically told him to back off. The more he sits with his thoughts on that, the more it feels like a stinging rejection. And what keeps driving the knife in deeper is that even though they have spent way less time together because he's completely backed off, she's now starting to call him to ask him for things — little things. Asking him to come over, like she did today. Talk about mixed messages.

He's musing over this as he listens to the messages she's left. And speaking of mixed messages — she's a total wreck. This is just hormones, though. It's gotta be. Bella went through a freak out right before giving birth, too. He decides to stop at Amanda's place last, expecting it to take a while.

Carisi turns the key in her lock, its green ribbon falling over the web of his hand between his thumb and his forefinger. In the other hand he holds a bag from Pangione's. He had taken a break from work in the late afternoon to go all the way to Staten Island during rush hour just to get something for her, and then returned to the precinct to look over some stuff for Barba in the early evening.

Yeah, he has to admit it to himself. Even if he doesn't have a chance in hell with her, he wants to be there for her anyway during this time. Because he still cares. He really does care.

"Manda?" he asks as he lets himself into the dark apartment.

No answer.

Everything is dark — even her bedroom.
He pushes carefully on her bedroom door and says quietly, "Manda?"

She's in bed, unmoving, and he wonders if she's asleep. But as he draws closer he can see what little light there is in the room reflected in her eyes. So he knows that they are open, and that she is not asleep.

"What are you doing here?" she asks with a low hiss.

"I brought you – "

"How dare you? I told you not to come."

"Yeah, well – you did but you didn't – "

"Were my THREE messages not clear?"

"Uh, no actually. They weren't."

"Men," she says dismissively with a huff.

"Pregnant women," he mutters under his breath, but loud enough for her to hear.

And surprisingly that gets a chuckle out of her. Which turns into a sob almost immediately.

"Hey Amanda, don't cry, okay? I brought something for you."

He goes over to her nightstand and turns on the light. She's wiping her cheeks.

"Okay, what is it?" she's trying to smile through her tears and managing to do a pretty good job of it.

He goes to pull over the chair he's been sitting lately when he visits her while she's resting in bed instead of on the couch.

"No, Carisi, it's okay." She stops him, patting the bed beside her. "You can sit here. I want you to sit with me."

"You sure?" he raises his eyebrows. More mixed messages. This is not fun. He knows she's hormonal, but still . . .

"Yeah, come on," she gives him a little wave. "Have a seat."

"Okay," he says a little uncomfortably. He knows she's going to snap again – he can still feel the unreleased tension between them.

But he sits anyway, pulling the bag from Pangione's onto the bed. Maybe if he's entertaining enough . . .

"Whatcha got for me?"

"Well . . . you wanted something unique . . ."

"Uh huh."

"And Italian . . ."

"Uh huh."
"From Staten Island."

"Yes."

"But not me."

"No, never you."

"Cause I fit the bill there, Rollins. You do know that, right?" "Yeah, yeah," she waves dismissively as he chuckles. "What's in the bag?"

"Panettone!"

"Lemme see."

He pulls it out.

"Fruitcake?"

"Italian fruitcake. The original."

"Are you kidding?" She doesn't sound pissed, but rather amazed.

"Nope."

"How did you get this? It's November . . . they don't sell this stuff this early in the year, do they?"

"Well . . . I know this guy. Down at the bakery I went to for you today, you know, on Staten Island?"

"Uh huh."

"And when I told him about you – "

"What?!" she interrupts. And there it is. The rage is back. "I can't believe you! First you tell someone that I'm 'shacky whacky' and then you – "

"Well you are, you know," he interrupts.

"I'm what?!"

"Shacky whacky," he says, making little crazy person circles at the side of his head with his fingers.

"Get out," she says in a low voice.

"Do you really want that?" He's not sure – he's really not sure he wants to leave her alone like this. She's been all over the map today – worse than he's seen her so far. Shacky whacky doesn't even begin to describe this anymore.

"I don't know." She starts crying a little and shakes her head. "I really don't like it when you tell people about me. Like I'm someone in your life, someone who . . . "

"Who what?"

"Carisi, your MOM knows about me. You told your mom."
"So?"

"My mom doesn't know anything about you. And yours was lighting a candle in church for me?"

"Well, you don't feel the same way about me that I feel about you." He shrugs. "You already called me on that, remember?"

"Yeah, I remember," she says softly. The tears are gone. "When you told me that about your mom I realized how far gone you were."

"Yeah, well," he looks down, embarrassed for always wearing his heart on his sleeve. He wonders how others hide their emotions so well. He finds it impossible.

Surprisingly, she reaches a hand out to his cheek, guiding him to look at her.

"It's not a bad thing, Carisi. It's sweet."

He allows himself a small smile, but he is wary. He knows this isn't going anywhere. Her hand falls from his face.

"I meant what I said, you know, about you being able to handle this. You've handled everything in your life just fine as far as I can see. And my mom praying for you? That's just to give you some support in this – support from God. An extra boost if you will." He smiles at her at little bit.

"And that's why I'm freaking out today, Carisi."

"Huh?"

She gulps down tears that threaten to spill again.

"I'm so afraid," she practically whispers so that he has to lean in closer to hear what she's saying.

"Of what?" He knows there's more here than she's ever told him. This is why he's here.

"I don't think I'll be a very good mother. I'm not sure I'll even like it."

"Hey now," he says and takes her hand.

"I won't, I just know. I have so many hang-ups surrounding my own mother. I don't want to be HER."

"You won't be, trust me. You are so different than her."

"Am I?"

"Yeah," he says adamantly. "For one, you're not an alcoholic. You're not going to abandon your child – leave them to fend for themselves. I know you – and you wouldn't do that."

"You have no idea," she says dismissively, and turns away thinking about the gambling. Carisi has no idea that she has to attend GA regularly to keep her demons at bay. And since being on bed rest, she hasn't been able to make a meeting – but thankfully it has also made it difficult to go out and play.

But Carisi's been good to talk to – not a substitute for a meeting, but still something good in her life. She looks forward to his visits. She had really needed to talk to him today. The baby was coming. And soon. This was all quickly becoming very real to her and very frightening.
He strokes the top of her hand with his thumb. "I have faith in you, Amanda. Even if you don't have faith in yourself."

"And I need to hear that, Carisi," she says, turning back to him. "But that's what's wrong here. With us."

"I don't follow."

She brings both hands to her forehead in frustration. "God, I don't want to be this way."

"What way?"

"Dependent. On you. On anyone."

"You're not dependent on me." He firmly locks her gaze in his. "At all."

"Really? Then why do I 'need' to hear that you have faith in me, huh? Why do I like it when you keep me company? Why do I want that so much?"

He's a little taken aback at that last part, not having expected to hear anything like that from her. But it explains her recent calls.

"Okay, as far as the last thing you just said . . . could it just be that you like me, Amanda? I am quite entertaining, if I do say so myself."

She smiles a bit at that and he continues. "People who like each other do like to spend time together. There's nothing weird about that – or in wanting that."

"Yeah, I guess, but everything altogether? It makes me feel weak."

"Weak? Are you kidding me?"

"No, I don't like feeling this way. I feel like I need your encouragement. Like I'm using you by having you come over here. Taking advantage – "

"Look," he interrupts her. "That's your mother talking. Completely."

Her face changes as she takes that in.

"If someone offers you something? That's not taking advantage," he says. "It's okay to accept my faith in you – even if it's exactly what you think you need to hear in the moment so that in some odd way that makes you think it's wrong. It's not, believe me. It's okay to accept my help with this stuff."

She nods a little, but still wrestles with believing his take on this.

"Look, I know your mom taught you otherwise. To never depend on anyone but yourself, to never accept help. But sometimes it's okay to accept help when it's offered. She was wrong, Amanda." He looks at her tenderly. "And you know why she was. We've talked about this."

"No, she was right. She was right, Carisi." She just shakes her head, the guilt overwhelming her because of the tenderness in his eyes. He is too nice. "I can't do this. I can't let myself do this to you."

"Do what?"

"I think you should leave now. For real."
"What – "

"And please don't hover around me once the baby is here, okay? Not like you have been."

_Huh?_ He's backed off lately – entirely. He's only "bothered" her when she's asked him to. What is she saying?

"Look, I know you'll want to be involved some when the baby comes, and I'll let you. But please share the burden with Fin. I can't dump this all on you."

"Can't dump? Amanda w –"

"I'm serious. I need to handle this on my own. You've gotta let me." She looks at him and he can see the strain all of this is causing her, the tightness in her eyes as she pleads with him.

_Sure, _he thinks. _Even though I know that's not what you really want._ But he decides to honor her wishes – he can't be there for her if she won't let him.

"Okay," he says and sighs deeply, pats her hand, and lets himself out.
Carisi puts his hand on the glass as the blinds snap shut.

"Hey," Olivia puts a hand on his back softly. He doesn't notice it.

He can't believe this is happening. Amanda could die – her baby could die – and he's shut out. Her face in those last few moments keeps flashing before his eyes – her crying in panic as she looks down at the sheets and knows something's terribly wrong. He's never seen her so scared and it frightens him.

He begins to panic himself. He wants Amanda to be alright – he needs her to be alright. His breathing gets dangerously shallow and he hunches over, starting to get lightheaded. And now there is a tightening in his chest. He grasps at it with both hands.

"Hey, Carisi," Olivia says softly. Her hand is still on his back, rubbing it now, trying to get his attention. "You don't look so good."

He nods in response, finally remembering that she is there with him too. But he can't speak a word because he can't catch his breath.
Olivia leads him over to the nearest chair and he sits down, his elbows on his knees. He smushes his palms into his eyes, trying to hold back the tears but failing. Eventually, his breathing slows down, the tears dry up, and he finds himself just staring at the floor, trying to hold himself together. But he's not able to — once the tears dry up he begins to tremble. He can't lose her — he just can't. He is starting to realize how much he really cares — just how deep this goes.

"Oh, Sonny," Olivia says sympathetically, sitting next to him in another chair. "I didn't know Amanda meant that much to you."

Even though he can't stop his shaking, at least he has caught his breath by now and can answer her. He doesn't want to let on just how much he actually cares about Amanda — he wants to keep his feelings private from his boss. So he looks up and meets her in the eye, giving what he believes to be a reasonable explanation for his panic. "Yeah, well, she's a good detective, you know. The squad can't afford to lose her. And if she loses the baby . . . she won't be in any shape to come back for a while. It would devastate her."

He takes in a sharp breath as his eyes begin to water again — he just can't help it. He turns away. But before he does he catches a glimpse of Olivia giving him a knowing look — an understanding look. Damn. He can't hide his feelings. He sighs and leans back in his chair. He never really could.

"Carisi, come with me. I want to take you somewhere," Olivia says to him gently as she rises from her chair.

He gets up and follows her.

She leads him down one corridor after the other. Too far away from Amanda. He begins breathing fast again, panic settling in. "We've gotta go back. We need to be there for her."

"No, Carisi," Olivia says firmly. "She'll be in there for quite a while — childbirth isn't exactly quick. Besides, they won't let us in until she's okay — until she's made it. There's nothing we can do but wait."

"But what if she d — "

Olivia cuts him off. "She won't. She's strong. You've gotta have faith in that, Sonny."

She smiles at him kindly and points at the sign over the door they have stopped in front of. The Chapel.

He gulps as he looks in and sees the pews and the golden cross hanging in the front of the room. Olivia had known exactly what he needed. "You're right, Liv. I think I need to pray right now. For Amanda."

"Yeah," she says quietly. "You do that."

He gives her a small smile of gratitude and enters the chapel to ask God to spare the life of the woman he now knows that he loves beyond a shadow of a doubt, even if his feelings for her will never be returned. . .
"You gotta bounce from the knees," he says with a wide smile, holding her daughter securely in his arms. He looks up, catching her eyes briefly. "They love that."

And in that moment . . .

That precise moment . . .

*When she notices the sparkle of pure joy in his blue eyes . . .*

*The one that makes her realize for the first time that this is a good man . . .*

It changes everything.

She awakens.
As Carisi walks away from Amanda and Jesse to head back to the precinct, he smiles to himself. Maybe things weren't as bad as they had seemed on Thanksgiving. At least she was talking to him.

He had been shocked when he received the call that morning. He hadn't heard from her since their falling out... well except for the day she was released from the hospital and he had tagged along with Fin. That didn't count. But today, she had asked him to meet up for lunch, told him she was going stir crazy. He knew she had just asked Fin - he had overheard her partner decline - but never thought she'd even consider him as 'lunch date' material. Not even as sloppy seconds. Before even thinking, he agreed eagerly. Probably too eagerly.

He had given himself a mental pep talk in the mirror in the men's room before heading out to meet her.

"Okay, you got this. Be cool... Be cool," he silently told himself as he dragged his fine-toothed
He smiled wryly at himself in the mirror at that thought.

"No we're not just friends. We're not even friends," he muttered aloud and set the comb down. Just as he was finishing, one of Tucker's IAB cronies walked in. The stern one. Carisi nodded at him. The SVU squad was always in trouble with IAB for something.

"Who's not friends?" the guy asked him.

Carisi threw his hands wide, "What? You continuing the investigation in the bathroom or something? Is that even regulation?"

The guy grunted in response, unzipped his fly, and started doing his business in a nearby urinal.

Carisi turned back to the mirror shaking his head and returned to his inside voice, "We've got a chance at being friends if I don't push for it. Don't push. She's asked you not to push. In more than one way."

He sighed, squared his shoulders, and said to himself aloud, "Okay."

He went back to his desk and put on his navy winter coat. Even though it was a clear day, it had been terribly cold. As he tugged down the coat's heavy wool sleeves and flipped the collar up, Fin asked him, "You going to see Amanda?"

"Uh, yeah," he said a little taken aback that Fin had figured that out.

"Say hi to her for me," he said jovially.

"Will do," Carisi said and nodded before heading out.

He had been light and friendly, and surprisingly she had seemed really happy to see him. But still she made sure to let him know that she had invited others - let him know that he wasn't special, that it wasn't him in particular that she had wanted to see. It's just that they hadn't been available.

But that baby sure was cute. It was easy to ignore any tension that had grown between them once they got started talking about Jesse and he got a chance to hold her. He was glad that Amanda had taken to motherhood so well. He knew she would. Their lunch date had gone really really well. Could he hope?

He's not sure as he thinks back to what had happened on Thanksgiving. Everything had gone so terribly wrong.

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_The day before Thanksgiving:_

_He is still in the chapel praying for Amanda and the safe delivery of her baby when the door bursts open with a ruckus. He hears a loud hush from behind him._

_He turns back and is startled to see his little cousins Frannie and Frankie who start running towards him for a hug as soon as they see him. They embrace him in silence, since they had just been admonished with a 'shhh.' _
He clings to them tightly. For some reason they are just who he had needed to see in that moment. They give him great hope and comfort.

After a while Frankie pulls back a little, "Are you okay Uncle Sonny?"

Carisi wipes a stray tear from his eye and in all honesty says, "No."

Then Frannie pulls back, her face a jumble of emotions, the main one being worry. "Why are you sad Uncle Sonny?"

"Okay guys, that's enough. Leave your uncle alone." The twins' mom had come up to them and was gently prying them off.

"No, it's okay," he says to his cousin. "It's really okay. They're a godsend."

He beams down at them and hugs them quickly once again.

"A godsend?" they both ask curiously, never having heard that word.

"Does that mean we're angels?" Frannie asks.

"Something like that," he mutters and then looks at his cousin. Really looks at her. She looks like something the cat drug in.

"Are you okay?"

"No, I'm sober," she says dryly.

He tries not to snort but doesn't succeed. Something about the way she says it is funny to him.

"Exactly," she says.

"Why are you guys here?" he asks all of them. "Not that I mind."

"Mommy's going to try Triple A!" Frankie says excitedly.


"AA, huh?" Sonny asks his cousin.

"Yeah," she responds, "About time, huh?"

"You're doing the right thing."

"Yeah I know, but it's hard."

"Yeah, but you've got a good reason to try to turn things around." He smiles down at the twins. "Two of them."

"It's been a really tough day though, Sonny. Haven't touched a drop. " She sighs deeply, looking down at her children. "But I need to 'man up' as they say. For them."

"For us!" the twins say in unison.

"She's going to Triple A for us!" Frankie reiterates excitedly.

"A little bit of accountability there, eh?" Sonny says.
"Yeah, a double dose," she answers him with the same wryness as before.

He laughs a little, but then it's her turn to really look at him. He looks haggard.

"How long you been here, Sonny? You look like hell."

"Came in last night."

"You need to get some sleep."

"I can't. Amanda - "

"Amanda?" Both twins perk up at her name.

"Can we see her?" Frankie asks.

"Yeah, we really like her. Please?" Frannie continues.

"I don't think so guys. She's not feeling well," Sonny tells them and his eyes get wet again.

"Oh no, Sonny, what's going on?" his cousin asks him, rubbing his arm.

Carisi squats down to the twins' level and says to them, "Hey, why don't you two go and sit in those pews up in front and pray for your mom, okay? Pray for God to give her strength. Can you do that?"

"Yeah," they say in unison and head up to the front of the chapel slowly.

He turns back to his cousin, and puts his hand to his forehead briefly. When he removes it even more tears are shining in his eyes. "It doesn't look good."

"For the baby?"

"For both of them."

"Oh no."

"They're both in jeopardy. We could lose either of them." He takes in a loud, sharp breath, fighting the tears.

His cousin dives in to hug him, stroking his back. She says soothingly, "It's okay, Sonny. Let it all out."

Carisi cries against her shoulder for while, just a bit, before pulling away.

"Thanks, I needed that," he says wiping his eyes, feeling a little better. "We really could lose her though and it's just been so … so … "

For once in his life he's at a loss for words.

"I can't believe you're going through this all alone." His cousin says. "Have you called anyone? Bella? Gina? Your mom?"

"No. It's just been - " he takes a deep breath and stops. Looking down and shaking his head he says, "I just haven't."

He looks back over at the twins, kneeling in the pews, solemnly praying. "I'm so glad you guys
showed up."

"Me, too," she says warmly.

"But hey, don't you have a meeting to get to?"

"Oh, yes, you're right. Let me go retrieve the twins."

He stops her. "No need. I'll watch them."

"You sure? The hospital has day care for those of us attending the meeting, you know. It's why I'm coming here instead of closer to home."

"It's no problem."

She gives him a doubtful look.

"Look, they really are a godsend to me right now. I need them. I need my family. And Frannie & Frankie? They're my two little rays of sunshine."

"Gotcha," she says and winks. "Why don't you tell them the good news. They'll be delighted to spend some time with you."

He smiles and watches her leave.

Sometime later his cousin finds Sonny and the twins building monsters out of hospital food in the cafeteria.

'A better use than eating it,' she muses to herself. 'That shit is nasty.'

Before they can notice her she studies them for a while, amazed at Sonny's easy way with children. He needs to find a good woman to settle down with so he can be a father, have a little family of his own. It would make him so happy - and he deserves to be happy. She hopes for his sake he doesn't live out his life as a bachelor - it would be such a waste. She knows he has an unrequited thing for Amanda but isn't sure that she's right for him anyway. She's kind of a bitch, and she doesn't trust her not to hurt the hell out of him. But she feels guilty for even having those thoughts because Amanda's fighting for her life.

"Hey guys!" she yells out to them when she's ready.

The twins run over to her and hug her, excitedly chattering to her about all the things that they and Uncle Sonny had been up to. It sounded like a whirlwind.

He was still sitting at the table looking utterly beat down with a small exhausted smile on his face.

"That's it," she says as she comes up to him, twins in tow. "We're taking you home."

"Wha - ?" he starts.

"Seriously. Now."

"Are you pulling 'big cousin' rank on me? Just cause you married my older cousin? That's not fair," he whines. "We didn't even grow up together. Not really."

"You bet your ass I'm pulling rank. And I'm still older than you. Come along."
The twins start to tug and pull at him to stand up.

"Up, Uncle Sonny."

"Get up!"

"But Amanda -?"

"Can wait. You've gotta take care of yourself Sonny, you're a mess."

"I want to wait and see what happens with her and the baby."

"No. Someone will call when they're okay."

"What if -?"

"Someone will call when they're okay." She emphasizes the 'when they're okay' part again. "She'll be okay, Sonny. They both will. She's tough as nails."

"You didn't see her."

"Doesn't matter Sonny. You gotta have faith. Now come."

Somehow they win him over and he finds himself back home in bed. He's so dead asleep that he doesn't hear the call when it comes in. It's been hours since Amanda delivered the baby when he finally wakes up in a panic, noticing that the sun has already gone down. But Liv had left a voicemail so it seems she's doing okay, but he needs to see for himself. He quickly puts on new clothes, trying to make himself look presentable.

"Oh no!" he says as he puts on his watch and notices the time. Visiting hours may be over soon. He hurriedly sends off a text to Amanda. "On my way. Sorry I missed it. :-(" His text is immediately answered, "NP. Just the 2 of us now. She can't wait to meet you."

It's a baby girl. He smiles.

While Carisi is visiting Amanda and baby Jesse at the hospital she turns to him and says seriously, "Hey, there's something that's been bothering me."

"Yes," he says in careful anticipation. But it's not what he thinks.

"In the midst of all this," she gulps a little, looks down, and picks at the bedspread a little with her free hand. She's holding Jesse in her other arm. "I really miss Frannie. She's my family too you know."

"I know," he says.

"She doesn't know what's going on, may not understand why the pet sitter's been taking care of her instead of me and that I won't be coming home for a while." She pauses and looks back up at him. "I miss my other baby."

"Amanda..."

"Can you do me a favor, Carisi?"
"Sure. Anything."

"Can you go check in on her, visit her? Give her some love and tell her what's going on?"

He nods.

"I know she's 'just a dog' to everyone else, but she'll understand you. Trust me on that."

"Okay, Rollins. I can do that for you."

She lets out a deep breath of relief and smiles. Looking down at baby Jesse in her arms she says, "Do you want to hold her one more time before you leave?"

"Absolutely!"

He wants nothing more and takes the bundle of joy into his arms and coos at her a bit. She's dead to the world and does not respond. He knows what that kind of tired feels like and smiles down at her peacefully sleeping form.

On his way back to Amanda's, Carisi passes a pet store and has an idea.

"Hey, I've got a friend with a dog that's like family to her, you know. And I was thinking of getting them a gift," he says to the store's owner. He proceeds to him what's going on with Amanda and how much she misses Frannie.

"You know, dogs love bandanas." He points to a display and Carisi's eye immediately catches a neon green one.

"Yeah, Frannie wears them all the time."

"Well, this shop offers a service that others' don't."

"What's that?"

"We can embroider them."

"No kidding?"

"Yeah, in your case I would suggest embroidering a message to her from Frannie."

"That's a great idea!" Carisi says excitedly. Something like that would be sure to make Amanda happy.

"Excellent. Which one did you want?"

Carisi immediately goes over and takes the green one from the display, placing it on the counter before the shop owner. "Can I have this one?"

"Good choice. What would you like it to say?"

"Um ... " he thinks about it for a while. What message could Frannie have for Amanda? 'I miss you' seems appropriate but would be irrelevant seconds later. It makes no sense for Frannie to be in a constant state of missing Amanda. He needed a more permanent message.

The owner could see him spinning his wheels.
"You know, many people just go with a simple 'I love you' as a message from their pet."

"That's perfect!" Carisi snaps his fingers and points one back down at the bandana, tapping it. "Why don't you embroider it to say 'I Love You Amanda'?"

"Can do."

There you go girl," Carisi says as he puts the bandana around Frannie's neck. "You love your mommy don't you?"

She wags her tail and seems to almost smile. Amanda was right - Frannie seems to know what's going on here.

"I love her too," he says to her quietly. "But shhh, don't tell her okay? It will just piss her off. It will be our little secret."

He stands up and says, "Okay, are you ready?"

He sets his phone to record video so Amanda can see what he's done. When they're finished, he pets Frannie one last time and says excitedly, "Your mommy's going to love this!"

She doesn't.
Amanda watches Carisi walk away, back to the precinct after his lunch break - the lunch break that he had shared with her. She now deeply regrets what transpired over Thanksgiving. Carisi is a good man - a good man who is walking away.

When they met up he had asked her if Jesse was six weeks old. She was just under four, but Amanda didn't correct him. It was exactly one week until Christmas and Jesse had been born the day before Thanksgiving. How could he forget? Could he not do math? Use a calendar? Or did it just really seem that much longer to him? The time had certainly dragged for her - on and on. Endless sleepless nights taking care of her new daughter and accepting help from a stranger, a part-time baby nurse she had hired at the insistence of her doctor until she was completely recovered from her delivery.

But Carisi was right - she really was enjoying motherhood. Much more than she expected. She thought back to the day before Thanksgiving. The day before everything went to hell between them.
The day before Thanksgiving:

"I wonder where Carisi is? He was here the whole night and then some before I went into labor. Waiting for you to relieve him, Fin." She looks accusingly at her best friend on the squad.

"Amanda, like I told you, I'm sorry. Something came up," he answers cryptically.

"Like?"

"I really can't talk about it. Maybe later."

"Okay." She sighs and gives up. He still won't tell her what prevented him from showing up that morning.

She can't help but feel a little betrayed that the two men she was closest to had each missed part of her delivery. Fin hadn't been there when she went into labor like he was supposed to be and Carisi hadn't been there when she came out of it. She thought they were closer than that, somehow expected him to be there when she awoke from her surgery - the emergency surgery she had had to deliver her baby by C-Section and save both of their lives. But now she realizes that she just can't expect anything from anyone, no matter how earnest they may seem - she had learned that from her mother. Thanks to Carisi, it was a lesson she had been forgetting lately but needed to re-learn. Even so, with her mother's sudden and unexpected departure it still hurt to feel somewhat abandoned by her friends as well.

"Amanda, do you want me to call him?" Olivia asks, referring to Carisi.

"No, no." She waves her hand dismissively.

Olivia studies her carefully for a minute and then makes a decision.

"I'll be right back," she says and heads out to the hallway.

Fin nods at her. He knows she's going out there to call Carisi.

"So what are you going to be naming her?" Dodds sits down on her bed and leans forward to peer at the baby in her arms. He's a little too close for comfort and she looks to Fin for help. She doesn't even really know this guy, her new Sergeant.

"Hey, Dodds," Fin says.

"Yeah?"

"I think the Lieutenant's trying to get your attention. You better go find out what's going on."

"Okay," Dodds says to Fin. "She really is cute, Amanda. Hopefully I'll have a little tyke like that myself someday."

"As long as he doesn't carry your father's name too," Fin says sardonically.

Amanda and Fin share a smile. The joke is lost on Dodds and he just shakes his head a little before heading out to see what the Lieutenant wants.

"They'd have to call him Mini-Mini-Dodds," Amanda whispers to Fin as he heads out. They share another secret smile. Mike still hasn't really figured out that they call him Mini-Dodds around the precinct, with his father, 'Big Dodds' being the Chief of Police and all. "How long do you think it will take before he figures out you lied to him just now?"
"Just long enough to get him off your bed."

And that's exactly just about how long.

"Funny guys," Dodds says as he returns. Looking at Amanda he says, "The Lieutenant did give Carisi a call by the way. But he didn't pick up so she left him a message."

Amanda furrows her brow and her new baby fusses a bit.

"Way to respect my privacy there, Dodds," Olivia says as she returns, having overhead him.

"Sorry Lieutenant," Dodds says formally, giving deference to his boss with his body language. "I just believe in transparency."

"This isn't work, Dodds."

"I'm sorry," he says again, contrite. He seems embarrassed that he's somehow done the wrong thing again, but that's all he seems to be doing since he got to SVU. "I won't do it again."

"Okay," Olivia says, and clasps her hands lightly. "I've gotta go Amanda. I wish you and Jesse well."

She comes over and and strokes the baby's forehead lightly. "She really is beautiful. You did well."

"Thanks." Amanda smiles down at her daughter, feeling a pride she never knew she could. She hears Dodds mutter, 'Jesse. How did I miss that?' in the background and tries to hide a smirk.

"Me too, Amanda," Fin says and comes over to the bed and takes her hand in lieu of a hug. "You know, that 'emergency' that came up and all. It doesn't sort itself out without me you know."

He winks at her and she says, "Emergency? Now I'm really intrigued. Spill."

"Not now," he says and gestures with his eyes towards Dodds, hoping he won't see.

But Dodds does see and crosses his arms. He has so much to learn before his squad will trust him.

Fin leaves and then it gets a little awkward with Dodds being the last person in the room with Amanda and Jesse.

"So..." he says.

"So..." she replies.

"How about Carisi, eh?"

"What about him?" Amanda asks a little defensively without meaning to, holding Jesse a little tighter.

"Ummm..." Dodds says uncomfortably, shuffling his feet, obviously trying to decide what to do next. "I think I should go."

"Okay, bye," Amanda says a little too cheerfully - and a little too quickly.

As Dodds makes a beeline for the door Amanda sighs with relief. "Now it's just you and me, baby girl."
But still she wonders what happened to Carisi. He had seemed so excited about her whole pregnancy and they both had eagerly anticipated Jesse's arrival.

Again that unwanted feeling of betrayal and abandonment set in.

"It's just you and me, Jesse. You and me against the world."

Later that night his text comes through.

'He cares!' She thinks with jubilation, wondering why this makes her so happy. Perhaps because suddenly she doesn't feel so bitter anymore.

She presses the call button for the nurse and asks her to bring Jesse in from the nursery where she too was being kept under strict observation. A placental abruption wasn't always easy for a baby and mother to survive, not even in this day and age, and they were going to make them stay at the hospital longer than normal.

Jesse is brought to her room just before Carisi arrives. She can't wait to share her with him, imagining his excitement. He is absolutely in love with his new niece, Bella's baby, and Amanda is hoping that he will love Jesse too.

"Hey there." She hears his strongly accented voice accompany a light knock.

"Come on in, Carisi."

"Oh, there she is!" He comes into the room and without even asking he swoops Jesse up and holds her close as if she's his own.

Amanda can't help but think he looks like a proud papa. This is very different than how he is with his little cousins, whom she knows he loves dearly. She wonders if he's like this with all babies . . . or just with hers.

"Oh wow, Amanda! You did good. You did really good."

He had always had a bright smile, but the one he shines her way is by far the brightest she has seen to date. She wouldn't see anything like it again until far in the future during their lunch date.

"This is little Jesse, huh?"

"You remembered."

"Remembered what?"

"What I was going to name her."

"How could I forget? It's perfect. Just perfect." He rocks her a little, touches her head gently. "She's going to be a redhead, you know."

"How can you tell? She doesn't have any hair yet." Amanda's stomach does the tiniest flip. Had Carisi somehow found out about Declan?

"I can just tell," Carisi says and winks which only serves to unnerve her even more.

Even though she is trying to hide it, Carisi notices her distress. "Oh, I can tell this is making you nervous. Here let me give her back."
She starts to tell him that having him hold Jesse isn't what's making her nervous - far from it - but she stops herself. She really does want to hold her sweet baby girl again. This is all so new.

He transfers Jesse lovingly, gently back into her arms. And then he sits down in the chair beside her and they spend some time together just talking before she finally brings up Frannie. She really misses her other baby and wants Carisi to go check on her. He agrees to do this for her without hesitation.

Things had been fine between them until the next day.

Looking back, she realizes just how great of a guy he had been the whole time and she never noticed, never even gave it a thought. Helping with Frannie, visiting her at the hospital for Thanksgiving despite the family obligations she knew he had, refusing to abandon her until Fin showed up as she went into labor, even after she had begged him, "Carisi go home."

In her panic over what had happened next she had barely registered the concern in his eyes. The fear and panic that matched her own. But she remembers it vividly now. Still staring at his retreating form, the blue and gray of his coat and pants weaving in and out of the crowd getting ever smaller, she realizes that he really cared for her. He really truly did. Was there ever a time when anyone else had?

She is beginning to feel a deep regret.

Thanksgiving Day:

The entire day of Thanksgiving passes and no one comes to see Amanda. The nurses makes her get up and take walks. Getting up to go to the bathroom yesterday for the first time had been insanely difficult, but it's getting easier and easier to get up and around. She has to show them that she's stronger than they think so that they won't need to keep her as long as they're saying they will.

Late that evening, when she returns from the nursery where she had just spent some quality time with her baby girl she is shocked to see Carisi sitting in her room waiting for her. The nurse that had been walking back with her gives them some privacy.

"Carisi, what are you doing here? It's Thanksgiving. Shouldn't you be with your family?"

"It's not a problem."

"It's a family holiday. And you've got a big family."

"Big enough to include you." He smiles and sits forward.

"Oh, that's not necessary. I don't want to impose." She waves dismissively as he stands up and comes towards her.

"Look," he says, putting his hands squarely on her shoulders. "You don't go home for the holidays. Any of them. You told me that. Is any of your family coming here?"

She shrugs and looks down. She had always felt a bit of jealousy towards those who had families that cared. And always felt like an outsider because of it.

He gives her a quick hug and then releases her. Then he says firmly, "I brought some of my ma's turkey and all the fixin's. We'll make a little family time okay? For you and Jesse. You wouldn't want
"her to miss out on her first Thanksgiving would you?"

"Well, no. But she's sleeping right now."

"I can wait," he says.

"Can you help me into bed?" She is ashamed to even ask but doesn't want to call the nurse back in and have to wait for her to return with him standing right there, perfectly capable of helping her himself. It would be silly. "They still won't let me do it by myself."

"Sure," he says, walking her over to the bed. She grips his shoulders as he holds her by the waist, careful to avoid pulling on any sutures, and helps her to get seated on the partially raised bed. Then she leans back and he slowly lifts her legs up onto it, tucking them under the sheets. He proceeds to fluff the pillow under her head, cradling her neck. His hands are so gentle. "I probably should have been doing this when you were on bed rest too, eh? Not letting you get by with being so stubborn and refusing my help."

She rolls her eyes at him. "I only asked you to help this time because I didn't want to bother the nurse any more tonight. Plus, it's the rules."

"Oh yeah, you only asked me to help because it's 'the rules.' I see."

He winks. She rolls her eyes again.

"Carisi," she says sternly.

"Okay, okay." He puts up his hands in mock surrender and changes the subject. "We'll have to do something a little different when Jesse's ready to have a Thanksgiving feast with us because I take it she's not on solid foods just yet."

Amanda gives him a wry smile. He knows it's too early. "No, not yet."

"You breast feeding her? Cause that's the best you know."

Before she can even answer, he hurries on.

"I read up on the adjustments you need to make while breastfeeding since you had a C-Section so that it's more comfortable." He takes hold of her arm to show her. "There's this one position you can do, this football hold, where you kinda put her under your arm and then she can latch onto your nipple like th -"

She puts a hand up to stop him before he can even demonstrate. Carisi sometimes still has trouble determining what's appropriate even though he had much improved since he started working at Manhattan SVU. Even so, she was way more comfortable with him right now than she had been when Dodds had just sat on her bed.

"Look, Carisi, I'm not sure it's appropriate for you to be coaching me on breast feeding."

"Oh yeah, guess not." He lets go of her arm and blushes a little. "My sisters you know -"

"Discuss it between themselves I'm sure," she interrupts firmly. "Not necessarily with guys they know from work."

She can see his enthusiasm deflating when he's suddenly demoted to the status of 'just a co-worker' by her very words. "You made your point Rollins."
His excitement over giving her breast feeding pointers had been innocent - she knows that. But still, she puts up that wall between them. She doesn't want him that close. It scares her to get up the vague hope that he'll be around, help her out with Jesse like he seems to want to. She steels herself heed her mother's lesson - you can't rely on anyone. It's just her and Jesse now.

But now she wonders just how bad it would be to let Carisi into her life. Let him help her if he still wanted to. She would have to be prepared for it to end at any time, but that didn't necessarily mean that she couldn't accept it now. She really could use some help. Physically, she would be past needing the baby nurse in a few weeks and then there would be no one around. She hated to admit how much that scared her.

Plus, Carisi had really taken to Jesse. The way he had smiled at her while he held her in his arms... Deep down she knew that even if Declan had somehow been able to be a part of Jesse's life he just wouldn't be like that with her. He had offered to help out, but would never give up his job and settle down just because he had a kid. He was too invested in his career, his drive to make the world a safer place, in being a hero. In her heart, she knew his true nature and that's why she hadn't wanted to tell him that he was the father of her baby in the first place.

But Carisi was different. She remembers how excitedly he had talked about the wonderful life she would have now that she was a mother. It seemed like he couldn't wait to become a father himself. And it really seemed like he had wanted to be on the journey with her. Like he was with his sister Bella.

Would it really be so wrong to let him in?

"Carisi!" she calls after him.

Thanksgiving Evening:

"You know what Rollins? Frannie has a gift for you. You know she's been missing you something fierce. She told me so herself."

Amanda laughs a little, but then grabs her stomach with the pain.

"Don't do that, hey." He reaches out a hand to her. "Don't hurt yourself. I'll try not to make you laugh."

"That's a pretty tall order there, Carisi."

He gives her a wry smile. "I'll do my best."

He pulls out his phone and flips through some images and videos on it until he finds the one he had wanted to show her. He starts playing it and hands her the phone.

Amanda takes it. The movie is silent, but it doesn't matter - she sees Frannie and smiles as her pup licks Carisi's phone, her tongue obscuring the view. She misses her so much.

She then sees Carisi pull Frannie back into view and turn her sideways, showing off a new green bandana around her neck.

"Carisi, you didn't -"

"Keep watching."
She sees him pull up a corner of it and then reads the words embroidered upon it.

She goes cold. Absolutely cold. She puts the phone down carefully and looks back up at him. He looks happy, excited.

"I can't believe you," she hisses.

"What?" he asks in all innocence. Indicating the phone with his hands he says, "Frannie and I - "

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

His brows furrow. "I don't understand. I thought you'd like it."

"Like it?"

"Well, yeah . . ."

"You LOVE me?"

"What? No. I - " he stutters and tries to backpedal. "Amanda, listen to me - "

"You need to leave," she says in a low voice.

"Wait. It's a mistake. You don't understand."

"It seems pretty clear to me."

"It's not. Listen - "

"To what? What do you have to say to that? Using Frannie to declare your love for me when I've been telling you to back off? To stop pushing me? What the hell, Carisi?"

"Look, I went to this pet store . . . " He describes what had happened. She's amazed she's even listening to him given the rage she's feeling and has no idea why she's even giving him the time to explain himself at all.

When he's done she says harshly, "That sounds like the biggest Freudian slip I've ever heard of."

"Yeah . . . " He admits, bowing his head. His ears are burning bright red. He doesn't even deny it. The nerve.

"Get out," she says with a threatening tone.

Silently, without even looking at her, he gets up to leave. She studies his retreating back and sees his shoulders lift a little when he reaches the door and hears him sniff hard. Then his head drops and his shoulders collapse as he walks through it, not looking back at her even once.

"Carisi!" she calls once again and starts pushing the stroller, trying to catch up with him.

Now that she's thought about it, she realizes that it probably really was just an innocent mistake when he had gotten 'I Love You Amanda' embroidered on Frannie's bandana. He was an honest person just like Nick had been - it was one of the reasons she had been attracted to Amaro in the first place. After Nate she couldn't handle any more liars. And Carisi wasn't a liar. Far from it. But then . . .

"What am I doing, Jesse?"
She abruptly stops pushing the stroller, realizing how glad she is now that she had lost Carisi in the crowd. What would she have said anyway? 'I'm sorry' wouldn't have cut it – she had utterly broken his heart. And now that she thinks about it she is absolutely mortified by the way she treated him on Thanksgiving. She doesn't want to face herself - or him.

She lets him go.
Chapter Summary

A Rollins & Carisi Filler Fic. This chapter takes place between Season 17 episodes 9 and 10 on Christmas Eve.

Chapter Notes

CARISI CAN'T USE A CALENDAR, so I had to pull the original draft of this chapter (and the following one) and publish three chapters in front of it -two of which were additions. So this may look familiar to those of you who read it before it was pulled.

But this particular chapter has some minor changes to the original, and a completely NEW ending scene. PLEASE RE-READ IT BEFORE CONTINUING ON with this series. THERE'S NEW INFORMATION THERE.

The next chapter will look very familiar - but still, it needed some change. It wouldn't be a crazy bad idea to look it over again in preparation for . . .

The third chapter! It will be ALL NEW and hopefully exciting! (I had to make so many plot changes to this trilogy because of Carisi's inability to use a calendar correctly and most of them were to this chapter - thank goodness I never published it).

And I'm so excited about the epilogue this "mistake" spurred too. Wee! Now this trilogy has turned into FOUR chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
She was frantic and Jesse wouldn't stop crying, wailing at the top of her tiny newborn lungs. Amanda couldn't bear to see her daughter in such distress and so she stopped what she was doing yet one more time to soothe her.

"Hey there, baby girl," she said softly as she held and rocked her, swaying side to side, "Shhh, shhh." The incisions left over from her C-Section were hurting less and less.

She kissed the top of Jesse's head, taking in that soft baby scent. She still couldn't get over that. Her precious Jesse always smelled so good – a mix of baby powder and baby breath. A new life. A new start. A chance to do things right.

Although right now she wasn't so confident in her abilities as a mother. Her place was a mess. Baby things strewn about everywhere - stuff she just hadn't had the time or energy to find a proper place for yet. Last time she was this frazzled she had called Carisi. Why? She didn't rightly know. She had gotten his voicemail and let it all out. Told him how terrible a mother she was 'cause she couldn't get her shit together but then she suddenly felt embarrassed and hung up mid-message. She hadn’t really let him back into her life yet – hadn’t spoken to him at all since their lunch date a week ago. He must have thought she was crazy.

She had received a text from him shortly after that, letting her know that he was sorry but that he was heading into a final exam and that he’d call her when he got out. It was obvious he hadn't even listened to the voice mail yet. She wished she hadn't left it.

Her phone must have died or something that night because she hadn't even noticed that she had a voice mail until the following morning after it was fully charged. It was from Carisi. She had sent him a text after listening to it:

Got your VM. Sorry for the freak out. All calm here now. – A

U sure? I can stop by and help you out if you’d like. – C
And they were. She had figured it out. Handled it on her own. And she was proud of that. But would she be able to handle today on her own? Make it all the way to Atlanta? She had major doubts about her ability to handle all of the stuff leftover for her to do after the baby nurse had helped her with most of the packing and left for the day. And the clock was running down.

Anxiously she looked at the time - which was not a good idea since Jesse had just quieted down, but she did anyway. Amanda’s own panic at noticing that their flight was scheduled to leave in less than an hour and a half riled Jesse up again. She sighed heavily, but returned her focus to her daughter whom she still held in her arms. She needed to soothe her. Jesse was her first priority now.

She had wanted to seem self-sufficient, still not wanting to admit that she might not be able handle absolutely everything on her own – to anyone. But now . . . she just wished she had the time to let someone assist her besides the baby nurse who only did so much. Even though she had already broken down and admitted her fears about this to Carisi before Jesse’s birth, her walls had gone back up almost immediately afterward. She was in the habit of not showing any weakness to anyone. But now those walls were crumbling – they had been all week. She really wished she could ask for his help, but felt she didn’t deserve it after what transpired between them on that horrible Thanksgiving night.

Jesse was totally calm again – just worn out and sleepy from all the crying she had done that afternoon. Amanda put her into her car seat gently and continued her quest to find everything she needed to pack for the trip. There was so much more to bring now when she traveled than she was used to – diapers, wipes, bottles, formula, Jesse's bath octopus. . .

Oh damn, where was that octopus?

It should have been by the sink where she had bathed Jesse last. Then she spotted it. "Ugh. Frannie!"

It was in Frannie's dog bed. But Frannie wasn't around to chastise. She had already been picked up for Doggy Camp, which had been her mother’s idea and ended up being quite an expensive Christmas present for Frannie. She hoped Frannie was settling in well at the farm with the other dogs by now but was a little peeved when she found the bright pink octopus staring up at her mockingly from the green corduroy of the dog bed. She grabbed it and felt the slime of Frannie's saliva still on it, saw the little teeth marks, and groaned. It was a mess, but she would not leave without it – and it would need to be sanitized, delaying her even more.

Looking at the clock again she realized her window to get to the airport in time was shrinking even further. It was very unlikely that she would make it.

With the bath octopus fully cleaned and in Jesse's diaper bag she called down to the cabbie she had begged to wait for her downstairs. She was now ready to have him come up and help her with her luggage.

"What time does your flight leave again?" he asked her once they were settled into the cab.

Amanda told him and leaned her head back, exhaling a breath. She would get a just a little downtime here before having to navigate the airport, which she was dreadng. Jesse was around a month old and this was her first trip. What was she thinking? She should have said no to her mom.

"You ain't gonna make it."

"Try," Amanda said through gritted teeth.
"It's your cab fare, lady. I'm just trying to help." He chuckled a bit to himself, like this was all so amusing. Just like Carisi would have done – always turning her irritation into something lighter, helping her to see that some things just weren't worth the expenditure of anger. "It's Christmas Eve – so for traveling, that's a blessing and a curse."

"How's it a blessing? The airport's going to be a zoo."

"True that. But, look around. There's no cars on the road." He smiled back at her through the rear-view mirror. "The coast is clear, as they say. I'll get you to LaGuardia in no time."

"Oh, good," Amanda mutters and then finds herself lost in thought.

Was she really this bad at taking care of Jesse and herself now? Or was there something more going on here? Why didn't she start packing last night? She supposed she had been tired, but maybe there was more to it than that. She really didn't want to spend Christmas in Georgia, that was for sure. Was she sabotaging this trip subconsciously? In the end she had felt trapped, unable to say no to her mother's invitation to come for Christmas.

At first Amanda had angrily told her that she didn't deserve to see Jesse after leaving her all alone to give birth knowing she had a high-risk pregnancy and was likely to have complications. But then her mother insisted that she let go of the whole thing and not let her personal feelings deny her from having a relationship with her granddaughter. And now that Amanda was a mother herself she could kind of understand that and felt that she shouldn’t deny her mother a chance to bond with Jesse. It just wouldn’t be right. Amanda had felt the guilt sink around her and agreed to come home for the holidays. For the first time in years.

They arrived at the airport with just 50 minutes to spare before the flight. Amanda gulped as panic rose from her stomach. She needed lots of help even getting to the kiosk to check in because of the stroller, all of the luggage, all of the odds and ends required to travel with a baby, and so on. It was ridiculous. But by some miracle she only had to wait in line behind one person to use it.

45 minutes. She punched in her confirmation code incorrectly three times before taking a calming breath, steadying herself to do it correctly this time. Jesse began to fuss again. She looked down at her and soothingly said, "It's okay baby girl. We'll be out of here soon. No need to cry. Just let mommy do this, okay?"

Turning back she put in her code correctly and the screen answered:

_We are unable to check you in at this time. Please see a ticketing agent for assistance._

"Mother of –"

"Can I help you with anything?" An airline agent who had been standing around the kiosk area approached her when he noticed her distress.

"Yes, I'm going to Atlanta and I need to check my bags. I'm running really late . . ."

"Yes, you sure are. You've missed the baggage cut off for Atlanta."

"What? But the plane doesn't leave for another forty-five minutes."

"Forty-two," he corrected. "Baggage cut off is forty-five minutes before any flight unless you have elite status. You don't have elite status, do you?"

"Uh, no."
"Then you won't be able to check your bags here. You'll have to go to the gate."

"What does that even mean?"

The agent was losing patience.

"It means you have to check your luggage with the agent at the gate, if they will let you. It's up to them. You'll need to go through security and head to the gate. Now. You don't have much time."

"But wait – I had requested someone to help me out here at the airport. It should be part of my reservation. I'm recovering from a C-Section." Amanda gives a little nod with her head to indicate Jesse in the stroller.

"Well, we’ll need to start with your reservation number . . . Then we’ll have to find someone. . . . I don’t know if we even have anyone,” the rep sighed impatiently, all put out. How had this not already been set up? She had arranged all this a week ago. Unnecessary time was being wasted.

She didn't want to rely on sympathy. But she was a Southern girl – she knew how to play the helpless belle to her advantage if she needed to. She started to try with this tough, crusty Easterner but was getting nowhere when out of the blue the agent whistled and waved at someone behind her.

"Justin!"

A young man with dark hair, who looked like he was still in high school but couldn't possibly be, sprinted over. "Yeah?"

"This lady needs help getting her stuff to the gate."

"Will do,” he said and turned towards Amanda, holding out his hand for her to shake. "Justin Carisi, Jr. ma'am. And you are?"

Amanda's mouth dropped. Even though he had a darker complexion, he still . . .

"Ma'am?” he asked confused, taking in the look of recognition on her face. "Do you know me or something? I'm sorry if you do . . . I . . . I don't remember you."

She closed her mouth. "No, it's not that, it's just – "

"Sorry to interrupt you ma'am, but your plane to Atlanta is already boarding. We gotta hustle." She noticed that his accent was thicker than Carisi's - if that was even possible.

"Sure, yeah. Let's go. How did you know I was headed to Atlanta?"

“I could tell,” he smiled impishly. Just like the Carisi she knew.

She pushed Jesse's stroller while he managed everything else, including charming their way to the front of the TSA line. Of course it didn't hurt that he was an airline employee himself and knew just what to say to various airport personnel along the way to keep them moving. Amanda breathlessly made it to the counter at the gate when Jesse decided to start crying. She looked down at her daughter just as Justin offered to take the handles of the stroller from her.

"I've got this. I can distract her while you talk to the gate agent." He bent over the stroller and started making funny faces and noises at Jesse which instantly quieted her down. She wiggled in confusion instead.

One of the gate agents who had been helping passengers board came up to the counter, "May I help
"I'm on this flight and I need to gate check my bags."

"No can do."

"Are you kidding me?"

"Sorry. You're running late. I can't help you."

"I need to get to Atlanta. With my bags."

"Oh, I can still let you on the plane, but you'll have to leave your luggage here. We can try to get it on the next flight, but seeing as it's Christmas Eve and we're oversold and all, it's unlikely we'll be able to get it to Atlanta until Christmas day – probably on a later flight."

"What?"

"Look, it's the holidays, lady. You should have made a better effort to make it here on time."

"I can't believe this." Amanda growled. She was pissed at this woman for judging her and ready to attack. She couldn't wait until late tomorrow. Her mother lived an hour out of Atlanta and she just couldn't wait that long for her bags – she had packed things Jesse needed in her luggage. Waiting more than a day for it to arrive was not acceptable.

But just then Justin stood up from engaging Jesse and said to his co-worker, "Look Agatha, it's Christmas. In the spirit of things can we try to . . ."

She attempted to shut him down. "It's your first holiday season working for us Justin, you have no idea."

"Yeah, I do. I worked Thanksgiving this year," he said defensively. "It was even more of a zoo in here than it is today. Isn't there something we can do?"

"No," she said firmly and pursed her lips into pout, crossing her arms over her hefty chest.

"Okay, okay," Amanda said and sighed wearily, giving in to the situation. "Can I get out on the next flight then?"

The lady harrumphed. "Did you not just hear me say it's Christmas Eve and that I can't even get your luggage on a plane until late tomorrow? What makes you think I can get you and your baby out any earlier?"

Amanda was done. This was not going to happen. She turned away from the gate agent without saying a word, furious. But then she turned to Justin, forced herself to smile politely, and asked him if he'd be able to help her with her things all the way back out to the taxi line. She was going home.

"Sure," he said and smiled. "But you look frazzled. You wanna stop somewhere for a quick bite or some coffee or something on the way out?"

Despite her agitation, Amanda smiled to herself. Do all Carisis have this urge to make sure people in distress get fed?

"Sure," she said, and they headed towards the terminal exit until they found a café along the way.

"Here, I'll get you a coffee – you can pay me when I get back. Just go ahead and sit down, you look
exhausted. What would you like?"

She told him her drink order, sat down and retrieved her phone. She smiled down at Jesse who was now fast asleep in her stroller despite the hustle and bustle. And then she sighed deeply and dialed – time to face the music.

"Mom?" she said when her mother picked up.

"Amanda, you'll never believe it," her mother breathed into the phone. "Kim is here!"

"Kim?" Amanda said in total shock. "Wait. How did that happen? She's in jail on manslaughter charges. How in the world did she get furlough?"

"Oh, Lorenzo did that for her . . . He’s that nice young lawyer that helped her at her trial. You remember, darling.”

Amanda sinks her head down into one of her palms. So this was happening.

Her mom continues, “It sounds like he’s sweet on her. And she’s convinced he’ll propose any day now. You should try to do so well, Amanda. Would be good for you to be with a prestigious man like him for once.”

"He's a defense lawyer. Nothing prestigious about that unless you're defending some famous, high profile criminal. And sometimes not even then. They usually defend scum, mom."

"Well, he defended your sister just fine – and she's far from scum. Besides, an attorney can do so much more for you than those policemen you're so fond of."

"Mom, can we not go there?"

"I'm just saying, Amanda. You should try to find a more distinguished man than your usual type. You’re pretty enough. It shouldn’t be too hard for you."

"Okay," Amanda says in an effort to change the subject. "I need to tell you something, mom."

"Go ahead."

"I missed my flight."

"Oh, no big deal, darling. Just come out on the next one. We'll wait for you."

"That's not going to work, mom. It's Christmas Eve. There are no more flights available today. None until late tomorrow."

"Oh, I don't believe that," she argued. "Just use your charm and I know you can get some nice man to help you out. I taught you how to do that."

Justin sits down at the table with her coffee and hands her the receipt. She smiles up at him in thank you and digs in her wallet for some cash to give him while continuing to talk.

"Mom, that's not going to work."

"Nonsense."

"The world doesn't work that way."
"It does for me."

She takes a deep breath. "Look, that's nice and all, but I'm telling you I'm not coming. At all."

There's silence on the other end.

"Mom?"

And then anger, "What do you mean you're not coming? Are you depriving me of my grandbaby?"

"Yeah, that's exactly what I'm saying," Amanda says sarcastically and rolls her eyes.

"I can't believe you're doing this to me!"

"Mom, you have no idea what I've gone through at the airport today – and there are no flights out!" Amanda fumes, exasperated. "It's not happening. I'm not flying all the way out there just to turn right back around the next day. I'm not doing it."

"You are so ungrateful – always putting yourself first."

"Mom – "

"I thought you'd change once you became a mother. Learn to have respect for your family." She can hear her mom sniff on the other end of the line. Probably putting on a good show for Kim.

"Give me a break." Normally her mom's words would have hurt her, but ever since Carisi had talked to her about her mom, she had begun to see some of this stuff in a different light. It was starting to sink in.

"Here, talk to your sister Kim. I can't take listening to this anymore."

Amanda hangs up the phone before her sister can come on the line.

"Nope," she says to it quietly once it disconnects. She definitely had no interest in talking to her sister after that little exchange with her mother.

Then she notices that Justin's just sitting there, looking awkward. It's obvious that he overheard some of the conversation.

To lighten the mood Amanda smiles at him and says, "Family, eh?"

"Uh, yeah," he stammers.

She realizes he's a Carisi and probably isn't well versed in fucked up family dynamics like hers. That is, if he's even related to the one she works with . . .

"Look . . . " she starts to explain.

"No, I get it," he interrupts. "I really do. I have this Aunt Carlotta, you see . . ."

"Uh-huh."

"Well, her husband died. Quite a while back. Years ago, actually. Her kids don't really remember him. They were too young. And she, well . . ."

"Yeah?"
"She kinda fell off of the deep end. Couldn't handle it. She drank – like your mom." He notices the shock on her face. "Sorry to just kinda assume, but it seemed kinda obvious that she wasn't sober on the phone with you just then. Why else would she say such nasty things to her own daughter?"

Amanda smirked. If he only knew. For such an insightful kid, he's still a bit innocent. He continues.

"Well, my Aunt C, you know – she would even disappear from time to time." He looks off into space for a bit, looking sad. "Her husband was a drinker. My mom and I think she started drinking herself to feel close to him once he was gone. She really loved him, you know? Despite his faults."

"Yeah, that happens."

"My mom was really close to Carlotta - they're twins. And after all of this . . . well, they grew apart. It was sad to see actually. Now they don't even talk."

"That's too bad."

"Yeah, but now she's considering letting her into her life again. I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not?"

"Well, she found herself one of those 12-step groups . . . got most of the family convinced that she's okay now."

"But not you?" Amanda's intrigued. It seems that he trusts his family about as much as she trusts hers. So different than Carisi. She had the feeling that they were related somehow, but maybe she was wrong.

"No, and not my mom either, not really. Aunt Carlotta's done this before. Let her own kids down something fierce. They love her so much and then she just randomly abandons them. Whenever the hell she feels like it. They don't understand what's going on. They really don't. It's not fair to them."

"Yeah, I can see that. Those poor kids. No one deserves that growing up." She leans forward. "But you know Justin, it sounds like your aunt's trying now. And that's a good thing. Those groups do work for a lot of people. For many it's a second chance."

"Or a third," he says bitterly.

"Yeah, and sometimes it takes more than one try. People do slip up before they figure out what they need to do to get this stuff under control."

"I guess," he says, with a bitter edge in his voice. "You sound like my cousin right now. He's so positive all the time. His whole side of the family is. Well, except for one of his sisters. She's more like us. And Carlotta's kids . . . I don't know how this happened, but somehow they ended up being more like him. Optimistic."

"Nothing wrong with being positive."

"I guess not. It works for my cousin. He's almost out of law school." He sighs. "I wish I could do something like that - I want to work for justice, too. But, with having to work and all to make a living, I just can't. Despite the good grades I had."

Without thinking Amanda says, "Well, he's going to night school you know, which gives him the ability to work full time. It's taking him longer, but he'll make it. You could do the same."
Justin looks at her, surprised. "So you DO know me from somewhere then?"

Amanda realizes what she's just said and tries to explain her slip. "Uh, no. Actually, I'm fairly certain I know your cousin."

"Sonny?"

"Yeah, him."

"Wait, are you the one he works with? The one that just had a baby?" he looks down at Jesse still fast asleep in her stroller.

Now she's curious. "Wait, how do you know about me?"

"Well, aren't you . . . ?"

"What?"

Their questions to each other hang there awkwardly.

"Well, Sonny's mom was praying for you and all . . . that you had a safe delivery . . . I saw her in church all the time – doing just that. I just assumed . . . "

"Assumed what?"

"Oh, I'm really sorry ma'am. I really don't see Sonny's side of the family all that much anymore." He tries to backpedal. "Somehow I thought . . . I didn't realize . . ."

"Realize what?"

"I thought you eventually got together," he looks down a little sheepishly. "Somehow."

"Why would you think that?"

"Like I said, I haven't seen Sonny in a while, but he was so worried about whether or not you'd pull through it was obvious that he . . . I don’t know . . . I just didn't figure that you'd reject him. That it wouldn't work out. I'm so sorry for assuming anything."

"Nothing to be sorry about," Amanda says carefully. Other family members knew how Carisi had felt about her? Not just his mom? That is a revelation. And it makes her uncomfortable.

Sitting in the taxi her phone rings. It’s her mother.

“Yeah?” Amanda snaps.

“Why did you miss your flight? I just want to know dear.” Her mother sounds a bit drunker than her last phone call.

Amanda sighs and decides to explain herself. “Because Jesse had all these little things that needed to be packed. I hadn’t real -”

“That’s because a person like you wasn’t made to be a mother.”

“What?” Amanda responds, stinging with hurt.

“You can barely take care of yourself, Amanda, even though I taught you better than that. And now
you somehow think you can raise a child? You’re delusional.”

“Mom -”

“I raised two children. You and Kim. I did a fine job. I’d like to see you even try to be half the mother I was. You know I had dreams I had to give up because of you? Because of him. I gave up who I was for my family. You have no idea the sacrifices I made.”

Amanda can’t get a word in as her mom continues to rant.

“And you? Still working? Raising my grandchild? Who do you think you are to abandon her to strangers like that?”

“Mom -” Amanda protests.

“Don’t ‘Mom’ me. You know, it was all for nothing. Look how you turned out? And your no good father? Gone. Pfffft.”

“It wasn’t all for nothing, Mom. You’ve still got Kim.” Amanda says. She swallowed down that hard truth as she said it. Her mother had always favored Kim. Her younger sister could do no wrong.

“Well, I suppose there’s that at least,” her mom admitted. “But it doesn’t mean that you didn’t turn out to be a disappointment. I can’t believe you think you can raise a child on your own. You weren’t even good enough to keep the man who knocked you up in your life. Is that any good for Jesse?”

Amanda can’t believe the hypocrisy she’s hearing. “Mom, you practically raised Kim and I on your own. Daddy was never around.”

“That’s different. I kicked him out. I made a choice. He wasn’t good for you two.”

“Jesse’s dad isn’t bad for her.”

“Really? Then why isn’t he around? Answer me that.”

Defeated, Amanda says, “Okay mom, you made your point.”

“I don’t think I have. You’d better get it together, Amanda and learn how to be a proper mother to that girl. I’m not going to help you now. I’ve taught you all I can.”

Amanda hangs up the phone and wipes away a few stray tears. God, she wants to talk to Carisi. He could help her sort this out. He was probably the only one who could. Was she really a bad mother? Bad enough that her mom thought so?

She is leaning forward in the backseat of the cab, elbows on her knees. She holds the cell phone in a death grip between her hands. She wants to talk to him so badly. This isn’t the frantic panic of the last time she tried to reach him. This is need. True need.

Oh god, when did she start needing him?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to both SarahInColour and KatBen08 for the beta on this. Sarah did the first
pass (and helped me to develop the early part of this chapter) - and KatBen08 did the 2nd pass after I had to take it down and re-work it because Carisi can't seem to use a calendar properly and he messed me up. LOL

I'm still going to tell the same story though - just in a different way.
This chapter takes place between Season 17 episodes 9 and 10 on Christmas Eve.

"Stop here!" Amanda exclaims abruptly when she sees the taxi unexpectedly pass Carisi's church. It's like a sign from God. If she really believed in God.

"Wait here," she says to the cabbie as she undoes Jesse from her car seat. "No matter how long it takes. I'll be back."

"It's your fare, lady," the cabbie says and pulls out a book.

Amanda turns and heads up the church steps. It's Christmas Eve. Carisi's gotta be at church right? She finds a priest she recognizes, Father DeFranco. He looks really busy, but still -

"Father!"

"Yes, dear?" The kind looking man turns towards her.

"I'm looking for Carisi."

"Carisi? I'm afraid we have a lot of parishioners with that name."

Of course they do. He's gonna make her say it. Carisi would be grinning in triumph if he heard her right now.
"Sonny Carisi. I'm looking for Sonny."

"Ah, yes!" He studies her a bit, looks at the baby in her arms. "I thought you looked familiar."

"We work together." She thinks about it. They're more than that - much more. So she corrects herself. "We're friends."

"Ah, okay," the priest coos a bit at Jesse. "Is this your precious little baby?"

"Yes," Amanda says beaming with pride.

"Sonny must be delighted. She really is a cutie."

That's an odd thing to say. "Why do you say that?"

"Well you're friends now, right?"

"Yes," Amanda says cautiously.

"He must be happy about that."

Huh?

"Father, is he here by chance?"

"Oh no, not yet. But he's sure to be here for Midnight Mass."

Maybe it wasn't a sign from God after all. "Thank you, Father."

She turns to leave.

He shakes the plastic baby blue octopus in his hand that he had received from Babies R Us earlier in the month. It is still in its original packaging. He had ordered it right away after he and Amanda had discovered it online. He had been planning to give it to her baby as a Christmas present - but that was before Amanda had shut him down - which she had done before it had even arrived.

Still, this octopus represented better times between them - hopeful times. And good memories of their friendship - before he had pushed too hard.

And it seemed like a toy.

He'd been acting like a little kid all day, dying to open that one Christmas present he really wants early. He finds that he just cannot leave the octopus in its packaging any longer. He reasons to himself that Jesse won't be getting this gift now anyway and he wants to see how it works for himself. So, feeling like a naughty child, he decides to take it out and play with it.

He fills the sink halfway full of warm water, plunks the octopus in, pulls it out, and reads the temperature. HOT.

He adds a bunch of cooler water, plunks it in, and reads the temperature.

COLD.

Now he adds just a touch of hot water. But just a touch.

When he draws the octopus out of the tepid water this time . . .
He smiles. This is fun. "Titration" – that's what his ex-girlfriend Alex would call it, he thinks. She had been a nurse – and would talk about doctors titrating psych meds to get the dose just right for their patients. But right now he doesn't feel like a shrink, he just feels like Goldilocks.

He hears the excited chatter of the twins outside his door. He drains the sink and puts the octopus on the countertop beside it. He can't wait so show them this. He pulls the door open before there's even a knock.

"Carlotta! Merry Christmas!" he exclaims and embraces his cousin in a big hug while two little blonde-haired balls of energy wrap themselves around his legs exclaiming, "Uncle Sonny!"

He's happy to see that Carlotta's still sober – he doesn't smell any alcohol on her. This is going to be a difficult holiday for her. Her first sober Christmas without Vince. He hopes she can get through it. He rubs her arms a bit as they part. "You gonna be okay?"

"Yeah, I've got these little angels."

"Yeah," he looks down at the twins who are still clinging to his legs and can't help but remember his cousin Vince as they were growing up. They look so much like their father. "You talk to JJ yet? Or, excuse me, Justin. He's going by Justin now, right? He was pretty upset at you the last time I saw him."

"Yeah he goes by Justin now, just like his dad, but I haven't been able to talk to him because my sister's still not talking to me. They've closed ranks." She pauses and puts a hand to her forehead. "She won't even let her husband talk to me either. Even though he's Vince's brother. . . even if it is Christmas. I'd really like to hang out with him, you know? Talk about Vince some."

"Yeah."

"But I want to make amends with all of them. Especially her. Cause things got so ugly between us, you know?"

"She's just not ready, C."

"Yeah, I guess not." Whining a little she adds, "But she's my sister, Sonny. My twin sister."

"Give her time." He gives her a small understanding smile. "It will be okay."

The twins have now unwrapped themselves from his legs and found their way into the kitchen where they are both excitedly chattering to themselves about the new "toy" they see on the counter. Frankie has been trying to jump up to reach it but he can't. Sonny catches them just as Frannie had gotten the bright idea to climb on top of Frankie to try to reach it herself.

"Whoa, there!" He swoops in and pulls Frannie off of Frankie's back just in time before she wobbles over.

"What's the big deal over here, guys?" he asks them as he sets her down. Carlotta takes a seat at the kitchen table and watches from afar.

"The thing!"

"It's blue!"
"Yeah, do you see it, Uncle Sonny?"

"What is it?"

"Is it a toy?"

"Does it go in the water?"

"Here, let me show you guys," Sonny says. He grabs a couple of chairs from the kitchen table, dragging them over to the sink. He puts one twin on each and now they are tall enough to look down into it.

"Octopus!" Frankie exclaims and reaches for the bath octopus on the counter.

"Ah! Uh uh!" Sonny chastises him, grabbing it himself before Frankie can. "I'll show you both at the same time and then you can take turns playing, okay?"

"Okay!"

"Ooooh, it's so cute!" Frannie exclaims now that she has a closer view of it. She reaches out to pet it's head.

"What's that bar thing, Uncle Sonny?" Frankie asks.

"This?" He points to the thermometer attached to the bottom.

"Yeah."

"Let me show you."

He fills up with sink with water and shows the twins how different temperatures will light up different colors on the thermometer bar. Blue for cold, red for hot, and the green one in the middle when the temperature is just right.

"Just right for what?" Frankie asks.

"For Amanda's baby. The right temperature for her bath water."

"Ooooh!" Frannie exclaims. "We haven't met her yet."

"When do we get to see her?" Frankie asks.

"Yeah, when do we get to see her?" his sister echoes.

"We love her!" the twins exclaim in unison.

Sonny scratches the back of his neck, thinking about how to answer this one. Will these guys ever get to meet Jesse? The way things are going he suspects not.

"I really don't know, guys."

"You look so sad," Frannie says.

"Yeah, Uncle Sonny," Frankie says, putting the octopus down.

There's those damn tears threatening to spill again. Why was he still so wrapped up in this? She rejected him weeks ago. Her calling him for help that one time might have been a window back into
her life, but she closed it as soon as he responded. And that lunch date last week, although it went well, didn't really mean anything. He finds that it just hurts too much to want her because frankly, she doesn't really want him. He needs to let her go. Yet . . .

As he wrestles with these emotions the twins look at him with worry in their eyes.

"Oh, poor Uncle Sonny!" they both exclaim and hug him from each side.

"Hey, C. Your kids really are cute, you know that?" he looks over at his cousin as he hugs them back.

"Yeah, I know. I'm lucky. The V in the 'JV squad' sure left something good behind."

"Yeah, he did."

Sonny and Carlotta reminisce about Vince and Justin and her sister as the twins continue to play with the bath octopus, both keeping a good eye on them.

"Well, the JV squad sure lucked out landing the Benedetti twins. We were all jealous," Sonny mused.

"You weren't."

"You don't know that."

"What are you saying, Sonny? That you had a thing for my sister? Cause you didn't have a thing for me, that's for sure."

"Nah, I didn't have a thing for your sister. She and I just competed for grades. I was grateful actually when Justin turned her eye. Her math grade dropped and I finally beat her."

They share a bit of a chuckle and keep talking.

"Okay guys, time to go!" Sonny exclaims as he swoops one twin in each arm up and off the chairs that they had been standing on in the kitchen. There is water everywhere – the counter, the floor, the chairs, and all over the twins.

Frankie won't let go of the octopus and water drips from it, down his arm and onto Sonny.

"Let it go!" Frannie bosses him, pointing at the octopus. "It's getting messy."

Sonny raises an eyebrow, looking at the water that has been splashed all over the kitchen.

"Someone's going to be a take charge mom someday," he says wryly over his shoulder to Carlotta.

"She's the oldest. She can't help it."

"Here, buddy, let's put that away." Sonny extracts the octopus from Frankie's hand and puts it down on one of the chairs.

"But I wanna – " he whines and reaches for it.

"No, Frankie. That octopus is for Amanda's baby. It's not yours," his mother tells him gently, but firmly. "You've gotta let it go."
"But can I give it to her?"

"I'm sorry sweetie, but we won't be seeing her before Christmas," she explains.

"Why not?" he asks.

"Yeah, why not?" Frannie chimes in and stamps her foot.

"I think Uncle Sonny needs to make a Christmas wish!" Frankie exclaims.

"Yeah! We wanna see Amanda. And her baby!" Frannie joins in.

"Don't we all," Sonny says quietly over their heads to Carlotta.

"What's happening with that?" she asks.

He shakes his head dejectedly. "Probably nothing."

The twins easily get bored at this line of conversation and wander off to gather their little coats and backpacks that they had brought with them and start to pack them up, leaving the adults behind to talk.

"You haven't seen her at all since Thanksgiving?"

"No. Well . . . except when she invited me out to lunch." He snorts. "But that was only because no one else could meet up with her. She didn't really want to see me."

"That's hard," she says sympathetically. "I know how much you wanted to be there for her through all this."

"Yeah, I was just so relieved that they both made it, you know. 'Cause we almost lost them."

"Yeah, I know."

"I guess I thought. . . oh, I don't know what I thought. I shouldn't be so disappointed. This is how she wanted it. She had long since told me she planned to do this on her own, even though she was scared. Asked me to back off long before she even went into that delivery room."

He crosses his arms, sighs, and looks down in defeat.

"It's not like I didn't have a warning. I just pushed her too hard." Those tears are threatening again. He pauses to get ahold of himself.

"But I didn't mean to," he finishes weakly.

"You're not usually so down, Sonny," Carlotta says, reaching out to stroke his arm in comfort.

"Yeah, I know. I can use the holidays as an excuse though, right?" He looks up and smiles falsely. "People get sad this time of year. Perhaps it's just my turn."

The twins are still busy by the front door, putting their coats on now. They had already broken out into a fight over the backpacks. But they always seemed to work it out without any intervention so Sonny and Carlotta had just let their argument play out without having really paid any attention to it.

Sonny runs his hand over his head, leaving his palm resting on his neck, looking down a bit, but not all the way. "I don't want to give up on her, but it's so hard waiting for friendship, something,
anything from her. But sometimes I think I'd take anything because I still love her ... Pathetic, no?"

"Is she worth it?"

"Yes."

"Then hang in there. She'll come around." Carlotta says despite her misgivings about Amanda. Her cousin needs reassurance right now, not an unwanted opinion about the woman he loves. So she doesn't bring that up. So instead she says,"Who can resist you?"

"Plenty of people. Plenty." He smiles wryly. "You have no idea."

"Well, not her. She'll fall victim to your charm someday. Trust me. I can tell." She winks.

"You only know her from when she was going off on you after she found the twins in the park all those months back. How do you know that?"

"Oh, she's fierce that one. Protective. She loves my kids, yet she barely knows them." She is speaking truth, despite the fact that she doesn't really like Amanda. She touches Sonny's arm and says earnestly, "Anyone with that much heart, no matter how hard they try to hide it, can find a matching soul in you."

"Never known you to be so optimistic before, C."

"I got a new lease on life, Sonny. Not going to waste it in darkness anymore."

They exchange warm smiles.

Sonny is sitting in the pews in the back of the church. Midnight Mass will be starting in about an hour and he had come early at Carlotta's request. He smiles as he looks a few rows in front of him where Carlotta is talking with both her sister and her husband Justin. But Justin's son hadn't arrived yet. He was probably still making his way back from work at the airport.

Carlotta had asked Sonny to be there when they all started talking, to facilitate things. But it seemed the three of them no longer needed him, they were doing fine on their own, so he had taken Frannie and Frankie back with him to the pews that he was sitting in now. The twins had both taken long naps that afternoon so that they could stay awake during Midnight Mass, but he wasn't sure that was going to work out so well for them. They were currently cuddled up on either side of him, snoozing away.

He takes out his phone and scrolls through previous text messages he had exchanged with Amanda, looking for some evidence of their connection before everything had gone so terribly wrong. He finds one from when she was on bed rest - from one of the days he had been unable to visit her because class ran late. He had still wanted to check in.

_How'd it go at the doctor's today? Your baby doing okay? Ready to join the world? - C_

_Y. I'm more than ready myself. You've been great BTW. Thnx. - A_

_You're going to really enjoy this – C_

_? – A_

_Being a mom. – C_
Srslly? – A

Trust me. It will be the best thing that ever happened to you – C

:-) – A

He sincerely hopes that she is enjoying motherhood, but he had also really wanted to take part in that aspect of her life in some way. He had been looking forward to it ever since he found out she was pregnant – he'd been over the moon in fact. But now that she has shut him out, he's just in pain - solid, unrelenting pain. He sits in the pews and thinks about how much he misses her and how much he's missing out on, Frannie and Frankie unwittingly providing him solace in their sleep.
A filler fic focused on Rollins & Carisi. This chapter takes place Season 17 between episodes 10 and 11 on Christmas Eve.

He’s sure to be here for midnight mass. . . He’s sure to be here for midnight mass.

Father DeFranco’s words echo in her mind over and over. She wishes. . .

“Ugh,” she groans. Why am I being so indecisive?

She wishes she could be with him for Christmas – she wants his insight, his assurance that her mom is wrong about her. She knows he can provide that. And she wishes . . .

She knows she wants more than just his comfort. She wishes to be with him. So why is she letting ‘fate’ stop her? Just because she arrived at his church much too early and he wasn’t there doesn’t mean she has to pay any attention to ‘the signs.’ She's the master or her own destiny. Why is she giving up so easily?

She stares at the clock, the door, wasting time. She wants . . . she wants him.

And he wants her. But he’s resigned himself to the fact that he can’t have her. But what if he could . . .
He looks down at Frannie and Frankie, still asleep on either side of him. They’ve been asleep so long that Frannie has drooled all over him and down the front of her fancy pearl dress by this time. She looks adorable in her stupor. And Frankie, well he’s been ‘playing baseball’ since he fell asleep. That kid’s so restless he can’t sit still even when he’s unconscious. Carisi smiles.

He remembers Frankie saying adamantly *I think Uncle Sonny needs to make a Christmas wish* when he learned that he wouldn’t be seeing Amanda or Jesse for Christmas and saw how sad that had made him.

Yeah, maybe he does need to make a wish. Or pray.

He thinks about how Justin had agreed to come to midnight mass in Manhattan instead of on Staten Island just because he had asked him to be there. Carisi had been the mediator – trying to help Justin’s side of the family to reconcile – and it had worked. That alone was a miracle – one he and Carlotta had prayed for together. That kid had so much resentment built up towards his aunt over the years that it was almost unbelievable that he had even agreed to come. Carisi had to admit his prayers were working for some things . . .

He bows his head.

*Oh Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing Carlotta and her family healing this Christmas. And, Lord? I’d like to have Amanda in my life again. Not just at work, but as a friend. I miss her so much and I really do want to help her with her baby – I don’t want her to go through that alone. You know how much I care about her. Amen.*

Carisi raises his head and notices that mass is about to start.

_And then a miracle happens. She walks through the doors in the back of the church. Amanda._

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She looks completely lost.

He rouses Frannie and Frankie. “Hey guys, the service is about to start.”

They both look up at him with bleary eyes. Frannie rubs at hers so fiercely it’s almost comical and Frankie lets out a big yawn.

“Why don’t you go back and join your mom, okay guys?”

They just nod, too tired to speak, and shuffle like zombies up the aisle. Once Carisi sees that they have been claimed by their mother, he exits his pew from the outside, not wanting to disturb the procession that’s already started. Unfortunately, that means a lot of shuffling past people who have already taken their places. And a lot of “excuse me’s.”

He reaches Amanda just as it looks like she’s about to bolt. She doesn’t notice him until he’s upon her and she startles a little bit when he touches her shoulder. Jesse had been asleep in her arms and now begins to wake up.

“Hey,” he whispers softly.

“Hey,” she answers back.

He holds out his hands for the baby even though he’s barely ever held her before. Amanda hands Jesse over to him without hesitation and it feels so natural he doesn’t even question how comfortable she seems doing that despite the fact that he’d been under the assumption that they were on the outs.
Silently he engages Jesse, touching her nose teasingly, swaying gently with her in his arms back and forth, back and forth. Her only response is a gurgle. He notices that she seems to have gotten bigger already . . . yet it’s only been about a week since he’s seen her. How is that possible?

Amanda smiles up at the tall, lanky man holding her baby with such ease. It’s easy to smile at him when he is so radiant – with that huge smile lighting up his entire face. She wants him in her life again. Perhaps if she says she’s sorry she’ll get her wish . . . and she needs to tell him she’s sorry, despite how ashamed she is of herself. He deserves that from her at the very least.

After she and Carisi take their seats in a pew at the back of the church, Amanda notices something and leans in to him.

“Is that Justin? With his aunt?” she asks incredulously pointing at his cousin, who is seated quite a few pews in front of them, right next to Carlotta.

Wait, how does she know Justin? Carisi wrinkles his brows, puts a finger to his lips, and says very quietly, “You’re not supposed to talk during mass, Rollins.”

She gives him a quick nod in response and they sit in silence once again, listening to the service, until it’s time for a hymn.

She watches him stand up proudly and bellow out the verses from the bottom of his heart. It is glorious to see him in his element and she’s so struck by it that even though she is holding a hymnal in her hands while he holds Jesse, she doesn’t even bother looking at it and trying to follow along.

He grins over at her when he’s done and they ‘trade’ Jesse once again.

Near the end, when the congregation starts heading up to the front of the church to receive communion, Carisi notices that Amanda looks uncomfortable. He leans over to her, so close his breath tickles the hair behind her ear and says, “Don’t worry, I’ll sit this one out.”

“You don’t have to do that,” she responds quietly, tilting her head back towards him so that a part of each of their foreheads touch.

She must not realize what she’s doing. He hopes she won’t notice and pull away, and he keeps his eyes downcast, wanting to draw out the moment. But he’s gotta say something or else this lingering of theirs will get awkward.

“It’s not like I’m going to go to hell for missing one communion. It’s okay.”

“Thank you,” she whispers back and the moment is broken. She pulls away and even though she smiles at him, he feels the distance between them.

“Ammanda! Ammanda!” the twins come running up to her after the service.

“Hey guys!” she says enthusiastically and crouches down to their level, baby Jesse in her arms. “You wanna meet Jesse?”

“Yes!” Frankie says loudly while his sister squeals with delight and hugs herself.

Carisi stands over them and just watches how excited the twins are about the baby and how natural Amanda is with them. Carlotta comes up to him and rubs his back for a minute.
“Hey C,” he says to her.

“Hey Son.”

“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, your kids sure are sweet.”

“Well, you had something to do with that.”

“How so?”

“‘How so?’ C’mon Sonny, you know better than to ask that. You were always there taking care of them, watching over them when . . .”

He notices her hesitation and turns back to look at her.

“When I wasn’t.” She smiles with tears in her eyes.

“Aw, Carlotta. Come here.” He envelops her in a big hug.

Having spent some time asking Amanda all about Jesse, the twins now take off to play with their cousin Emma – they want to show her something they brought to church in Frankie’s backpack. Amanda stands back up and notices Carisi and Carlotta. Carlotta gives her a strange look. Almost like . . .

Carisi breaks the hug and turns back to Amanda. “The twins run off?”

“Yeah, they saw Emma and suddenly Jesse wasn’t so interesting anymore.” She chuckles and looks at Carlotta, Justin’s infamous ‘Aunt C.’ “Hello again.”

“Hello,” Carlotta says cautiously. “Justin tells me you guys met at the airport today. He was surprised to see you in church.”

“Well, uh . . .”

“Why did you come here? As far as I know this isn’t your church, is it?” Carlotta crosses her arms.

Amanda feels suddenly attacked and Carisi immediately notices the tension between them.

“Girls, girls.” He jumps between them.

They both look at him disdainfully.

“You don’t need to run interference, Sonny – we’re all adults here,” Carlotta says coolly, pushing on his chest, moving him away. “Seriously Amanda, why are you here?”

She doesn’t owe this woman an explanation, but she finds herself giving one anyway.

“To see him.” She nods at Carisi.

“Why?” Carlotta’s eyes narrow.

“Why do you care?”

“What’s so urgent you had to see him at midnight on Christmas? You know this is a time for families.”
“Okay, okay, break it up.” Carisi tries to step back in.

“Butt out,” the two women both snap simultaneously.

“No,” Carisi says and touches Amanda’s elbow to get her attention. “If you two are going to duke it out, at least hand Jesse over.”

Amanda doesn’t look at him and just glares at Carlotta instead. “No, I’m done here.”

“Now that you’re a parent Amanda, let’s see how well you can raise that little girl. It’s harder than you think. I’m not sure you are up to it.”

She looks Amanda up and down but then walks away before Amanda can even protest. But she wouldn’t have anyway – the wind had gone out of her sails. After her argument with her mother today, what Carlotta said had just plain hurt.

“Hey, are you okay?” Carisi asks gently.

His caring manner is too much and Amanda turns completely away from him and wipes at her eyes some, trying to be discreet. But there’s no such thing as discreet around Carisi – he’s too perceptive.

He touches her shoulder, but she does not turn back to face him.

“Hey, it’s okay,” he says. Well, that came out of nowhere. What was that all about?

After a few moments of contemplation, he asks her, “Amanda? Not to press, but why did you come by my church tonight? I’m a little confused here myself.”

“You guys are in so much trouble! I’m telling Father DeFranco.” Elizabeth crosses her arms smugly and looks down threateningly at her little cousins.

Frankie’s lower lip trembles. “Why?”

“Yeah, why?” Frannie asks.

“Cause that’s stealing!” Elizabeth says in mock frustration with an eye roll. “You two are so dumb. Just babies.”

Emma laughs a little, finding the situation funny. “I’m a baby.”

Frankie ignores her – he doesn’t find it funny at all. He doesn’t like getting in trouble.

“Stealing?” Frannie asks incredulously. “Like one of the seven deadly sins?”

“No, it’s one of the Ten Commandments, dummy! Don’t you even pay attention in CCD?” Elizabeth reprimands her harshly.

Tears start to spill over Frannie’s cheeks.

“You made my sister cry!” Frankie practically shouts and points up at his cousin. “That’s a sin, Lizzie.”

“No it’s not. You don’t know anything. I’m getting the Father.” She flounces off, her white lace dress bouncing around her as she goes.
Frankie hugs his sister. “It’s okay Frannie. It’s okay.”

“Are we really in trouble?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’m a baby,” Emma says randomly again.

“Yes, you are. Now go away and leave us alone,” Frankie tells her grumpily.

Carisi walks Amanda and Jesse closer to the altar. They are close to the communion rails when she stops them, front and center.

“Carisi, I’ve been meaning to tell you –“

At that very moment Jesse decides to start fussing.

“Here, I’ll take her,” he says.

Jesse quiets down a bit as he rocks her, but not all the way. Amanda knows she could break out in a wail at any second. She doesn’t really want to be interrupted but she steels herself to –

“Amanda! Amanda!” she hears the twins, turns around, and sees that they have suddenly come upon them. And she notices that Father DeFranco is hanging back behind them.

Frankie has a blue bath octopus outstretched from his arm.

“Here take this!” he says, and drops it like it’s a hot potato.

“Oops,” Frannie says, but not in mirth. She looks a little scared and they both look . . . contrite.

Amanda picks the octopus up off of the floor and then looks up at Carisi who blushes. She turns her attention back to the twins.

“A bath octopus?” It’s just like hers only a different color.

“Yeah,” Frankie rushes forward to explain. “I’m really sorry we stole it Amanda.”

“Yeah, we’re really sorry,” Frannie says.

“You stole this?” Amanda asks.

“Yeah, from Jesse.”

“We didn’t mean to.”

“We just liked it and Uncle Sonny said we wouldn’t get to see her for Christmas so we thought we could play with it for a while . . .”

Carisi is blushing hard now and Jesse starts to cry.

“You – ?” Amanda looks up at him.

“Yeah, Rollins. I didn’t mean anything by it and I bought it for Jesse for Christmas before . . . well, you know.” Thankfully the baby needs his attention that very moment so he can turn his focus on soothing her instead of seeing Amanda’s reaction. His blush recedes.
“Was that okay, Father?” the twins turn and ask the priest.

“You did good, little ones. Just remember to ask before taking things from now on, okay?”

“Yes, Father,” they both say solemnly.

Amanda reaches into her baby bag, still holding on to the blue octopus. “Hey guys!”

“Yes?” the twins say, their attention back on her fully.

“Look what I have. What Jesse has.” She was glad she hadn’t fully unpacked from her trip.

She pulls the pink octopus from the bag and now has both of them in her hands.

“Ooooh!”

“Can I touch the pink one?” Frannie asks.

“Sure,” Amanda answers and looks up at Carisi while Frannie pets it. “Great minds, huh?”

“Something like that,” he says, smiling down at her. Great minds indeed. He muses that they always seem to be on the same wavelength – even when they are apart.

Jesse has completely fallen asleep in Amanda’s lap as she and Carisi sit in the front pew. A lot of people have left the church by now and it is quiet in the sanctuary.

“You were going to tell me something?” Carisi asks her.

“Yeah. . . um. Listen. . .”

“I’m listening.”

His blue eyes are dark in this light. Deep and beautiful. She’s got to get through this.

“The way I treated you at Thanksgiving. . .” She brings one hand up to her forehead. It is shaking. This is so hard. “I am so ashamed.”

“Hey there. No need for that.”

“Yes, yes there is a need for that.” She turns her eyes on his. “I’m sorry. I’m so so sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

He is stunned and his mouth opens, forming a little ‘O.’ He thought he was in the wrong. Not her.

She continues, “I mean, I know it was a mistake. I know that. I know you didn’t mean anything by it.”

“What if I did?” he challenges.

“Let’s not go there. Please,” she says sarcastically, tilting her head at him.

“Okay,” he says and hangs his head, not wanting to look at her.

Oh no. . . He realizes that he might have had a chance just then . . . she might have been opening the door. Oh God, I shouldn’t have said that. Not now. But she always seemed to push back on him. Hard. He knew where he stood.
It had always been her instinct to push him away. But she didn’t want to do that now. *Oh no, what did I just say?* She hadn’t meant for her words to come out that way – it was just a reflex. She needs to fix this.

“Carisi,” she says and touches his shoulder, his upper arm, waiting for him to look back at her.

Unbeknownst to them two little blonde-haired twins had snuck into the pew behind them and are crouched down in hiding, looking up and listening to their every word.

After an excruciatingly long wait, he turns to face her and she gulps. It’s now or never.

“I need you to understand something . . .”

“Okay.”

“I want you in my life.”

He stares down at her, his eyes darting back and forth in disbelief. *Does she? Does she mean it?*

In an attempt to make sure he’s reading her correctly in the dim light he leans closer and she tips her face up to his . . .

“Ooooh,” one of the twins whispers so quietly that only the other one can hear. “Do you think they are going to kiss?”
His eyes are still darting back and forth. He’s so close to her now. *What is he waiting for?* 

The next thing she knows he’s wrapped her in a fierce hug and is exclaiming, “I’m so happy!”

She hugs him back and says, “Me too.”

And she is happy . . . but something’s off . . .

He breaks away from their hug but keeps his hands on her upper arms and practically shakes her. “I missed you so much Amanda. Thank you for letting me back in. You, me, and Jesse? We’re going to have some fun times. We really are. I promise.”

He reaches down to pick Jesse up off her lap and holds her securely in his arms, his radiant smile beaming down at her and up over towards Amanda again.

“I’m so glad we can be friends.”

And there it is.

He just wants to be friends. She smiles back at him with a poker face in an attempt to hide her deep
disappointment.

Damn, I must have broken his heart so thoroughly that . . .

She sighs inwardly.

. . . the damage is irreparable.

“I wanna light a candle,” Carisi says to Amanda, still holding Jesse. “Come on.”

She takes his proffered hand and lets him lead her over to a small altar full of votive candles. He hands Jesse over to her when he gets there and she watches him light a candle with a soft smile, its flame joining the sea of those already lit around it.

“Who was that for?” she asks him.

“You and Jesse,” he says simply. “You see, the candle will stay lit even after we leave . . . it’s an ongoing prayer. Like my mother did for you back when we were all worried about you.”

She stares out at the sea of candles and thinks for a moment. “May I light one?”

“Sure,” he says and takes Jesse.

Amanda leans over, match in hand, and lights a candle for the man standing beside her . . . making her own Christmas wish in the process.
Amanda had just put Jesse down to bed when she hears her phone vibrating on the table in the other room. It is only 8pm. Was it Fin again? Or Carisi this time?

Fin had invited her to join him and Carisi to ring in the New Year. Although that sounded nice on the surface, deep down Amanda didn't want to do it.

"Carisi you know . . . he's alright. Come join us," Fin had said to her when she had finally decided to decline a couple of days ago.

She knew Carisi was 'alright.' Too well. Fin didn't understand how much it might pain her to see him. She was still deeply disappointed by the fact that he only wanted be friends with her, even though she had brought that on herself.

"I just can't find a sitter, it being New Year's and all," she had said, but in all honesty, she hadn't looked very hard. . .

"Yeah?" she says when she finally picks up the vibrating phone from the table.
There's tittering on the other line. And then a little boy's voice says something unintelligible followed by laughing. She pulls the phone away from her head to check the number. Yep. It's Carisi's. Two guesses who the little kid is.

"Frankie, hon? Can you put your Uncle Sonny on the phone please?"

"I can't do that, Amanda."

"Why not, sweetie?"

Then a high pitched little girl's voice is on the phone. She shrieks, "Cause he's sick!"

She hears the phone hit something and now there's laughter from further away. What the hell is going on?

"Carisi!" she says loudly into the phone and then hears Jesse fuss. Damn.

Turning her attention back to the phone she can hear a slightly muffled voice say, "Settle down, you two."

That doesn't sound at all like Carisi. Then there's a long pause and a crash in the background followed by laughter.

"I mean it," the voice says.

Frankie's back on the line giggling.

"Frankie, who's there with you?" Amanda says sternly. She's worried now. Are they with Carisi? Or had she heard someone else?

"Uncle Sonny."

She breathes a sigh of relief. The twins are okay.

"Yeah, he's sick," Frannie pipes in, having taken the phone away from her brother again. "How's your puppy, Frannie?"

"She's fine, sweetheart, but I need you to put your Uncle on the phone."

"I can't do that," she sing-songs.

"Frannie, I need to talk to him. Put him on the phone." Carisi had obviously lost control of the twins somehow.

In a frustrated huff the little girl says, "He's sick!"

"Yeah, we told you!" she can hear Frankie say in the distance.

Amanda hears extended coughing and now she can hear a faint, almost weak voice. Poor Carisi. "Bring me the phone, Frannie."

"No!" an adamant Frannie says.

"Yeah, you aren't allowed to talk," Frankie says. "Give him another cough drop."

"No, you do it. I'm on the phone with Amanda. Right Amanda?" Frannie replies.
Not for long. She's going over there.

By some miracle, Amanda does actually find a sitter for Jesse. She arrives in tears and is only available because her boyfriend had just dumped her. She is devastated, but holding Jesse brings a smile to her face quickly and she thanks Amanda profusely for asking her to watch Jesse that night, marveling at the joy that a child, even if it's not your own, can bring into your life.

A wry grin crosses Amanda's face as she thinks of Frannie and Frankie, raining terror over at Carisi's place right now. She figures that at this very moment he probably doesn't share her babysitter's sentiment.

When Amanda gets to Carisi's apartment, to her amazement she doesn't even have to knock because the door is slightly ajar. Her hackles go up instinctively – doors randomly left ajar are usually signs of foul play – but in this instance, she's thinking it's due to twin mischief more than anything. But just to be certain . . .

"Carisi?" she calls in through the door. She can hear the twins screeching. "I'm coming in."

She finds her way back to the bathroom where she sees Carisi lying on the floor huddled around what looks like a container filled with puke. Her nose wrinkles. It stinks too.

Frankie is practically sitting on his head, playing with pieces of his unkempt hair, utterly fascinated, while Frannie is crouched on the floor trying to force him to drink some water. He keeps jerking his head away from the rim of the glass and weakly saying no, but she keeps trying.

"Frannie! Frankie!" Amanda says sternly.

The twins jump away from Carisi and he moans, grabbing at his stomach, knocking some puke out of the container and onto the floor in the process.

"Yes, Amanda?" the twins ask in unison, looking up at her with woeful eyes.

"What do you two think you are doing?"

"He's sick," Frannie says and points at Carisi. "He needs to drink water. Mom says you have to drink water when you're sick, but he's only had four glasses. He needs more but he won't drink it. He's acting like a baby."

"Yeah, a total baby!" Frankie chimes in. "I'm checking him for lice – cause those make you sick, you know. But he just complains and complains and pushes me off his head."

"Do you even know what lice are, Frankie? What you're looking for?"

That stumps the little boy. "Uh, no."

"We're only trying to help," Frannie interrupts, then looks up solemnly at Amanda. "Is he going to die?"

Carisi takes that very moment to moan loudly and hurl.

"Gross! He's puking again!" Frannie exclaims, leaving the bathroom and running in circles, shaking like a leaf.

Frankie just giggles like this is the funniest thing in the world. But when Carisi starts up a post-puke
coughing jag Frankie does his own little dance, jumping up in an attempt to reach an unopened box of cough drops on the counter. "Uncle Sonny needs cough drops!"

Amanda halts him by grabbing his arm. "Frankie, join your sister out there for a minute, will you?"

His stops abruptly and now his eyes are worried. He looks down at Carisi lying on the floor pathetically and asks, "Is he going to die, Amanda?"

She looks down at Carisi herself, puts a hand on her hip and says with a touch of sarcasm, "You gonna die there, Carisi?"

Staring at her with his miserably ashen face, Carisi shakes his head.

"There you go, Frankie. Straight from the horse's mouth. Now go join Frannie for a sec, kay?"

"Yay!" He merrily runs out of the bathroom and he and Frannie dive into Carisi's couch. Not onto, into, plowing into it from the side as if they are both Superman.

Amanda shakes her head and closes the bathroom door far enough that she and Carisi can have some semblance of privacy, yet cracked open enough to still be able to keep an eye on the kids. She positions herself at the edge of the tub so she's not looming over the exhausted man below her on the bathroom floor. "How you feeling?"

"Like shit."

"I can see that," she nods at the container with streams of puke that have sloshed over the sides. He hugs it protectively.

"What are they doing here?" she asks him, indicating the twins with a brief nod of her head. "I thought you were going out with Fin."

"I got sick. . . and. . . ooooo. . ." He moans again and clutches his stomach. Beads of sweat form on his brow. He looks terrible.

"Hey there," Amanda says and reaches out to comfort him.

"No!" he says surprisingly loudly as he flinches away from her. "No touchie."

"No touchie?"

"No touchie the sickie."

"Huh?"

He cannot hold it back any longer. He vomits into the container one more time. And then he leans his head back onto the floor and pants for a few moments before coughing again.

When the coughing jag passes he says quietly in way of explanation, "No touchie the sickie. When I'm nauseated it only makes it worse. I can't take it. Just the thought of it . . ."

"I'm sorry," she says.

"S'okay."

Amanda hadn't noticed, but two sets of eyes had been watching them through the crack in the door
ever since Carisi had last vomited. "So you were too sick to go out with Fin tonight but somehow
you ended up with the twins? How did that happen?"

"I know I know!" she hears Frankie say excitedly and startles.

"Me too!" says Frannie, shoving him aside, causing the door to open as she bumps him into it.

"What happened then?" Amanda asks the twins.

"Mommy had to go to A-A-A-A."

"Yeah, but this time it's a party!"

"Yeah! She told us all about it. No alcohol allowed and it's lots of fun."

"She might even meet our new daddy!"

"Well that's what Gramma says anyway."

Amanda looks down at Carisi who's doing his best to form a wry grin with his face – the face that's
already been contorted in misery for a good portion of the evening.

"And she called you?" Amanda asked, floored. "To babysit? When you're obviously in no condition
to take care of them? What was she thinking?"

"I faked it."

"You faked it? How?"

"I wasn't this bad when she came by to drop off the rugrats."

"I would hope not." Amanda shakes her head. "Why would you do this to yourself, Carisi?"

"She's family. They're family."

"Yes!" the twins exclaim in unison and dog pile him.

"Oh my God," Carisi groans, but his words are barely audible, he is feeling so weak.

"Off! Off!" Amanda commands. "Shoo! Shoo!"

The twins go running out of the room but within seconds there is a loud crash.

"Oh no," Amanda says starting to get up.

"No, leave it be," Carisi says in an almost inaudible whisper, clutching his stomach in pain. "Stay
with me."

"Okay."

She takes a really good look at him without the distraction of the twins. "You look so weak and pale
there, Carisi . . . and you've practically lost your voice. Should I call a doctor?"

"I want to be a doctor!" they can hear Frankie yell from the living room and Amanda looks out at
them. He and Frannie are diving into the couch again.

"No you don't – you want to be a fireman, silly," Frannie argues.
"Nah-uh."

"Uh-huh."

"Nah-uh."

"You just said so last week."

"Well at least I don't want to be a silly librarian." Frankie sticks his tongue out at his sister. In response she pushes him into the couch and starts rubbing his face into one of the cushions.

"Hey!" Amanda yells from the bathroom. "Knock it off, Frannie. You come over here right now."

She turns towards Carisi and whispers, "They're so rambunctious. What did you feed them tonight? Super-concentrated sugar bombs or something?"

"You don't want to know," he mutters.

Frannie comes to the bathroom door but doesn't dare cross the threshold. She's a little scared at the tone of Amanda's voice. "Amanda, am I in trouble?"

"Yes, you are. You can't be doing that to your brother. You could hurt him."

"Yeah!" she hears Frankie sass from the other room.

"Frankie, you come over here too."

Sheepishly he does. However, before even being chastised, he knows what he needs to do, what he needs to say. "I'm sorry, sissy. Sorry I made you mad. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

And then Frannie practically cries and hugs her brother back, apologizing profusely as she clings to him. She tells him that she hadn't wanted to hurt him.

Amanda looks down at Carisi, dumbfounded.

"It's just how they are. It's why Carlotta lets them fight it out," Carisi explains.

"Huh." Amanda thinks about that for a bit before turning back to him. "Are you sure you're okay? You must be dehydrated."

He coughs, trying to hold back yet another heave. "Not with all the water Frannie has been force feeding me."

"That's not the right kind of water."

Carisi just looks at her quizzically.

"Never mind. I'll make some for you later. First let's get Carlotta back over here. This is ridiculous. You, laying on the floor like this . . ."

"I don't want to move. I like the floor. It's nice and cold." He coughs a bit.

"Really?"

"Yeah, and I like Mr. Puke here." He says, hugging the container full of vomit to his chest. It is getting precariously full, but he seems rather attached to it.
"Suit yourself," Amanda says. "I'll leave you to your greatest love over there then."

Carisi starts laughing, but then it quickly turns into a coughing jag that wears him out. He flops his whole body flat on the floor with a sigh when he's finished. Amanda seizes the opportunity to get that container out of his hands while his guard is down.

"Hey!"

She flushes its contents down the toilet and cleans it in the sink before handing it back to him. She notices "Mr. Puke" artfully painted on the side of it, but the letters have been worn out over time and undoubtedly with use. He must have had this since he was a child.

"What, are you jealous of Mr. Puke now?" he asks with a little twinkle in his eye as he takes it back. "You moved pretty fast there, Rollins."

She rolls her eyes.

_Is he starting to feel better?_

By the time Carlotta arrives the twins are passed out on the couch, exhausted. The havoc they have wreaked on Carisi's place is abundant. She looks around a bit and shakes her head.

"Sorry," she says before she realizes she's speaking to Amanda. "Wait, why am I telling you that?"

"I have no idea," Amanda answers.

"Where is he?"

"On the bathroom floor. He doesn't want to move – he finds it comforting or something."

"Nonsense," Carlotta says and bustles into the bathroom. "Sonny-Honey. Are you feeling okay?"

She reaches down and strokes his face. Carisi pulls away from her a bit, but doesn't flinch like he had when Amanda had only tried to reach out to him and he had protested 'no touchie.' Yet he lets Carlotta touch him – in fact he even lets her help him up and lead him into his bedroom. They leave Mr. Puke behind.

Amanda feels . . . something. Can't put a name to it.

"Hey, can you grab that?" Carlotta calls from his bedroom, meaning the container of vomit.

Amanda squints her eyes and feels like a servant as she picks up a relatively slimy Mr. Puke and carries the container into Carisi's bedroom. She doesn't bother to wash it out first.

"Thanks," Carlotta says when Amanda brings it to her, barely looking at her. She puts it on his nightstand.

It's the first time Amanda has seen his bedroom. And to see it like this, with him lying ill on the bed, Carlotta all over him . . .

_Stop, she tells herself. They're cousins._

But Carlotta looks back at her with a strange, almost territorial look when she notices Amanda watching them. It makes her shiver, so she leaves his room to give them some privacy.
The twins and Carlotta had left a few minutes ago and now it was just Carisi and Amanda. She approaches his bed with a large glass of what looks like plain water in her hands.

"Here," she says and indicates that he should lift his head to drink it. "I don't want you getting dehydrated on my watch."

"Eww," he says after one sip. "This better be medicinal."

"It is. Drink up."

"Uck," he says after another one. "What IS it?"

"My mom's recipe."

"For what?"

"Diarrhea."

"I don't have diarrhea, Rollins."

"I know, but it works for excessive vomiting too."

"What's in it?"

"Sugar and salt."

"Blech."

"Yeah, I know," she laughs. "Trust me."

"Does this stuff really work?"

"I guess so. Kim and I are alive aren't we?"

He chuckles, which unfortunately sets off another coughing jag.

"Oh poor --" she starts to reach out to him, but then stops herself, withdrawing her hand.

"Amanda, it's okay. I kinda want your comfort right now."

"You do?"

"Yeah, I just don't want to be touched, really."

"You didn't seem to have any trouble letting Carlotta touch you," Amanda says, not paying any attention to how bitter she sounded.

Carisi furrows his brows, thinking about that.

"Hey, Amanda?"

"Yeah?"

"I think there's a way."

"A way?"
"Yeah, minimal contact. Something that won't set off my stomach . . . yet something comforting."

"Okay . . ."

He raises a pinkie.

Now it's Amanda's turn to furrow her brows.

"Pinkie cuddle?" he asks.

She can't tell if his eyes look the way they do because he's sick, or because he's deliberately making puppy dog eyes at her. "How does that work?"

"Give me your pinkie."

She holds up her pinkie and he grasps it in his own, never losing eye contact.

"See? Comforting."

At some point during the night, Carisi had let her fully tuck him into bed – but he remained dressed – and somehow he had convinced Amanda to climb into bed with him as well, also fully dressed. So as his neighbors cheer outside his window, ringing in the New Year down on the street, the two of them find themselves under the covers in a fierce pinkie cuddle as he tries to hold back waves of nausea.

"Stay. Please," he begs, gripping her pinkie hard.

Carisi obviously needs her pinkie cuddles and she finds that she doesn't want to leave him either. *That qualifies as an emergency, right?* She finds it very hard to say no to him, so just after midnight, Amanda calls her sitter and asks her to stay overnight with Jesse.

Sometime later . . . long past midnight after his vomiting subsides, they fall asleep together with their pinkies entwined, never letting go even in sleep.
"Amanda! Amanda!"

"Mmmm . . ." Amanda is still basically asleep but attempts to roll over, away from the demanding voice.

Her pinkie gets caught . . .

"Huh?" her eyelids flutter a little.

He falls in love with her all over again, just looking at her sleepy face. But no, she's starting to awaken. Gotta hide it.

"Amanda!" he says, shaking her pinkie a little. "Wake up, I'm hungry."

"You're wha . . ." she begins groggily. "Carisi, what?"

"I'm hungry and sickie."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"Sickie no workie."
She groans. "You've gotta be kidding me here, Carisi. You want me to make you breakfast?"

He giggles. "No not really. Gotcha!"

"Don't scare me like that." Amanda says, but now fully awake, she takes a good look at him. Even though he hasn't vomited in hours, he still looks pretty bad. "No, you know what? I AM going to make us something to eat, even though I can't believe you can even be hungry right now. Whatcha got?"

She disentangles her pinkie from his as silence falls, as he thinks. It almost feels odd to be free of him.

He sits up, but then grasps his head and moans in agony. "Oh God, I've got a splitting headache, Rollins."

She reaches out and rubs his back without hesitation. He does not flinch like he had last night, which is good. But despite her best efforts, he's probably still dehydrated. He had thrown up a lot. "Poor sickie. Sickie need wa wa."

"Oh, I got you speaking sickie-poo now too, huh?"

"Looks like."

She gets up from the bed, planning to get him some more of her mother's water remedy and then start breakfast. But then she suddenly feels . . .

"But we gotta make this quick. I'm worried about Jesse," she says with a touch of anxiety rising in her voice.

"Jesse?"

"Yes, Carisi. You know, my baby? My daughter? The one who was ripped from my womb less than two months ago?"

"Oh, yeah. Her. Whatcha worried about her for? The sitter's competent, is she not?"

"Don't you 'oh yeah . . . her' –" Amanda shakes a stern finger at him.

Carisi sees tears, angry tears shining in her eyes and puts his hands up in defense quickly. "Kidding, Rollins. You know I was kidding about that, right?"

"You know what, forget breakfast," Amanda mutters, not looking at him, and begins to shuffle about, restless. "I – I gotta go."

"Hey, what is it?" Carisi inquires, his pounding headache momentarily forgotten. "You're on edge here."

"I haven't been apart from her." Amanda meets him in the eye and says forlornly, "Ever."


She sees his proffered pinkie and takes it, sitting back down on the bed beside him. It's her turn to take comfort in him. She curls up and lays her head on his shoulder, forgetting that he's just supposed to be a friend. Because she doesn't let people who are just friends get this intimate with her.

No, he's not a friend in this moment. He's is Carisi. And they are what they are, together in this
moment, sitting quietly, entwined.
Dodds peers down at Jesse and says, “Wow! She’s beautiful.”

_He must really want that little tyke he talked about_, Amanda thinks, but then answers, “Not at 4am she’s not.”

That gets a light-hearted chuckle out of everyone at the precinct who is checking out her new baby, and some advice from Lieutenant Benson.

“Enjoy maternity, Amanda —“

Carisi doesn’t know why he does it – yes he does, it’s just become an easy habit – when he reaches out to touch Amanda instinctively, forgetting where they are. He quickly whips off the hand that he had placed on her shoulder, hoping that no one had seen him do that.

“– when my sister had to go back to work, it was like the most wrenching thing.” He gets admonished by the Lieu for saying that, but takes it in stride.

Yes, ever since that night of intense pinkie cuddling, touching each other casually felt less like an invasion of personal space and more like the most natural thing in the world . . . and their 4am “meetings” only intensified it.
They started about two weeks ago . . .

“How you holdin’ up, Amanda?” he asks cheerfully one morning at 7am, after he had fully recovered from whatever bug had plagued him on New Year’s and was on his way to work.

There’s just a grumble on the other line at first, and then . . . “4am feeding again, Carisi. Go away. I need to sleep before she starts up again.”

The phone goes silent in his hands.

Later . . .

“Hey, ‘Manda?” he asks as he’s putting away some groceries for her later that day. She is less dependent on the baby nurse now, but he still knows there are some things she just shouldn’t be doing – like lugging around distilled water jugs for the humidifier in Jesse’s room. “Jesse wake up regularly in the night?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like at 4am?”

Amanda mocks a shocked ‘O’ with her lips. “How do you know that?”

He cocks his head to the side. “It seems to be the time you most complain about. If Jesse’s worn you out it’s always ‘4am this’ and ‘4am that.’ You know what I mean?”

“Yeah, she does seem to have a routine.”

“You want any help with that?”

“Help?” Amanda’s not sure how Carisi could even help with that. Jesse usually needs to be breastfed at that time and his nipples aren’t exactly bursting with milk like hers are. She chuckles inwardly at the thought of Carisi lactating.

“Yeah, I thought I could come over on the way to work some mornings. Get up a little early, you know.”

“Uh, that’s a lot early. Besides, what would you do after I go back to bed? Work doesn’t start that early, you know.”

“Eat breakfast,” he says simply and shrugs.

Now that’s logical. Damn. She flicks the bangs on her forehead a couple of times trying to figure out a way to logically decline his help. She doesn’t like to accept help. But she can’t find one.

“Okay,” she says. “Just let yourself in around 4am I guess.”

“Okay,” he agrees and beams a gigantic smile back at her.

“Hey,” she hears softly as she feels her arm being stroked gently. She rolls over and snoozes a bit, but there it is again. “Hey.”

She stretches against the hand that is now rubbing her back softly. She yawns and forces herself to open her eyes and roll back over. She sees him, sitting on the edge of her bed, through the veil of sleep that is quickly fading.
“Hey there,” she says.

“Hey there,” he replies.

“That was a nice way to wake up.”

“Yeah, I figured I’d give you something different than the harsh start-up of Jesse crying.”

“It’s nice. I like it,” she says, sitting up fully and rubbing at her eyes.

“Okay, Amanda, what do I need to get set up here? I figure once she starts crying I can go in there and change her diaper, ’cause that usually needs to be done, right?”

Amanda nods.

“Okay, and then I’m assuming you’ll want to feed her.”

“I’ll get up for that –“

“No,” he says putting a hand up. “Let’s try something. What kind of stuff do you need? To nurse? Without leaving the comfort of your bed here.”

“Umm. . .” Amanda thinks and then has him bring a couple things over for her. Not leaving the comfort of her bed sounds really nice.

“Okay, anything else you do with Jesse at 4am?”

“I usually have to sing her to sleep, cause she’s fussy as hell in the morning.”

He looks down and smiles into his hands, thinking about how glad he is that he’ll get to hear that. He’s been wondering what her singing voice is like since Christmas – ever since she stood and watched him sing in church but didn’t open her mouth to join him. “We can do that together.”

“Are you for real?” Amanda asks him, cocking her head to the side.

“What?”

“Uh, in my experience “real” men don’t do these kinds of things.”

“Well, then I guess I’m not a real man.” He starts to chuckle, but then Jesse starts crying loudly from the other room and he pops up from the bed, exclaiming, “I’m up first!”

This goes on almost every morning as long as Carisi hasn’t been worked late into the night. He comes early, wakes Amanda gently, changes Jesse’s diaper, passes her over to Amanda for feeding and then gives them some privacy. When Amanda’s done, they don’t always have to sing Jesse to sleep, but he loves it when they do. Just a little . . .

And on the mornings when Jesse falls right back to sleep after nursing sometimes they talk quietly for a while as Amanda drifts off instead. One morning he tells her about the twins, some crazy story about when they were too young to even walk or talk.

“Yeah, when my cousin Vince had those two –“

“Wait,” Amanda says, still cognizant enough for something about that phrase to bother her. “Your cousin Vince? I thought Carlotta was your cousin?”
“She is. They are. Were.”

Okay, now that’s confusing. Her brows draw together in a firm line. “How exactly are you and Carlotta related?”

“Well, Vince is my first cousin and Carlotta and her twin sister moved to town when we were all in junior high and high school.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Vince and his brother Justin each married one of them. The Benedetti twins,” he says almost wistfully, looking off into the distance.

“So you’re not related?” Amanda snaps.

“What?” His head whips back to face hers.

“You and Carlotta. You’re not related.”

“Of course we are. She’s my cousin.”

“Not by blood.”

“No, not by blood. She married into the family. She married my cousin Vince. Presto chango, she’s my cousin too. His death didn’t change that . . . She’s family,” he says firmly.

“‘Kay,” Amanda says quietly. She doesn’t like this. Doesn’t like this at all. She knows there’s so much more to this story. After all, he practically helped Carlotta raise Frannie and Frankie. Just like he’s helping her with Jesse.

She agitatedly picks at the comforter, not listening to his stories about the twins anymore. She can’t wait for him to leave.
Chapter Summary

A filler fic series focusing on Rollins & Carisi. This chapter takes place during season 17 episode 13.

Rollins and Benson are at the hospital, walking towards the elevators together, discussing Libby, the woman who had just been raped in plain view of all of her neighbors in the courtyard of her building. Neighbors who wouldn't come forward as witnesses. Benson is telling her detective that despite this, they've got to lean on them for more information, since Libby's memory isn't likely to return given her drug use that night.

"Good luck with that. They all made it pretty clear, they don't really care for her," Rollins protests, in reference to Libby's neighbors.

"Maybe so. But we have to," her Lieutenant insists.

"I know there's no such thing as a perfect vic, but this lady . . . " Rollins pauses, frustrated, and then continues, " . . . has got two little girls, she's doing drugs, God knows what else. You know how hard it is for women to lose custody."

"Addiction is addiction, Rollins."
She thinks about Frannie and Frankie. And Carlotta. And the way she had neglected them. The way her own mother had neglected her and Kim. It made her blood boil.

"Yeah, but she's got kids. You don't get to make those kinds of mistakes anymore." As the elevator doors close, Rollins takes one more parting shot in an attempt to win this argument with her boss. "It's just not her life to ruin."

Amanda and Carisi's 4 AM meetings halted abruptly after that night when the subject of Carlotta had come up. Amanda made the excuse that he needed to study for the bar exam and shouldn't be wasting his excess time on her. But the reality was she just didn't want him to see how much it upset her that Carlotta wasn't actually his cousin. That woman…

That woman wasn't good for him. And she knew it. That woman was a total wreck.

But one time Amanda did let her feelings slip. The weekend before she went back to work...

"So why have you been helping Carlotta with Frannie and Frankie all these years?" she asks him.

He's almost insulted. "What kind of question is that? They're family. Family helps family."

"Not my family," Amanda says with a touch of bitterness.

"Well, I've said it before and I'll say it again, Amanda, my family's not your family," he gives her a grin. One that should make her smile. It usually does, but today it backfires. She just looks pissed.

"What's with you?"

"Oh, I don't know," she says with sarcasm. "I just thought you'd be hanging with me and Jesse today instead of taking Frannie and Frankie to the park, that's all."

"Amanda," he answers in all reasonableness, "You haven't even let me come over in the mornings anymore and now you just show up randomly at my door? How was I supposed to know you wanted me to hang out with you and Jesse today, eh?"

"You're supposed to be studying for the bar exam! I wanted to give you time for that." She throws up her hands, trying to make it look like that really was the reason she hadn't wanted him to come over anymore. Not because of her feelings . . .

And why is she here again? she asks herself. What exactly is she doing?

"Well there's a simple solution, you know," he states simply.

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

"You, me, Jesse, Frannie and Frankie all go to the park together. Heck, we can even bring Frannie."

"I don't want to," Amanda says with a surly voice, and crosses her arms.

"Okay, that's it." Carisi comes forward and puts his hands on her shoulders and looks her straight in the eye. "What's going on here?"

"I just don't understand how you can take care of HER and her messes all these years! She's fucked up, Carisi. Why would you want a woman like that in your life?"

"Want a woman like that? What are you talking about here, Rollins?" But then his eyes light up and
a wicked smile plays about his lips. "Oh, wait. Are you jealous?"

"Of course not," Amanda spits, yet she remembers the way he had wistfully said 'the Benedetti twins…' and wonders for split-second if her blood doesn't boil green. No, Carlotta's just bad for him. That's it. That's all this is. She shakes her head.

"I think you are…" he sing songs as his doorbell rings, practically joining in the chorus. "Carlotta! Hey there!"

He pulls his cousin through the door and hugs her warmly. Amanda just stands there, one hand on her hip, a surly expression on her lips. That is until Frannie and Frankie bowl her over.

"Amanda!" They both exclaim in unison and hug on her legs tightly. "We love you, Amanda!"

She looks down at their little blonde heads, and pats them. Then she says gently, "I love you guys, too."

Satisfied, they go running off, throw down their backpacks upon Carisi's couch, and rip toys from them. They always seem ready to entertain themselves at a moment's notice. Amanda shakes her head in wonder. She turns back to Carlotta and Carisi. They've broken from their hug, yet Carlotta's hands still linger on his forearms. It makes her sick just looking at them. She roughly starts to grab her things, and packs up Jesse.

"Hey wait," Carisi says to her. "Where are you going?"

"I can't stand around and watch this."

"Watch what?"

"You love birds."

Carlotta practically snorts. "What?"

"You know you're no good for them," Amanda says, nodding at the twins. "You're no good for him either."

"Amanda, don't," Carisi says in a low voice as Carlotta bristles besides him.

"I know you're in AA now, Carlotta, but I don't trust you." Amanda's eyes turn to slits. "You'd better not let those kids down again. Your 'cousin' here may have had a crush on you in high school, but that doesn't mean he has to pick up the pieces for you for the rest of your life."

There's a stunned silence as Carisi blushes a deep bright red.

Amanda is mortified. Her instinct was right. Her heart sinks deep into her churning stomach.

"Carlotta, I – I" Carisi starts to stammer.

Astoundingly Carlotta turns towards him, touches his forearm almost lovingly, and says, "You too?"

"Great," Amanda mutters. She can't bear to be around for this, this 'special moment' they are having. She grabs Jesse and hauls ass away from there as fast as she can.

As she and Jesse are in transit, all she can think about is how Carisi doesn't deserve a woman who is that messed up. A woman like Carlotta . . . and if she is being honest, a woman like herself.
He deserves better.
A filler fic series about Rollins & Carisi. This chapter takes place during Season 17 Episode 13.

Carlotta barely notices Amanda's quick departure, but Carisi does and feels deeply uncomfortable. About a lot of things.

"You liked me...?" Carlotta tentatively asks. "Back then?"

Carisi's blush only deepens and he brings a hand to his neck. He looks into her eyes and nods silently.

"Oh my God," she breathes, "I did too."

"Well... you know..." Carisi starts to try to say something, but finds he is at a loss for words. How to explain this...

"I thought you liked my sister!"

"Justine? Nah," Carisi waves dismissively. "I told you, we just competed for grades. The competition would get heated from time to time. I guess you mistook that for passion..."

"But I liked you, too, Sonny! How come you didn't tell me? There were times I wondered about you. Before Vince. But the way you would look at her..."
"Yeah well, she looked like you . . ." This time Carlotta's jaw drops and she waits silently for him to continue. "And you were kinda cute. Inside and out. I found you . . . attractive, you know? Sometimes when I would look at Justine I thought of you. Can you blame me? You're identical."

Now it's time for Carlotta to blush.

"Please don't kill me."

She doesn't. Instead she steps closer . . .

"Oh, Sonny," she says quietly and strokes his cheek softly.

Rollins is back at work, busy as ever – and missing Jesse the entire time. The first day she had been on the scene with the rest of the squad, then off to the hospital to work with their vic, and then back to the precinct. A total whirlwind. She didn't have time to think about Carisi's 'burgeoning new love life.' Eyeroll, please. And he didn't talk about it with her either.

Good.

Now they are sitting together in court. Why did he choose to sit next to her again? Doesn't matter. They're just friends. It's going to be easier to keep it that way now.

"Wow. That was rough," Carisi says to her after Libby is cross-examined and court is adjourned.

"Yeah, well. That's what happens when you –"

Benson interrupts them. "Carisi, take Rollins back to Libby's place. You two console her, okay? Court was brutal today. She's going to need the moral support."

"Copy that."

Great, Rollins thinks, now I have to give moral support to a junkie. She looks out the window as Carisi drives. Ever since she had Jesse she vowed she'd never slip up – never go back to gambling. But there were those who gave into their addiction, despite having children to raise. Libby, Carlotta, her mother . . . It made her so mad.

"Something troublin' you there, Rollins?" Carisi asks her.

"No," is her instinctual response. But wait, yes, there is, she really wants to tell him, but she knows he won't understand. She doesn't say much further.

She's still in thought when they pull up at Libby's building . . . catastrophizing about Carlotta – about all the bad things that she could do to Frannie and Frankie . . . and all the bad things she could do to HIM. God, she doesn't want to see him hurt. That's the last thing she wants.

"We're here."

"Kay."

Out of the blue Carisi turns and asks her, "Hey, do you want to come to a party with me this weekend? Get Jesse out of the house?"

Surprised, she asks, "Where?"
"My cousin Justin's place – it's his birthday."

"The kid? The one I met at the airport?"

"No, Justin Sr., his dad. Well, his real names is 'Justus.'" Carisi chuckles a little at that. "A good Roman name, you know. We like to decorate his cake with little scales every year, ya know."

Rollins can't help but laugh a little with him.

"C'mon, it will be fun. Carlotta will be there. The twins –"

Amanda puts up a hand at the mention of Carlotta. She refuses to go there. "No thank you, Carisi. Jesse and I will be fine."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Suit yourself." He shrugs and opens up the car door to let himself out.

---

For the majority of their time with Libby, Rollins perches in the window, off to the side, and lets Carisi take the lead. He's often better than she is when it comes to comforting the vics these days, now that he's grown into the role. And in this particular case, he certainly is. Rollins doesn't have much sympathy for Libby being harshly questioned about her drug use – about how it basically made her incapable of remembering her own assault.

They're interrupted by Libby's friend, Doug, who seems a little squirrelly once he sees Carisi. She exchanges a look with him as Doug makes an excuse to leave.

Libby tells them about Doug once he's gone. "He's an odd duck, but he's been a friend. We're both single, no family, no support. Except AA."

Carisi makes a quick excuse to follow Doug and question him further, leaving Rollins alone with Libby.

"Excuse me, Doug! Can I ask you a few questions?" Carisi shouts after the man retreating through the courtyard.

"What about?" Doug says as he turns around.

"Well, actually it's about what happened to your friend, Libby."

Carisi proceeds to tell Doug that he's been caught in a lie and that Libby needs his help now, needs his testimony. He's gotta come forward. Do the right thing.


Desperation racks his posture and sorrow lines his eyes. He sounds just like Carlotta does – she always felt so bad when she would lose her grip on sobriety.

Carisi says adamantly, "Okay, listen to me. Everybody screws up, okay? Everybody. But Libby got hurt on the stand today and if you don't testify, this case is over."

Carisi urges Doug to push past his mistake and do the right thing. And by some miracle he agrees to.
He spends most of Saturday prepping Doug for the witness stand before heading out to his cousin's birthday party.

"Hey there, Sonny," Justine says morosely as she slowly swings open the door to let Carisi in.

"Oh boy," Carisi says, pretending to fan a vile scent from the air with his hand. "Who pooped this party?"

"My sister," Justine says, angrily.

Her husband joins her, putting an arm about her waist protectively. "You'd better go talk to her, Sonny. And get her out of here. I can't believe we were foolish enough to let her back into our home. She's not welcome here ever again."

Sonny hangs his head. Carlotta.

He searches the back bedrooms and finds Carlotta in one, sprawled out on the bed muttering to herself, skirt hiked up indecently. He reaches over to pull her skirt down, to protect her modesty, before even sitting down on the bed and trying to talk to her.

"Carlotta? Hey! Carlotta?"

"S-sooonny -y" she slurs, as if awakening.

"Yeah, it's me, Carlotta. Come on now, sit up." He tries to get her to sit up, but she's so floppy and offers zero assistance of her own. He gives up immediately and just hangs his head. "I am really . . . really disappointed in you right now."

"In me?" she almost giggles.

He shakes his head. He keeps trying to remind himself there's no reasoning with her when she's like this. She won't likely even remember most of it.

"Yeah, Carlotta. You!" he practically shouts. "What were you thinking? Justine, your sister, finally lets you back into her life and this is how you repay her? Do you have to destroy everyone who loves you?"

Carlotta whimpers and sits up. All on her own. Amazing she even has the coordination for that. She flops her chin onto his shoulder.

"Everyone I loved is already destroyed," she says quietly. "There's no one left."

"C'mon, stop talking that way," Carisi says. "You've got Frannie and Frankie, your babies. You love them don't you?"

"They're not HIM!" she rages, screaming into his ear.

He pulls her away from his ear. "Hey now."

"How can I love them Sonny? How can I love them without him?"

"You can, Carlotta. You can."

"No," she shakes her head vehemently. "No I can't. It's too much."
"What's too much?"

"The responsibility."

"C –"

"I can't do it without Vince, Sonny. I can't."

"Hey, yes you can. You've got us."

"Us, who?"

"Your family."

"What family? I destroy everyone that loves me. Didn't you just say that to me?"

"Yes, but –"

"Then who's left, Sonny, huh? Who will be left to take care of me and the twins?"

"Me."

"Pshfaw!" she waves a dismissive hand that ends up on his thigh. He carefully removes it.

"Vince left me, you know. You'll be gone, too. Just like him. Mark my words," Carlotta says, weakly shaking a finger at him.

"Vince didn't leave you, Carlotta," Sonny says firmly. "He DIED."

"Mommy?"

Speak of the devil. Frannie and Frankie are standing in the door frame, their blue eyes full of worry.

"Look at them . . ." Carlotta says, reaching out towards them clumsily.

"Is Mommy sick again?" one of the asks.

"Oh no," the other one says, realizing that yes, she is.

"Vince's little angels . . ." Carlotta continues.

"Guys, I need you to pack up your stuff, okay. We're going to be leaving soon," Carisi commands them.

"Is Mommy going to be able to walk?" Frannie asks.

Good question. Carisi looks back at Carlotta, who's flopped back down onto the bed and has started crying.

"Is Mommy sad about daddy again?" Frankie asks.

"Guys, now." Carisi says firmly and the twins scamper out.

At this point, Carlotta is wailing and calling out Vince's name. Carisi can't stand to see her like this – it's so painful.

"C?" he says softly, rubbing her arm. "Hey, C. Sit up."
"I can't. I just want to die."

"I know Carlotta, I know. But you'll get past this. Let me help you."

She allows him to pull her up and into his arms. He strokes her hair as her tears drop onto his shirt. There's so many of them it becomes saturated and sticks to him.

"Shhh. It will be okay, C," he says soothingly.

"I loved him so much. I don't want to have to live without him."

"I know."

"No, you don't." She sniffs loudly. "No one will ever love me like he did, don't you understand?" She looks up and into his eyes. "You saw what we had. You know, Sonny."

He just nods.

"He loved me. He truly loved me. And that will never happen again."

She drops her head back onto his shoulder.

"You don't want this, Sonny. This kind of grief, this pain. Don't let yourself fall in love this deeply, ever. You understand?"

He nods. He's kinda in agreement with her. It's so painful to watch her go through this. And he has been for years.

Just before Carlotta passes out in his arms she whispers, "Don't let her love you like this... she's only going to hurt you when it ends."

Libby's case is over and the SVU squad is all shuffling out of the courtroom. Carisi hears Amanda say bitterly, "What? You think she's going to change her life? I don't. I think she's going to be drinking again by Friday night."

Just like Carlotta, Carisi thinks and hangs his head.
Amanda picks up her phone. It’s Carisi.

“Yeah, Carisi?”

“Hey, Amanda I – hold on.”

She hears him talking to someone, but can’t make out any words at first. Then she hears an enthusiastic little boy’s voice say, “Okay Uncle Sonny!”

“Sorry about that. Hey, I was just calling to ask a favor.”

“Shoot.”

“Well, um Carlotta –“

Amanda stiffens a little at hearing her name.

“– she uh, kinda needs me to watch the twins tonight.”
“Tonight? Carisi you’ve gotta study for the bar. It’s crunch time. You turned her down I hope?”

“Well, she didn’t actually ask . . .”

She hears some rustling and then he says to someone else, “I love you too. But you gotta stop jumping up onto my neck like that, okay?”

Faintly she hears a little girl’s voice say, “Okay Uncle Sonny. But how else am I supposed to help you study?”

“By letting me talk to Amanda for a sec, ‘kay?”

Yeah, this isn’t going to fly. She’s heading over there.

“Frannie! Frankie! Come over here and leave your uncle alone. Now.” Amanda waves the twins over to the kitchen.

“No, Rollins . . . it’s okay,” Carisi answers with a tired voice. “They weren’t bothering me.”

“No,” Amanda says and points at him. “They were. I don’t want to hear any argument from you. Get back to your studies.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he says and grins foolishly.

“I mean it,” she says sternly. “Pen to paper.”

He lifts up a pen and makes a dramatic gesture of touching the ball of it to the legal pad below him.

“Good boy.”

He grins at her as she turns back to the twins who are looking at her with anxiety lining their faces.

“We didn’t mean to –“ Frankie starts.

“Yeah, we don’t want him to fail,” Frannie finishes.

“It’s okay you guys, come sit down at the table and we’re going to do an activity real quiet-like that will help your uncle with his studies, okay?”

Just then Jesse starts to wail.

“I’ll get her,” Carisi is up and out of his chair without thinking.

“You sit back down,” Amanda commands him.

“Wow! Amanda is strict,” Frankie breathes.

“Not like mom,” Frannie answers him just as quietly.

But Amanda hears them and bristles at being compared to their mother, Carlotta. She shakes her head. How could she dump the kids on him like this RIGHT NOW? She had to know he had to study for the bar exam – it wasn’t that far away – it was serious crunch time for Carisi. She would never dream of taking advantage of him like this – not even if they were together.

“You two, sit for a second. I think Jesse might need a new diaper. Voices Volume Two, okay?”
“Yes ma’am,” they say a little too excitedly, too enthusiastically, and a little too loudly in imitation of their uncle just minutes ago.

Amanda puts a finger to her lips.

“Volume Two,” they both mouth at Volume Zero.

As she’s changing Jesse’s diaper, Amanda keeps thinking about Carlotta and getting more and more angry. She decides that she and Carisi need to have a little talk about boundaries – and maybe more than that – once this is all over – once Carlotta’s retrieved her kids and left. But for now, Jesse’s put down for a nap and it’s time to occupy the twins – keep them out of his hair.

“Guys,” Amanda says quietly as she takes a place at the table. “We’re going to make a gift for your Uncle Sonny that’s like a good luck charm for studying so he can pass that important test. Sound like fun?”

“Yes!” they say in an excited Volume Two.

“Great. First we have to scavenge for stuff in the kitchen ‘cause I don’t know exactly what he has. But he better at least have a nut . . . I thought I saw some of those around here . . .” she muses.

“Scavenge?” Frannie asks.

“It means to hunt for stuff.”

“Oh cool!” Frankie exclaims.

“Hunting is cruel,” Frannie protests and crosses her arms. “It means you have to kill something.”

“You do?” Frankie asks wide-eyed.

Amanda tries not to laugh at Frannie’s very precise, yet limited, definition of the word. “It’s not that kind of hunting, guys. We’re just going to look for stuff. Real quiet-like. You ready?”

“Yup,” Frankie says, gets down from his chair at the table, and starts creeping around like a burglar. Frannie just looks at him and purses her lips with a hand on her hip.

Amanda allows herself a little laugh. At Volume Two. She just loves the twins – they are so amusing. Too bad Carlotta comes with them.

Amanda had found a nut alright. And the right kind too. A nice big walnut. It’s smack dab on the middle of a piece of waxed paper and she and the twins have been decorating it for quite a while before they hear Carisi’s cell phone ring in the other room.

Amanda says loudly, “I thought you turned that off?”

“It’s C,” Carisi says and answers it. “Yeah?”

“That doesn’t answer my question,” Amanda mumbles under her breath.

“How does this look, Amanda?” Frankie asks touching the ‘graduation cap’ he’s just applied to the Study Nut’s head.

“Very good, Frankie.”
“Do you like orange stuff I did, Amanda?”

“Yes, I think it’s very nice, Frannie.”

Amanda herself had done the ‘fine detailing’ on the face of the Study Nut. Including drawing very studious-looking glasses on it with a fine Sharpie. Carisi seemed to have pens of every size, shape, and color littered about. Frannie had gone nuts with an orange one.

“She’s coming over ‘Manda.”

“‘Kay,” Amanda replies to Carisi. “Okay guys, looks like we’re almost done. Just some finishing touches, then we can present this to Uncle Sonny.”

She wants to get that all over with before Carlotta’s inevitably dramatic arrival.

“YAY!” they reply.

“That was not Volume Two.”

“Sorry,” they both mouth in Volume Zero.

She just chuckles, knowing that one day they’d get the hang of this volume thing.

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The Study Nut is complete and ready for transport and presentation to Uncle Sonny. Amanda carefully peels it off of the waxed paper now that all of the glue has dried and carries it to his desk herself. Even her dog, Frannie is excited. She looks like someone’s going to take her for a walk as she follows them into the other room. “The twins made something for you.”

“Oh, wow!” Carisi says as he picks it up to examine it. “You guys made this? For me?”

Frannie and Frankie excitedly point out all of the Study Nut’s features and how they will help him to pass his test and become a lawyer someday.

“The graduation cap is for being all done with school.”

“The scroll is for all that paper you have to mess with all the time, Uncle Sonny.”

“And the glasses are to make you smart.”

“Really smart.”

“Yeah!”

He and Amanda exchange a look. He knows the twins are too young to have the dexterity to have drawn those. “So you think I need some brains, huh?”

“About as badly as the Scarecrow did,” Amanda quips.

“What’s with all this orange, guys?” Sonny points all around the Study Nut.

“That was Frannie’s idea. She was being weird.”

“I was NOT.”

“Were too.”
“Ugh,” Frannie groans. “Uncle Sonny, could you please tell my brother that the orange is for Frannie. So you don’t miss her when you’re taking your test – so you know she’s with you in spirit. And so am I ‘cause we share the same name.”

She reaches over and gives Frannie a great big hug.

Frankie pouts and mumbles jealously, “I wish someone named something after me.”

Carisi gives him a little side hug and says “Already happened, Frankie. Long ago. Ever heard of Ol’ Blue Eyes?”

“No.”

Right then the doorbell rings and Frannie barks.

“Then that’s a story for another time, kiddo,” Carisi says and releases Frankie, heading to the door.

“I’m going to go check on Jesse,” Amanda says and ducks into his bedroom where Jesse’s been sleeping peacefully. She doesn’t trust herself around Carlotta. Better to hide.

“Hey, what was that about?” Carisi says to Amanda as he leans on the frame of the doorway leading to his bedroom and spies her sitting on his bed. Carlotta and the twins have left.

“What?”

“That whole disappearing act of yours.”

“I didn’t want to cause a scene.”

“A scene?” He’s intrigued now, so he leans back and crosses his arms, waiting for her to elaborate.

“I don’t like her, Carisi.”

“I can tell,” he says and nods. “So why’d you come over? You had to know that there was like a 100% chance of running into her.”

“Because she just dumped those kids on you, Carisi. When you needed to study. I had to hel –”

“She did not ‘dump’ – “

“Of course she did,” Amanda snapped. “What else would you call it?”

“It was an emergency.”

“Sure. Some emergency her drunk ass got her into you mean.”

“Manda –“

“No, Carisi. I don’t want to see you being a chump.”

“A chump?” What was this about? His brows knit together.

“Yeah. You deserve better. I can’t believe you’re even with her. Why would you do that to yourself? You KNOW she’s got an addiction.” This is exactly why I can never be with him. He’s way too good . . .
“Manda –”

“You’re walking into this eyes wide open, and yet you still want to be with her.” Amanda looks away because she thinks she’s going to start crying. “What is wrong with you?”

“Hey,” he says softly, coming over to the bed, realizing there’s much more here than he first thought. He touches her shoulder. “Why does this have you so riled up?”

“Because –” she starts and then hiccups on an impending sob and stops herself. She won’t let herself tell him – she can’t. And she still won’t look at him, but she needs to clarify something. “I’m not jealous, you know. I don’t want you to think that.”

“Oh no,” he says teasingly. “I would never think that.”

That gets a chuckle out of her that stops the impending tears in their tracks. She bats absently at his thigh. “Stop it.”

“What?”

“Stop making me laugh. You do that too well.”

“It’s what I live for.”

They both share a little laugh and she finally can look at him again. “No, seriously. Carlotta’s bad for you Carisi. She doesn’t take care of the things she loves, not even her own babies. She’s only going to disappoint you again and again and again. You deserve better than that. You deserve someone who is actually capable of loving you. Someone who’s not a bottomless pit themselves. I don’t want to see you hurt.”

_Not even by me._

“I won’t be.”

“Says the naïve fool.”

He starts grinning like the Cheshire cat. He’s hiding something – she can tell.

“What? Spill.”

“Uh, yeah, you see, Rollins,” he scratches the back of his neck. “Carlotta and me . . . we aren’t exactly dating.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, you see, we’re not even really dating at all.”

Amanda flushes bright red at her mistake.

“It was nice to see you jealous for a minute there, though.” A corner of his mouth rises into his signature smirk. “I found it adorable.”
"Okay. But Carisi, you go with," Lieutenant Benson finally gives in at the end of the briefing about Yates. Detective Lindsay's right - these girls' families need closure and she had failed to extract any useful information from him. Benson had brought in the Chicago detective to handle Yates instead of honoring his initial request to see Amanda. But it had backfired. Amanda knew it would have been best if she'd been sent in the first place and should now be muttering a victory 'yes' under her breath but she finds that she can't.

Go with Carisi? No way.

Carisi had been against this from the start. He'd been hounding her ever since Yates claimed that they had some bones in evidence that were actually Chicago vics and had asked to talk to her.

"Rollins, I know you think you're an expert on this guy -"

"I AM. And he specifically wants to talk to me."

"Doesn't matter. It's too dangerous."

"Why?"

"Because you're too close to him."
"Carisi, that's exactly WHY I'm the best person to speak to him."

Carisi can't come. They had gone round and round on this. Amanda tries to reason with her lieutenant.

"There's no point in sending him," she says a little nervously. They are in close proximity to Carisi's desk and she doesn't want him to hear. "Yates isn't even going to make eye contact with him and there are CO's everywhere."

"Rollins, we know Yates. He's probably been playing them since the moment he got there," Benson tells her.

Carisi overhears their exchange. How could he not? They're right in front of his desk. He thinks how Yates has been playing Amanda all along and frowns deeply. It's a good thing he's going with her.

As the warden walks Rollins and Carisi into Green Haven correctional facility she waxes poetic about how Yates is a model inmate. Neither of them are buying it.

"You see that? Yates charmed the warden. It's classic sociopath," Carisi says when they're out of earshot, putting his thumb and forefinger together as he reiterates. "It's classic."

"I know, Carisi. I know."

Does she? His stomach churns with worry for her. He's dealt with these kind of scum before - plenty of them - during his stint in Homicide. But Amanda? This is virgin territory for her. Yates is the only serial killer she's spent any real time with. And he finds her fascination with him to be unsettling.

When they enter Yates' cell, Amanda puts on a softer demeanor with her body language and her voice, which takes on lighter notes of the South. Yates starts in by making comments and asking questions that are way too personal.

When he says to Amanda "You are glowing. Are you breast feeding?" Carisi charges forward with a hand up. "Okay, that's enough."

"It's okay, Carisi," Amanda calls him off, the Southern belle still in her voice. Then she winks at Yates. A little flirt.

Carisi eventually stands back in a corner of the cell and just takes notes of their interactions - of every little clue this sociopath who is charming Amanda is dropping. He observes that even while Amanda thinks she's playing him with her little flirtation game, she's getting dragged in deeper and deeper herself. Yates wants to be transferred to the honor block? Of course he does. And he expects Amanda to help him, to fight for him.

Turns out they both end up fighting for him. A call in to Benson, a meeting with the warden. And then they find out about the little "Rudnick problem."

Rudnick is already on honor block and once Rollins and Carisi discuss his history with Yates the warden informs them that she suspects Yates' request for transfer to the honor block might be a ploy to get revenge on Rudnick for killing his fiancé.

Amanda tells her, "It could be, but if Yates was intent on that, it would have happened already."

"I'd like to talk to Rudnick. He's an odd one - I'm not sure how he'll react," the warden says.
"No disrespect, warden - I don't want to step on anybody's toes here - but he and I have a good rapport. Maybe I can sound him out?" Carisi offers.

As they head out of Green Haven, Amanda is on the phone with Benson. She informs her boss that she and Carisi have succeeded in getting Yates transferred to the honor block, but don't have enough time to go back and see him again that day to extract more information.

"Tomorrow morning, we can drive up here first thing -"

"No, absolutely not Rollins," Benson says. "Yates got to talk to you. From now on he has to talk to me. Am I making myself clear?"

"Copy that, Lieutenant."

"She doesn't want you coming back here up here again, right?" Carisi says and nods a bit smugly. "I don't blame her."

"Why? Why does everybody keep saying that? I mean, you saw us together. It was fine."

"Yeah, he's got your number."

Amanda scoffs. "Like Rudnick doesn't have yours?"

"Not really. I mean, I just like talking to the guy, you know. He's got his own world view."

"I rest my case."

They exchange wry smiles.

During the drive back Carisi says to her, "You know, I was hoping that motherhood would mellow you out. Make you want to take less risks, for Jesse's sake, you know."

"Less risks? What are you jabbering on about, Carisi?"

"Yates."

"I'm just doing my job, Carisi. It's fine."

"He's dangerous."

"So's Rudnick," she countered.

"Yeah, but -"

"You're in just as deep with him as I am with Yates. Let's not talk about it anymore."

She turns up the radio.

He frowns and keeps driving.

The next day Carisi can't help but notice that Amanda has been sighing and restless, trying to do paperwork while the others are up at Green Haven talking to Yates. He comes in to the breakroom and sees her kicking the vending machine, trying to get a drink out of it. "Whoa, hey. You okay?"
She leans a hand against the plastic front of the vending machine and puts the other one on her hip in resignation, not looking at him. She seems quite out of sorts, so Carisi tries to put a hand on her shoulder tentatively, briefly. But it just comes off as awkward.

"Listen, my sister took some melatonin when she got a little postpartum."

"I'm not depressed, Carisi. I'm pissed off."

"Why? Because Liv won't let you go back up to Green Haven?"

"Exactly. Because Yates is going to take one look at Benson, Dodds, and Barba up there and think that they're all ganging up on him. Or worse, that I pulled a bait and switch on him."

Unexpectedly, jealousy courses through him. Putting an arm up on the vending machine, he leans into her space. "Worse? Why? You worried about your relationship with Yates now?"

"Yeah, that's exactly what I meant," she says in a nasty tone.

Carisi looks away, suddenly hurt. Amanda kicks the bottom of the vending machine one more time, succeeds in finally getting a drink, and makes a little victory noise.

Carisi is still looking away.

"What?" she asks him.

"I'm just glad to see how motherhood's really mellowed you out," he says himself in a nasty tone, driving home the point he's been trying to make for the last few days.

She opens the can. Taps the top of it and gets a funny smile on her face.

"That's another thing. I hate being coddled." She starts to walk out then turns around. "What? I have a baby and all of a sudden I can't talk to serial killers anymore."

He shakes his head, frustrated. How did this conversation get derailed so quickly? It almost felt like a lovers' quarrel.

Is this what it would be like to be with her?

Happy Valentine's Day! Part 1 of 2. Look for Part 2 tomorrow as part of International Fanworks Day. :-)

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Stolen Moments Chapter 52: Serial Killer Buddy
"He's got your number," Carisi says to Amanda about Yates as they leave Green Haven.

She scoffs.

"Like Rudnick doesn't have yours?"

"Not really. I mean, I just like talking to the guy, you know. He's got his own world view."

"I rest my case."

Did he? Carisi turns over in bed, thinking about Rudnick.

The guy was amusing. And consistent. From that first road trip when he seemed concerned about Carisi's cholesterol consumption to today when he warned him about the dangers of bacon it seemed like Rudnick actually cared that he lived a healthy life. Rudnick had even told him he appreciated that Carisi had always treated him with respect, something he tried to do with everyone. Carisi smiles and turns over, thinking about how that would make Father De Santis proud. "Do unto others . . ."

Nah, there's nothing wrong here. Rudnick's just an interesting guy. I like him. Nothing to worry about.
"Lieutenant, I did not see this coming," Amanda says to Benson.

Carisi turns around and immediately says to her, "Nobody's blaming you."

It turns out that Yates' request to transfer to honor block was actually a ploy so that he could piggyback on Rudnick's own plan to escape. Dodds assures them that he won't get away.

Amanda just shakes her head. "You don't know Yates."

Along with Benson and Barba, Amanda is interrogating Bronwyn Wilkins, who had helped Rudnick and by extension Yates, escape from Green Haven correctional facility. They are trying to ascertain the two fugitives' plans. They had been on the loose for twenty-four hours now.

"I was working with Dr. Rudnick on his impulse issues," Bronwyn says. "He's a very sensitive man. We grew close."

"How close?" Amanda asks.

"He was a confidant, able to read my moods. Like he'd say 'you seem like you're feeling a little sad today.'"

Benson eventually confronts the woman, frustrated that she can't see Rudnick for what he is and her part in all this, not thinking of all the people that could be hurt because of her reckless actions.

But Bronwyn protests,"Dr. Rudnick has dealt with his darkside."

"He chopped a woman into little pieces!" Benson yells.

"That's not the man that I know!"

"Oh my God," Benson says and pulls back.

Amanda jumps right back in. "Bronwyn, I'm sure he can be empathic and make you feel wanted, attractive. But he was using you."

Benson jumps forward once more. "They left you to die in the trunk of a car. He doesn't give a damn about you."

But Bronwyn cannot be convinced of that. Rudnick had saved her life by telling Yates that he would kill her once she'd served her purpose. Yet he hadn't - he only pretended to shoot her and they left her for dead. That's all she needed to know.

Amanda wonders if this was what Carisi had seen in her 'relationship' with Yates? Illogical loyalty. She's pretty sure she's not like Bronwyn. She certainly doesn't feel like Bronwyn. Yet . . . Yates had still used her to escape. Easily.

Amanda rushes over to Carisi with a tablet. "The dogs picked up Rudnick's scent. He's barely moving or even breathing."

Carisi can see an image of what appears to be Rudnick in a boat under a tarp, but it's very hard to make out, hard to tell what he's doing in there.
"This is the State Police," the man behind them shouts towards the boat. "Come out slowly with your hands up."

The policemen behind him ready their weapons.

"Alright, he is trying to get up but can't," Carisi says.

"That piece of crap already got one of ours - I'm not risking these guys. Fire into the boat," the man says.

"Whoa whoa whoa whoa!" Carisi lunges towards the line of policemen, who are ready to fire. "Hold on. Do not shoot. I know this man."

Amanda follows right behind him saying to the policemen, "Stand down."

"We've got history," Carisi continues.

"We got it we got it we got it," Amanda assures the state police, allowing Carisi to do what he needs to do.

He approaches the boat, gun in front of him, Amanda giving him cover. "Dr. Rudnick, it's Carisi. I saw you on the infrared. Can you hear me? I'm walking towards the boat. I want you to live tonight. Isn't that what you want?"

He thinks about the bacon and the cholesterol. Now he's the one looking out for Rudnick.

"Alright, so you're going to put your hands above your head. Alright, nice and easy doc." He climbs up and cuts open the tarp that is covering the boat and sees Rudnick completely incapacitated, covered in blood and shaking.

As Carisi calls for help, he whispers, "Thank you thank you."

"Just stay with me Dr. Rudnick."

"Something changed," Carisi says to Amanda.

"What do you mean?"

They are awaiting further instructions, sitting in a corridor of the hospital where Carisi had just been speaking with Rudnick. He had been the only one able to extract information about just where Yates might be heading.

"He touched me and . . ."

"And what?"

A shiver courses through Carisi. "I knew. I just knew, Rollins. Just how bad he is."

"Well, he is a serial killer . . ." Amanda says with a tip of her head and not a small amount of sarcasm, trying to lighten the mood. But it is lost on him.

"Yeah." Carisi hangs his head. "But when Rudnick grabbed onto me, I knew he wasn't my friend even though somehow I thought he'd been acting like one all along. As soon as I got Wellesley Island out of him the pretense was over. I couldn't rip my hand out from under his fast enough."
"Hey, it's okay. Yates fooled me too. I feel like -"

Carisi looks up and interrupts her before she can finish that sentence. "I'm sorry, Amanda."

"For what?"

"That I was jealous of your relationship with Yates."

She's taken aback and her mouth opens and closes a couple of times. She doesn't notice Benson waving them over.

"Silly huh?" he asks and stands up. "Guess I got jealous, too."
I posted this as a reply at FF.net, but realize it should probably reach a larger audience, so I'm posting it as a "dummy" chapter here:

For the last two guest reviewers who were wondering (or asking for it) . . . YES this series is definitely going to continue/be updated. Just probably not at the pace everyone would wish cause I'm sick and have less time to devote to stuff. Also, Season 19 (and 18 grrr) has thrown me for a bit of a loop in regards to Rollisi and what to do with this fic so updates may be very slow or non-existent until the summer hiatus, especially because I've reached a part in the story that originally was going to be a turning point. But we'll see. I'm still trying to suss out EXACTLY what I want to do here.

So, no fears! This fic WILL continue. I'm glad you've all been enjoying it. :-)