

Think Once, Think Twice

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Think Once, Think Twice

by [Fahye](#)

Summary

"First one to cry annulment covers the other's weekends for six months," Jake says instantly.

(or, the one where amy santiago falls in love with and gets drunk vegas married to jake peralta, not necessarily in that order)

Notes

I can't believe I've been in fandom this long and never written any variation on 'woke up married' or 'fake dating', let alone the veritable collage of romcom tropes contained herein.

Chapter titles are from *Die Hard*. Obviously.

And finally: klb and Wesle have done an amazing and hilarious [podfic of this story](#), which I strongly encourage you to check out!

WE'LL GET TOGETHER, HAVE A FEW LAUGHS

"Oh, God," Amy says into her hair. "I wish I was dead."

Well, that's what her brain is trying to convey to her vocal cords. The message is apparently intercepted and corrupted because what comes out is "*Weshabadud*," along with a sensation on her tongue that's a faithful replica of what she imagines that hoof in Boyle's favourite takeout would taste like, if anyone was stupid enough to let it near their mouth.

She turns her face further into the pillow, shudders down some nausea--don't think about the hoof, Amy, *don't think about it*--and casts her mind back to the previous night with the same sort of morbid care that she uses when walking through back alleys behind bars at 3am on a Saturday night. There's bound to be something squishy and foul lurking there.

The drunkest Amy has ever been in her life was at a wedding, and it was a complete accident. It wasn't her twenty-first, or her graduation from the police academy, or even the celebration of her first official collar (which was a *total* waste of time, as far as alcohol went: she was trying to impress Captain McGinley, back before she'd given up on him as a role model, and she was terrified that Drunk Amy might express some views or engage in some behaviours not in keeping with the image of Detective Santiago, up and coming young officer of the NYPD).

No: like the worst kind of cliché, the one night that left Amy with her cheek pressed groggily against a toilet seat, while the far-off sounds of *With Or Without You* and the not-quite-jasmine scent of the air freshener merged with her thudding pulse and the smell of her own vomit respectively, was her cousin Stacia's wedding. And even then, it wasn't like she didn't remember it the next morning. Sure, the details were fuzzy. But she had a clear and queasy memory of her champagne glass, its level rising and falling and then rising again, as the speeches droned on and a waiter who looked like a dapper teenaged version of Will Smith kept wandering past with the bottle and a wink.

In retrospect, Amy realises, he was probably trying to hit on her. And just as probably was eventually scared off by what Jake likes to call the Santiago Alcohol and Attractiveness Wormhole, in which she bypasses all of the fun and adorably free-spirited stages of inebriation and goes directly to maudlin and splotchy, do not collect \$200.

Jake drew a whole diagram on the whiteboard when he was explaining this. It was in the form of a Monopoly board. Of course.

But that's it. That's Amy's one great drunkenness story, and it's no fun at all, and she's always secretly, bitterly wondered if people ever *do* become drunk enough that they can't remember what happened the previous night. Surely they all start vomiting before they get to that point. Surely it's a phenomenon that exists largely in movies with stupid plots about monkeys and/or prostitutes.

Nope.

She was pretty much dead wrong about that.

Eventually, enough light filters through her hair that Amy thinks she can risk opening her eyes fully. She takes the daring step of rolling onto her back, which in the moment ranks up there with kicking armed drug dealers in the knees in her personal bravery stakes, and she capitalizes on the opportunity to sit upright in the bed before her inner ear can work out what's going on and toss vertigo into the gumbo of horrible sensations.

So far, so bearable.

It's a hotel room. It's one of the more tasteless hotel rooms that Amy's ever been inside, and Amy is a *cop*. Awful hotel rooms are disproportionately represented in the Congratulations, It's A Crime Scene! stakes.

And hey, well done her for managing to put a word like 'disproportionately' together, what with the way her head is buzzing like the terrifying electric toothbrush that Scully brought in to the precinct one day and Jake promptly stole so that he and Rosa could Macgyver it into a sex toy slash suspect intimidation device, with the help of some duct tape and the contents of the Miscellaneous Cutlery Crap drawer in the break room.

("You don't want to know where *this* little baby goes," Jake had purred, perched on the edge of the interrogation room table like a sexually ambiguous Muppet.

The perp eyed it and said, "Is that a *melon baller*," in the voice of one who was rapidly recalculating the number of years they'd consider an acceptable jail term.)

Amy wiggles around a bit on the pillows to see if there's an angle at which she'll feel more human--no, apparently not--and pauses when something under her butt makes a tired, crinkly sound.

She gropes under the sheet to find out what it is. In the process she notes that she's wearing her second-nicest black cocktail dress and her most expensive bra, the one with the terrifying underwiring that makes her breasts feel like they've been put through hours of punishing PT if she wears it for more than a few hours at a time. She's never been dumb enough to *sleep* in it before.

The crinkly thing, when Amy manages to extricate it and smooth out the worst of the creases, is a piece of memo paper with the 9-9 letterhead, heavily stained and smelling like the floor of the holding cell they reserve for handsy drunks.

Amy concentrates through the buzzing and manages to focus by squinting her eyes. It's that or start looking around for her glasses, and that would require a lot more movement than she's comfortable with right now.

THE PLAN™ courtesy of Detective Rosa Diaz

1. Fly to ~~Montreal~~ VEGAS BABY!!
2. Hit a ~~classy hotel~~ bar AND GET SUPER DRUNK

3. Bone a stranger NOT THE SAME STRANGER FOR BOTH OF US. UNLESS SHE'S REALLY *Grow up, Peralta*.

4. Slump over. You're welcome, losers.

Amy takes a deep breath and turns the paper over. The non-letterhead side is a battlefield: two sets of handwriting, both alike in indignity, both becoming less and less comprehensible as the words lurch down the page.

Peralta dares Santiago to go over to the hen's night table and pretend to be a time traveller.

Santiago dares Peralta to stand on the table and do his Darth Vader impression.

Peralta dares Santiago to wear the coaster hat for the rest of the night!! haHA!!

S dares P to go dunk his stupid head in the ornamental pond

P dares S to drink ALL THE VODKA. YEAH. ALL OF IT.

"Oh my God," says Amy, in a tiny little voice. Her stomach emits another sad bubble of nausea.

Somehow, right now, Captain Holt knows about this piece of paper and is very disappointed in her.

She can't make out at all what the last few dares are, because they're less words and more flimsy squiggles that could maybe, on a good day, be mistaken for a two-year-old's idea of what words should look like. But given that the vodka dare was clearly carried out in full, she isn't sure she wants to know.

In the name of not-yet-knowing things about the previous night, she doesn't look too closely at her surroundings when she crawls out of the bed and in the direction of the bathroom. That's probably why she trips over a bundle of sheets on the floor, which is more solid than it first appears.

"Augh," moans the bundle of sheets.

"Peralta?"

After some weak, bulgy movements, Jake's head emerges from between the folds at one end of the sheet-bundle, like the birth of the world's most hungover butterfly.

"Santiago, I'm going to ask you something very important and I want you to think carefully before you answer. *Do you have any aspirin?*"

"Ugh," Amy says. Most of her wants to abandon him to his suffering while she has a go at showering her own away with some very, very hot water, but-- "Jake, what happened last night? I don't remember, but I think it was...messy. And public."

"Hur hur," Jake says, sort of. It comes out more of a slurred snort. "Name of your--"

"Shut up, Peralta, this is serious!"

"We were getting over our slump," he says, but he sounds uncertain. "Fly to--wait! We're in Vegas!"

Some more bulging happens as Jake does something flailly with his limbs which totally fails to disentangle him from the sheet.

"I remember checking into the hotel," Jake says, subsiding again. "I--whose room are we in?"

Amy makes herself look around with more focus. Her overnight bag is propped against the wall, open, and some of her clothes are hanging in the closet. Amy is fleetingly proud of her previous day's self; some basic standards of tidiness were adhered to, at least, even if everything went to shit after that.

"Mine," she says.

Jake lifts his head from where it's been smushed against the cocoon of sheets and also the floor. There's a complicated and unattractively twitchy look on his face. "Then why am I--did we--we didn't--"

"No!" Amy yelps.

"Right." Jake lets his face drop again.

Thankfully he seems willing to put Amy's certainty on this point down to womanly intuition. Probably because he's spent way too much time with Gina, who once proclaimed that she exuded so much intuition from every pore that people sitting next to her on the bus sometimes had emotional epiphanies from the sheer force of her presence.

Amy's womanly intuition in this instance has more to do with the fact that she would never, ever put a pair of panties back on to sleep in once they had been removed for sex purposes, because *ew*, and also--

"I have a *boyfriend*," Amy reminds the both of them.

"Yeah, yeah," Jake says, with a hint of the brittle brightness that he gets whenever they're talking about Teddy.

"So neither of us remembers anything." Amy sighs. "That's just great."

"Wait," Jake says into the carpet. "We are detectives. We can detect this. We're gonna detect it so hard."

"There is some physical evidence," Amy says gloomily, and fetches the piece of paper.

Jake screws up his face, untangles a hand far enough that he can scrub violently at his hair, and sits up so he can grab the paper and read it.

"My Darth Vader impression *is* amazing," he says after a while.

"I'm sure it was." Amy snatches the paper back, shudders, and throws it onto the bed. It's hard to throw paper; it drifts in teasing little arcs and ends up on the floor. "That doesn't help us."

With great care, Jake manages to stand up, until he's got a single fold of the sheet draped over his shoulder like someone at the end of an eventful toga party. Beneath it he's wearing a once-white dress shirt and an actually quite nice pair of slacks, which means he probably went around for half of the previous night introducing himself in an awful British accent and ordering shaken-not-stirred martinis despite the fact that he hates martinis.

"Next step in searching for clues. Turn out our pockets."

"Yeah, sure." Amy slaps the sides of her dress.

"I don't know! Half of Gina's dresses have pockets!"

"Half of Gina's dresses have little hoods with fox ears on them. Or are made of crushed velvet and Lycra."

"Don't you like, tuck things into your bra?"

"What? Peralta, *no*."

"Paydirt!" he proclaims, fishing things out of both of his own pockets. "Let's see. Casino chip, nice. Two dimes. Hah! A napkin with someone's phone--oh, wait, no, that's my phone number, never mind. And this."

He unfolds a piece of paper which was clearly shoved into the pocket without more than a perfunctory crumpling. The part of Amy that sometimes stops tourists on the street to show them how to refold their street maps, because they're doing it all wrong, gives an inner twitch.

"Great," she says. "More stupid dares. Are any of those ones from the period in the evening when you still had a basic grasp of written English?"

Jake looks at it. He opens and closes his mouth. Then he laughs, high-pitched and bizarre, for almost ten seconds.

"Uh. The good news is, I think I might know what the last dare on *your* bit of paper was."

Amy's stomach tries to remind her about the hoof again.

"Good news," she says. "That means, that means there's bad news. *What is the bad news?*"

Jake holds out the piece of paper.

Amy squints her eyes into focus again. The words Clark County Nevada cohere at the top of the page, followed by--some other words.

For many long moments she feels nothing. She feels entirely numb.

Then she lets her knees collapse her down onto the edge of the bed. It's that or surrender to the scream that's building steadily and painfully behind her sternum.

"I," she says. "I need a cigarette."

"And now she descends into smoking?" Jake says, clutching at his chest in what must be an automatic version of his usual jackassery. He gives a weak cackle. "I can't believe you've hidden such a filthy habit from me, Amy Santiago, you are *not* the woman I married. Last night. Apparently."

Amy stares at him.

Slowly, Jake's face goes the same appalling shade of off-white as his abused dress shirt.

"Do you, um, do you think this could be a dream?" he says, voice laced with manic hope. "I might have smoked something, maybe we both smoked something, this could all be a great big peyote-induced hallucination! Yes!"

The scream has bypassed Amy's mouth and now it's filling her skull with a kind of floating, detached, lavender cloud of panic. She leans over and pinches Jake as hard as she can, using her nails and giving his skin a vicious twist through the shirt before releasing it.

"Aaaahhoh, oh. Oh. Shit," Jake says, and trips on a trailing edge of sheet and falls right over.

WELCOME TO THE PARTY, PAL

It should never have been a slump in the first place, is the thing. And yet.

It started, more or less, like this:

"Damn it!" Jake yells. "Gina!"

"Excuse me a moment," Amy says to Geraldine Belluci, forty-two, five foot four of blonde smarm and mascara and *totally* responsible, no matter what she says, for scamming six separate men by faking a seizure on dates while her partner lifted their wallets.

"Hey, take your time," Belluci says. "I'm gonna have a smoke."

"What--no, give me that," says Amy, snatching the lighter. "No smoking! There's a sign!"

"My momma gave me that lighter on her deathbed. I'd better get it back."

"Oh, I'm sorry," says Amy, "am I *taking your personal possessions* without *asking*? I wonder if there's a *name* for that?"

"My momma lit a cigarette for Frankie Avalon with that lighter."

"Or a *law* against it, maybe?"

Jake has picked himself up from the ground by now, vibrating in the middle of the bullpen like an angry cloud of bees, and he directs a vicious kick at the nearest chair. Nearby, Hitchcock and Scully pay him no mind whatsoever. "Seriously, Gina!"

"Busyyyyy," Gina yells back, thumbs glued to her phone. "Did you need something?"

"I know what you're doing," Jake says. "I'm onto you."

"Ooh, are you gonna *arrest* me?"

"Yes," says Jake. "Yes I am. Only no, because it's not illegal to rearrange furniture. Unfortunately."

"I dunno, Jake." Gina looks up, her thumbs stilling. There's an expression of concern on her face that Amy knows better than to take at, well, face value. "You go away for a few months, you maybe get into some gangster brain-muddling thing like cocaine--"

"Yes, I totally developed a *cocaine* habit--"

"--or Chianti, whatever, all I'm saying is that when you go away, you *forget* things. It's not our fault if, say, you think your desk is two feet closer to the wall than it actually is. And keep stubbing your toes on it."

"You--"

"Wait, hold up." Gina's phone gives a cheerful bleep and her eyes lock back on to the screen. "Yeah, I just gotta answer this real quick."

Jake collapses into his chair and shoves his legs out in front of him, heels digging into the carpet. "Who are you even texting?"

"Just some guy I'm seeing," Gina says vaguely.

Jake looks dubious, and Amy doesn't blame him. 'Some guy I'm seeing' could mean, for Gina, anything between 'a deli delivery guy I met once and developed a stalkerish crush on', and 'a male stripper I've apparently been sleeping with on and off for seven years', yeah, Amy is not going to forget *that* one in a hurry.

Amy has meanwhile opened her desk drawer and pulled out a notebook. She flips to the top page, which holds a tally.

"Times Peralta Has Been Injured In The Line Of Duty (By Office Furniture)," reads Belluci, leaning over Amy's desk. "Haaa." She has a nasal tinkle of a laugh that's a little like Rosa's.

Jake shoots a betrayed look in Amy's direction. She draws a diagonal line through four other lines and shows him the page along with her brightest smile.

"Thanks, Santiago, that's very helpful," says Jake.

"Any time," Amy says.

Jake picks up his coffee mug, makes a face as he swirls the contents, and then heads in the direction of the break room.

"That was fun," Belluci says. "I'm glad we could share that, you and me."

"Oh, shut up and drink your coffee," Amy says.

The only reason they aren't doing this in the interrogation room is because Hitchcock mistook Boyle's lunch (Sri Lankan goat curry, apparently) for his own leftovers (two-day-old meatloaf), upended the container down his shirt in shock after a single mouthful, removed his shirt, rinsed said shirt in the water fountain, and then had the bright idea of drying it over the back of the interrogation room chair because--direct quote--"We didn't want it in *here*, it smelled funny."

So now the main interrogation room stinks of turmeric and weird meats, which the captain has decided comes dangerously close to cruel and unusual, and they're airing the room out with two ancient rotor-blade fans that Jake lugged up from Records, and Gina's hairdryer. And Amy is 'holding' Geraldine Belluci at her desk, mostly by pouring her multiple cups of awful precinct coffee and letting her giggle flirtatiously at the sergeant's biceps.

It doesn't really matter, because Rosa is going to be bringing in the partner any second now and they'll have the two of them dead to rights. So this is more of a booking-in than anything

else; Amy has all the paperwork half filled out already. She's kind of impressed at the way Belluci is maintaining her innocence in the face of frankly ridiculous circumstance, though.

"So you're telling me that you just happen to set up six dinner dates through this website, Love Casino or whatever--"

"Give Love A Chance Dot Com," says Belluci primly.

"--sure, and halfway through the entrees, at every single one of these dates, you fell from your chair and started having a seizure."

"I guess candlelight sets me off," says Belluci. Amy has to hand it to her, not many people would be able to deliver that line with that straight a face.

"And I guess it's just coincidence that all six of these men, after the small crowd of helpful and not-so-helpful onlookers had dispersed, discovered that their wallets were missing."

"I didn't hold it against them," Belluci says. "I paid for dinner."

"Yeah, you offered to pick up the bill at a restaurant owned by your *cousin*, I did pick up on--oh, hey," Amy says, spotting Rosa at the entrance to the bullpen. Yes, yes! Here it--oh. "Oh. Seriously?"

Rosa raises her arms and gives one of her angrier shrugs. No perp. No partner. No corroboration. No chance to leverage this into Prisoner's Dilemma.

"No," says Amy, hearing her own voice come out plaintive and girlish. She should have worked harder at the confession, damn it, everything else is circumstantial when all they have is Belluci. Damn Hitchcock and his stinky shirt, anyway.

Belluci looks around. "Oh, hey, look at that," she says. "I guess that person we were waiting for isn't coming? Not that I'd know anything about that."

Because Amy is not actually the kind of cop who takes property off suspects--at least, not without providing them with an itemized receipt, as per protocol--she gives the woman back her lighter. Belluci immediately cracks open a pack of cigarettes, snags one from it with her lips, and lights up in open defiance of the No Smoking sign.

Amy glares. "I'm sure that's bad for your fake epilepsy."

"Aw, you're thinking of asthma, Detective." Belluci blows smoke in Amy's face. Amy screws up her nose and fights not to cough. "So I'm free to go, right?"

Amy slumps back in her chair. Then she thinks morosely about how appropriate a verb that is.

"Ugh. Yes. Go."

"Damn it," Rosa says, giving Belluci and her triumphant smirk a wide berth as they cross paths in the middle of the room. "Bitch lost me in the underground. Sorry, Santiago."

Amy feels her face crumple. "Do I really seem that pathetic to you all?"

"What?" Rosa says.

"You *apologised*."

"Uh. Yeah." Rosa, probably sensing emotion, looks down at the scuffed toes of her scary boots. "Whatever. Jesus, are you going to cry?"

"No," says Amy, nasally.

It's just--she hasn't closed any cases in over a week, and this was meant to be the one to break the drought. She was going to write a beautiful, colour-coded report and place it casually but not too casually on the captain's desk, somewhere where he'd notice it and read it and maybe glance at her and incline his head a few degrees in a way that meant, *good job, Santiago*.

And now her chance of that beautiful eventuality is gone! All gone!

It is all, somehow, Jake Peralta's fault.

Jake's undercover stint with the Ianuccis was predicted to take six months, but it was over in four, which was probably a good thing. Or at least it was until Jake spent a solid week upon his return crowing about how he'd managed to bring the case in before schedule, and repeating all the compliments bestowed upon him by his new best friends at the *Bureau*, trying to drop that word all *casually*, as though he hadn't been an organising member of the 9-9's night of drunken ranting last year when the Feds yanked that serial kidnapping case right from under their noses.

If subjected to thumbscrews or goat curry odour, Amy might admit that she missed him more than she'd expected to, while he was away. That she still found herself twisting around in her seat during each morning briefing, watching for Jake to saunter or sidle through the door so that she could direct the customary ha-ha-you're-late smirk at him. That she looked up whenever a Taylor Swift song came on the radio, readying herself for when Jake would leap at the thing, switch it off, and then challenge her to sudden death lyrics-completion. (Their last bout before Jake's departure had been a resounding victory on Amy's part, with Jake faltering halfway through the second verse of *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together*.)

Basically, working at the 9-9 wasn't nearly as much fun without the endless small games and contests that slipped in and filled the gap left when The Bet was over.

Amy did her best to rouse a healthy competitive spirit in her fellow detectives--good practice, surely, for when she has to motivate her own ragtag crew of police!--but, well. That was doomed to failure. Boyle hasn't got a competitive bone in his body, and Rosa has the kind of self-possession that Amy can only dream of, striding through life without the slightest need to prove herself to anyone.

"If you are going to cry," Rosa says, now, "at least go and do it in the break room. There are tissues and shit in there."

And Jake. Who Amy has no intention of crying in front of. She's got no intention of crying in front of *anyone*, she is *not going to cry*, but she is especially and particularly not going to cry in front of Jake.

"Or do your paperwork," Rosa adds. Pauses. "You like paperwork, Santiago."

"I've done it all already," Amy says despairingly. "This is stupid. I'm not going to get anything else done today."

Despite that she sits at her desk for a few more minutes, waiting. Usually when she says something like that the universe sends her Jake Peralta at his most obnoxious, waving a minor success in front of her face, and Amy usually finds herself picking up someone else's shitty case, or answering a clear hoax call, out of sheer irritation with him.

Today, though: nothing. Jake fails to emerge from the break room, Hitchcock and Scully both clock off promptly on the hour, as usual, and finally Amy casts one more guilty look in the direction of the captain's office before leaving.

It's not like--

Well, it's not like she's *forgotten* what Jake said, before he left. It popped into her head when he was away, often promoted by those Taylor Swift moments, or when she channel-surfed past any of the Die Hard movies.

Today it pops into her head as she's on her way home, and then it refuses to leave. It hums there beneath the noise of the subway, and in time with her steps as she walks along her street, and she's so cranky by the time she's faced with her apartment door that she has to try three times before she can fit the key in the lock and turn it.

I kinda wish something could have happened between us.

Jake hasn't said anything about it since he got back. Amy hasn't said anything either.

In fact, they're so busy not saying anything about it that they're talking just as much as ever, but they've lost some of their--something. Their ease. If you'd polled ten Amy Santiagos this time last year, nine of them would have laughed to hear their day-to-day interactions with Jake Peralta described as *easy*, but there it is. These days Amy keeps running into strange, small awkwardnesses in their conversation.

But. It doesn't matter. They weren't a couple then, they're not a couple now. It's fine.

Besides, Amy's dating Teddy. She thinks it's going well--it's already the second-longest relationship she's ever been in, which has to be a good sign, right?--and they've even started talking about moving in together.

Well. Teddy's been dropping hints about the fact that maybe they *should* start talking about it, and he's also been awkwardly complimenting her interior décor in a way that, well, Amy *is* a detective. She does have a pretty good radar for when someone is bullshitting her, no matter how well-intentioned.

"But I *do* have a good eye for colour," Amy mutters aloud, reflexive.

She hangs her purse on its hook and looks around, admiring the proof of this statement. The intricate cobweb of one crocheted doily has slipped sideways and there's an asymmetry in the amount of it hanging over each edge of the wooden surface. Amy moves it until it's perfect, and feels soothed.

When she returned from visiting the captain's house for the first time, Amy stood in her living room and vowed, for a mad moment, to take everything but the microwave (that appliance of glorious connection!) to Goodwill and start over with simple, stern, classic pieces.

But that moment passed. Because before Captain Raymond Holt existed in Amy's life, there was Captain Leo Baez, whose daughter Alicia Baez married a man called David Santiago and promptly proceeded to give birth to an academic, two teachers, an engineer, a chef, a banker, and two police officers.

Alternatively: seven boys, and Amy.

When Amy thinks about her grandparents' house she thinks about sitting in a room that smelled of lavender and coffee, picking out chords on the piano while her grandmother called instructions from the kitchen, and listening to the shouts of her brothers as they raced around the yard. But she also thinks about her grandfather standing next to the stool, his big hand resting comfortably on the piano's lacy dust cover or adjusting the porcelain figure of a girl with a bucket, telling Amy stories about cops he'd worked with and criminals he'd caught.

Sure, the one and only daughter of the Santiago family was wrangled near-constantly into pink and frills and bows, and as a result Amy rebelled firmly against dresses from the age of fourteen, not needing to provide the opposition with any more ammunition in her ongoing war to be taken seriously.

It wasn't until she became a police officer that she let herself admit that, actually, she *liked* pink.

So that's what the potpourri and the floral curtains and the delicate teacups mean, even if Amy has never quite been able to explain it to anyone. They mean that you can be tough and feminine at the same time. You can be a good cop, a *great* cop, even if you exist surrounded by flowers.

Amy likes her apartment, for all that she's always on the lookout for something with higher ceilings and more rooms that magically falls within her budget and isn't the recent site of a prostitution ring or a double homicide. It's hers and it's home.

But right now the air in it feels thin, the silence depressing. She could call Teddy; she takes out her phone and thumbs down to his name in her contacts list.

After a few moments, she puts the phone back in her purse and puts on her jacket.

An hour later she's back at the precinct, a bag of Chinese takeout in one hand. She clears her throat annoyingly at the night shift officer who uses her desk--Symonds? Simpson?--until he vacates it in favour of Gina's, and she also appropriates the oldest whiteboard. This board is deeply scratched and abused, the wheels screech like tortured pigeons, and it has two sets of genitals drawn on it in the evil blue permanent marker that looks exactly like all the other markers but which is impossible to scrub off, even with Gina's industrial-grade nail polish remover, which was banned from the building after she left the top off the bottle and the fumes forced everyone to evacuate, coughing and wiping their streaming eyes. Someone should probably throw the evil blue marker in the trash, but cops are cops, so nobody has.

It doesn't take her long to sketch out the structure of the case she's building. This is partly because she has it memorised, has it dancing in front of her eyes whenever her mind is blank and she's staring into space, but mostly it's because the structure is so damn *skeletal*. A few lines, a lot of circles filled with question marks. Two full names. Some footnotes, because footnotes are important.

And...a whole lot of fucking conjecture, excuse Amy's French.

She sits in front of the whiteboard and stares at it, hoping the sheer act of carving the diagram deeper into her consciousness will bring about some kind of epiphany. She stares while she works her way through a whole bag of egg rolls, and she tries to keep staring while she makes headway into some beef chow mein, but she has to keep breaking eye contact so she can frown down at her noodles. They're slippery with sauce and far more fall off her chopsticks than make it to her mouth, but she perseveres. She's a persevering kind of person.

"Why don't you use a fork?"

Amy looks up. *Flop*, goes a noodle.

"Because this is Chinese food," she says. "You're supposed to eat it with chopsticks."

"Even if you're really, really terrible at it?"

"What are you doing here, Peralta?"

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I asked first," Amy says, pointing her (clearly, defective) chopsticks at him accusingly.

"Just clockin' some crims," Jake drawls. "Puttin' away bad guys, you know. Evil never sleeps and so neither do I."

Amy casts what she hopes is a withering look at him, and is startled when it seems to work. Jake Peralta doesn't wither in the face of bacteria-ridden street food, Gina's nail polish remover ("Oh, yeah, he's probably immune. I used to do my nails on the fire escape twice a week when we were kids and I made him hold the bottle.") or the captain's most dangerous monotone. But here he goes, withering down into a chair.

"Fine," he says, before Amy can speak. "I caught *a* crim, and now he's about to be released because of an evidence screwup."

Amy struggles with herself, and triumphantly manages to be the bigger person. She rummages in the plastic bag of food and then holds out some clean chopsticks and the container of honey chicken.

Come to think of it, she's never been that into honey chicken. She doesn't even remember ordering it, which raises the horrifying possibilities that a) she ordered it on autopilot, or b) Mrs Khoo included it anyway because she assumed Amy *forgot* to order it, and both of those speak to the number of times Amy's called Khoo's Kitchen to order takeout for the rest of an investigation team.

"Is that going to kill me?" Jake demands, and Amy realises she's been squinting suspiciously at the food carton.

"No, it--"

"Don't actually care, I'm starving and it smells amazing." Jake grabs it out of her hands. "But Sarge made me go and get the fans out of the interrogation room again, because apparently the computers in Records 'need to be blasted with air at all times so they don't explode' or something, I don't know, anyway, *anything* would smell amazing after that. Oh my God, honey chicken, my favourite," he finishes, and tries to fit four pieces in his mouth at once.

Amy shudders and looks back at the board.

"Wamefrooit," Jake says, muffled around his huge mouthful of food. He spits some half-chewed chicken into one hand.

"You're disgusting," Amy informs him.

"Walk me through it."

Amy hesitates. It's her thing, this fledgling case, and she's been guarding the pathetic scraps of it jealously, but...Jake *wilted* and in that moment he looked just as punchy and sad as Amy feels. So this could be like a welcome home present, a peace offering, an apology for the fact that they've been weird since he got back.

She walks him through it. It's not a lot, really; barely around the block, as walking goes.

Statistically speaking ("I saw that face, Peralta, shut up. Statistics are important.") the 9-9's been picking up an unusual number of juvies, a lot of them on suspicion of possession, and one of Amy's depressingly small number of snitches has been feeding her hints about a new player making inroads in Brooklyn's drug scene. A new player prone to using kids as mules.

And just before Amy let one of those kids off for lack of evidence (and after an earnest speech about community-mindedness that got her an extended middle finger and a lot of, well, French) she overheard--something. Maybe nothing. But something that drew a line in

her mind between this sudden spike in drug-running employment, and that match-fixing thing that was all over the news the previous week.

Amy's knowledge of sports is wide-ranging by necessity. She has to know when the Islanders have beaten the Bruins so that she can Skype Ed in Boston and make triumphant jeering faces at him, and if she doesn't know how the Lakers are doing then she and Luis won't have anything to fill the first five minutes of their Sunday phone calls, which is usually as long as it takes for Luis to break and start gushing about Evie doing whatever it is that three-year-olds do, or the fact that Mike's discovered a new recipe for cinnamon rolls, or that Mike's taken up Krav Maga, or Mike--look, if Amy is as annoyingly besotted as her second-eldest brother remains after ten years of marriage, she'll consider herself lucky. Or maybe shoot herself.

She keeps up with sports news, is the point. And everyone heard about Joey Harmon, who was caught betting on one of his own games through an online gambling site, and *then* was found to have enough cocaine in his apartment that his own team's PR office threw him to the wolves more or less on the spot, and whose promising career went down in a ball of flames and criminal prosecution. It was nasty.

It also wasn't the sort of thing you'd usually link to street-level drug sales, but there it is. The line's been drawn. Now all Amy needs is...any proof at all. And a lot more information. And about ten more names.

Jake doesn't interrupt much, for Jake, as Amy explains the shabby outline. He stares at the board hungrily, even when he's inhaled all of the chicken and most of the fried rice that Amy wordlessly passes him when his chopsticks start twitching.

Amy looks at Jake looking at the board, the intent sweep of his eyes from question marks to footnote and back, and something clicks in her head.

"You don't actually like undercover work, do you?"

"Whaaaat," Jake says, his voice going high pitched in the way it always does when he's uncomfortable. "Are you kidding, I love it. I'm amazing. Go ask the Ianucci brothers--oh wait, you can't, because I put their asses in *prison*. That's right."

Amy rolls her eyes.

"I know you're *good* at it. You're creative, you think fast, whatever. And everyone knows you could talk your way into or out of anything. But this is what you love about policing." She gestures to the board with her chopsticks, which by now are browned and tacky with sauce. "You love puzzles, Jake."

Jake settles his chin in one hand, food discarded. He doesn't say anything for a while, which is so unlike Jake that Amy's unnerved.

Finally he says, "You know I held a gun to a guy's chin until he pissed himself in front of his kid?"

Amy opens her mouth. Closes it.

"Yeah," Jake goes on, as though she'd replied. "Leo Ianucci thinks it's fun to send his people round and deliver object lessons about paying your debts on time. Thinks it's even more fun when one of those people is an ex-cop. I got pretty good at the patter, you know, *rah rah, Mr Ianucci's disappointed in your attitude, rah rah*. And this one guy looked like he was going to start crying, except instead he got this big dark patch on his pants. And his son was standing right there. Maybe eight? Skinny kid wearing Iron Man pajamas. Saw the whole thing."

"That's..." Amy says, and then can't think of a word that doesn't sound stupid.

"Yeah," Jake says again. He shrugs, too big and too careless. "I thought it'd be kind of fun, you know, being undercover as myself. Easy, right? But it's hard to come up with a good story about the person you're being, when you're being a version of yourself. If I was being, I dunno, Ricardo Lamborghini, then I could tell myself that Ricardo doesn't care about that kind of thing, that he's the kind of guy who enjoys humiliating other men. But when it's me, when it's just *me* pretending not to care--it means Jake Peralta is that kind of guy. And that's. That really sucks, after a while."

Amy feels a little bit sick.

"That does suck," she says, heartfelt. "Sorry."

Jake gives another shrug, this one more subdued.

"So, hey, you think I'm creative?" he says after a few moments.

Amy smiles. "That's definitely one word for it."

"Ha." Jake smiles back, tentative. "We're going to nail this son of a bitch on your board," he says, suddenly. "Whoever he is. You and me. We're taking him down."

Amy watches yet another noodle slide off her chopsticks, and feels warm. "Yeah," she says. "We are."

And then...they don't. They get absolutely nowhere.

And just like the horrible carob-coated cherry on the sergeant's latest disgusting yoghurt 'sundae', all of their other work seems to suffer as well, going from bad to ghastly in the space of a week.

Jake goes full-on martyr about it: he starts wearing dark sunglasses indoors, writes SLUMP on his desk with the evil blue marker, and loudly blames the fact that he's rusty from his time undercover. Amy doesn't even have that excuse. All she's got is a general feeling of losing her edge, never as happy or as sharp as she should be. She snaps at Teddy over dinner and then again over the phone, when he tries to give her advice about it, and usually they *love* giving each other advice about work. That's like, half of their pillow talk, right there.

This whole disaster isn't helped at all by the fact that Diaz-and-Boyle seem to have really clicked as a working partnership, now that the last vestiges of Boyle's hopeless crush have dried up. The two of them are making lots of arrests and high fiving all over the place. It's terrible. It's the *worst*.

"Diaz," Jake whines. "Diiiiiaaaaaz."

"Jesus, *what*."

He looks up from where he is flopped down on his desk, using the Open Cases Pile Of Garbage as a pillow. His hair is sticking in every possible direction. "Help us," he pleads.

Rosa rolls her eyes and picks up a pen. She clicks it against her thigh with the same air of violent satisfaction with which she releases the safety on guns.

"Fine," she says. "But only because this shit is getting so depressing I'm starting to think about mercy killings. I've told you my method before, but clearly it didn't stick, so I'm going to write it down."

"I don't know if this--"

"Shut up, Santiago," Jake hisses.

Rosa sighs. "One of you morons get me a sheet of paper."

JUST A FLY IN THE OINTMENT

When Amy's eldest brother Rafe got engaged, they did the announcement formally at a Santiago family dinner. Rafe stood up and looked awkward, Donna blushed and told everyone that the ring was off being resized, and Amy's mother started sobbing into her asparagus.

The next engagement in the family was Jorge's, and its announcement overshadowed a Christmas dinner that Amy's mother had spent twelve hours preparing, so Amy suspects there was less parental disappointment than was expressed when the engagement lingered for three years before dying a painful, screaming, that-cheating-puta death.

Luis and Harry got married within a month of one another, and--both of them having learned a lesson from Rafe's enormous, stifling nuptials--both weddings happened in foreign countries. Harry proposed to Gabrielle in Paris and they were married three weeks later in Valencia, and Luis spent a weekend in Vancouver with Mike and came back with the word 'husband' poking its way aggressively into all of his sentences. Then it was Jorge's turn again, this time to a quiet unexceptionable girl who worked in HR at his engineering firm.

As the babies of the family, Danilo and Edmundo (named in an inexplicable swerve back towards the traditional after the experimental phase that produced *Harold*, *Julian* and *Amy*) seem to be feeling no pressure whatsoever to enter the state of matrimony; Rafe likes to complain that *he'd* never have been allowed to reach the ripe old age of twenty-eight without acquiring a spouse. Julian, cheerfully and perpetually single, has become expert at dodging familial barbs in such a way that they glide over his shoulder and lodge in Amy, standing--so to speak--right behind him.

Amy Santiago's wedding announcement doesn't happen at a family gathering, or over Facebook, or even in a mass text. No, the first the world hears of Amy's marriage comes twenty minutes into an otherwise normal Monday morning at the 99th precinct, when Boyle makes the horrible mistake of asking how everyone's weekend was.

"We got *married*," Jake blurts.

"*Peralta!*" Amy snaps, before she can engage her brain.

Total silence falls.

The sergeant shifts in his chair in a way that somehow makes his biceps even more obvious than usual. "We?" he says, sounding pained.

Some more silence happens, while Amy tries her best to glare a hole in the side of Jake's stupid, stupid, traitorous head. They *discussed* it. They weren't going to tell anyone. They were going to look into how you get a drunken Vegas wedding annulled, which surely must be a thing that happens all the time, and none of their coworkers would ever know about it unless for some reason they ran a thorough background check on either of them.

The next sound in the room is the cackling laughter of Rosa Diaz.

"What?" Boyle says.

"I have to be dreaming," Gina says, "this is too good," and Rosa is *still laughing*.

Amy doesn't know what she wants more: to shrivel into a ball, or to explode into fire.

Captain Holt, standing in the open door of his office, looks from Amy to Jake, back and forth, back and forth, his head slowing down inexorably like the little silver ball on the edge of a roulette wheel before it makes its final choice, and--is Amy is having Vegas flashbacks? Is that what's happening now? She's going to die and so her life is flashing in front of her eyes, even the drunk bits.

"Santiago," the captain says finally, "my office."

"Yes, sir," she says.

No, she *wants* to die. She wants to roll around in a meadow full of puppies until her throat closes up and she dies a soft, cuddly anaphylactic death.

She trails the captain into the office and closes the door behind her, not making eye contact with anyone. Even so, in her periphery she can see Gina doing some kind of mime that probably represents Amy's imminent death by embarrassment. Amy takes a deep breath and turns around, clasping her hands tight in front of her.

Captain Holt looks at her.

All Amy can think, in this moment, is that she's well and truly stomped on the sanctity of marriage. Not the sanctity in the way that some people use the word, but the actual *truth* of it, and her stupid shotgun too-drunk-to-remember-it marriage is actually more legal than the captain's, and it's just--it's just awful.

She prepares herself for judgmental silence and poker face, which she will endure with a minimum of lip-wobbling and defensive babbling, she *will*.

Instead, the captain looks at her with what Jake calls his robot-discovering-feelings face.

"Santiago," he says. "Is everything, um. Alright?"

Amy opens her mouth to say something that's going to be either actually-sir-no or absolutely-fine-sir-yes, she's not sure which, and instead she bursts into tears without actually bursting into tears. It makes her nose feel like a tamped-down champagne cork.

The captain leans back slightly in his chair. It has the same sort of air to it as Rosa looking at her boots.

"Are you...sneezing?" he asks.

Amy shakes her head furiously.

"Are you having a fit?"

"No, sir!" Amy manages, spurred into indignation by thoughts of Geraldine Belluci.

The captain sighs. "I know Peralta has been through a lot in the last few months. And I know you are a nurturing sort of person, Santiago--"

"No, I'm not!" Amy protests. "Wait. Yes, I am? Is that good?"

"--and that's why you'll do a good job, when you have a precinct of your own--"

"I will?!"

"--so I thought this might be an attempt, however rash and unorthodox, to--look out for your partner. To have his back."

"Wait," Amy says, reeling from the emotional whiplash of *a precinct of your own*, but also thinking about the kid in Iron Man pajamas. "Been through a lot? Like what?"

"Ah," the captain says, that particular flat and careful *ah* that means he might, possibly, have made a mistake. "I thought he might have...actually, I don't think I should say anything else."

Then he dismisses her and calls Jake in with no more than a pointed finger and a nod. Jake's in there for a long time, and there's none of the histrionic noise that usually streams from the office when he's interacting with the captain. The precinct is silent with the weirdness of it. Nobody even pretends to be doing any work. Amy sorts her paperclips by size and her pens by colour and then tips them out and does it again.

When Jake comes out his eyes are dry and his shoulders are tight. Amy looks at the way the smirk breaks out onto his face as he glances in her direction, half a second too slow, and she feels even more curious and even more awful.

"Jake," Boyle says, with wide eyes. "I didn't know the slump was *that* bad. You actually took my advice?"

"Uh," says Jake. "What advice was that, Charles?"

"You know! Get married and then get divorced."

"Oh, man," says Hitchcock. "If you're getting divorced does that mean I don't have to get you a wedding present?"

"Is that what you're doing?" Rosa demands.

"Ooh, *or*," drawls Gina, lounging against the nearest desk, "is this another bet?"

Jake is still looking at Amy. They stare at each other for a long beat, and in Jake's face Amy sees something bitter now, lit by the same flicker of recklessness that was there when he wagered his only valuable possession for the chance to humiliate her. And Amy lost, and

wore a stupid dress with a giant bow, and Jake somehow managed to send pictures of her in that dress to *every single one of her brothers*.

"Yep," she says, beating him to it. "First one to cry annulment is a rotten egg."

"First one to cry annulment covers the other's weekends for six months," Jake says instantly.

Amy narrows her eyes. "For a *year*."

"Terms," Jake says, striding over to plant himself in front of her desk. "I get to introduce you to anyone we meet as my partner in both crime-solving and the wonderful journey of life."

"Okay," Amy says. Whatever. She knows what will wear him down. "At least one date night per week, a *proper* date, and if any social occasion arises to which I might be expected to bring a significant other, you're available, and you'll behave *perfectly*."

"I'm going to get you a *hideous* ring."

"Fine!" Amy snaps.

"Fine!" Jake shouts, and holds out his hand.

Amy grabs it. Jake squeezes, hard.

Please let this be the thing that was missing, Amy thinks. A game. A bet.

"This was not what I told you to do," Rosa says. "They were simple instructions. Santiago didn't even have to do the last bit because of--oh, shit," she says, half-laughing in that sadistic way she has. "Does this mean Teddy is your mistress now? Because that would be amazing."

"No," Amy squawks.

And-- "Oh, *no*," Amy says, two seconds later. She drops Jake's hand and presses her palms against her cheeks and feels like the worst person imaginable. Again. "I have to break up with Teddy."

She really hates breakups.

But by the end of that particular Monday, after one threatened suicide, two armed assaults, an honest-to-god lost cat (which turns out to have been locked in the woman's laundry room) and two vodka-based drinks, Amy's thinking that she should probably feel a lot sadder about the prospect of this *particular* breakup than she does. After all, a person in a serious long term relationship shouldn't be able to be goaded into maintaining a joke of a marriage, should they? That's...that's not *normal*, right?

But when she sits down and thinks about how her her life might be without the Dating Teddy part--swirling the ice in her glass while Rosa sips beer in stalwart silence on the next bar stool--it stings a bit, but mostly Amy feels something that, she is horrified to realise, is a lot like relief.

We have to talk, she texts Teddy, knowing how it looks and trying not to care. *Dinner?*

Amy's used to being the dumpee. She's only been the dumper twice before, and both of those were after less than ten dates, and both of them had only made it to that many dates because she was too much of a wimp to do anything but keep showing up. She doesn't flatter herself that either Liam or Horrible Phil had been very surprised when she gave them the awkward dumping talk. And for both of those guys, she'd known exactly what she didn't like about them, even though she'd done the expected dance of my-job-is-really-hectic-right-now with an insincere little shimmy of you-deserve-someone-better tacked on to the end.

But she genuinely likes Teddy, and she doesn't have a single reasonable excuse for dumping him, except for the fact that he really *does* deserve someone better than her terrible, cheating, bigamist self.

The solution is clearly to go for broke and just, well.

Lie.

"Secret feelings," Teddy says.

"Yes," says Amy, staring intently down into her wine glass like it might contain DNA evidence. "Very secret."

"For Jake Peralta."

"Yep," says Amy. "For...years. Years and years."

"Then why, and stop me if this is a stupid question, are you dating me?"

"Because I was trying to move past them," Amy says, impatient. This aspect of her made-up story is obvious, surely. "I really like you, Teddy--"

He laughs, short. "Yeah, don't."

"--and I thought dating you would be...good for me?"

Wow, this sounds dreadful, even though none of that last part was *technically* a lie. Amy shuts her mouth and does some more wine-staring. When she glances up again, Teddy's swirling his own dregs of wine and looking angry in a quiet way.

"So that's that, then," he says. "Jesus. You know what the guys will say when I tell them my girlfriend got *married*? To someone else?"

Amy's anger isn't quiet at all. It strikes her guilt and gives off a fierce spark.

"Is that the problem? You're worried about how I've made you look?"

"Come on, Amy," he says. "Don't pretend you don't--didn't--like how I made *you* look." He laughs again; Amy kind of wants to slap him. "I guess you always were one to climb the

ladder. Why have a boyfriend when you can drop the word *husband* into every conversation, show off just how family-oriented you are?"

"That's not fair," Amy says.

Her guilt says, *Well...*

Teddy shakes his head. "Jake Peralta. You know what? I'm not even that surprised."

"What?" Amy snaps. She manages to cut herself off before she says something like, if *I* was surprised, then you *definitely* have to be surprised. Because, oh, yeah: secret feelings.

"Do you even listen to yourself talk, sometimes? *Peralta* did the most annoying thing today, let me tell you about it for ten minutes straight. *Peralta* and I spent three hours on a stakeout. *Peralta* couldn't be more obvious if he was actually pulling my actual pigtailed."

"Yeah, I think we're done here," Amy says.

Her stomach is squirming. She and Teddy have never fought, and now part of her is wishing they'd learned how, because has he been saving up all of this sour, edged annoyance? Where the hell would it all have gone, if they'd stayed together?

She eyes the bottle of wine longingly.

This new spiteful version of Teddy follows her gaze and grabs the neck of the bottle, pours himself another full glass, then sets the bottle down on his side of the table where she can't reach it.

"No," he says. "I'm the one who's been dumped, I get to sit alone in the restaurant drinking my feelings, or whatever it is that characters in Meg Ryan movies do. You get to leave."

"Fine," Amy says, rising with as much dignity as she can manage.

She's almost too annoyed to leave without saying the actual words, but she knows she owes him this much. And she tries to honour the debts that she owes.

"Teddy. I'm sorry."

"Go away, Amy," he says to the wine.

Amy does.

After that moderately horrible experience, Amy's not in the mood to appreciate the hideous JUST MARRIED banner that Jake hangs above her desk the next day. Still, she takes a deep breath and tries to pretend that her sense of humour stretches to juvenile gestures like this one, because she's not going to be the one taking this more seriously.

"It's beautiful, pumpkin," she says, tilting her head to the side and pulling up a smile. "I feel so bad that I didn't get you anything."

Jake lunges up to her and grabs her hand, which he presses to his chest, looking like an opera singer on the brink of an aria.

"You have given me the priceless gift of your eternal love and devotion, *darling*. And bragging rights over like five dudes I went through the academy with, who bet me that I'd die alone and unwed. Well, unloved, but also unwed. Ooh, hey, I wonder if there was any money riding on that? I should go check."

He dumps Amy's hand unceremoniously and runs in the direction of the door.

"Who are you telling?" Amy shouts after him. "We're not telling people."

"We totally are!" Jake calls back.

"No, because then we have to *untell* them," Amy says, but Jake's left the bullpen by now.

"Nah, it's fine as long as it's not on Facebook," Rosa says. "Wait, is it on Facebook?"

Amy literally feels the blood plummet from her face.

"Crap," she says.

She hurls herself at her computer and spends a frantic ten minutes trying to remember her Facebook password, which is complicated by the fact that she hasn't logged on to the stupid site since Kylie discovered acai berries and hemp clothing and decided that technology was a barrier to Communion with the true Self.

Given that Kylie celebrated this decision by throwing her cell phone into a babbling north-flowing brook (or, you know, the Hudson), Amy hasn't spoken with her in a while.

"Don't you have the password saved in your browser?" Gina calls, after she's spent a while watching Amy's desperate keymashing.

"I don't use Facebook at *work*," Amy says. "That would be a waste of police resources!"

"Oh...right," Gina says vaguely. "Sure."

"You should just use the same password for everything," says Scully. "Mine is 'password'. See? Easy."

"I use different passwords for everything," Amy says. "That's what the IT manual said to do."

"You read the--never mind, of course you did. And you don't keep them written down in code, somewhere that nobody would ever think to look?" Rosa demands.

"That's not secure," Amy wails.

She tries another combination of unrelated words, and numbers that don't have anything to do with her birthday or the street number of any houses she's ever lived in (also as per the IT

manual). This time, as soon as she presses Enter the whole screen goes pale and the words SECURITY ERROR 452 appear in neat red text in the centre.

"Whoa, hang on." Amy lifts her hands from the keyboard in reflexive guilt and freezes there like someone on the wrong end of an armed robbery. "What happened? What does that mean?"

"Huh," says Rosa. "Want me to hit it? Hard?"

"No!" says Amy.

"Wow," says Gina. She heaves a showy sigh and presses her phone to the side of her head. "I'm on it. Yeah, hello? You need to come up here, Detective Santiago's probably ruined thousands of dollars of police technology or something, because she can't use social media websites properly. Because she's literally a hundred years old."

Amy's hands wobble as her freakout reaches a peak--who is Gina calling? what if she's calling the *deputy commissioner*?--and then drop into her lap. She leans back in her chair and glares at the frozen screen. Jake is going to pay for all of this. Amy will fill his car with snakes.

Okay, maybe not *snakes*. Definitely at least frogs.

"There. Savant will fix it," Gina says.

"Who?" says Scully.

"Oh, yeah, we have that new IT guy," Rosa says. "How come we never see him around? Is he nocturnal? Most of those geeks look like they've never seen the sun."

"He has an office somewhere," Gina says, her phone now back in its accustomed position four inches from her face. "I don't think it has any windows, though."

Now that the initial panic has passed, Amy can see that it's pretty unlikely that Jake has gone so far as to put anything on Facebook. If anything about her relationship status was on the internet, her phone would have exploded with texts from various brothers by now, thunderclouds heralding the ultimate storm that would be the phone call from her mother.

"I was one of those dudes," Rosa says suddenly. "From the academy."

"What?" says Amy.

"I bet Peralta he would never get married." She pauses. "I think I owe him a hundred bucks. Tell him and I'll rip out your liver."

"Did you really think that?" Amy asks.

Rosa snorts. "Nah. Of course he was gonna get married, he's crazy romantic. But he makes really hilarious faces when he's upset. I figured it was worth lying about it at the time."

"Crazy romantic," Amy says. "Peralta?" Trying to get her head around the idea feels like a snake dislocating its jaw to swallow an antelope.

"Duh," Gina says. She's clearly decided that Amy's disaster of a morning is the best show in the 9-9 and she's sticking around to see how it plays out.

"I don't think he's been on more than three dates with anyone the whole time I've known him," Amy argues.

"Yeah, he really sucks at dating. Plus he mostly has shit taste in women," Rosa says. "No offense, Santiago."

"Um," Amy says.

"Jake wants to think he's James Bond," Gina says sagely.

Shaken-not-stirred, yeah; Amy knew that already.

She's going to regret this. She is. She is. But--

"What is he really, then?" she asks.

Gina fixes her with another *duh* look. "A Disney princess."

Amy's brain floods with images of Jake in a yellow ballgown, ugh, God, *no*. She's so thankful to be interrupted by the approach of their bored-looking IT director that she rises from her chair and steps forward with her hand extended like a debutante. She realises when she's beaming like a fool that this is probably overkill, but too late, she's committed.

"Hi," she says, trying to sound uber-professional to make up for it. "Carey, right?"

"Corey," he says, rolling his eyes. "But like I keep telling you people, it's *Savant*."

"Corey, heh," Rosa says, and smirks.

"Okay, Savant," Amy says, before the guy makes the mistake of entering an argument with Rosa and ends up a sunlight-deprived smear on the sole of her boot. Besides, there's a whole section in the NYPD Tolerance and Diversity in the Workplace booklet about respecting people's chosen names and pronouns and things. This probably isn't quite the same, but Amy grew up knowing that Harry would absolutely punch any Santiago sibling who referred to him as *Harold*, so she's used to letting people pick their handles.

Savant drops himself into Amy's vacated chair and looks at the computer. "What were you trying to do?"

"LogintoFacebook," Amy mumbles. She's so irresponsible. She doesn't deserve Captain Holt as her rabbi. She's lucky he's away speaking at a leadership seminar today, and not here to witness her shame.

Savant doesn't seem to care about Amy's blatant attempt to misuse police resources. He lowers his hands to the keyboard and hovers them there for a thoughtful second before plunging into motion like a concert pianist.

"You've got quick fingers," Rosa says. She says it with the usual Rosa lack of inflection; Amy eyes her nervously in case she's sizing up their IT director for an old-fashioned shootout of some kind, and they end up having to hire yet another one because this one has bullet holes in him.

Once again Savant fails to pick up on the danger, and instead, horrifyingly, winks.

"My girlfriend appreciates them," he says.

"Charming," says Amy.

"Wait, wait," says Gina. "Hold on a minute, penguin boy. You have a girlfriend? A real human woman exists who voluntarily calls herself *your girlfriend*?"

"I, uh." Savant looks taken aback. The machine-gun rattle of his fingers on the keyboard has paused. "She's a--lady. That I'm. Seeing?"

He sounds very uncertain at his own choice of verb. Amy's never seen him this uncomfortable before. On the one or two other occasions when she's seen him interact with people, he's tended to look at them with the sarcastic impatience that says he could probably erase their entire electronic existence, or persuade the NSA that they constitute a significant threat to national security, but he's not going to do it because he's feeling lazy just now and also there's a Farscape marathon about to start.

Gina can have that effect on people.

"Penguin boy?" Amy inquires.

Savant tears his rabbitry gaze away from the headlamps of Gina's attention and returns it to Amy's computer.

"Linux," he says, which is no help whatsoever. "Yeah, I'll fix this, but I don't like people staring over my shoulder. Go and sit somewhere else and bang some rocks together, or whatever it is that you do."

"I'm going to go *investigate crime*," Amy says.

Scully chooses that moment to pipe up with, "Guys, is it bad to spill water down the back of your computer? Maybe I should jiggle this blue cable a bit, to dry it off."

Savant says, "Um," and then every computer screen in the room goes blank in unison.

Amidst the general outcry of pain and unsaved reports, Amy sees a brilliant opportunity, and opens her mouth to try out some of the leadership-in-crisis skills she's been learning from books that she maybe, possibly, saw the titles of on the captain's bookshelf and then stealthily Amazoned.

However, before she can say anything, Boyle puffs his way into the bullpen with two trays of espressos balanced precariously in his hands.

"Sorry that took so long, guys, the queues at Nutmeg just keep getting longer. I think people must have read my blog post about their raspberry friands. Wait, what'd I miss?" he asks breathlessly, and then, "Oh, man," as three of the coffees succumb to momentum and tip sideways off the paper tray. They fall to the floor, splashing their contents against his pants legs as they do so.

"You okay there, Boyle?" Rosa asks.

"Hot," Boyle whimpers, his knuckles white around the trays.

"Here, give me those." Rosa steps forward, hands outstretched to help, and catches the heel of her boot in a coffee puddle. Her leg shoots out and she crashes to the floor, bumping Boyle hard enough that another one of the coffees follows its fellows, lemming-like, over the edge. It hits Rosa square in the shoulder of her leather jacket, whereupon the lid falls off and latte froth begins to soak through the mass of her hair.

"Sorry! I'm so sorry!" Boyle babbles.

"Whoa," says Savant, distracted from his task.

"Rosa! Here, use my shirt to mop it up," says Hitchcock.

Gina's phone camera makes a clicking sound. "Instagram insta-*classic*," she crows.

"I am going to *kill someone*," Rosa says to the ceiling.

And that, of course, is when Sergeant Jeffords gets back from his therapy session.

"Peralta," the sergeant starts. Then he appears to realise that Jake isn't in fact anywhere to be seen, and trails off in confusion. "Don't you all have work to do?" he says finally, and heads for his own desk, pausing only for long enough to lift one of the few intact coffees out of Boyle's hands. "Why is my computer not working?" is his next question.

Amy sighs and offers Rosa a hand up out of the coffee puddle.

"Hitchcock, seriously, put your shirt back on," she says. "Gina, can Rosa borrow your hair dryer?"

"In a second," Gina says. "Snapchatting."

"Snap what?" Amy says.

Gina makes a disgusted noise. "Okay, you are *totally* a hundred years old. And your scowling is harshing my vibe, so you should go and be post-menopausal somewhere else, mmkay?"

"I am not post-menopausal!"

"Pre-menstrual?"

"Gina."

"Amy," Gina says, leaning forward, her voice falling into the kind of faux-hush that attracts more attention than yelling. "Are you pregnant? Is that why you got married? You can tell me, you know."

Leaving aside the fact that telling Gina anything about her reproductive health sounds like a terrible idea: "I--no! I am *careful*," says Amy. "I am *so* careful. I wouldn't get pregnant before I was in a serious, settled relationship."

"Right," Rosa says. "You were that person who threw a fit playing Life if you ended up with baby-pegs in the car before you landed on Buy A House, weren't you?"

"Embarking on parenthood before ensuring financial security is irresponsible!" Amy protests.

"That's what they all say," Gina says darkly. "That's what Natasha said."

"Natasha?" Amy asks.

"You know, Natasha, from my dance troupe?"

"Ooh, *Natasha*," says Jake, sidling up out of nowhere, clearly back from his further adventures in ruining Amy's life. "She's super hot. Don't worry, sugar pie, I would never cheat on you," he adds, sliding an arm around Amy's shoulders.

"Right, Natasha," Amy says, shrugging Jake's arm off. In the repressed fever dream that is her memory of FLOORGASM!'s last performance, she thinks she remembers an obnoxiously flexible redhead who went by that name.

"Yeah," says Gina. "She kept talking about how her career was so important, she wasn't ready to settle down, blah blah blah, and then she and her boyfriend went to Europe for two weeks and *boom*. Pregnant."

"That's so careless," says Amy.

But she can't inject too much judgment into her voice, because that's pretty much what happened to Harry and Gabrielle when they went back to Valencia for their one-year anniversary, and that produced Davey, who is Amy's favourite nephew. Not that Davey needs her attention; he's also the favoured grandchild, because of Harry's blatant effort to win himself progeny points by being the first one to name a kid after their father, thereby offsetting the great debacle of You Got Married In Spain And Didn't Invite The Family.

"Eh, my mom once told me I was conceived because her favourite Chardonnay was on special and there was nothing good on TV," says Jake.

"Wow, Jake, that's a beautiful story," says Amy.

"I thought so." Jake gives her the grin that's 70% sincerity and 30% sarcasm.

Amy smiles back before she can remember to hate herself for being able to break those percentages down so precisely.

"Okay, I'm done," Gina says, putting her phone down. "Did you want the dryer with the brush attachment, or without?"

"My hair's gone sticky," Rosa says. "Forget it. I'll just cut that bit off."

"Sorry, Rosa, but it's a full time job being this popular on Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram, the Kwazy Cupcakes chat function *and* Tinder." Gina counts each one off on her fingers with a flourish.

"You *have* a full time job," the sergeant calls.

"I try to gain an average of five new Twitter followers every day," Gina says. "It's hard work."

"What, that's insane," Jake says, "that's, like, six hundred a month."

"Seriously, Jake," the sergeant says, "*learn math*."

Thankfully, someone calls in a robbery at a sporting goods store at that point, and both Amy's IT ineptitude and her brand-new marriage fade into the background of an ordinary working day.

She made a bet, though, and she named terms, and so she finds herself crossing the street outside one of her favourite restaurants at promptly eight pm that Friday night, wondering why she never remembers that the heel on this left boot needs replacing until she's *wearing* the damn things.

Amy steps up onto the pavement and almost slides forward a full foot when the lack of heel-traction coincides with a patch of grease, but manages to remain upright with a minimum of flailing.

To her surprise, she can see Jake sitting at a table inside the restaurant. She was assuming that his total lack of punctuality also extended to dates, but there he is, wearing a green shirt and a leather jacket that hugs his shoulders jealously, so dark and rich a brown that it looks like stained wood. The wonders keep piling up: his hair actually looks like it's seen a comb in the last week.

There's a game that Amy's grandfather used to play with her and Harry, whenever they went out for ice cream. They would sit in the tiny park opposite the gelateria and her grandfather would gesture to people with his cone of choc-mint, keeping up a low, chatty commentary about how they looked and what they were doing, and what story you could tell about the woman in the alligator shoes that explained the stain on her shirt, or why that car might be slowing down when the man in the driver's seat looked bored rather than lost; better than any Sherlock Holmes story, because it was happening right in front of them, and their abuelo was *magic*, and there was no place on earth that was safer or more wonderful than this rusty bench, sitting by his side.

Harry and Amy would listen, to begin with, licking small rivers of vanilla off their wrists. But audience participation was encouraged, and all suggestions given grave consideration and feedback. Amy felt like bursting with pride when she correctly identified that the man decked out in at least three items of Yankees gear was probably looking so annoyed, and walking so fast in the direction *away* from the subway station, because he'd forgotten something at home and was going to miss the start of the game.

It's not really surprising at all that they were the two who ended up cops.

Amy keeps herself in the street shadow and peers through the window of the restaurant, trying to wipe her mind clear of what she knows, trying to read Jake Peralta like a stranger, like she learned to when she was a sticky child and then learned again at the academy.

White male, early to mid thirties, sitting alone at a two-seater table exactly on the stroke of eight. Neatly dressed. Picking up the menu, opening it, putting it down again, prodding it so that it stands at a clean angle, bracketing the salt and pepper. He looks quickly to the door whenever it opens. Cheap denim jeans, expensive jacket, cheap glass of beer with three inches of glass already showing above the level of liquid: a date, most likely, and not one where he's sure of the outcome. When they're not glancing at the door his eyes dart from person to person in a way that seems more assessing than anxious, just a light touch of his gaze in each place before moving on, constantly hungry for information in a way that might mean--novelist? Actor?

But then Amy's hypothetical breaks down, because for all that she's seen Jake play lots of different roles, she knows he's never wanted to be anything but a cop. She can't *see* him as anything else.

"Detective Santiago!" Babs swoops out of the kitchen as soon as Amy steps into the restaurant, and bestows air-kisses with such violence that some flour transfers itself in a cloud from Babs's whites to Amy's purple knit top.

Amy smiles, relaxing. She can smell cumin and citrus and smoke.

"*Aha*," says Babs, "so you're who tall, dark and nervous is waiting for. Detective, if you're going to start using this place for dates, you should give us some warning."

Jake's looking over at them, smirk wobbling onto his face, and the tension slams back into Amy's shoulders. Crap, crap, why *did* she choose here? This is one of her favourite places in the city and now Jake's going to ruin it for her.

"Oh, that's Jake," Amy says. "He's just, uh," and then her brain does the kind of total screeching unsafe halt that the advanced police driving course she took (took twice, in fact) was very firm about condemning.

"--Jake," she finishes.

My husband hisses her own voice, over the brake-screeching. Amy tunes it out.

"Hello, darling," Jake says. "You've got flour all down your top."

"Yeah, I'm going to--"

"Yeah, I thought you might."

Amy ignores Jake's smugly outstretched hand in favour of dropping her purse on her chair as she does an about-face and heads for the bathroom. Five fretful minutes of dabbing later she's back at the table, mostly flourless.

"Much better," Jake says. "Now you look like a murder victim."

Amy looks down at the dark, damp patch right over her heart.

"I know you're into that, Peralta," she says.

"*Shhh*." Jake's shoulders fly up to hunch around his ears. "I told you! We will never speak of the Morgue Incident again!"

"This has to be a proper date, remember? Conversational topics are ladies' choice."

"That is not a rule," Jake accuses. "Oh, by the way, I already ordered for you. Since this is a *proper date*."

There's wine on the table, poured into two glasses. Jake doesn't drink wine, much.

Amy picks up her glass and has a strange, intense feeling that rises from the core of her, like the moment *after* the moment when you realise that you're dreaming; the moment when you realise that you haven't woken up, and that maybe, just maybe, you could decide what happens next.

"You'd better have ordered the guacamole," she says.

"Why, because it's the cheapest thing on the menu?"

Jake's voice has picked up a sharp edge. Amy closes her mouth on the story she was going to tell about how she and Boyle discovered this place on a boring, sweltering summer stakeout, and Boyle spent twenty minutes telling Babs what was wrong with her salsa verde, but Amy fell in love with the guacamole and the iced tea and the smells that clung to the walls, and came back the next day, and then the next week.

Instead, her competitive spirit rouses itself and kicks down the last fragments of dream-feeling.

"Aw, don't be like that, honey," she says, as sweetly insulting as she can manage. "I'm more than happy to pay. If I thought you'd married me for my money, I'd have made you sign a prenup."

Jake swirls his wine around so violently some of it slops out, and then shoves the front of his face into the glass.

"Good nose," he says, too loud. "Good legs. Good feet."

"I don't think *feet* is a wine thing," Amy says.

"I'm pretty sure you should agree with me now that I'm your husband. The sky is green, wine has feet, that top makes you look like you have a horrible disease."

Amy glares at him. Was that a really oblique *Taming of the Shrew* reference? No, look who she's talking to, of course it wasn't. He can't even put together a cultured insult; he definitely doesn't deserve Babs's guacamole.

"Guacamole!" the waiter declares, sliding it onto the table.

"Fantastic," Jake says, with his fakest smile.

"I hate you," Amy says.

"Four courses to go, Santiago," Jake says. "Unless you're sick of your fancy date already. Unless you want to *bow out*."

Amy swallows a whimper and steals most of the tortilla chips.

READ BETWEEN THE LINES, MAN

"So when you said, a social occasion," Jake says, "did you already have this in mind? Because I have to admit, that's impressive planning."

"I RSVPed four months ago," Amy says.

"Okay, that's *psychic* planning."

"I was dating Teddy!"

"I--oh, right. Plus one." Jake hands the card back to her. "Hey, this could be fun. Okay, my name is Simon Braithwaite, slightly shady taxation lawyer, yacht-owner, secretly dedicated to my collection of tropical parrots. We met on the ski fields of New Zealand when you mistook me for the brother of an old friend from the Naval Academy--you're a medical officer in the Navy, by the way--and we ended up doing shots of blackcurrant schnapps in front of the lodge fire--"

"Come on," Amy says, her mouth tickled into a smile. "*None* of that is true."

"Who cares?" Jake throws his arms wide. "You never talk about this town, so I assume it's a shithole--"

"Thanks."

"--and you're not going to see these people again, are you? It's a reunion! The whole point is to have won at life after school!"

"I know that," Amy says; does he think she's stupid? Of course winning is the point. "That's why you're coming."

"One husband," Jake says, saluting. "Check."

That hits Amy on the bruise left by Teddy's comment about ladder-climbing, but she pushes it away before she has to think about it too hard.

"I can't be a doctor in the Navy. My parents still live there, people know I'm a cop."

"Oh, shit," Jake says. "We're staying with your parents?"

"Why are you grinning?" Amy says. "*Stop grinning.*"

"Your *parents*," Jake says. "Wow."

"We're not staying with my parents. I am not even telling my parents *about*--this." She flaps her hand between them.

"Well, yeah, you kind of have to," Jake says, sliding further onto Amy's desk. Amy moves her pile of completed reports away from his butt before he can crease them. "You can't be single for your parents and married for your ex-schoolmates in a small town."

"I'm not telling my parents that I married you. Let alone the whole *drunk in Vegas* thing."

"You have to tell them something about me," Jake says, impatient. He puts on a high-pitched voice. "Oh, hello, Mrs Santiago! It was so nice to see Amy at the reunion, and it was even nicer to meet her totally amazing and super handsome husband Jake." He clears his throat and changes voices. "Husband? Our Amy? No, she told us she was still the crazy doily-owning spinster we always suspected she would be."

"Where is this little scenario going?" Amy asks frostily.

"Come on, Santiago, you're a cop. Think about it. You've got two conflicting stories: single on the one hand, married on the other."

"Someone's lying," Amy says, automatic.

"Yeah, it's suspicious, right? But: 'Married? No, Amy and Jake aren't even engaged yet.' 'Oh, I thought she said--'"

"Someone's remembering it wrong," Amy says. She can see her defeat looming, because damn him, Jake's right. She's interviewed enough witnesses to know that they're all unreliable in one sense or another; the trick with deception is to fall in that grey area of memory without creating glaring contradictions. "Alright, fine. For my parents, we are dating. That's it."

"Amy Santiago, dating a nice Jewish boy." He's grinning again.

"Sorry, you're not going to score any shock points," Amy says. "Luis already used up the whole supply with *his* husband."

That's a bit of a lie. There are always, always more points in this, the one competition of Amy's life that she's not keen to win. And the way David Santiago's eyebrows dance at the sight of Jake standing on his doorstep means that she's probably pulling ahead.

"Amy," says her father.

"Hello, sir," Jake says, sounding almost normal. Thank God.

"You must be Jake," her father says, but he's looking at Amy. "Well, in you come."

By now Amy's parents know, obviously, that she broke up with Teddy. Her mother made noises at the time that were half disappointed and half sympathetic, but they never *met* Teddy, and here Amy is showing up for her school reunion with some co-worker she's been complaining about for years and has now been dating for--as far as they're concerned--a very short time.

Amy watches with the paranoid intensity of someone on the sixth hour of a caffeine-fuelled stakeout as Jake turns the dial on his charm all the way up to levels usually only seen when

he's trying to wrangle free pastries out of little old ladies, or persuade teenagers on the brink of amphetamine psychosis that maybe they want to put the knife down.

It's not like Amy didn't know he could be like this, but...it's her parents! What if the unthinkable happens and they actually like him? What if they *approve* of him?

She needs a distraction.

Amy gets out her phone and texts Julian: *Please come home and be single at them for a weekend.*

Julian texts back, *HAHAHAHAHA* and attaches a picture of a bottle of wine that literally has his name on it, scrawled on a Post-It note attached to the label.

"Wow, thank you, Mrs Santiago," Jake is saying. "I would *love* to hear some childhood stories about Amy."

I'll owe you one, Amy texts, made rash by desperation.

Will you now, she gets back. Followed by *I'm intrigued*, half an hour later, and then nothing more until there's a knock on the front door two hours after that, because Julian does like to make an entrance.

"I'll get it!" Amy shouts, bolting up from the dinner table.

"You owe me two for this," Julian says, as soon as she opens the door. He steps inside and wraps her in a hug.

"What? No," Amy hisses back. "The deal was one. One only."

Favours are a serious form of currency amongst the Santiago siblings. Luis used to keep a chart of them, on the wall of the bedroom he shared with Rafe, and he kept coming up with ways to complicate the whole system by making favours transferable. All questions about the minimum and maximum values of favours in real world terms, and all disputes regarding when a favour had or hadn't been cashed in, were solved--and are still solved, in fact--by Luis.

Nobody's surprised that *he* ended up in banking.

Julian, though, has an unspeakably cool shaved undercut and an earring and works as a drama teacher; Amy doesn't have to meet a single one of his students to know that most of the girls and probably a fair few of the boys are madly in love with him.

"Hey, Mimi, are you okay?" Julian says. "What's this about?"

Amy clings onto him for a few seconds longer, breathing slowly. This is stupid. She's fine.

"Julian!" comes their mother's voice. "Mijo, what a nice surprise! Come and meet Amy's new boyfriend."

"New *boyfriend*," says Julian, his voice rising a tone in glee.

"...one and a half," Amy says.

"Deal," says Julian, and squeezes her before he lets go.

Somewhere in the middle of dessert, Amy's torn between mentally kicking herself and resenting every single one of her other brothers for either living further away than Julian, or for being too tied up with their own families to be able to drop everything and come to her rescue. She and Julian have always been close, always been allies. It's unfortunate that she didn't stop to think through the ramifications of putting him and *Jake* in close proximity.

"Oh my God," Jake's wheezing, a spoonful of caramel tart arrested halfway to his mouth. "Do another one."

Before starting work at the 9-9 and meeting Jake Peralta, Amy would have sworn that there was nobody on earth who loves an audience as much as Julian. Her brother twists his face into an unerringly good impression of Stephen Colbert and launches into a monologue, and Jake counters with a rendition of the time he and Rosa chased a perp into a live filming of *The Daily Show* and Rosa ended up tackling the guy and knocking a gun out of his hand in the middle of the set. This is one of Jake's favourite stories, and it acquires new details every time he tells it. Normally Amy will grin and mull along with the key points, but--look, Amy loves her mom's caramel tart, and knows it was made especially in honour of her visit, and now she will forever associate the taste of it with Jake Peralta sitting at her parents' dinner table in prime storytelling mode while Julian has raptures about shaking the hand that's shaken Jon Stewart's, or something.

"I like this one, Mimi," Julian says.

Jake slides his spoon off his tongue with a wicked flourish. "You hear that, Mimi?" he says.

Amy slumps back into her chair. Not even tart can save this.

"That's...so great," she says weakly.

"Amy, what did you have planned for tomorrow?" her father asks.

"Oh, Amy's promised to show me the town," says Jake, while Amy's trying to persuade the words *I thought I might strangle my husband* to vacate her mouth in favour of something more appropriate.

"That'll take all of twenty minutes," says Julian.

Jake's got a smile on his face that's perplexing Amy; she doesn't think she's seen it before. It keeps tipping in the direction of smug and then tipping back again before it can get all the way there. It's 50% sincerity and 50% nervousness, she realises. Huh.

After that, there's no way she can get away *without* showing Jake the town. At least it gets him out of the house the next morning and away from Amy's mother, who is shamelessly exchanging shakshuka and coffee for personal information about Jake and anecdotes about

their dates ("...amazing guacamole, you should make Amy take you there next time you're in the city...").

Amy makes Jake realise the folly of his suggestion by dragging twenty minutes' worth of landmarks out for over two hours, pettily refusing to stop at Mrs Holloway's corner store for pretzels, and providing an excruciating level of detail in her commentary.

"And there's the high school," she says, slowing to the speed of a Manhattan gridlock and enjoying the way Jake's legs twitch.

The school's probably meant to look smaller and duller, now that Amy is officially grown up, but it looks as it always has, a cluster of blond brick buildings hiding in a mess of trees.

"That's where we're going tonight," she adds, still in point-out-the-obvious mode.

Jake perks up a bit and gazes out of the car window approvingly. "I bet it gets really creepy at night. Like a Stephen King novel."

"As if you've read Stephen King novels."

"I've read one."

"One of the fifteen whole books you've read?" Amy says, dryly.

"You got it."

Amy smiles and taps her fingers against the steering wheel, which has managed to absorb some warmth from the half-clouded sunlight as they make their sluggish way around town.

"Seriously, how did you make it through high school English without reading more books than that?"

"Cliff Notes," says Jake, in a what-are-you-stupid? voice. "And lots of 'losing' my school-assigned copies of the books. Oh, no, Ms Taylor! I don't know where it could be! Maybe my *absent* father took it with him when he *left* us forever. Or maybe my mother sold it for *booze* money--"

"You're terrible," Amy says, picking a scrunched-up candy wrapper out of the car's drink holder and flicking it at him.

Jake snatches the wrapper out of the air and unfolds it with interest. Only the fact that he's probably five seconds away from licking it--god, Amy works with some disgusting people--makes her say hastily, "Okay! Pretzels."

"Chocolate-coated," Jake says at once.

"This is a shithole, remember?" Amy smirks at him. "I'm pretty sure chocolate-coated pretzels are a big-city luxury, not to be found in the poor, backwards stores of my hometown--"

Jake actually lifts his thumb to his nose and waggles his fingers like a six-year-old, making a rude noise.

Amy lifts her foot from the accelerator in silent threat, and Jake mimes good behaviour and settles back into his seat.

After a while he says, "I bet you filled your school texts with little coloured post-its, didn't you? I bet you read them cover-to-cover and never wrote in them once."

"You wrote in textbooks?" Amy asks, aghast.

"Oh, totally. And drew little doodles in them, too."

"You didn't."

"Mmhm, in *coloured pen*."

"Lalalalala," Amy says desperately, cramming one ear against her shoulder as she drives, and hoping her hair covers the other.

Mrs Holloway's store turns out to stock both chocolate-coated pretzels and Amy's favourite flavour of Jolly Rancher chews--watermelon--which she learns when Jake tosses a pack of them onto her lap as he climbs back into the car.

"Helen Holloway remembers you," he says, tugging his pretzel packet open with a plastic pop. "You know what she said? *No, Amy can't have those, they'll stick in her braces.*"

"They did stick in my braces," Amy says. "I wasn't allowed Jolly Ranchers for three years, and the day after I got my braces off I ate four packs in ten minutes and then threw up all over our back step. Bright red vomit, too. My mom was so angry."

"What are you doing?" Jake laughs. "Are you literally trying to open that with your *knee*--here, give it to me."

Amy surrenders the candy from where she's been fumbling at it one-handed, and Jake unwraps one pink-red square. "Want me to throw it?"

"No, Jake, I don't want you to throw it."

Jake drops it into her palm without further fuss. "So," he says. "What thrilling adventure do you have planned for this afternoon? Not that anything could top Amy Santiago's grand tour of the Actual Most Boring Town In America."

In the end Amy doesn't have to make any plans, because Julian--his spirits only slightly flattened by a morning spent helping weed the gardens and listening to their mother's hundredth rendition of You Just Need To Meet The Right Woman (Or Man)--declares over lunch that he and Jake are going to spend the afternoon bonding over ten-pin bowling.

At the very prospect, Jake instantly becomes a version of himself out of a 1950s musical, and starts drawling about ice cream sodas and *jive music*, probably to cover up for the fact that

he's crap at bowling. The last time the precinct went to the nearest bowling alley, for Hitchcock's birthday (two weeks late, because he's so prone to hopefully lying about it whenever he wants cake that nobody can ever remember when the real date is), Rosa, Gina and Sergeant Jeffords wiped the floor with everyone else there, while Jake tried to convince the unimpressed teenagers using the adjacent lane that he'd totally meant to send his ball down the gutter, it was called *psychological warfare*, geez, look it up.

Whatever; maybe Amy can convince Julian that the satisfaction of thrashing her new boyfriend at the super-manly indoor sport of rolling balls at phalluses (Gina's words, not hers) is worth at least half a favour.

For their part, Amy's parents are pleased with the plan because they probably think Jake's responsible-boyfriendness is going to *rub off* on Julian, they think he's a good *role model*, like showing Julian that normal thirty-four-year-old guys want to be in committed relationships where they do things like attend high school reunions and meet parents. It's all so sickeningly ironic Amy could scream.

Instead she takes her mood with her, like a small stormcloud bundled up in her arms, and goes to dump it into her grandmother's lap.

Rita Baez still lives in the house where Amy begrudgingly and poorly played the piano before she was allowed to go and join the game of cops-and-robbers outside. There's still a porcelain girl holding a bucket on top of the piano, the plump embroidered cushions still smell of lavender, and there's always, somehow, a batch of arroz con leche in the fridge for hungry descendents of all ages.

Amy sits on the beautiful fabric of the couch and sullenly shovels cold, creamy, raisin-studded goodness into her mouth with--ooh, is this a new teaspoon? It's pretty.

Halfway into the bowl her shoulders have come down from where they were tensed near her ears, and she's laughing at a story about her grandfather trying to make it home from a chaotic Saturday shift in time for their anniversary dinner.

"The look on his face when he opened the door!" her grandmother says, laughing too. "Like he was expecting tigers to leap at him. And I was sitting at the table with my hair perfectly set, so *tragic* I looked, like a real film star, all ready to tell him that dinner had burned."

"Had it?"

Her grandmother scoffs elegantly, and her eyes soften. "Of course not. Warm in the oven for hours, and tastier for it. I couldn't punish him for caring about his job. I admired that in him so much, even when I was angry about the late nights, or worried about the danger."

Amy sets her empty bowl down on the table and feels an ache in her throat that's not the vanilla, something large and uncertain and heavy.

"It can be a lot to ask of someone you love," she says. The words don't sound totally her own, a distasteful echo of another person's voice in her mouth.

"Don't settle for less, mamita. You find someone who understands," she tells Amy. "Someone who won't hold it over your head."

"Someone like you, huh." Amy smiles.

Her abuela smiles back, and the mischievous dimples appear, the ones that are so prominent in the faded wedding photograph that sits in pride of place on the polished coffee table. The dimples are obscured with wrinkles now, but they're there nonetheless.

"You should be so lucky," Rita Baez says airily.

So Amy's feeling more settled, more forgiving, as she gets dressed for the reunion dinner. She spent a long time choosing what to wear, and now that it's on, she's half convinced she should have gone with her first-nicest black cocktail dress, or the pink one with the full skirt, or the fiendishly expensive grey one she impulse-bought last week when she was having an ugly day and her hair smelled of tuna from spending an hour in the fish market interviewing an eyewitness to an assault, a mostly-deaf Greek man who calmly gutted and filleted while Amy bawled questions into his good ear. The whole experience had left Amy demoralised and splattered in fish scales, and weak for a 40% OFF sign.

Amy sighs and smooths her hands down her dress one last time. The one she chose to bring is so dark a red as to be almost black, like peppers blistered under a grill, and it's a soft wool that hugs her legs to just above the knee. She toes on the patent leather heels that match her thin belt, and holds two sets of silver earrings to her cheek before deciding on the ones that dangle like tinsel, like stiletto blades, the ones that always make her feel as sharp as they look.

The vibe of it all is perfectly high school, aptly enough. Standing in her old tiny bedroom, in front of the dresser, using the side of her finger to tidy the line of her lipstick; she could be waiting for Mikey Goode to come by and pick her up for prom.

She even does the whole walking-dramatically-down-the-stairs routine, even though the only person at the base of them to appreciate her performance is Julian, who flashes her a smile.

"Well, *someone's* getting some tonight," he says cheerfully. "And in our ancestral home, too. Have you no shame?"

Amy rolls her eyes and pretends she can't feel the blush staining her neck, safe behind the cowl collar of the dress.

"Have you seen my date?"

"Not down yet," Julian says. "He must still be primping."

"Hey, my hair takes *effort*," says Jake's voice, from behind her.

Of course Jake would be the one to get the big stair-descending moment. He's wearing a suit, all crisp black and white, and it gives Amy a nausea-punctuated memory of his bleary eyes looking up at her from a tangle of sheets on the floor of her Vegas hotel room.

He doesn't look bleary now. Or crumpled. He looks...he looks really good, actually.

Jake doesn't altogether stop in his tracks when he sees her, but there's a definite break in the rhythm of his steps, and his mouth does fall open. Amy feels a flutter of something pleased and almost affectionate as he gazes at her, the constant flux and laughter of his face momentarily paused. She touches her throat with the tips of her fingers, self-conscious, and swallows past a dry tongue.

"I know, it doesn't have a giant bow on it," she says. "Try to contain your disappointment."

Jake grins. "I'll do my best."

Once they're out the front door, standing in the porch light as Amy ties the belt of her trench coat, Jake fumbles in a pocket of his suit and moves close enough that he can hold out his hand, with a small object in the centre of it.

"Um. Here. Public event, we're married again, so..."

"Oh," Amy says.

She's been assuming that Jake forgot that particular term of the bet, that he tacked it on in the heat of annoyance. The ring is a simple band of silver with a single moonstone, and the metal looks cold but it's warm, when Amy takes it between her fingertips, from where it's been tucked away close to Jake's body.

"That belonged to my grandmother," he says, not meeting her eyes. "So maybe try not to, you know, drop it in a body cavity or a bowl of punch."

Amy blinks. "I thought you said--"

"Even hideous rings cost money, it turns out. And I have approximately none of that. So."

At this point Amy could mention the ring from the Worst Date Of All Time, which cost a whole dollar and probably rolled down a sewer grate on that dirty street. But the moonstone gleams even in the dirty too-orange light, and the setting is old-fashioned and fussy in a way that Amy might have chosen for herself.

Her own grandmother's ring lives on her right hand. She slides this one onto her left.

"Okay," she says. "Let's go."

To her irritation, the high school does undergo something of a genre change after dark, with the cosy trees transformed into dense reaching shadows. Amy fiddles with the buckle of her coat all the way up the main path, and doesn't comment when Jake grabs her hand and tucks it through his arm as though he's rewriting their whole fake backstory in his head so that it takes place circa 1850. Amy could do with a ladylike fan, actually; her coat's a bit too warm for the evening air, and at least it'd occupy her other hand.

The gym--a new building, since Amy's time, with a shiny floor and a vague rubbery smell--is half full of tables, but there's no assigned seating, thank God. There is a whole array of name

badges, which Amy tries not to scowl at. There's no good way to wear a badge as a woman in evening dress, when your only options are poking holes in an expensive garment or clipping it sideways from whatever fold or flap or hem you can find. Name badges, like so much of the world, were designed for men.

"Hi there! Name?" says name badge JULIE FITZPATRICK, behind the table.

"Simon and Amy Braithwaite," Jake says.

Amy puts the force of her weight through the square half-inch of surface area that's the heel of her shoe, planted on top of his foot. Jake's face becomes a rictus of mostly teeth.

"Amy Santiago," Amy says. "Plus one."

"Amy, wow, of course," says Julie, with nothing like recognition in her voice.

Amy takes AMY SANTIAGO and manages to perch the badge on the side of the cowl in such a way that only one of the corners pokes uncomfortably into her skin. It'll do.

"Why don't I get one?" Jake demands. "And I think you *broke* my foot."

Amy ignores him. Julie Fitzpatrick was--on the swim team? In Amy's AP History class, too, that's right, sitting in the back row giggling at words like *concubine*, and never too far from the shoulder of--

MARISSA BAXTER, badge pinned mercilessly to the slope of her chest, fabric damage bedamned. She's swaying the sway of the easily bored, one hand clutching a full glass of red wine, as Amy and Jake make their way across the floor, and she catches Amy's eye mostly because Amy is staring like a rude person. The lushness of precocious puberty has thickened out into a solid figure, Amy's memory of long brown curls coming up hard against a choppy modern bob dirtied with blonde highlights.

"Marissa," Amy blurts. "Hey! I mean, hi. How have you been? It's so good to see you, I mean everyone. And you too!" --and shit, her voice is too loud. Too enthusiastic. Nobody is that happy to see someone they barely interacted with, at school, years ago. Come on, Amy, get it together.

Everything else about Marissa might have changed, but the slow blink of calculated attention is the same.

"Amy Santiago," she says. "Yeah, hey."

"Jake!" says Jake, leaping in with his usual intolerance of silence. "Amy's husband."

This blink is even slower. "Sure," Marissa says, and takes a sip of her wine. Then she inclines her head to someone sitting to her left and strikes up or possibly continues a conversation, with an obvious flick of her heavy lashes back at Jake and Amy.

Most of Amy's working up to a huff--*well*, that was *rude*, etc.--but somehow it turns into a moment when Amy feels like--like this is the first time she's ever worn proper heels, and

she's not so much wobbling as perpetually uncertain as to where her weight should be, and there's a spotlight shining off the disco ball and hitting her, improbably, just her, illuminating her completely and without mercy, Amy Santiago, back in the smallness of her former life with something to prove, here to *win*, how pathetic, when anyone can see--everyone can see, everyone must be looking--she's the same stiff girl who always stood apart feeling exactly this mixture of frustration and jealousy and a bafflement so strong it's like choking, very *much* like choking, in fact, like her lungs aren't working properly, like the air's stuck in there and refusing to leave--

The touch on her waist is like something alien, from a dream. But Amy's body is startled enough that it abandons the incipient panic attack, and she manages to exhale.

Jake's palm stays where it is, his arm loosely around her back, and he darts a look at her.

"Amy?"

"I'm fine," Amy says, sucking in air, and out again, yes, she's fine.

Jake's arm tightens, pulling her in until her whole side is pressed against his, solid and warm. After a moment Amy remembers that they're married and this is normal and expected and she's allowed, so she lets herself lean into it, grateful.

"Remember, blackcurrant schnapps in New Zealand," Jake says.

Amy bites her lip to keep the giggle in, then remembers she's got lipstick on and un-bites it.

"I'm going to the ladies'," she says. "Try not to completely ruin my reputation before I get back."

It's a vain hope; when she's patted her cheeks with cool water, fixed her makeup and emerged into the noise of the room again, Jake is storytelling, of course. It's obvious in the wave of his hands and the fact that he's managed to attract a small circle of onlookers.

Amy arms herself with two flutes of champagne from a passing waiter and takes a swig from one of them that's generous enough to send bubbles tittering up into her nose.

She hears her own name when she gets within earshot of the group, and resigns herself to hearing all about the exploits of Amy Braithwaite, medical officer in the United States Navy.

"--and then the perp said, What're you gonna do, sweetheart, *nag* me to death? and then Amy grabbed his wrist and twisted him down onto his knees and he was making this *whining* sound, like a three-year-old-girl, it was so beautiful, and the next day she found like twenty kay-gees of cocaine hidden in the wall of his dealer's house."

"You did say Amy *Santiago*, right?" says someone.

"Detective Amy Santiago," says Jake. "That's right."

Amy elbows her way into the circle. "Excuse me," she murmurs, because she's not entirely incapable of playing it cool.

"Darling," Jake says, and it sounds easy, natural. "I was just talking about you."

"Yeah, I heard," Amy says.

He smiles at her, and she doesn't bother to break it down into components, just smiles back. Aside from the asshole who sounded so sceptical a moment ago, most of the people in the circle are looking at Amy with admiration. It's like magic. Amy floats forward, gliding on her heels, and hands the second glass of champagne to Jake. His fingers brush and linger on hers as he takes it. Abracadabra.

"So, Amy," says BENJAMIN FORD, six foot and already balding, with an alcoholic flush to his cheeks. "Have you ever shot anyone?"

Amy's got her the sharp point of her shoe all ready to deploy, but for once in his life Jake shuts up, just stands behind her shoulder and lets her answer the question, and Amy relaxes back into the magic. For once in *her* life there's no niggling sense that she's in a complicated race, or maybe a scavenger hunt, and that she missed a small, vital part of the initial briefing and so she's constantly a step behind everyone else no matter how hard she tries or how fast she runs. No. Tonight she's got a successful career, she's got a husband, she's rolled the right numbers. This is how life is supposed to be.

That champagne disappeared fast. She should get some more.

"Oh, look, they're serving dinner," she says, gracious like one of those well-dressed and totally poised people from Downton Abbey. "We should sit down."

"Oh my God," says Jake, as they take their seats. "This is amazing, we're definitely winning, did you *see* that one woman, she looks like that florist we found two days after she had a heart attack in her tanning bed--"

"Shh," Amy hisses, delighted.

Jake gives her a wordless look while he's pushing all the salad parts of his salad to the side of the plate. The look says: you would not be having nearly as much fun if you weren't with someone who knows that the point of this evening is maximum gloating and minimum guilt about bitchy comments, but if you were instead with someone who would make an effort to be fair and pleasant and *boring*, eg. your recently-ex-boyfriend Teddy.

Okay, Amy might be reading into that.

Either way, he's right. Amy concedes the point by transferring the bacon parts of her salad from her plate to his.

"You're such a great Jew," is all she says.

"Mmm," Jake says. "Pig product."

She only has to kick Jake under the table once during the meal, when a rambling story about his time undercover takes a confusing turn into comparative yacht-shopping, complete with

what even Amy can tell is Jake's utter lack of knowledge about yachts, and she realises he's veered off into Simon Braithwaite territory again.

Other than that, everything goes well.

"Hi," someone says, as Amy is engaged in a silent game of calorie-counting chicken with the white chocolate mousse cake which was set in front of the empty chair to her right. "Amy?"

"Jill!" Amy says, honestly pleased. "Hi. Um, this is my husband, Jake."

Jillian Cho, argumentative in AP English and voted Most Likely To Be Arrested At A Protest March, reaches over Amy's shoulder and shakes Jake's hand. "Nice suit, dude, very dapper."

Jake beams. "Yours too."

"Are you here with someone?" Amy asks, before she can turn off the part of her that's in competitive autopilot. She feels dickish about it, but Jillian just laughs.

"Yeah, I'm catching hell for dragging her here when she can't even, and I quote, drink the small town stupid away. Second trimester," she adds, making a face.

"Oh," Amy says. "Congratulations?"

"Anyway, Jackson was saying you're a hotshot NYPD detective now? Come and amuse Nancy for me. She loves cop shows, maybe she'll forgive me for the alcohol thing."

Amy smiles. "Sure."

Jill's partner Nancy does appreciate Amy's grisly work stories, but it turns out she appreciates even more the fact that Amy too was an art history major and can still talk semi-intelligibly about Francis Bacon and Bellini's sculptures. When Amy makes it back to her own table, there's a small and unenthused crowd of people starting to fill the 'dancefloor' section of the gym--God, it's totally prom all over again--and there's a blonde woman sitting in Amy's vacated seat giggling at everything Jake says.

It's been fifteen years, sure, but Amy recognises that determined, flirtatious head tilt and that lazy voice.

"--must say I'm surprised," the voice is saying, as Amy approaches.

Jake flicks his eyes up to meet Amy's over the blonde head for a lightning moment, amused and bright, then return to looking at Mandy fucking Lloyd, excuse Amy's--no, no excuses, *Mandy fucking Lloyd*--without any change in his expression. It's an old code of theirs and it means: wait, I've got this, they've almost woven enough rope to hang themselves, stand by with the handcuffs. The familiarity of it stops Amy's feet.

"Amy Santiago? God, she was always so uptight. You strike me as the kind of guy who'd prefer a bit of *fun*."

Just in case her meaning wasn't clear to, say, *Martian observers*, Mandy punctuates that by leaning in and stroking Jake's arm, all the way from his elbow to where the cuff of his shirt emerges from the suit jacket, and...is she fondling his bare wrist?

Amy takes a deep breath and discovers that she's white-hot furious. Mandy doesn't know anything, they don't know *anything*, all these people with their quicksand nostalgia pulling at Amy's balance. They don't know her and they don't know Jake, and the two of them have *plenty* of fun, and how *dare* Mandy Lloyd put her soft, silly hands all over Amy's husband like she has every right to--

Wow, look at that, her feet are moving again.

"Amy," Mandy says, without a hint of embarrassment. "So nice to see you."

Amy smiles at her. It feels weirdly tight on her mouth, and she's not sure what she's doing with her teeth. Good.

"Come and dance," Amy says, curling her hand into Jake's. This necessitates Mandy pulling her own hand away, not without some awkwardness. Also good.

"Absolutely, yes," Jake says.

"Are you any good, Jake?" Mandy lazes, draping herself forward over the table; Jesus, the woman's shameless.

"I'll have you know we very nearly won an amateur ballroom dancing competition last year," Jake says, with a totally straight face, and Amy has to drag him upright and onto the floor before she ruins a perfectly good act of territory-marking by laughing.

"I hope you realise that now you have to actually dance with me," Jake says. "Or, no, I have to actually dance with *you*, and I think we've already established that I am a dancing god and you have seven left feet."

"Seven?"

"It's a medical miracle."

"Three years of tap lessons doesn't make you a dancing god, Jake."

"Oh, really?"

Jake drops Amy's hand from where he's been trying to force her into a rhythm, or something, and he does an honest-to-God spin, tucking one foot behind the other and flicking his hands out to the side. He looks so pleased with himself and so ridiculous that Amy almost rolls her eyes and leaves him to it, but there are people grinning and whistling, widening the circle around him as he hams it up outrageously and tips an invisible hat in Amy's direction.

The Fred Astaire act lasts for the rest of the song, and when that one finishes and transitions into something slower, Jake holds out his hand to Amy again and she lets her smile carry her

forward. They fit together, his other hand in the small of her back, their bodies pressed close and their feet--well. Their feet.

"It's *swaying*," Jake hisses. "How are you bad at this?"

"I am not bad at it," Amy protests, and promptly steps on his foot.

"Amy, seriously," Jake says. "You're overthinking it. Just--dance."

"Dance, dance," she mutters in his ear, mostly to feel the tremble of laughter in his shoulders where her hand rests.

She inhales the warm air, with its smell of gym rubber beneath the soft bite of Jake's aftershave, and then she exhales. Just dance. Stop thinking. Just dance.

"That's it," Jake says, and dares them into a twirl.

Like some kind of miracle, Amy's feet do what they're supposed to, and triumph calls a grin onto her face. "Look at that."

"Look at that," Jake echoes.

Amy looks--at him. It feels dangerous to do that, all of a sudden, like stepping out of safe shadows with your gun raised, shielded by nothing but your badge and authority. She's not thinking. She's dancing; she's feeling Jake's hand hot on her spine through the wool of her dress; she's moving with him, their faces are close, and over his shoulder she can see Mandy Lloyd watching them with a sour expression.

A fierce emotion flows through Amy as she splays her fingers at the back of Jake's neck, the tips of them buried in his soft hair, and she'll blame that fierceness and the champagne in equal measures, later, for the fact that she takes a deep breath and pulls him down.

The touch of his mouth on hers is gentle and good, shockingly good, actually. Amy digs her fingertips into his skin, not quite meaning to, and Jake makes a near-silent noise that might be a question. His neck is rigid, the muscles tight. She can't read the line of his lips with hers, whether they're thin or smiling. Whether they're parting in shock or in hunger.

Amy kisses him again, more surely, granting him permission, granting it to both of them, *stop thinking*. This is--making a point, this is playacting, right, and she's prepared to make a big show of it if that's what the occasion calls for.

But Jake doesn't push, doesn't deepen it. He kisses her back and it stays simple, easy, an all-the-time-in-the-world kiss that nevertheless sends heat flurrying in an interested way up Amy's spine to cradle the base of her skull, curious and joyful. It shouldn't be this easy. Amy keeps her eyes closed and balances herself between Jake's mouth and Jake's arms, wrapping her up like she's something precious, like he doesn't want to let her go.

She's contemplating whether her knees actually feel weak or whether that's the champagne again, when into her head pops the image of Jake, saying goodbye to her in the parking lot.

Rambling his way through a confession that she had no idea how to deal with, at the time, no ability to process as part of the existing Jake Peralta context.

Bets are one thing, faking it is one thing, but this...this could actually be a cruel thing to do.

This game of theirs has already collected one casualty. She's hurt Teddy enough; she doesn't need to hurt Jake as well.

Amy opens her eyes and breaks the kiss. She doesn't know where to look, so she looks over his shoulder again, where Mandy-fucking-Lloyd's face has curdled into further levels of envy. Which is stupid: it wasn't even that good of a kiss. It wasn't deep or frantic or sexy or-- anything.

It wasn't. Anything.

Jake says, "If you think you can bluff me into calling the bet like *that*, you're going to have to try harder."

Amy's eyes dart back to his lips and she thinks about trying harder. She thinks about it vividly.

Wait, hold on-- "Try harder?" she says, indignant. "What does that mean? Are you saying I'm a bad kisser?"

Jake opens his mouth, closes it, and opens it again. It's unclear whether he's actually censoring himself or whether he's paralysed with the sheer number of possible comebacks.

While that verdict is pending, Amy casts a glance around. Mandy's not the only person staring at them, by now. Does this still count as winning at life after high school? It's hard to tell.

"So much for Most Appropriate," Jake says, finally, and Amy bursts out laughing.

It's a piece of information that follows Amy home from the reunion dinner and then follows her all the way back to New York, the fact that she kissed Jake Peralta and enjoyed it. Like all inconvenient but vital pieces of information that don't fit with the rest of the evidence--and so might provide the key to a whole case, given enough time--it niggles at her. It hangs out in the back of her mind and tries to sidle forward in quiet moments: when she's standing in the deli queue kidding herself that she'll try something new instead of falling back on her usual sandwich order, when she's kneeling on her apartment floor matching each dryer-warm sock to its fellow, when she's patiently holding the conversational pause as Luis shouts, "No, Evie! *Not* for eating!" on the other end of the phone, to a background chorus of three-year-old squeals.

Much to Amy's dismay, it also comes up at work.

"Captain's going to put someone on the James Street murder," Rosa says.

Amy snaps her head around and locates Jake. They're standing at roughly equal distances from the door to the captain's office.

"Dibs!" Amy shouts, abandoning all pretense at dignity, and starts to move.

"You can't call dibs on a case!"

"Uh-huh, that sounds like *loser* talk to me--"

"Auggghh!" says Jake, as Amy throws herself bodily in front of him and makes it through the open office door. She gets the door closed and locked while Jake's still stamping his foot or whatever, and can't resist the urge to press herself up against the glass as annoyingly as possible: ooh, look, I'm on *this* side, you're on *that* side.

For his part, Jake presses himself just as annoyingly against the other side and then their faces are close, and his eyes are wide and there's an unshaved patch just under the left side of his mouth and Amy jerks back, because it's stupid to imagine that she can feel the heat of his body through the glass and the blinds and the--everything--but she *can*, she's hot and prickly all over, and Jake has an odd expression on his face, tight and surprised

Amy fumbles with the cords and eventually flips the blinds closed, blocking Jake from view.

"If you're quite finished, Santiago," Captain Holt says.

"Um. I'm done. Sir," she says, adjusting her shirt. "May I say you're looking very--"

"This is about James Street, isn't it."

"Don't do it, Captain!" Jake hollers, muffled, through the door. "She's using her body for evil! Don't give in to her womanly wiles!"

Amy feels a blush coming on. "*Peralta*," she yells, anyway.

"Hmm," the captain says, looking at her thoughtfully. Well, probably thoughtfully. It might be...sympathetically? Disdainfully?

God, Amy's not getting any better at this.

"Sir--"

"Were you planning to use wiles on me, Detective Santiago?"

"No, sir!" Amy hastens to assure him. "I would never!"

"I have wiles as well!" Jake shouts. He's hammering on the door with his knuckles now. "Captain! Captain, ask her about *my* wiles!"

Captain Holt raises a single eyebrow and Amy's blush goes radioactive.

"Murder case?" she pleads.

It's just information. It's just...a complication.

But it's nothing Amy can't handle; she's a professional, she can work with someone she's attracted to. More importantly, she can crush someone she's attracted to into *pieces* when it comes to winning bets. It's all about prioritising.

When she gets out of the captain's office--with his word that he'll at least consider recommending her to the team in charge of the James Street murder, success!--Jake's subsided and is sulking with his head on his arms at Gina's desk. Gina is absently flicking gummi bears into his hair with the hand not occupied with her phone.

"I'm serious," Gina says. "Marriage counselling."

"That is the worst idea you've ever had," Jake says. "And I say this as the person who was present when you put an ad on Craigslist asking for Hugh Jackman's toenail clippings."

"Now that I'm in a relationship--"

Jake lifts his head. "Since when?" he demands.

Gina flaps the gummi bear hand dismissively. "I told you, there's some guy I'm seeing."

"The same guy? And you're not engaged to him yet? You get engaged at the drop of a hat." Jake stares at her for a few beats and then a slow grin breaks out on his face. "Gina, you *like* this one, don't you?"

Gina gives him a look that even Amy can interpret as: you want to lecture *me* about engagements?

"Now that I'm in a relationship," Gina charges on, "I've decided to share my expertise with the world. I'm a very giving person, Jake. I'm doing a course," she adds. "On the internet."

Jake's face is a picture. A picture probably titled Study In Discomfort, With Stupid Hair.

"But Gina, we're not--"

"Not actually married?" Gina can raise her eyebrows higher than mortal eyebrows should be raised. She gives a throaty laugh. "Uh, yeah. You are. And I have to do this counselling assignment for my course. Amy, get over here and sit down."

"We have work to do," Amy tries.

Gina's flicking through screens on her phone so fast Amy's thumb aches in sympathy. "Yeah, uh-huh, sure. In a minute. Here we go, *roleplay*. You can have different names for this, I guess. Breathe deeply. Mmmmm. Connect to the mask. You are *Susan*. And *Peter*."

"Wait," Amy says. "As in the kids from Narnia?"

"When have you had time to read a book?" Jake asks. "I don't think I've ever seen you put your phone down."

"Uh, ereader app?" says Gina, wiggling her phone. "Some of us are *cultured*, Jake."

"Gina," says Amy. "Weren't they siblings?"

That gets her a pitying look. "Aw, Amy. It's a metaphor."

"A metaphor for *what*?"

"Shh, Susan," says Jake, who's passed through resigned and has come out the other side looking weirdly into it. "We should be glad she doesn't actually worship a creepy giant lion that may or may not have given me confusing nightmares when I was a kid. Ugh. Okay, no, now I'm having flashbacks to the movie. I'll be Jesse. Susan and Jesse."

Amy rolls her eyes. "Yeah? Where's your soulpatch, *Jesse*?"

"Where's your ring, *Susan*?"

"Children!" Gina shouts.

Amy feels a jolt of something cool, and curls her left hand up without looking at it.

"I actually do have work to do," she says. "Sorry, Gina."

It was probably a reflex on Jake's part, a way to score points by dredging up the past. But Amy's still got the moonstone ring. She slipped it into her jewellery bag at the end of the reunion night and made a mental note to return it to Jake when they were back in Brooklyn, but she keeps forgetting to bring it in to the precinct.

The next day she puts it on her finger and wears it to work. She doesn't say anything. Jake doesn't say anything, though Amy watches his eyes and she knows he's noticed. Another game, then.

Two days after that, Jake's watching *her* eyes, and cracking his knuckles in the morning briefing loudly and incessantly enough that Captain Holt has to pause proceedings and subject him to a direct stream of quelling sarcasm. Amy sneaks looks at Jake's hands, meanly, while he's squirming and distracted. The ring on his finger is silver and plain.

Amy doesn't say anything about that, either.

Rosa does; Rosa says, "Jake, seriously?" and Jake laughs and doesn't look at Amy, and says, "What's the matter, Diaz, never seen a symbol of eternal matrimony before?"

Nothing's changed. The terms are the same.

But now Amy will be going about her day and she'll see the flash of silver against a coffee cup, as Jake's leaning against his desk and frowning at the case outline she drew on the oldest whiteboard, and she'll feel like the floor has dropped away for a few seconds, leaving her treading air.

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Amy's hand is close to shaking as she uncaps the marker, but she manages to keep it steady as she writes a single name on the oldest whiteboard, top and centre, and then draws a fierce swirl of a circle around it.

"Whoa, Santiago," Rosa says, halting next to her. "Really?"

"I'm..." Amy calculates. "Ninety-one percent sure."

Rosa tilts her head with a yeah-okay-fair kind of expression.

Amy says, "Jake was chatting to Naomi Caplan, the head of admin at Major Crimes--"

"Chatting *up*," Rosa says, rolling her eyes.

"Hey!" Jake protests, jogging over from the other side of the room. "Naomi's a friend of my mom's, I haven't tried to hit on her since I was, like, eleven. Plus she gives me amazing rugelach."

"And gossip," Amy says.

"And gossip," Jake agrees. "How else would we know that Major Crimes brought O'Grady in for questioning about his drug racket three months ago, but couldn't make anything stick?"

"Jack O'Grady," Sergeant Jeffords says, coming over as well. "Have we heard of him?"

"We punched him in the face once," Jake says. "And by we, sarge, I definitely mean you."

"You mean little Johnny O'Grady?" The sergeant frowns. "I thought we must have scared him clean, we haven't picked him up for--two years now?"

"He's graduated," Amy says grimly. "He's keeping his hands off the goods, now; he's found underlings to get picked up for him."

"That's a way to come in two years," Rosa says. "I didn't think he had that much clout."

"He didn't," Jake says. "But he does now. Trust me. Even the Ianuccis preferred to ignore him, even when he started nibbling away at their territory."

"What made the difference?" asks Boyle. Now half the precinct is crowded in front of Amy and Jake's board; Amy's not sure how she feels about this. Having the rest of the team see what she's trying to do makes it more real, somehow, and like failing to make anything of it will be more real as well.

"Money," Amy says.

"You think that's the link to the match fixing?" Rosa says. "Yeah, I get it. He's got a sponsor."

"That's good work, Santiago," the sergeant says. "But you know that's still only a third of a case, don't you? You've got a lot of gaps to fill."

"Which is why we need to know what Major Crimes has on him," Jake says.

Rosa snorts. "Good luck with *that*."

"We have to go after the Vulture," Amy says. Such a dramatic announcement deserves more gravitas than she can really give it, but she's gratified when Boyle gasps. "I need him to fill my gaps."

"That's what she said!" Jake says. "Yes. High five me that, Charles."

Boyle looks pained, but does it.

"Honeymoon's over, I see," Rosa drawls.

Sergeant Jeffords glances between Jake and Amy. He, too, looks pained. "I'm gonna want to be able to deny all knowledge of whatever's coming next, aren't I?"

"Sarge," Jake intones. "This is for your own good."

The sergeant sighs and goes back to his own desk. Nobody's pretending he's not going to be keeping an ear out for their conversation, but at least plausible deniability is a bit more plausible now.

"The Vulture's never going to tell you what he knows," says Rosa.

"I know," says Jake. "We have to get a copy of the file."

Rosa snorts. "Yeah, *sure*. You think he's gonna let us near anything of his, after that thing with the corkscrew? He knows that we want to out-Vulture him. Roughly. And repeatedly."

"Right," says Amy. "So we get him out of the office by making him think he's got a chance of closing one of our cases."

"Really?" Boyle says. "He's not stupid enough to follow a tip without making calls first."

"No." This is the bad part. "So we need an active case that actually is close to being solved."

A thoughtful silence falls.

Three heads turn thoughtfully in Boyle's direction.

"What," Boyle says. "What--no! Not the Fraser case!"

"You said yourself, you're almost there," Amy says. This feels mean, like stealing candy from--well, it's Boyle, so like stealing expensive single-origin cocoa beans from a very discerning baby.

"Come on," Boyle pleads. "Can't you guys find another way to make the link to O'Grady?"

"This is the only lead we have." Jake puts his hands on Boyle's shoulders, his face serious. Oh, man, Boyle is done for: Jake's using his it's-you-and-me-buddy voice. "Joey Harmon's not talking to anyone, and we've got no excuse to bring him in again. It's this file or nothing. Charles Boyle, you're our only hope."

The brief, doomed flare of Boyle's self-interest is stifled, as they watch, by the rising wave of his innate team spirit and generous fellowship. Amy admires it, she really does. But she doesn't know how people like that ever get *anything done*.

Boyle heaves a sigh. "Alright, Jake."

"Yes!" Jake crows, squeezing Boyle's shoulders. "Charles, you're the best."

As the only person in the precinct with an established non-Vulture contact at Major Crimes, Jake is the one to lay the bait. He enters the office with an utterly fabricated message for Naomi Caplan from his mother, and--as he tells them all afterwards--manages to work the Fraser case into conversation as soon as the Vulture is in earshot.

("And *then* I overcompensated." Jake screws his face into something approaching earnest horror. "Oh, I, um, I mean, Charles is still *so* far away from closing that case, there are still *so many* dead leads--you know, stuff like that.")

Amy and Rosa stake out the closest street entrance to the Major Crimes office. Amy assuages her conscience by a) telling herself they're doing this in the name of putting away a serious bad guy, b) reminding herself that if the Vulture weren't so much of an asshole about their precinct they'd probably be able to get hold of the file through normal inter-departmental channels, albeit slowly, and c) using the stakeout time to catch up on some of the endless staff-eval survey forms on her phone.

"Why do they call it a Survey Monkey?" Amy asks. "Wait, are you--oh come on, don't text Gina, she already thinks I'm some kind of inept senior citizen."

"Uh huh," Rosa says. Her phone vibrates with Gina's reply.

"Hashtag Shit Santiago Says," Amy reads. "What? What does that even mean?"

"Oh, hey, on the move," says Rosa.

Amy looks up. The Vulture is standing in the street entrance with a bag of gear slung over his shoulder, causing a small gridlock where people are trying to move either in or out of the building. He takes his sunglasses out of his pocket and slips them onto his face with the air of someone about to deliver a heinous pun.

"Sexy jerkoff," Rosa mutters.

"God, you have weird taste in men," Amy says.

Rosa smirks and drops the paper bag with the crumbs of her stakeout-friend from Nutmeg--Boyle has gotten them all hooked--into the nearest trash can. As soon as the Vulture heads down the street away from them, Amy and Rosa duck around to the door where the building's fire stairs open to the street.

"We really should tell someone that the street door opens from the outside," Amy says, as they're climbing the concrete steps. "It's a real security hazard."

"Santiago, the door opens if you jiggle the handle for exactly seven seconds and lean down-and-right," Rosa says. "As long as nobody tells any *criminals*, I think we're fine."

Despite all conscience-assuaging Amy feels kind of criminal herself, sneaking around the Major Crimes office and half expecting that the Vulture will leap out from behind a door, despite the fact that she watched him leave with her own eyes and no doubt he is even now crowding in on Boyle's interview and--

Ugh, Amy's getting mad just thinking about it.

Luckily, Major Crimes is well used to unfamiliar and semi-familiar faces wandering in and out, prone as they are to snapping up other people's cases and reaching uneasy arrangements regarding jurisdiction. Amy has to duck her head to avoid making eye contact with Douglas from the 4-5, who appears to be arguing about chain of evidence with an unimpressed blonde. Rosa does her usual thing of stalking around with so much confidence that nobody questions her, and Amy's got a good don't-bother-me frown in her repertoire. She shoots it at the room at large while Rosa rummages through the open cases cabinet and emerges with the O'Grady file.

"I suppose there's a silver lining to the fact that the NYPD still insists on hard copies of everything," Amy says.

"Yeah," says Rosa, jabbing with unnecessary force at the buttons of the office copier. "At this rate we'll be moved to that paperless system some time in the middle of the next century."

Rosa slips the copies beneath her formidable jacket and they make their escape.

Of course, the Vulture being the Vulture, he can't resist the urge to hang around the 9-9 afterwards, crowing about his victory in the Fraser case. Boyle looks close enough to tears that Amy doubts he's faking it, and he quickly disappears into the break room to drown his sorrows in a Tupperware container of seafood bisque.

"Detective Diaz," the Vulture says, leering. "Ready to admit that you're hopelessly in love with me?"

"Detective Pembroke," Rosa says. "Not in a million fucking years."

"Warming to me, I get it." The Vulture tosses a stapler from hand to hand and looks around to see whose eye he can catch. Amy pretends to be really interested in her coffee; she's a shitty liar at the best of times, and she knows she'll break out in a smug expression if she doesn't get a grip on herself.

Just her luck, the Vulture decides to saunter in her direction anyway.

"Ah," he says. "Jonah!"

"Okay, first of all, I think you mean *Judas*," Amy says. "And second of all, I don't think you can call me that when I never agreed to join your team."

"And I bet you're regretting that now, huh? Just think, Santiago. You could be part of a department that actually closes cases, instead of dragging your feet in this useless stinkhole of a precinct. That kind of poor judgement is why you're never going to make it any higher than plain old detective."

"Hey!" says Jake, in his amateur-dramatics voice. "Don't talk that way about the love of my life!"

"Oh, man," says Amy into her coffee.

"Please," the Vulture says, swinging his attention around to Jake with something between a scoff and a snort. Jake, for his part, is still tapping away at his computer keyboard. "As if Detective Santiago would go for *your* big white ass. It would be a crime for her to throw away her exotic caramel beauty like that."

"My *what* now?"

"You get him, baby," Jake says, not even looking up.

"You know what?" Amy says. "Actually, I liked his big, white ass so much I put a *ring* on it."

The bullpen hushes, sensing primetime entertainment, and Rosa makes a grinning *ohhh* sound that somehow manages to emerge like a sibilant between her teeth.

"I don't get it," the Vulture says after a pause, smirk faltering.

"Feast your eyes on *that*," Amy says, extending her own be-ringed hand and wishing the ring lived on her middle finger so that she could kill two birds with one shiny stone. She's tilting her upper body a bit too much, aiming for Beyoncé and hitting something else instead--a cross between Gina and Queen Latifah, maybe?--but the look on the Vulture's face is priceless, stuck on a single uncertain note like the splutter-splutter of his stupid motorcycle's engine.

"Wait, seriously?" the Vulture says.

Jake finally responds to Amy's hand flapping behind her back, signalling that she'd appreciate some backup, and glides up next to her.

"Sorry we didn't invite you to the wedding," he says. "It was a small, intimate affair."

"This is a joke, right? Hah hah. Hah." The Vulture looks around the room.

"It was a beautiful ceremony," Rosa says in her flattest tones. "I totally cried."

"Want to see the license?" Jake asks.

"This precinct is the *worst*," the Vulture snaps, waving his hand around. He tries to make a dignified exit but ends up tripping over Jake's chair, because Gina's not one to give up on a good prank like moving someone's furniture around.

Amy snorts with laughter and pokes her coffee-flavoured tongue out at his retreating back.

"Wait," she says after a moment, "you have the license here?"

"What? Oh, yeah, somewhere." Jake gestures to his desk, where a folder is sliding inexorably off the teetering Open Cases Pile Of Garbage.

Amy raises her most dubious eyebrow. "If you say so."

"Don't get me wrong, that was hilarious," says Rosa. "But I thought you weren't telling people."

"What are you looking at me for?" says Jake. "Santiago's the one who was waving her ring around."

"Considering how many victims, suspects and forensic scientists Jake's already told," says Amy, "I think that stupid cat is out of its stupid bag." She smiles fake-sweetly at Jake. "When I win, Peralta will just have to tell everyone that I divorced him."

"It was in the *terms*!" Jake protests.

"Oh, I know," Amy says.

Jake, always one to take an inch and run a marathon, has absolutely been introducing Amy to people as his partner in crime-solving and the wonderful journey of life. Often in those exact words.

Two weeks later, he's recovered from that joke and shortened it to introducing her as his wife, and somewhere along the way the edges get rubbed off the sarcasm. Soon Amy has red-eyed widows patting her hands and telling her that her young man seems very nice, and isn't it lovely that they can work together as well, and treasure these moments, it can all go away so--so fast--and then Amy's frantically mouthing *find a kleenex!* at Jake over a quivering head of curly hair while the woman sobs into her shoulder.

When she first issued the challenge and grabbed Jake's hand with her own seminar-firm one, Amy was high on irritation and hubris and, if she's honest, didn't expect it to drag on like this. She thought it'd be an easy win.

But it's still going and they've settled into something like a *routine*, which is horrifying in its own way. Friday night is still date night. Amy makes reservations at the kind of restaurant where instead of descriptions the menu gives you only lists that sound like a botched game of word association, or the instructions for a magic potion: *liquorice, duck, tamarind, chard*. Jake turns up to every single date with a pressed shirt, an embarrassing bunch of flowers, and an expression of manic determination that usually vanishes by the time they're mocking the

entrees and Amy's fending off Jake's hand with a fork as he tries to dab tamarind foam onto her nose.

On the night there's a gruelling and extended siege of a paranoid junkie's apartment and they miss their dinner booking by, oh, about three hours, Jake stops in front of Amy's desk.

"It's still Friday," he says. "Date night, for another whole twenty minutes! Where did you get that knife?"

"It's Rosa's," Amy says.

"Right, of course."

Amy looks up and points the knife at him. "If you don't tell her I'm using it to get gum off the bottom of my shoe, I'll waive date night. All...twenty minutes of it."

"That's a pity," Jake says, and shoves something at her.

Amy stares at it. "What is that?"

"Celery," Jake says. The wilting, leafy stalks have been bound together with some novelty Scotch tape with tiny Christmas trees on it. "I found it in the fridge."

"Dude, gross," Amy says.

"Date night begins!" Jake grins at her in the way he does when he's accidentally stumbled onto the high ground and is going to defend it from all comers with the verbal equivalent of a foam sword and a bubble gun.

"Date night means a proper date," Amy says automatically. She takes the bouquet of celery anyway and lays it on her desk, leaving a good radius of space between it and any important paperwork.

"Flowers," Jake says. "Check. Sort of. Shirt *not* covered with tasered-perp vomit. Check."

"Yeah, whose is that?"

"Rosa's. Shut up. In my defence," Jake says, over Amy's laughter, "I'm pretty sure she bought it from a menswear shop in the first place."

Amy writes an enormous D- and B+ on the nearest piece of paper and holds them up.

Jake makes a face. "Execution and effort, yeah, yeah. Hold on to your Sharpie, Detective Santiago. You're gonna want to amend that statement."

"Jake, I'm pretty sure that missing a booking at Terapin with no notice gets you put on some kind of blacklist."

"Alright, firstly, there is no such thing as a Michelin blacklist no matter what Charles says, and secondly, we're not going to Terapin. Come on."

Amy gives up on both her efforts with the knife and any hope of controlling the night's events, and follows Jake to the second holding cell. She stops in the entrance to the cell and wraps her hand around the cool metal of a bar, which clinks gently against her ring. If anyone asks, she's going to blame the gum still stuck to her shoe for how long she stands there staring at the table, metal chairs, and honest-to-god tablecloth and silverware. The tablecloth is a worn bedsheet with dubious stains, and the silverware is probably from the depths of the Miscellaneous Cutlery Crap drawer, but still.

"Never let it be said," says Jake, "that I reneged on the terms of our deal."

At the smell of garlic sauce and felafel, Amy's stomach gives a rumble like subway noise rising from a grate in the street. Lunch was a bag of Doritos, almost ten hours ago.

She pulls the Sharpie out of her pocket, writes an A on her palm, and shoves it into Jake's face with a violence that arises from her not trusting herself to talk. Jake inhales against her hand in a big, obnoxious snort.

"Mmm, pen fumes," he says.

"I smell shawarma!" shouts someone from a cell down the line.

"Shut up, Ronnie!" Jake shouts back. He pulls one of the chairs back--there's a sound like tortured brakes as it drags against the concrete floor--and bows with a flourish.

Amy sits.

That's how the whole thing is, really. Jokes that start to feel less like jokes. For a week straight, after the Date Night In Holding Cell Two incident, Amy ups her game by buying Jake's favourite bagels on her way in to the precinct so she can make a big show of giving them to him at lunch along with a simpering face. Jake becomes immune to the catcalls that accompany this pretty fast, and Amy realises she is more or less volunteering to bring him a packed lunch every day, so she stops. But Delia at the bagel shop keeps putting the onion bagel in the bag along with Amy's poppyseed one, without even asking, and Amy hasn't the heart to stop her.

At lunchtime, tapping her foot to the New York Red Bulls PR office's maddeningly catchy hold music, she munches on her own bagel and contemplates throwing Jake's in the trash. But as per the Santiago family code, wasting food is, if not a *crime*, at least morally reprehensible.

A sneeze creeps up on her, rising through her throat and shaking her whole head like a punch. Then another, and another, until Amy hangs up the phone. Odds are good the person she was waiting for has gotten distracted by another call or one of those cat meme things and forgotten her existence, anyway.

She swallows her mouthful of bagel and sneezes again, violently. When she looks around, there's Natasha-of-Floorgasm, sitting on the edge of Gina's desk. Rosa is feeding a piece of Boyle's favourite pizza to a friendly-looking dog, while Boyle looks on mournfully and Gina takes sniggering pictures of the whole process with her phone.

"Hi, Detective Santiago," says Natasha.

Amy rubs at her eyes where they're starting to itch and says the first thing to come into her allergy-addled mind, which is unfortunately, "Weren't you pregnant?"

"Like, a year and a half ago," Gina says.

"Kid's with her dad," Natasha says.

The door to Captain Holt's office opens and Sergeant Jeffords steps out.

"Has anybody seen Peralta?" the sergeant says.

"Chasing down a lead at that dry cleaner's," says Rosa.

"Why is there a dog in my precinct?" Captain Holt demands.

"Captain," Gina says reprovingly. "Natasha is on an awareness-raising campaign."

"For...food poisoning?" the captain says, shifting his gaze to the pizza

"Hey!" says Boyle.

"No!" says Gina, at the same time. She lowers her voice to a piercing hush. "*Canine lupus*."

The dog in question snatches the last bit of crust out of Rosa's hands and wags his tail happily.

"Hmm," the captain says. "That is indeed very sad. But Santiago is deathly allergic to dogs, so perhaps your friend could go and raise some awareness...elsewhere."

"I'm fine," Amy wheezes. She's so touched. Captain Holt cares about her! Well, her sinuses.

"Who's an adorable puppy?" Boyle coos. "Which dog park do you take him to?"

"We--" Natasha starts, but she's drowned out by a chorus of people shouting variations on *Don't answer him!*

"Oh, come on, guys," says Boyle.

"No, Charles," says Rosa. "What did we say?"

"No more dog parks," Boyle says, drooping. "You should read my blog," he hisses at Natasha.

Since becoming a dog owner, Boyle has expanded his blogging empire to include reviews of every dog park and pet supply shop in Brooklyn, as well as beginning a quest to raise Richard and Dan as the puppies with the most discerning palates in New York.

That's a direct quote from his blog header.

Anyway, for someone with a pathological inability to disagree with someone in person, Boyle has an unsurpassed willingness to defend his opinion online. Amy has seen him wade into a comment thread and end a potentially explosive feud over Brooklyn's most authentic flat whites between two expat Australian hipsters, displaying the sort of authoritative hand that could be taught as a case study in the police academy's class on deescalating conflict.

"Detective Santiago," the captain says.

"Sir?"

"My office, please."

"Sir," Amy says, once she's seated. "If this is about the O'Grady case, I know it's still--"

"This is not about the O'Grady case," Captain Holt says. "Are you in need of facial tissues?"

Amy nods, sniffing, and he reaches for a box on a shelf and puts it in front of her. The box, Amy notes with a sad little flare of irony, has photos of puppies printed on it. She grabs a handful and wipes at her eyes and nose, but her allergies are already settling down now that Natasha and her lupus-ridden dog are no longer in the same room as Amy.

"Santiago," says the captain. "We need to have a talk about your future."

Clouds of histamine and happiness fill Amy's mind. The day is finally here! Captain Holt is going to take her under his wing and tell her all the secrets of leadership!

"Yes, sir," she says. "Of course I've thought long and hard about my five-year plan, and I've written down some things--well, there's a chart, actually, I could go and get it--"

"That won't be necessary." The captain blinks several times at her in succession, and then rests his chin on his folded hands. "This new bet that you and Detective Peralta have made, it's still going, isn't it?"

"Yes," Amy says, deflated.

"Are you. That is to say." The captain clears his throat. "Do you need to talk about it?"

Amy feels something that she can't classify. It's either terror or joy. Maybe both. "Sir, are we having a conversation about our feelings?"

"No, Santiago. We are having a conversation about *your* feelings." The captain sighs. "It was my initial opinion that I am not the best person to fill this role--"

"No! I mean yes! You're perfect, sir!"

"--and that it is something you should instead be discussing with a...girlfriend."

Amy can hear the quotes around the word 'girlfriend', given extra disapproving weight by the fact that the captain probably knows a lot of women for whom girlfriend means, well, *girlfriend*.

"You would make a wonderful girlfriend, sir," is what emerges from Amy's mouth.

Captain Holt blinks. "Thank you."

"You're. You're welcome."

"However," the captain continues, "it was pointed out to me that this may not be a large...category...for you."

Amy opens her mouth to protest this, thinks about Kylie and the acai berries and the wasteland that is her Facebook page, and closes her mouth again.

"My work is my life," she says. She can hear the way she sounds: more defensive than usual, less proud.

"The last bet you and Peralta made was good for the precinct," Captain Holt says. "This one is not."

"Have our numbers dropped, sir?"

She knows they haven't. In fact, chalk one up for both Rosa and Boyle, because the whole debacle *did* appear to fix their shared slump.

"That is not what I'm talking about," says the captain. "Whether or not it's good for you as police officers is debatable. But it's not good for you as *people*."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," Amy says.

The captain closes his eyes and looks as close as he ever comes to outright pained. Then he opens them. "Alright, Santiago. Now we are going to talk about...*my* feelings."

Amy makes a valiant effort not to hyperventilate.

Captain Holt says, "My work is *not* my life. It used to be. And then I met Kevin. I want you to understand that all the ambition in the world doesn't mean anything if you are not genuinely happy to come home to the person you've chosen."

There's the word *ambition* again. Amy is really getting tired of how something she's always been proud to call herself is starting to feel synonymous with *attention seeking*. It's bullshit.

"But--the whole thing's a joke, sir," Amy says. "I know, I know, it's a *terrible* joke, but--"

"Santiago," says Captain Holt. "I realise this may sound hypocritical. Coming from me. But Peralta is...how shall I put this. Unable to make words with his mouth about how he actually feels. In fact, one could say that he is only good at holding the things that he wants tightly to his chest. Like a small child. Or at least, what I have it on good authority that small children are like."

"Maybe you should be *his* feelings-girlfriend," Amy mutters, unfairly speared by two intersecting bolts of jealousy.

"What was that, Detective?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I have asked Sergeant Jeffords to talk to Detective Peralta. I am not going to order you to end this bet. What the two of you choose to do is up to you."

And *that* sounds synonymous with 'there are no wrong answers', which Amy has known since elementary school is *even more bullshit*.

"Thank you, sir," she says glumly, and leaves the office.

Even if the sergeant tries to appeal to Jake's emotions--ha, good luck *there*--Jake will just hear it as a hint to step down, to call uncle, to give in. And if there's anyone who would have failed every single academy class on deescalation, it's Jake Peralta. So Amy's meant to give up a year's worth of weekends in order to be, what, the responsible one? The one who isn't behaving like a small child?

No.

She doesn't know when Sergeant Jeffords manages to corner Jake for his own feelings-girlfriend conversation, nor just how much physical intimidation or alcohol is required to get him to sit still enough to have it. The total lack of change in Jake's behaviour is enough to tell her that he's just as good as she is at ignoring strong hints from authority figures. Better, probably. He's had heaps more practice.

Jake doesn't mention it, *Amy* doesn't mention it. Everything's fine apart from Amy's ongoing low-grade guilt at, well, ignoring strong hints from an authority figure--from *Captain Holt*, no less--which sits in her gut and makes itself known in queasy little burps from time to time.

In the time-honoured tradition of police everywhere, Amy throws herself at the O'Grady case so that she doesn't have to think about her personal life. Joey Harmon's a dead end, for now, but in another week they've scraped together enough circumstantial evidence to justify calling another player in for questioning. This player is Gabriel Lloyd, twenty years old, English by way of Cameroon; it's only his second season on the Red Bulls but he's already appeared on billboards selling breakfast cereal and men's watches. He's a great player. And he may or may not have been blackmailed by Jack O'Grady into fixing matches in order to benefit the enormous gambling syndicate who have been bankrolling O'Grady's drug operation.

Oh, yeah, Jake and Amy's whiteboard is looking a lot less skeletal now.

"Hello? Thank you, yes, move." Gina waves Lloyd out of her way as she returns to her desk. She has a fresh can of soda in one hand and a lollipop stick protruding from the corner of her mouth.

Amy stares. "Gina, your dentist must cry himself to sleep at night. On silk sheets, on a luxury yacht."

"Nu-uh, this is *necessary*," Gina says, wagging the soda as she sits down. "You can't get properly into the headspace required for a marathon session of Kwazy Cupcakes unless you *fill* and *surround* yourself with sugar."

Gabriel Lloyd perks up. "Hey, you play that game?"

"Do I play that game?" Gina gives a derisive laugh and spreads her arms. "You're looking at a platinum level Frosting Master."

"Brilliant," says Lloyd. Amy represses the urge to sigh in shallow appreciation of his accent. "I've been stuck on level 7 of Marshmallow Mountain for weeks."

"Ohh, that's a hard one," Gina says, transferring her lollipop from one cheek to another. "I could send you a Cherry Cheat, if you want. I've got, like, ten."

"Really?" The six-foot-eight specimen of lean and chiseled manhood produces a grin that's bordering on goofy.

"Sure, what's your username?"

"Gina, seriously," Jake says.

"Gabe," says Lloyd's silver-haired glamazon of a lawyer, in almost exactly the same tones.

"Gabbyness22," says Gabriel Lloyd, without a trace of sarcasm. "Two Bs."

"Got it," says Gina.

The expression on the face of Lloyd's lawyer shifts from mild constipation to outright acid reflux. She reaches awkwardly up to clap a heavy hand on her client's shoulder, and steers him away from Gina's desk.

Amy sits behind the one-way glass while Jake does the interrogation. After five minutes she has to unpeel her fingers from where they're bent over the edge of the desk she's leaning on, tight enough to cramp. Jake's not a bad interrogator when he's focused, and Amy's gut and experience are both telling her that Lloyd's too edgy, too eager, too restless to be innocent. If they'd pulled Lloyd in alone, without warning, they might have had a chance of bluffing their way past every empty space that remains on the whiteboard, cowing the guy with jargon and threats. But his lawyer's the best that a professional sports salary can buy, and she's quick to shut down any line of enquiry that smells like a fishing expedition. Any time Jake exposes a crack and inches towards it, the lawyer does the oratorical equivalent of stamping on his fingers with heavy boots. No, she doesn't see why her client's performance in that particular match is worth remarking on. Yes, and her client has already denied that claim. Are any actual charges being laid here? Does the detective have any questions with a basis in evidence rather than fantastical speculation?

Amy winces. The word *fantastical* has an unfortunate red-rag effect on Jake, who's now losing his train of thought as metaphorical steam rises from his ears.

"Look," he snaps finally, slamming his hands down onto the table. "We know. Okay? We know O'Grady's got something on you, maybe it's drugs, maybe it's something else. He goes *after* kids like you. He sets you up, and then he owns you, so when he tells you to take a tumble or kick the ball in the wrong direction, whatever, you do it. But we don't care about you. We want O'Grady off the streets so he's not using ten-year-olds to peddle his product, and we want to know who's bankrolling him and turning a profit on the fixed games. You're not important, *Gabe*. Whatever it is, you can get out from under his thumb. We can help. Just *tell* us."

That's...not bad, as Hail Marys go. It's showing more of their hand than Amy's happy with, if this gets back to O'Grady, which it almost certainly will. But it's gutsy.

Amy's worked blackmail cases before, though, and she could have told Jake that the victims can be skittish, especially when they've got a lot to lose. Lloyd is just a kid, and someone's clearly put the fear of God into him about what happens to his career and his reputation if he blabs to the cops. In the face of Jake's dramatics his mouth wavers and then goes thin.

"I don't have anything else to say," Lloyd says.

His lawyer gives a dragon smile. "You heard him, Detective. We're done."

Amy lets herself out of the viewing room and is seated at her desk by the time Jake reappears in the bullpen. Both of them know that she was watching, but at least this way they can pretend that she wasn't, and they won't have to talk about it while the disappointment is raw. It's just past six o'clock and the rest of the precinct is packing up for the night, leaving a bubble of cautious space around Amy as though she's emitting noxious fumes of renewed slumphood.

"I hate this job," Jake says, dropping into the nearest chair.

"No you don't," Amy says.

"Come on, let me hate it for five minutes."

Amy glances at her watch. "You're on the clock."

Jake breathes quietly and angrily for two of those minutes. Amy accidentally-on-purpose catches her sleeve on a pile of paperwork, picks up the scattered paper, and reorders them until they're even neater than before.

"It's Friday," Jake says suddenly, halfway through minute three.

Amy runs an untangling hand through her ponytail, trying to persuade herself she has the energy to dress up and play perfect couple. Maybe they could go back to that French place; Jake hates French food.

Next to her, Jake rubs the heels of his hands against his eyes and makes a frustrated noise, kicking his long legs out in front of him.

Amy sighs. "Do you want to order pizza and watch *Die Hard*?"

Jake drops his hands and beams at her, relief bright on his face. "Uh, only *always*," he says.

"You hate being a cop for another two whole minutes," Amy says. "Quick, pizza order."

"Jake who hates being a cop likes...pepperoni," says Jake.

"So, just like normal Jake, then."

"Pepperoni and *jalapeños*."

Amy swallows a giggle and calls in the order before he can think better of it, because it's going to be hilarious watching him pick them off and/or make eye-watering faces all evening.

"Come on, Jake who hates being a cop," she says. "We can pick the pizza up on the way."

They bicker for two whole minutes about whose television will provide the best Die Hard viewing experience, but Amy wins because she called in the pizza order at Dino's, which is on the way to her place. Jake covers for his loss by bitching all the way there about having to eat his pizza off prissy plates with flowers on them, instead of out of the box like God intended.

"You're such a baby," Amy says, throwing a roll of paper towel at his head as he's making himself at home on her couch. "You don't deserve my good china."

Jake snags the roll out of the air and grins at her, then flops back down into the cushions. He busies himself with the remote controls and pauses the movie on the studio logo.

"Hurry up, Santiago, pizza's getting cold."

"Peralta," Amy says sweetly, "would you like the teacup with the bluebells on it, or the one with little birds?"

Jake emits a squawk of protest and half-erupts from the couch. Amy rolls her eyes as she hands him one of the sweating bottles.

"*Kidding*," she says. "Here, hold still, let me open it."

"You have beer," says Jake.

"I have beer."

"Best wife ever," says Jake, clinking their bottles together.

"You got it," Amy says.

They demolish the pizza and drink the beer and watch John McClane win back his wife from the dark hole of a broken marriage via shooting a lot of people and blowing shit up. Jake picks jalapeños off his slices and flicks them at Amy, who manages to catch a good half of them in her mouth. Amy stretches out with her bare feet in Jake's lap and accidentally kicks him in the solar plexus when the helicopter explodes. Yeah! Yippie-ki-yay! Jake loves his job

again, and Amy does too, Amy is *totally* proud to be a cop. Amy has...lost count of how many beers she has drunk. Oops.

"Oops," she mumbles, struggling into a sitting position.

Holly Gennero, onscreen, clings to her husband's bloodied bicep and announces that her name is Holly McClane.

"You tell 'em!" cheers Jake, slumping further down in the couch. He looks sideways at Amy with a look of pathetic concern. "You're not gonna change your name back, right?"

Amy rolls her eyes and tries to elbow him. She misses, and ends up sprawled half across Jake's lap. It's not comfortable.

"I *haven't* changed my name," she tells the underside of his nostrils. "That's *sexist*."

"Yeahyeahyeah." Jake waves that away. "But if you *did*."

On the TV, the limo is driving away in the snow, Christmas music is playing, and the credits have started to roll up the screen. Amy stares up at Jake. There are too many layers of hypotheticals here, like onion peel or woolly sweaters.

"That wasn't in the terms," she says, because it's the only thing she can come up with.

Jake chews on his lips and doesn't say anything. Amy huffs and wriggles around until her head is resting on one of his thighs and her elbows aren't in direct contact with his knees. That's better.

"Hey, you have sauce on your chin," she says. "Just here, look--"

Jake grabs hold of her hand as she lifts it to prod at the dried sauce. Then he keeps on holding it.

"I know it wasn't in the terms," Jake says. "Maybe we're both still doing this because what if this is *it*? For both of us? What if we were not-married again, and our job kept being, you know, the job, and we never got this again? Or we got it, and then the other person didn't understand, and left us to fly to LA with the kids, and there was no convenient German madman played by Alan Rickman for us to rescue them from on Christmas Eve?"

Amy mines the nugget of meaning from the earnestly-slurred grammatical mess of that sentence, and finds her eyes hot and smarting. Why is she thinking about her grandmother, all of a sudden?

"That's...so sad," she says.

Ugh, here it is. Maudlin and splotchy, right on cue. She really should have been counting those beers.

"Are you crying?"

"No," Amy snaps, tearfully. "Shut up, Peralta."

She pulls her hand out of his. Jake shrugs and slides his freed hand under her shoulders, starting to tug her upwards so he can move his legs.

"What, what are you doing."

"This is a *hug*, Santiago," Jake says. "Try not to swoon."

"Yeah, right," Amy scoffs, but she doesn't resist.

Jake manoeuvres himself so that he's stretched out on the couch too, wedged between the back cushions and Amy, and folds his arms around her.

Amy's heart thuds against her ribs. She is absolutely not swooning. It's just that she's been doing *so well* at ignoring the fact that she's attracted to Jake, but ignoring it hasn't been enough to make it go away, and here it is, all of her dumb desire popping up as whole and inconvenient as ever, like her libido is playing a game of Whack-A-Mole. It's so stupid: he smells a bit like pizza, and he's still *Jake Peralta*, and Amy should be tense. She should be pulling away. Usually she doesn't like being touched when she's feeling emotional. But her muscles are beer-lazy and Jake's legs are warm, his arms even warmer, and the hug doesn't feel demanding. It doesn't feel like anything but comfort.

"You're gonna be fine," Jake mumbles into her hair.

Amy closes her eyes, as an experiment, and takes slow breaths. The credits music seems to be coming from very far away.

Just before she falls asleep she hears Jake say, "We're gonna be fine."

When she wakes up again her foot is cramping. Brooklyn's night-city noise has shifted to day-city noise, and sunlight is peeking through her lace curtains. Some time in the night they've shifted position: Jake is stretched out beneath her with Amy's legs falling into the gaps made by his own, and her head is pillowed on the angle of his shoulder. Amy's hair has escaped from its elastic and is loose, tickling her cheek. One of Jake's hands is stroking idly up and down her back.

Amy's head feels slow, filled both with tired contentment and the mild, muggy ache of a hangover. Part of her is trying to wave a red flag. Part of her would fight an indifference of hipsters (collective noun courtesy of Boyle) for a coffee. And all of her softly buzzing skin wants to unfold and enjoy being touched without her brain getting in the way, and it's winning. In this moment it seems seems effortless and natural for Amy to turn her face fully into the crook of Jake's neck, make a sleepy noise and open her lips against his throat.

Jake's hand halts. She feels the hesitation as he begins to lift it away; she feels the moment when he sets it against her lower back again, firmer than before, in a way that makes Amy want to push against it. The urge is half contrary and half reptilian, heat-seeking, like all she needs is something to rub against and she can shed her cautious self in favour of something new.

There's a strange laugh caught in Amy's throat. She smiles and lets it out, a vibration of her lips against Jake's skin, and she hardly has time to inhale again before Jake's other hand is in her hair, gripping gently at the base of her skull. He tugs until she lifts her head and looks down into his eyes, which are soft and brown and with a questioning furrow between them. Amy's hair is a messy curtain, shielding them from the sun. Jake's mouth is slightly open and his chest is unmoving where it's pressed against hers, his breath hitched and waiting.

More red flags and varied anxieties try to shout through the morning-slowness and the hot reptile whine of Amy's blood. Amy leans down and touches her lips against Jake's, and silences all of them.

This time she isn't surprised that it's easy. It's like picking up a book exactly where you left off. Jake surges up into the kiss, his hand holding her head in place, taking greedy sips from her mouth. All of Amy's attention crowds itself into small places: her bottom lip, her sternum, her scalp where his fingers touch it.

She can't keep in a gasp when Jake's other hand, moving across the untucked hem of her shirt, finds skin. Her whole body shudders and an odd and very undignified sound comes out of her nose.

"What, is this--"

"Ticklish," Amy manages, "just--"

"Oh." After a moment, Jake grins at her, and it's only 30% the sly possibility that he might use this knowledge against her in future; the other 70% is purely happy.

He firms his touch again, using palm instead of fingertips. Amy nods frantically in answer to the question he hasn't asked, and leans down again, kissing his jaw and then back to his mouth, kind of furious at how addictive it is, all sharp and smooth and hot. She works a bent arm between Jake's neck and the cushions, using it for leverage; she needs to be *closer*. The heel of Jake's hand is kneading at the long muscles beside her spine, up and down until those muscles are softening like butter and Amy wants to melt into him.

Making out on a couch hasn't felt this good since Amy was twenty and losing her virginity, after nineteen years of not understanding what the fuss was about, six months of rapid epiphanies after her sex drive finally arrived without so much as an apology for its tardiness, and then another six months of feeling like she was going to burst into actual flames whenever she sat next to Conrad Smith in their Baroque Architecture tutorial.

Amy pulls back just far enough to admire the flush on Jake's cheeks and the wet sheen of his lips. Giddiness is filling her chest like steam.

"That's, um," Jake says, sounding gratifyingly dazed.

"Yeah," she agrees. "Bet you wish you remembered the wedding night now, huh?"

Crap. *Crap*. She knows as soon as it's out of her mouth that it was the wrong thing to say.

She's the first one to go tense, and Jake's not far behind. The easiness vanishes, and in its place the strangeness of the whole situation crashes down with a force that's tangible, like the worst sort of beach wave, the sort that dumps you hard against the sand and leaves you with grit in your eyes and water in your throat.

Amy sucks in a panicked breath and her mind goes totally blank. Somewhere in the universe are the words that will fix this, but she couldn't find them with a map and the Millennium Falcon.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Jake demands. "Ha ha, we were drunk, we don't remember--you actually think I would have--what?"

"No! No, it was--"

"Is that what you think of me?"

Amy's torn between the equally ludicrous urges to run out of her own apartment and to pin Jake bodily down until they can sort this out. She ends up moving awkwardly off to the side, displacing cushions and knocking her funny bone against Jake's knee as she does so. Good job, Amy, good *fucking* job. Amy Santiago's patented ability to ruin everything strikes again.

"Forget it," Amy says. "Please."

"This whole bet was your idea!" Jake snaps, getting to his feet.

Amy struggles to hers as well. She won't let him have any more of a height advantage than usual, if they're going to argue it out. Defensiveness is climbing up her throat like a strangling vine. "Well, this whole *marriage* was your idea!"

"Well--hang on, why was it *my* idea? You don't know that. There were two of us writing things on that piece of paper, in Vegas."

"Oh, of course it was you, Jake, you're the one who--"

"Who what, Amy?" His voice goes hard. "No, come on, say it."

"*Forget it.*"

Jake does a full rotation on the spot, like he's so furious that it's propelling him, and when he faces her again she almost doesn't recognise him.

"Just because I told you, once, under the influence of--of leaving--that I was *maybe* interested in *maybe* dating you, you think this is how I'd go about making that happen? You think this is how I wanted to get married?"

"I don't see you fighting too hard to get *out* of it."

Amy hears the spite in her voice and hates it, but all's fair, right? All's fair in--

But this isn't war, and it can't be--the other thing. It's a fucking joke and it's officially, definitely, no longer funny.

Jake says, "The sergeant told me once that his wedding day was the best day of his life. His most wonderful memory. And I don't know, I guess I always figured that would happen for me, eventually. Maybe once Jessica Alba got divorced and we allowed a tasteful period of--anyway, the point is, I didn't even *get* that memory. I got a piece of paper and a hangover."

And me, Amy thinks. She grinds the ball of her bare foot into the rug until it feels like it could catch fire.

"How do you think I feel? I was supposed to have a big romantic proposal, and a proper engagement, with a *proper* ring. I was supposed to plan a wedding and invite my cousin Stacia so that I could wear white and beam at her so she'd have to remember all the times she's made snide comments about me being *on the shelf* as though that's still a thing that normal people say. "

"That's not marriage," Jake shoots back. "That's a party. That's showing off."

"Come on, Jake," she says scornfully, "you love *both of those things*."

"Fine, yes, I do. But marriage is about what happens next. And what keeps happening."

Amy bites back her first instinct, which is the truly ugly *how would you know*, because there's fighting and then there's throwing someone's childhood in their face like a handful of sand.

"Okay, Jake, what is marriage? This? What we're doing?"

Jake casts a glance at the couch and another at the empty pizza box, a weird break in the rhythm of the fight. His mouth is uncertain, dancing in and out of sarcasm. Amy is rocked by the memory of kissing him at the reunion, kissing him ten minutes ago. And more than that: it's all caught up in the memory of his stomach vibrating under her feet as he laughed during the movie, and the way his arms felt around her, both familiar and new. She doesn't know when this started to feel normal and right. She only recognises it because now it's all gone wrong.

Jake says, "I guess not."

Amy thinks about Captain Holt saying that the bet was bad for them as people; she thinks about Jake in the parking lot before he went undercover, clutching his box full of belongings, awkward and nervy and honest. She doesn't have a name for her feelings right now. But maybe it's her turn to put herself out there, to suggest that they ignore the terms and Vegas and all the stupid trimmings and just--try starting over, for real. Romantic-stylez. With a zee.

It couldn't exactly go any worse, right?

She takes a deep breath.

"I'm sorry," Jake says.

Amy's breath sticks. She swallows it. "What?"

"I'm sorry for all the jokes," Jake says, stiffly, like he's reading from an internal script. "I can see it's been--unfair of me--and look, obviously it was stupid to let this drag on when it is...what it is. You deserve something better, Santiago."

Amy stares at him miserably, because she used 'you deserve better' on Horrible Phil, and it meant 'you think showering every third day is acceptable and you talk over me in front of other people'.

In this case, it could mean any of a number of things.

"Are you calling it?" she asks. Her voice isn't smug; it sounds hollow. But at least it's steady.

Jake exhales. He looks really, really tired. "Weekends for a year," he says. "Yeah, okay."

Amy winces. "Jake. Forget the--"

"Hey," he says. "Crushing debt, remember? I could do with the money."

I'M GOING TO COUNT TO THREE

Julian, as the family member highest in her Favorite Contacts list, is Amy's first call after Jake leaves her apartment. While she's waiting for him to pick up, Amy sits in a corner of the couch, twitches with memory, leaps off the couch, and relocates to a chair in the dining room. She draws her knees up to her chest and curls her bare toes around the chair's edge, feeling small.

"H'lo?" Julian says. "Sorry, muesli. Hello?"

Amy closes her eyes as tight as they'll go and pours the story of the disaster into Julian's ear. All of it. From the beginning.

"A map and the Millennium Falcon?" Julian says. "Really?"

"Ed made me watch the trilogy with him," Amy says sullenly, "*twice*." Edmundo's labmates are all dedicated geeks, and every time Amy visits him in Boston she gets sucked into a vortex of sci-fi movies and arguments about superheroes.

"Okay," Julian says. "As I understand it, you and your hilarious *fake* boyfriend got *actually* married and then somehow double-dog-dared yourselves into this game of dating chicken like a pair of six-year-olds, this is me *not* being surprised, by the way, hang on--"

"What?"

Her phone beeps and presents her with a picture that Julian has apparently just snapped of himself looking like an idiot.

"That's my unsurprised face," he tells her.

"Mature, Hooligan," Amy snaps.

"Ooh, nicknames," says Julian amiably. "You wanna start with me, Meatosaur?"

"Augh," Amy says, slumping down in her chair. Her hangover is smugly reasserting itself; she feels like someone's piling weights onto her head. "No. Sorry."

Julian whistles. "Apologies. Wow. Must be serious. So, you've got some feelings in your pants for this guy, you acted on them in a way not at *all* appropriate for six year olds, and then you somehow managed to ruin it all by talking. How *totally* unlike you," he adds, but there's kindness lurking beneath the teasing. "Seriously, though, what do you want now? What's the best case scenario for how all of this ends?"

"I don't know," Amy wails. "I just--I wish he was still here, and I wish I'd never even met him, he's so *stupid*, and I wish things were back to normal and I wish I could borrow Rosa's nail gun and nail his feet to the floor and then maybe rip his clothes off a little. A lot. Haven't you ever felt like that?"

"Well, no," Julian says dryly. "Sorry, Mimi."

Amy smiles despite herself. "You're no help."

"I'm here for all your venting and sarcasm needs, you know that. You want romance talk, try Harry or Luis."

"Good idea. Thanks, you've been great. Only not."

"Don't forget, you still owe me one point five favours!" Julian shouts, as Amy hangs up on him.

She tries Luis next. Mysterious babblings and screechings can be heard in the background.

"What's that noise?" she asks.

"Oh, we've stuck Evie in front of some cartoons. Amy, you know it's Saturday, not Sunday, right? Have you lost track of the days again? Have you been sleeping right? You know shift work can--are you drinking enough water?"

The fussy concern in his voice is like the smell of fresh bread, warm and comforting.

"No, I know," Amy says. "I know it's Saturday."

She braces herself, and tells the whole story again. She has to pause a few times so that her eldest brother can make *aww* noises or break into coughing fits in order to poorly disguise his laughter.

"The Millennium Falcon?"

Amy groans. "*Not* the point, Lu."

"Alright, Amy," he says, easy. "What's the point?"

And that's the million dollar question, isn't it?

Amy scuffs pale patterns in the rug with one foot. She looks at the bottom of her shirt, which is yesterday's shirt, creased with sleep and closeness and the urgent grip of Jake's hands. She looks at her sensible fingernails, and sees the ring. The moonstone is cloudy and blueish, friendly in the morning light.

She should have taken it off during the fight. She should have thrown it in Jake's face. But she'd honestly forgotten that she was wearing it. It's part of her routine, now; it has its own spot on her dresser for when she's showering, and during the day she's stopped feeling it there at all, like it's part of her skin.

"Oh, *shit*," Amy says, and bursts into tears.

Fifteen minutes and a lot of sympathetic clucking and pragmatic advice from Luis later, she's dried her eyes, and although her nose still feels tingly and clogged she's at least prepared to

face the day. As long as no more emotional crises decide to leap out from behind a corner and ambush her.

And it *is* a crisis: Amy has feelings for Jake Peralta, and not just feelings in her pants, either. Someone should have told her that this could happen. Time travel will obviously never, ever happen in Amy's lifetime, because if it does then she will--spacetime, whatever, but she *would have* gone back to that casino in Vegas and interfered with that game of deteriorating dares, somewhere between Jake's Darth Vader impression and Jake dunking his head in the ornamental pond, so that Amy never drank All The Vodka. And never reached a point where any part of her thought it was a good idea to: get married to Jake, *stay* married to Jake, make a bet about it with Jake, and then systematically proceed to--what? Stockholm Syndrome herself into wanting to have messy, marathon sex with Jake? Actually caring about Jake?

One of the (very few) negative reports that Amy received while at the police academy read: *a preoccupation with possible outcomes that makes her a thorough strategic thinker, but lets her down somewhat when the time comes for quick decision-making under pressure.*

Not that she read it enough times to memorise the wording and then stayed awake agonising about it every night for two weeks afterwards, or anything.

Clearly, that instructor didn't know what they were talking about, because--drunken weddings notwithstanding--Amy's obsessive future planning has let her down here. She really should have thought twice before agreeing to a bet which had as its forfeit a year's worth of weekend shifts. Because the upshot is that now she's stuck at home with her *feelings* on a Saturday morning, with a full day and a half of--*leisure*, ugh--stretching nauseatingly ahead of her.

For a few seconds she considers going in to the precinct anyway and telling Jake to ignore the bet, ignore the terms, and go home, but that wouldn't be fair. Both of them are the type of person to throw themselves at work when they're trying to avoid other things. Is she really going to make Jake lose the bet *and* then take away the only vaguely silver lining of his punishment?

Amy's phone rings, the vibration startling her where it's still clutched in her hand.

"I've just had a thought," says Julian, when she picks up. "I'm calling in one of my favours, right now."

"Really?"

"I want salted caramel cannoli from Pronto Deli, and I want it delivered to my doorstep, in person, by my baby sister."

"I am *eleven months* younger than you," Amy says automatically. "Wait. Did Lu put you up to this?"

"If I *had* spoken to Luis," Julian declares, "it would only be to argue with him about whether home delivery of cannoli counts as one or point five of a favour."

Amy smiles and hugs her knees. "What was the ruling?"

"One," Julian says. "But only because the salted caramel ones sell out by noon on weekends."

"You got that from Boyle's food blog," Amy accuses. "Why do you *read* Boyle's blog? You don't even live in New York!"

"Chop chop, Mimi, it's almost eleven," Julian says cheerfully, and hangs up on her.

So Amy, because she's got amazing brothers even if she does resent four-sevenths of them for being better than her at marriage--hell, at this point there are probably species of alien algae living in frozen moon-lakes who are better than Amy Santiago at marriage--ends up having a very tolerable Saturday. She spends the rest of the morning blasting Kelly Clarkson in a car that smells increasingly of caramel and powdered sugar, and the afternoon watching silly movies while Julian does even sillier impressions of his students. Julian's like a trip to another country; his company is like sinking into the blissful anonymity of a train full of people who can't understand a word you say. He knows about love, he knows about romance, he can and will declaim a dozen passionate speeches from a dozen plays, but you still get the impression it doesn't actually *exist* for him outside of a theatrical conceit. Like he suspects the rest of the world is just faking it for shits and giggles.

After spending all her emotional resilience making sad goose noises at Luis over the phone, right now Amy doesn't need someone else to sympathise with her. She needs someone for whom romance is as beside the point as an underwater bicycle.

Hanging out with Julian gives Amy a burst of confidence and sheer avoidance that lasts through most of Sunday morning. Amy Santiago is fine! Amy Santiago is a whole person! She has people who love her! She was perfectly fine before she even *met* Jake Peralta!

On Sunday afternoon she has the genius realisation that even though she isn't at work, there's nothing to stop her from recreating the whiteboard on her floor with hastily scribbled Post-It notes, of which she has a rainbow's worth in her Backup Stationery Drawer. Sadly, no incredible breakthroughs in the case manage to emerge while she's constructing it. When she steps back to look at the whole, shaking her foot to try and dislodge a lime green Post-It that's attached itself to her sole, the case remains at a standstill. Nothing in the file they stole from the Vulture, nothing that Jake and Amy have managed to haul together, will prove that O'Grady's people ever had any incriminating or even vaguely suspicious contact with the players they are--probably, *certainly*, Amy's got a cop's gut even if she prefers to use her head--blackmailing.

There's an empty square of rug in her outline. She's forgotten one of the links in the structure; what *was* the name of the street-level pusher that Major Crimes picked up? Jake would know. He spent an entire morning at his desk reading the file cover-to-cover until Captain Holt asked, flatly, if the lack of his usual manic activity indicated some sort of dreadful sickness.

Amy transfers the tenacious green Post-It absently from one foot to another, listening to the *brrrpt-brrrpt* of the ringing phone.

"Amy?" says Jake's voice, wary.

"Oh! Oh my God," says Amy, and drops her phone in horror.

From the rug she hears the tinny sound of Jake saying, "What? Hello? You know what, Santiago, *screw you--*" and then the dial tone.

"I forgot!" Amy shouts down at the phone.

She crouches down and grabs for it. Her hand feels numb and clumsy. Shit, shit. Amy Santiago is *not fine*. Amy Santiago is, apparently, now engaged in a game of chicken with Jake Peralta's name in her contacts list.

This is stupid. There has to be a handbook for this, some kind of protocol. Amy believes in protocol. And she can't be the first person in the history of human relationships to have screwed up this monumentally.

With mild trepidation, Amy turns to the Internet.

Gina's online course in marriage counselling requires her to maintain a kind of advice column, which she's been emailing to the entire precinct on a weekly basis. Amy clicked on it once and only once. She got half a paragraph into Gina's reply to someone called *Desperately Hoping* ("Dear Desperate: so first of all, let's talk *accessorizing* and *soundtracking* the perfect stalking-your-ex-husband stakeout...") and then closed the window with such violence that she accidentally closed a half-finished report as well. It turned out well, actually--typing up the report the second time gave Amy a chance to really *perfect* the structure of her dot points--but the incident stuck with her.

Now, after some wary Googling, Amy ends up reading three separate non-Gina advice columns about dealing with breakups, all of which advise her to respect the other person's space and not contact them. Amy spends some time agonising about if it counts as a breakup when it wasn't even a proper relationship, opens a bottle of wine, goes in search of more advice blogs, drinks a glass of wine, reorganises her linen closet, drinks another glass of wine, and makes a couple of soothing spreadsheets covering worst-case scenarios for the next morning, up to and including Amy having to fake her own death or Captain Holt telling her that he is *disappointed in her conduct*.

Finally, in a moment of despair, she Googles 'how to download crazy cupcakes'.

Google asks her: did she mean *kwazy* cupcakes?

"Yes, I did," Amy agrees, ever grateful for improving feedback.

Amy sees dancing cupcakes on the inside of her eyelids for a good half hour before falling asleep, but she sleeps well, and faces Monday morning with a determined good mood that lasts until Delia puts her blueberry bagel in a bag and then extends the tongs in the direction of the onion bagels.

"No!" Amy snaps, extending a hand like she's trying to prevent someone from touching together the two wires that will complete the circuit and blow the building sky-high.

Delia, understandably, freezes in place and stares at her.

"Sorry," Amy says. "I'm just--okay, yes, I can see how that was an overreaction. Sorry."

"No onion bagel today?"

"No."

Delia shrugs, folds the paper bag closed, and takes Amy's money. When Amy reaches out for her bagel, though, Delia keeps a corner of the bag hostage and levels a concerned expression over it.

"Is everything okay?" Delia asks.

Which is unfair; everyone knows that's a diamond drill bit of a question, able to cut right through the stiffest facade and find the swirling mess of tears and chin-wobbling hidden beneath.

"Y-yes," Amy says. "No. I'm--going to be late for work."

That's a lie. She's early enough for work that there's still time to kill before the morning meeting. Jake has retained his habit of sliding into his seat just as the captain opens his mouth to begin, so she's not surprised that his desk is empty. Hitchcock and Scully are shortening the lives of their keyboards with sugar as they work through a box of donuts, and Rosa is leaning against her desk holding a mug of coffee.

"Hey, Rosa," Amy says. "How was your--"

"Shh," Rosa says. "I'm watching this."

Amy follows her gaze. Gina has cornered some girl who, aside from her hipster glasses, looks like she's escaped from the set of *Grease*: a white blouse, an explosion of puffy lace under a pink circle skirt with tiny white dots, a gold scarf and bright pink lipstick.

"I'm telling you," Gina's saying, "the best bargains are *always* from estate sales, especially if the person was a minor celebrity in the 1970s. You should see my collection of lycra bodysuits. They were a total steal, and the dead lady they belonged to? Totally a backup dancer for Cher."

"Oh, *ew*," Amy mutters. "What did you do with the one she gave you when we fixed her window locks?"

"Burned it," Rosa says. "You?"

"I wish," Amy says mournfully. She was brought up to respect gifts. The hideous thing is hanging in her closet, untouched and radiating guilt. And, apparently, the dead spirit of disco fever.

Gina's victim looks more fascinated than creeped out, and appears to be taking notes. Boyle is hovering behind the girl's shoulder with a worried expression.

"Who is that, anyway?" Amy asks.

"Boyle won some New York blogging award," Rosa says. "This infant won one too, which means she gets to follow him around all day and blog about his life. Or something."

"Amy!" Boyle says, voice drenched in relief. He steers the girl away from Gina and towards Rosa and Amy. "This is Bonnie Teng. Bonnie, this is Detective Amy Santiago."

"Hi!" says Bonnie Teng. She has a visitor's pass clipped to the waist of her skirt.

"Rosa says you're a blogger?" Amy says.

"That's right!" says Bonnie.

"Bonnie won the Lifestyle category of the Blogs of New York awards," says Boyle.

"Yeah, that doesn't sound like a real thing," Rosa says.

"And Charles here won the Eating Out category," says Bonnie. "All of the winners are doing a day-in-the-life feature on another one of the winners. It's going to be so much fun!"

"What do you write about?" Amy asks.

"Well, I started out blogging about vintage clothing, but these days I'm mostly focused on interior design," Bonnie says. Her pink mouth is bracketed by dimples when she smiles. "My blog is called Trinkets by Teng."

"Did you say Trinkets by Teng?" Captain Holt, on his way from the break room to his office, pauses nearby.

"Yeah!" Bonnie says. "Do you want a card?" She bounces over with a stack of business cards in her hand. Amy blinks rapidly before ascertaining that Bonnie's cards *are* actually shaped like cupcakes; Amy's not having a residual hallucination from that silly game.

"Hmm. I believe my husband reads your blog," the captain says. "He has mentioned it to me."

Bonnie beams. Amy fights down an immediate surge of jealousy and tells herself that Kevin would like the interior design of *her* apartment if he saw it. They bought the same microwave, and that means something.

"Detective Diaz," Bonnie says, "where did you get that jacket?"

"Why?" Rosa demands.

"I *love* the cut of it."

"Pulled it off a corpse," Rosa says.

"*Really?*"

"She's kidding," Boyle says. "She's...kidding, right?"

Rosa leaves an uncomfortably long pause before she gives one of her less authentic smiles and says, "Yeah. I'm totally kidding."

Bonnie gives a relieved laugh. "So...where did you get it?"

"A shop."

"Bonnie," Amy says, coming to the girl's rescue, "you can ask me about any of my clothes, if you like."

Bonnie looks from Amy's favourite red shirt to her black belt and her black pants and black ankle boots, and then hopefully up to Amy's face as though in search of some jewellery more exciting than Amy's gold studs. What, Amy can't wear anything that *dangles*, that's just asking to have your earlobes ripped when a perp grabs hold of them in a fight. Sergeant James from the Police Academy told that story a lot, and liked to freak out the new cadets by showing them her scars.

"No," Bonnie says, "um, that's alright. Thanks."

"Morning briefing," the sergeant calls. "Come on, people."

The first Amy sees of Jake is the back of his head, walking out of the briefing. She's been on the other side of a fight with him before, and she's prepared for anything from incessant humming to peanut butter being spread over her chair, but instead of any of his usual childish approaches Jake is being--normal. Aggressively normal. Normal in a very un-Jake-Peralta kind of way. He sits at his desk and doesn't come and perch on the edge of Amy's, he keeps the loud groaning noises when faced with routine paperwork to a minimum, and he doesn't throw any paperclips or crunched-up pieces of paper over their computers to get Amy's attention.

As a kind of peace offering, Amy puts out a bowl of pretzels on her desk; this is usually foolproof Peralta bait, but he doesn't touch them. And when Boyle marches Ronnie Schultz through to processing, Ronnie bestowing cheerful nods as he goes, Jake doesn't glance at Amy with his usual triumphant expression to remind her of the one time, years ago, when she bought in to Ronnie's ridiculous lies and spent most of a day visiting pharmacies to ask about an urgent medication that turned out to be entirely made up.

Mid-morning, a Taylor Swift song comes on the radio, or at least the digital streaming device that Gina replaced their old radio with when it perished in a Boyle-induced soup accident last month. Amy starts singing the song under her breath, automatically, getting herself in the groove, waiting for Jake to turn it off and start their usual lyrics-completion battle.

She's still singing when she remembers that this probably won't happen. But when she looks up from her paperwork, Jake's standing there, his hand on the radio like he's just woken from sleepwalking.

Amy starts actually listening to the words coming more-or-less melodiously out of her mouth.

Jake gives a shake of his shoulders and looks Amy right in the face, and turns the music off.

It's up to Amy to finish the next line, that's how this game works, but she she only makes it through the first word before her voice weakens and dies: *let me remind you this was what you wanted*.

Amy's face fills with heat like climbing the steps from the subway up into the worst and most humid of summer days. She doesn't sing the line after that; Jake doesn't sing it either. Both of them are silent, stubborn, waiting for the other break the pattern, and isn't that just--*perfect*. Just *typical*.

"Oh, great," Rosa says, into the silence that seems to have expanded, like a toxic gas, to fill the room. "What have you idiots done now?"

"What's going on?" says Bonnie Teng.

"Nothing," Jake says loudly. "Nothing is going on."

"*Peralta* lost the bet," Amy snaps.

"You're getting divorced?" Boyle's face crumples like an umbrella in a gale. "Aw, you guys."

"Annulled," Hitchcock chimes in. "It was whichever of them called annulment first."

"How do you remember *that*," Jake demands, "when you can barely remember how to mirandize a perp?"

"I'm confused," says Bonnie Teng.

"I don't *believe* this," Gina says, hand pressed to her heart.

"Right?" says Boyle. "They just seemed so--"

Gina says, "Have you *no* consideration for me? I need at least one success story to pass my marriage counselling course."

"It was a bet, Charles," Rosa says. "Jesus, are you getting *teary*?"

"No, it has to be divorced," Scully's telling Hitchcock. "They've been married for long enough."

"Can we all please--uh, Scully, that's really not how the law works," says Sergeant Jeffords.

"No, annulment requires proof of fraud," says Rosa. "At least in New York State."

"That's true," Gina says knowledgeably.

"But they were married in Nevada--"

"They *were*?" says Bonnie Teng, who is taking notes again.

"And," says Boyle, in a thick voice, "divorce requires separation."

"We are separate!" Amy says, trying to inject something like normality into this farce, but the bullpen's off and running now: there's a full-fledged argument about divorce versus annulment in process, with bonus interjections from Boyle about the tragedy of watching an emotional partnership dissolve into ashes, or some other equally unscientific metaphor.

Amy leans her forehead on her hand and looks at Jake, who's still standing near the radio. Jake looks back. In movies, when two people are staring at one another across a crowded room, everyone else fades away. Amy's heart is a warm and weighty rock inside her chest and she wonders: if she opened her mouth and screamed loud enough, could she empty the room but for the two of them, making a space for them to speak into? Would that help, at all? Would that fix anything?

The words *I'm sorry* are brimming on Amy's treacherous lips. But Jake looks 30% wrecked, 70% angry, and that's not right, why should *she* apologise, and how dare *he* be angry? He's not the wronged party here.

And neither's she. Because this isn't a breakup. Because it wasn't a relationship.

Rosa answers a phone that, Amy realises, has been ringing for a while. She pulls the receiver down to her chest and raises her voice above the noise. "Homicide. Apartment block on Park and Pacific."

"Oh, thank God," says Sergeant Jeffords.

Bonnie Teng looks taken aback by this sentiment.

"That's just his police zeal," Amy assures her. "Crime. Solving. We're all very...zealy...here."

"You mean zealous?" says Bonnie.

"Santiago, Diaz," the sergeant says.

"On it," says Rosa, grabbing for her wallet and badge. "Santiago, let's go. Leave Boyle's middle schooler alone before she challenges you to a spelling bee. And you lose."

"I'm *twenty-four*," says Bonnie Teng.

The universe has taken pity on Amy. It gives her a very straightforward ("You mean *boring*," says Rosa) homicide, where the husband spends a grand total of ten minutes trying to sell them the story of a masked intruder who opened the door to their apartment, ran in, beat his wife around the head with his own baseball bat, paused to wipe the handle clean of fingerprints, and then ran away again.

"Uh huh," says Rosa.

Amy looks around the room, trying to see past the milling crime scene techs and the occasional flash of their cameras. No television, though there's a space for it. The coffee table's an ugly battered thing and too small for the indents in the shabby carpet, like it was

pulled off the curb to replace something bigger. Husband and wife were both at home in the middle of a Monday, both dressed in casual clothes that smell of cigarettes.

"Were you guys having money troubles, Darren?" she asks.

Darren's jaw clenches and then opens like the burst gates of a dam. Yeah, they were having money troubles. He was laid off four months ago and she was only picking up the odd cleaning job here and there, not that it'd stopped her from wasting his unemployment checks on manicures and lottery tickets, and she had the gall to tell *him* he wasn't providing for them like a man should, that it was all *his* fault, and she was going to walk out on him, well, he showed *her* how a real man dealt with his problems--

"Sure," Amy says, once Rosa is done shouting the man's Miranda rights over the latter half of this tirade. "That definitely sounds like beating her to death was the only solution."

Darren gives her a grateful look. "You feelin' me?"

"Oh my God," Amy says, cuffing him with more force than is strictly necessary. "*Men.*"

"Marriage is the worst," Rosa says.

Weirdly, Amy thinks she's trying to help.

"Yeah," Amy agrees.

"Yeah," sighs Darren.

"You shut up," Amy says. "You're a terrible person."

When they get back to the station and hand Darren off for processing, Jake's gone again, off with the sergeant at an armed robbery call. Boyle is down in forensics discussing something that Bonnie Teng's visitor pass doesn't give her clearance for, so Bonnie has attached herself to Gina and the two of them are bonding over the fact that they both have phone dangles. According to Gina, phone dangles are going to be the next big thing, because they're just retro enough to be ahead of the curve.

"That's right," says Savant, lifting his phone without even glancing away from the screen. His phone, too, has something dangling from the corner.

When did this happen, Amy wonders. Has a portal to 2001 opened up somewhere? How are they even *attached*?

"What are you doing here?" Amy asks, instead of any of those questions.

"He's fixing my computer," says Hitchcock. "Somehow it got a whole lot of viruses. I have no idea how!"

"Yeah, it's not like you ever spend any time looking at pictures of naked Ukrainian ladies," says Savant.

"What!" says Hitchcock. "How do you know? I close the window! Every time! I mean. No, I don't spend any time doing that."

"I love old people," says Savant. "They're adorable."

"Viruses," Rosa says. "That's not going to affect the servers?"

"Nah," says Savant. "My system-level firewalls are unbreachable. Besides, I disconnected this dude's computer from the servers months ago. Yours too, other old dude."

"Huh?" says Scully.

Amy tunes them out, plants herself in front of her own computer and writes her arrest report. Then she indulges in a fit of something that's half melodrama and half self-coddling, and looks at the internal NYPD careers website. She creates a new spreadsheet, colour-codes the columns, and starts bookmarking postings and making notes about available detective-level transfers within Brooklyn.

The career counsellor at Amy's high school was the first one to be taken aback by Amy's dedication to all facets of job-hunting and career planning, when she walked into her first mandatory session with a binder already chock full of SAT printouts and college brochures, laid it on his desk, and produced her list of questions (double sided, single spaced) with a flourish. Amy has made an art out of polishing her CV, writing to selection criteria, practicing her handshake and her interview face, and updating the folder that contains all the pertinent anecdotes that best illustrate her leadership, teamwork, diplomacy, communication skills and professionalism.

She's enjoying herself so much that she almost forgets why she's considering leaving the 9-9 in the first place.

It's lunchtime by the time Amy tears herself away from the screen, her stomach both enticed and disturbed by the four-course gourmet takeout meal that Boyle seems to have decided it's his duty to provide for his fellow blogger.

"And this," says Boyle in a reverent tone, "is the *hoof*."

"I'm going to get hot dogs," Rosa says. "Hey. Skirt girl. You want a hot dog?"

Bonnie Teng looks paralysed by good manners. Amy sympathises.

"Santiago?" says Rosa.

"No, thanks." Amy hoists her bag of bagel, though when she pulls the bagel itself out, something about it doesn't quite--smell right? Taste right?

She's finished the bagel and is trying to be dainty about sucking cream cheese and honey off the side of her hand when she realises what the problem is. She's become accustomed to the faint oniony whiff that Jake's bagel transfers to her own, like that horrible cinnamon tea of Gina's which infected every other tea bag and most of the coffee grounds in the break room cupboard and led to the Great Tea Purge of 2012.

Amy throws the screwed-up ball of her paper bag at the trash can with uncoordinated force. She hits Bonnie Teng's feet, in their smart white pumps, instead.

"Detective Santiago?" says Bonnie.

"I'm sorry," Amy says.

Bonnie ventures, "Would you like a macaron?"

"Ginger and persimmon!" says Boyle. "A playful marriage of flavours. Ohmygod, Amy, I'm sorry, marriage, how insensitive of me--"

"No," Amy says. "I'm. No, thank you. I'm going to the--I'll be right back."

In the ladies' room, Amy splashes water on her cheeks, sets her shoulders, and looks at her sensible shirt and her hair pulled back in its sensible ponytail.

"Well, Detective Santiago," she says. "This all seems very impressive so far. Can you tell us about your experience with *community engagement* as it relates to the NYPD?"

Amy calls her interview smile onto her face. "Of course. I was personally selected to run a junior police outreach program for disadvantaged youths, and on another occasion my partner and I--"

That's a story about Jake.

"I know it's very important to be seen as an active and involved member of the community outside of one's professional role, and last year I attended a monthly trivia night fundraising for local groups such as the Boy Scouts--"

And *that* was only because Jake and Gina pressganged her into the team as a deliberate third wheel when someone's aunt's hairdresser's cousin spread a rumour that the two of them were dating, a prospect which made Gina laugh until her voice was hoarse. Plus they needed someone who could answer questions about events prior to 1980. Jake and Gina couldn't be more engaged with the community if they were related to every single member of it by blood, which they very nearly are.

Shit. Amy needs to stop thinking the word *engaged*, because now her ring finger is itching. And the truth is that Jake pops up everywhere in the folder of anecdotes, woven through the fabric of her professional life; the truth is that Amy's stupid bet and stupid feelings have thrown a large rock through the window of a valuable working partnership and--friendship, sort of? She didn't think of it in those terms, before, but it was a friendship. It was a good one, too.

"God," Amy says, "I am not crying because of a *bagel*, I am *not*."

She's not, technically. She's so annoyed at herself for crying that she's not doing much more than sniffing and grimacing into her hands. Amy's feelings, stupid or otherwise, are her own thing to deal with. Jake said it himself: just because he once told her he liked her, it doesn't mean anything now. And so they made out on Amy's couch: *that* doesn't have to mean

anything except that they were a bit drunk and a bit lonely, caught up and insecure. *What if this is it and we never got this again?*

What if.

Amy sighs and goes to contort herself so she can get her wet face under the hand dryer, because the paper towel dispenser is, as usual, empty. Rosa walks in when Amy's clearing the smudge of mascara from beneath her eyes with one finger and seriously considering a shame cigarette.

"Hey, Santiago," Rosa says. "We've got another call, let's go."

"I'm coming," says Amy.

Rosa says, "You'll like this one."

Like may not be the right word. But the vindictive cheer Amy gets from walking Geraldine Belluci, recidivist epileptic, through the precinct and right into the interrogation room is definitely the best thing to happen to her all day.

At least the woman doesn't try to light up a cigarette this time. She just chews obnoxiously on her nicotine gum in a loud, open-mouthed way that makes Amy ache with sympathy for her own mother and the nightly battle she fought across the dinner table with eight children under the age of fifteen.

"Seriously?" Amy says. "The same scam? In the same restaurant? Did you think we *wouldn't* find out?"

Belluci leans back in the chair and crosses her arms, a furrow between her brows. "Funny how you two turned up before the ambulance."

"Luca needs to treat his staff better," says Rosa. "*Funny* how you can leave someone your card and tell them to call if the boss's cousin tries her old tricks again, and eventually they'll be pissed off enough to turn snitch."

The furrow deepens.

"So," Amy says. "Are you still using that dating website to choose your victims?"

"Victim is a strong word, Detective," says Belluci. "They get a date with me. That's not nothing, you know."

"*Are* you still using--"

"You check my account," Belluci says with a shrug. "I haven't logged on to Give Love A Chance for months."

An hour later they've wrestled a statement out of Belluci and compared it to that of the waitress who's agreed to be their witness, and Rosa is showing Amy how a dating app works.

"Wait," Amy says, appalled. "Stop swiping! How do you--what if that person is nice?" She's trying really hard not to say the actual words *give love a chance*, but at least she understood the function of dating websites. In theory.

"Gut instinct, Santiago," says Rosa. Her thumb swivels expertly: left, left, left, brief pause, left. "This isn't about administering a quiz to find out if their life goals are compatible with yours."

"That was just an idea," Amy defends herself, looking around automatically for Bonnie Teng, but the bouncy blogger has left the building; Boyle is giving evidence in court this afternoon. "I never actually did it."

Alright, fine: she *wrote* the quiz. It's sitting on her hard drive somewhere. But she never deployed it. Even Amy Santiago can recognise that most other human beings don't find paperwork to be a romantic first date activity.

"Rosa's right," Gina says. "I only use Tinder for judging people's selfies. The Kwazy Cupcakes chat function is the *only* place to find potential life partners. There's a special code, see? Starfish emoji plus sending someone a Cherry Cheat means you're just coming out of something long-term and want the other person to move slowly."

"Is that where you met your boyfriend?" Jake asks.

"Yes, but also no," says Savant. Who is, inexplicably, still in the bullpen. Today is the most Amy's seen of him since he was hired.

"Okay, but I asked *oh my God are you serious*," says Jake.

Rosa's grinning in the way she does when she scents blood. "The penguin boy. Is your boyfriend."

"Oops," says Savant. But his face isn't altogether an *oops* face, Amy thinks.

Gina freezes in place for a second and then spins her chair, very slowly, until she's facing the wall.

"Yeah, I do not acknowledge the plane of existence that holds this conversation," she says. "Hommmmm."

"Come on, Gina," says Savant, over her humming. "This is stupid. You've met my *mother*."

Amy stifles a horrified noise and can't help looking at Jake, who surely has a reaction to this. But Jake has pulled out his own phone and is tapping furiously at the screen.

"Huh," Jake says, and, "I wonder--*huh*."

Amy's competitive radar was finely honed during their original bet, when her success depended on clocking more felony arrests than Jake. She can tell when he's on the precipice, about to take a ridiculous leap of Jake-logic that will lead to a vital breakthrough.

"What is it?" she asks.

"Gina," Jake says. "Gabriel Lloyd gave you his username for this thing."

"Right." Gina says, spinning back around. "We messaged a bit. Nothing serious. Gabbyness something."

"Twenty-two," Amy remembers. "His jersey number."

"Hey, IT guy," Jake says. "Corey."

"*Savant.*"

"Yeah, I'm not calling you that, Napoleon Dynamite. Whatever. Can you hack into an account? Give us access to the messages?"

"Did you get his phone number and email as well?" Savant asks Gina.

"Am I a cave-dwelling nobody?" says Gina. "Of course I did." She fiddles with her phone and then thrusts it under Savant's nose.

"This relationship is weird," Rosa says. Then: "I approve."

"Yeah, I can. Child's play," Savant says, though with less bored swagger than usual. Amy doesn't blame him. Gina's advice column is enough to make anyone nervous of doing anything that might warrant being dumped by her. "Give me a minute."

Amy looks around, waiting for someone to protest that they probably need a warrant for this to be admissible. The someone might have to be Amy. But...this is her whiteboard. This is *her* stalled case. They'll find the proof elsewhere. Here, now, Amy needs to know that she's right.

"Okay, what am I looking for?" Savant asks.

"That's it?" Rosa looks impressed despite herself. "Just like that?"

Jake snaps his fingers. "Amy, the date of the first match he threw, the one where we realised it was him--"

"May sixteenth," Amy says. "I can get the others. I made--"

"--a list," Jake finishes, "of course you did," and he's grinning, so unexpected that it sends a jolt of helpless and bittersweet happiness through Amy's chest.

All of them are clustered behind Savant's chair now. They probably look like the scene in any disaster film where the soda-gulping scientist works out that the meteor is on a direct path to earth.

Savant scrolls up through Lloyd's account and finds a message received on May fifteenth. "Good luck tomorrow," he reads. "Palm tree emoji, shooting star emoji, Bonus Time

Lemondrop."

"Gina," Jake says. "What does that mean in your code?"

"Nothing," Gina says. "That's nonsense. Now, if it was a maple leaf instead of a palm tree, that'd be different."

They're close to something, Amy can feel it. But after some more opaque tapping and clicking, Savant announces that he can't get into the account that *sent* the message; ideally they need the actual, physical phone that sent it, to make the link.

Everyone winces at the screech of tortured wheels as Jake drags the oldest whiteboard over. The sound finally attracts the attention of Captain Holt, who looks first dubious (Amy thinks) and then intrigued (possibly?) by the idea of a coded messaging system delivered through a game about colourful baked goods, but eventually he deems it not a complete waste of time and, having blessed proceedings with his stern approval, returns to his office.

"Who do we like for it?" Jake says. "O'Grady wouldn't be sending the messages himself."

"What about the syndicate?" Rosa says.

Amy looks at the outline on the whiteboard. "No, they're placing the bets. They've got even more reason to keep their hands totally clean of it. Someone from O'Grady's organisation. Downstream."

"But trusted." Jake taps a pen against a name and turns around, eyebrows cocked at Amy.

Amy nods slowly. "Could be."

"You can't bring Dillan in just because you want to look at his phone," Rosa says. "O'Grady will *spook*. Hard."

"So we don't bring him in." Jake pulls his own phone out of his pocket and shrugs on his jacket. "I've got an idea."

"Jake, what--" Amy starts, but he's already leaving. "This is *my case*," she yells after him. "Damn it, Peralta!"

He's back only ten minutes later, by which time--feelings or no feelings--Amy is about ready to wrap her hands around his stupid neck, and not in a sexy way. Jake catches the edge of her glare and hovers behind his desk.

"Okay!" he says quickly. "Okay. I needed to make a call from somewhere that didn't sound like a police station. There's a contact of mine from when I was undercover, Artie. He was barely involved with the Ianuccis. I figured he hadn't realised that I helped bring them down, and I was right. As far as he's concerned I'm still a crooked ex-cop." Jake has a hint of bitterness to his voice. "He's a go-between. He might be able to tell me where Dillan hangs out socially, and we can get someone in there, lift his phone."

"You've got an in with O'Grady's crew?" Amy demands. "You didn't think that was worth mentioning?"

"Hey, I can only play this card once," Jake says. "This is the best lead we have right now. I figure it's worth it."

Amy exhales. She feels shaky, and still annoyed, and also desperately glad that their working relationship might be more intact than she'd feared. Her emotions have done too many hairpin turns today and there are *zero* techniques from her advanced police driving course that she can apply to this bullshit.

"Okay," she says. "I hope so."

The next morning Amy is at work even earlier, while the night shift is filing out looking rumpled and tired around the eyes. Amy pours coffee into the most enormous mug she can find in the break room cupboard. It has two cute pandas on it, along with the words World's Greatest Dad, but Terry was banned from it by popular vote after they realised that adding that amount of caffeine to the sergeant's default muscular anxiety led to shouting, moderate paranoia, and one actual hole punched in the actual wall.

Today, in the name of Dealing With Her Own Shit--and also because the 9-9's lively debate yesterday left her a bit muddled on the details, to be honest--Amy starts to research the correct procedures for the legal separation of a married couple. It seems like it should be a good, constructive, mature step. Instead it leaves her staring at the website, feeling hollow panic like a fist closing around something vital in the nest of her ribs, as the precinct fills steadily with people.

Eventually Amy succumbs to cowardice and closes the window. She doesn't know if Jake's made any attempt to look this stuff up--Jake Peralta, doing paperwork? All experience suggests not.

It's not like they've talked about it. It's like a smaller, more depressing game was kicked into motion the morning after Die Hard, when Jake left her apartment: first one to bring it up makes it real.

Amy's already drunk most of the coffee in the huge panda mug. That's probably why her hand is trembling when she opens the top drawer of her desk and looks down at the moonstone ring, where it lies on top of her second-best list-making notebook. She should give it back. She should put it on Jake's keyboard and not say a word. That's what she should do.

"Santiago!"

Amy jolts in her chair and frantically tries to remember if she's done anything to piss off Rosa. She shoves the drawer closed again.

"Santiago. Ladies' room. Now." Rosa doesn't even pause. Amy scurries after her.

"What is it?" Amy asks, when Rosa's kicked at all the stall doors with her thick black boots to make sure nobody else is in there.

"I was on a date last night," Rosa says.

"Congratulations?" Amy says. Perhaps she fell asleep at her desk. Perhaps this is some strange alternate universe where Rosa corners her in the bathroom for girly gossip.

"Thanks," Rosa says, absolutely flat. "It went well. We had sex. Whatever. The point is, I put my phone on silent. It was in my bag. I didn't look at it until I was almost here this morning."

"Okay?" Amy says.

"Jake left me a voicemail," Rosa says, pulling out her phone. "Last night. I think--look, I think you should hear it."

The voicemail goes like this:

"Rosa! Rosaaaaaa, Rosa. Sorry, I'm a bit. A bit jittery. And hey, guess what, I've picked the worst timing in the world to realise that I'm in love. With my wife. Isn't THAT just--the greatest. We're talking HORRIBLE in love, like, you remember Jane, at the academy? Like that, only times a million. Shit."

The thump of Amy's heart should be shattering the tiles beneath her feet. She can't tear her gaze away from the phone. Rosa's fingernails are painted a deep bronze.

Jake's manic voice breezes on. *"Anyway, the reason I'm calling is because Artie just got back to me and Tommy Dillan is flying to Chicago in two days but he's going to be at the Lionskin tonight. Turns out O'Grady's uncle is the club owner. I'm going to check it out, see if I can bump into him. So if I haven't texted you the all clear by tomorrow morning then please send some backup. Lots of backup. With guns. Okay, I'm--"*

End of message, says a female voice that sounds, in Amy's fervent opinion, inappropriately calm for the situation at hand.

"And did he--"

"No," Rosa says. "I'm going to tell Holt, right now."

Amy's stomach twists in sick fear. "Jake. Oh God, he is *such an idiot*."

"Yeah," Rosa says. "He kind of is, sometimes. But if you give him shit for this," she adds, "I will punch you so hard that ten-year-old Amy Santiago will feel it across the fabric of spacetime and just start crying. For no reason at all."

"I--wow, that is...a vivid image. I'm not going to," Amy says. "Rosa, I *swear*."

Rosa stares at her, hard. Amy has the vague urge to admit to every instance of jaywalking she's ever committed, and the single time she was dared into shoplifting when she was fourteen, even though she was so guilty afterwards she vomited and then snuck back into the

store the next day to put the eyeshadow back on the shelf. No wonder half of Rosa's perps don't even make it to the interrogation room before confessing. Amy needs to learn how to stare like this.

Finally Rosa blinks. "Are you in love with Jake?"

"I don't--I wouldn't say--" Amy stammers. The muscles of her throat flutter painfully. She can feel her whole face trying to wince. "I. Probably?"

"Jesus. Why am I involved in this. *Figure it out*, Santiago," Rosa says.

This time the *or else* dangles silently between them, with no imagery attached.

Amy swallows.

"Alright," she says. "Let's go."

ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS PULL THE TRIGGER

"Dude, you can't break the finger with my wedding ring on it," Jake says. "My wife will kill me."

"*Leo is gonna kill you,*" says a voice that Amy has already mentally accessorised with twitchy shoulders and some terrible facial hair.

"Aw, man, really?" says Jake. "What if I want his nephew to do it? How about one of you guys gives him a call? You know him, right? Jack O'Grady. Runt of a guy, comes up to my shoulder and really fucking ugl--*owowow*, *alright*," the rest of his breath escaping in a wheeze.

Amy forces herself to tug off the headphones of the parabolic ear she shamelessly appropriated from the precinct's equipment clerk, a humourless man whom everyone agrees has nothing *near* the sense of fun that you should have when your job is more or less being Q. The listening device looks like something from Get Smart, but it's top of the line, and sometimes you don't have a convenient bug planted where you need it.

Less than a minute later she's standing on the street in front of the locked door of the Lionskin club. She looks down at her hands and folds them into fists. She takes a breath deep enough to hurt, raises her face, and starts to pound her fist against the door.

"Hey!" she yells. Whack, whack, whack. "Hey! Assholes! Open the door!" Whack, whack, whack.

This is New York, so for the most part the people on the sidewalk don't even bother to glance at her, but soon there's a slim margin of personal space around Amy that wasn't there before, and fewer elbows punishing her for daring to inconvenience the foot traffic.

"I'm not going anywhere!" Amy yells, mouth to the keyhole for all the good that will do. "I can keep this up all day!"

Whack, whack--and the door cracks open to show two inches of a man's scowling face.

"Listen, you psycho," he growls, but Amy took a *class* in strategic entry; she gets first her foot and then her whole leg through the barely-open door and shoves her way through before he can manage to object.

"Where is he?" she snaps.

"Steve, what the fuck?" shouts someone from halfway up the stairs that must lead to the rooms and offices above the club proper.

The whiteboard in Amy's mind supplies: *Steven Harris*.

Amy snakes her way out of Steve's grasp as he tries to make up for his error by grabbing her arm. She runs up the stairs.

"Are you in charge?" she demands. "Where is he? Where's my husband?"

She's aware of the gaping, shivering space behind her; the steepness of the stairs. But surprise is still working in her favour. This man is dark-haired and nervy and too confused by Amy's sudden presence to do more than ask, "Who?"

"Jake Peralta," and this is the dangerous bit; Amy rushes on while pretending not to see the sudden sharpness in the man's face, "I know he's here, there's no use protecting him. I got the phone company to trace the cheating dickhead's phone to this location, and of course it's a *nightclub*. My momma told me not to marry a cop, and she was right. Out all night, probably still drunk--what, has he passed out in a corner somewhere? Is he 'interrogating' some stripper with a name that belongs in a liquor cabinet?"

She lifts her chin and yells past the guy's shoulder. "*Jake!* Jake, you asshole, how stupid do you think I am?"

"...Amy?" comes a thin and confused shout.

"Jesus fucking Christ," says someone from even higher up the stairs. "Just get her up here as well."

This time Amy makes no objection to the grip on her arm, and lets herself be walked up to a landing, where a grey-haired man with a face like a bulldog is hovering in a doorway.

"Wait," this man says. "Don't be an idiot. Peralta's a cop. Pat her down first, Tom."

An outraged civilian wife would probably stiffen in indignation and discomfort when being thoroughly searched for weapons, which is good, because Amy needs an excuse for her surprise. Tommy Dillan's grown his hair out since the mug shot that appears on their whiteboard.

Dillan finally finishes groping Amy's ankles and moves away, and they hustle her through the door into a small room with thin velvet curtains nailed to the window frame, and Jake Peralta seated on a chair with his hands zip-tied together through the frame behind him.

"Oh my God," Amy screeches. Her voice cracks with nerves; it probably adds to the effect. "What are you doing? Jake, baby, I'm sorry I doubted you!"

She starts towards Jake's chair, but Dillan's got a firm grip. "Hold it," he says.

"Amy," declaims Jake in a throbbing voice; he's always been quick on the uptake when it comes to these kinds of dramatics. "Darling, you shouldn't have come here. These aren't guys you want to mess with."

"Does he owe you money? Please, please don't hurt him," Amy begs, whirling around and grabbing hold of the front of Dillan's jacket. "We haven't been married that long! I love him. Like, *horribly* love him. Did you ever see *The Notebook*? Like that, times a *million*."

She casts a look at Jake, just long enough to see his shock melt into thoughtfulness, and then turns her most imploring gaze back on Dillan. "Don't you have anyone special in your life?"

"Get the hell off me, Jesus," Dillan says, now looking unnerved. "What do we do with her, Leo?"

Leo O'Grady--ha! Amy thinks, through the haze of adrenalin--gestures irritably. "Tie her up as well, for now. We're gonna have to talk to Jack about this."

There's no other exit to the room, and the chairs are sturdy, so O'Grady seems content to leave them in the room with Steve guarding the door outside. He might be listening, but Amy figures her flimsy cover story won't matter for much longer. She twists her wrists in the plastic tie and watches the nervous shake of her ankles.

"That was impressive," Jake says, as soon as they're alone. "But, Amy, are you *stupid*? Coming here on your own?"

"No," Amy says, "*stupid* was going on your own to try and *steal something* from a member of a *drug ring*."

Their chairs have been placed back to back and also ziptied together, which is a strategic move that Amy's going to have to remember for the next time she's subduing violent perps. It's a pity they aren't facing one another. Amy's doing some quality glaring right now.

"Hey, I--well, okay, fair," Jake says. After a moment he adds, "Seriously, your *momma*?"

"Oh, God," Amy moans. "I don't know. Was it too much?"

"It was amazing," Jake says. "This version of Amy Santiago is *feisty*."

"Anyway," she says. "I didn't come here alone."

In an ideal world, or in a Die Hard movie, the door would crash in at this moment to reveal her backup.

"Well," Amy amends, when this fails to happen. "I did. But--do you remember when you bet Captain Holt that you could steal his Medal of Valor?"

"Oh, nice," Jake says. "You're the misdirection."

"That's the plan."

If she moves her fingers slightly, she can touch Jake's. She's still feeling shivery; she squeezes an awkward part of his hand in hers for comfort, and he squeezes back.

"You're wearing the ring," Jake says.

"You didn't take yours off," Amy says. "I should have noticed that. Some detective I am, huh?"

"So," Jake says, untangling his fingers from hers. "I guess Rosa told you about my message."

"Yeah, she played it for me."

"Right, of course she did."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Silence, for a while.

"Neither of us are going anywhere," Amy says. "I'm right here, Jake. Don't you even want to try?"

Jake kicks his feet against the frame of his chair in a frustrated burst. "*Aauuggh*, God, I hate emotions, why do there have to be *emotions*. Okay. Amy. Look. I'm sorry I was such an asshole. But it feels like I blew the only chance I was ever going to have on a *game*, and I--I guess I didn't want to let it go because it seemed like such a waste, you know? Of what could have been. Because I know we could be good together. We *are* good together."

Amy tries to blindly take his fingers again, but Jake jerks them away as though from the hot barrel of a gun.

"Jake--"

"It feels like I woke up that day in Vegas with someone else's life, and any day I could wake up and it could be gone again, and--that's *terrifying*, Amy, don't you get that? That is literally the most terrifying thing I can imagine. And I *know* it was a joke, it wasn't real, for you, but--yeah. So no, I don't want to talk about it. At all. Ever."

That was a hell of a lot of talking, right there. Amy's not stupid enough to point that out.

"Not being married to me would be...the most terrifying?"

Jake sighs. "Yeah. Pretty much."

"What about...paperwork?" Amy tries. "Endless piles of paperwork. Paperwork forever."

"No, you're right, of course," Jake says instantly. "That would be much worse." He pauses. "Except--it wouldn't. I love being married to you, Amy Santiago. I don't want to be married to anyone else. I don't want *you* to be married to anyone else."

Amy ducks her head, as though there's anyone who can see the expression on her face: this helpless, crinkled, hot-nosed smile that she's directing down at her lap. This feels like the most romantic moment of her life, and it's *terrible*. It's worse than the fact that her one great drunkenness story involves Hateful Stacia's wedding and Amy's cheek pressed intimately to a toilet seat. At the very least, this admission of Jake's devotion should be taking place in a setting that doesn't feature hideous, moth-holed velvet and the smell of cigarettes and stale coffee, let alone being *tied up by drug dealers*.

Amy comes to the sudden conclusion that if any hypothetical grandchildren ask her to tell the story of her life, there will be a lot of lying involved. Jake will have to help with the details.

"Amy?" Jake says, and then the door *does* crash inwards.

"This is just great," says Sergeant Jeffords, once he's had a few seconds of standing silhouetted in the doorway like an action figure. A lot of shouting and thumping is now happening elsewhere in the building. "I feel like I should take a picture."

"Sarge!" Jake jerks back and forth so violently that Amy's chair rattles as well. "Awesome! Let us out! Let me at those guys, come on, I'll show *them* the strong arm of the law--"

It's adorable how he still thinks he's James Bond instead of the Disney princess despite the fact that he's literally in the process of being *rescued from villains*, Amy thinks.

"Are either of you wearing a flak jacket? Or carrying a weapon?" the sergeant demands. "I don't think so. We're going to stay in this nice safe room."

"Come on, sarge," Amy says. "You could at least cut the ties."

"I don't know." The sergeant crosses his arms. "I like knowing that Peralta's going to stay where he's put."

"Damn it. This is punishment for not taking backup, isn't it," Jake says.

"Oh yes," says Captain Holt. The sergeant moves into the room to allow the captain in. Amy tries to sit up extra straight in her uncomfortable criminal bondage chair, and to look alert and professional.

"Don't worry," the captain adds. "There will be other punishments."

"Captain!" Jake cheers. "Thanks for coming. I totally knew you would bring in the troops, arrest O'Grady's uncle for unlawfully detaining a police officer, all of that. It was all part of my cunning plan."

"No, Peralta," says Captain Holt. "This was *our* cunning plan, which was only necessary because of *your* thoughtless stunt."

"All cuffed and clear, Captain," says Rosa from behind him. She and Boyle crowd into the room, which is becoming cramped.

"And look," says Boyle. "Tommy Dillan dropped something." He lifts one hand and promptly drops its contents on the floor. "That wasn't a--hang on," he says, scrambling for the object. "He didn't actually drop it. Even though I just--anyway. I took it off him when I was patting him down."

"Dillan's phone!" Jake says. "Charles, you're a champion."

"Can someone please untie us now," Amy pleads.

"I got it," says Rosa. She gives a casual flick of her wrist and unfolds a knife that's almost as long as her hand.

"Why do you even need this many knives, Diaz?" says Sergeant Jeffords.

"You know," says Rosa. "Cutting my sandwiches. Terrifying my enemies. Normal stuff."

Amy sighs in relief and massages her wrists as she stands up. Jake makes a much louder sound of relief, but only gets as far as transferring his body weight onto his left foot before the sound turns strangled and he goes very still.

"Huh," Rosa says. "I always wondered what Peralta turning pale would look like. I figured...like nothing at all."

"Because I'm so white, I get it," Jake says. His mouth feints towards a smile.

"Do you require assistance, Peralta?" asks the captain.

"No! No, I'm all good," Jake says, and purposefully lifts the other foot a wobbly inch off the ground. "S-see? Oh man. I don't--" and this time he goes the colour of mouldy camembert before his legs buckle, his eyes flutter glassily, and he collapses to the floor.

Boyle moves fastest ("Jake! Jake, my man, did they *shoot you*?") and ends up cradling Jake's head tenderly on his legs while Amy tries to squash the unprofessionally jealous thought that it should be her doing that, and Rosa radios for an ambulance and goes down to the street.

"Airway," Boyle is muttering. "Danger, response, establish an airway."

In his lap, Jake coughs and stirs. "Ugh. Am I--what happened?"

"You fainted," says Captain Holt.

"Don't move," Boyle tells him. "Your Glasgow Coma Score might be fluctuating."

Jake makes to sit up, looks queasy, and settles down again. "Charles, no offence, buddy, but if there's gonna be mouth-to-mouth, I nominate Amy."

Amy's face flushes, but it's mostly pride. "I am very good at mouth-to-mouth," she says. "Plus the instructor said my chest compressions had *robotic efficiency*."

"Please don't compress my chest," Jake says. "I think Tommy Dillan already tried that. With his fist. Oh, wait, no, I've got a better one! Robotic efficiency--"

"Yeah, yeah," Amy says, smiling. "Name of my sex tape."

"This is so much better than when you guys were divorcing," Boyle says fervently.

Rosa must have magical, dispatch-terrifying powers: sirens are already filtering through the window, and it's less than two minutes before paramedics are prodding Jake, who now looks

palely manic and embarrassed and keeps flipping back and forth between telling them that he's fine, and trying to bequeath his leather jackets to Rosa in the event of his tragic demise.

He's talking enough that he probably *is* going to be fine. But the small muscles of Amy's hands don't believe her brain, they're restless and she has to flatten them against her legs, and her throat keeps trying to clench painfully around her breath.

"Play something cool at my funeral, *augh*," Jake yowls.

One of the paramedics nods and pulls her gloved hands away from his chest. "You need to get these ribs looked at, Detective," she says firmly. "And your ankle needs to be X-rayed."

"Santiago," the captain says, as they're loading Jake into the ambulance. "I thought you might need these."

"Thank you, sir." With her badge and gun attached to her person again, Amy feels something in her shoulders loosen. Screechy civilian wife has left the building! Amy is back to being--worried cop wife. Shit.

"Would you like me to drive you to the hospital?" asks the captain.

"What?" Amy spins to face him. "Really? No. We should--I mean, I should. There's going to be so much processing to do. And I really want to make Tommy Dillan think I'm going to crush his hands against a table, even though I never would, because police brutality is contemptible and a dark mark on the name of our profession."

"Alright," Captain Holt says. "However. Would you like me to drive you to the hospital?"

"Yes," Amy says. "Thanks."

He even offers to use the car lights and siren to get them there faster, but Amy's not lost *all* of her senses. Her feelings are not an emergency. It would be a misuse of resources. (She thinks Captain Holt looks impressed when she quotes the exact regulation in question, but...he could also be thinking about classical music. Those expressions are so similar.)

So of course they get stuck in a stupid four-block gridlock because of stupid roadworks. Amy should probably use this quality time in an enclosed space with Captain Holt to talk about her dreams and aspirations and whether he's noticed the new labelling system she's trying out in the break room, but instead she drums her fingers on the dashboard until she makes her *own* teeth grind with annoyance, and wishes like hell she had her packet of shame cigarettes with her.

By the time they arrive at the hospital, Jake's been installed in a short stay ward. The doctor who meets Amy and the captain at the nurses' station is a tall, stunning woman who looks enough like Tyra Banks that Amy really hopes they didn't give Jake too many painkillers.

"Sorry, we don't usually allow visitors over lunchtime," the doctor says. "You could go and have a coffee downstairs, and come back at two?"

"I need to see him," Amy says.

The doctor's eyes flick to Amy's badge and return to her face with a new layer of sympathy, but she shakes her head. "I understand. But--"

"He's my husband," Amy blurts.

"That," says Captain Holt, behind her, "is actually true."

The doctor gives a half-smile. "Okay. Just for a little while."

Jake still looks the wrong side of anaemic and he's wearing one of those horrible hospital gowns, but Amy's heart gives a skip at the sight of him anyway.

"Mr Peralta," the doctor says, "your wife is here."

"Hey," says Amy.

"Hey." Jake's face creases in the way it does when he's thought of a joke. "Amy, this is Dr Jameson, she's kind of terrifying. Dr Jameson, this is Amy Santiago, my partner in crime-solving and in the wonderful journey of life."

Dr Jameson laughs. "Ten minutes," she tells Amy, and closes the door behind her.

Amy turns back from staring enviously at her wavy ponytail. "Seriously, she looks so much like--"

"I know," Jake hisses.

"Please tell me you didn't tell her about your Tyra sex dream."

"I have too much dignity for that," Jake says. "Who am I kidding, I tell everyone about that dream. But I did not tell Dr Jameson. She *is* terrifying, and she had a needle in my arm."

"Smart," Amy says. "So have you broken anything?"

"Nah," Jake says. "My ribs are fine, though I have a bruise on my side that looks weirdly like the Floorgasm logo."

"Huh," Amy says.

"Right? And apparently a tendon in my ankle pulled off, like, a tiny bit of bone, but that still just counts as a bad sprain. So I get to wear this amazing boot made of plastic. For two months."

"I was scared," Amy says. "God, Jake. I was *scared*."

Jake swallows and some of the humour falls from his face. "Yeah. Sorry." He looks down at his hand; it's pale and open on the bed covers.

Amy puts her own hand into his. Jake's thumb runs over her knuckles and Amy fights down a sudden and ghastly urge to cry.

"By the way," Amy says, "Rosa said to tell you: *haa*, you fainted like a pussy."

"She says the sweetest things," says Jake.

Amy doesn't want to release his fingers. She has to, in order to move some blankets off the chair beside the bed so that she can sit down. She pulls it close, so her knees are tucked up against the mattress, and meets Jake's gaze.

"Hey," Amy says. Screwing her courage to the sticking place, wherever that is: the palms of her hands, perhaps. The thud of her pulse. "I don't want you to be married to anyone else either."

"Really?" Jake says.

"Yeah," Amy says. "I know we don't have a secret code involving push ups, or anything, but-I swear on my grandfather. I swear on John McClane. *Really*."

Jake gives a smile that's 100% sincere, and so blinding that Amy has to lean over and taste it, her hand against his cheek and her heart, her relief, her tentative hope, all glowing on her tongue.

"Wow," Jake says, when she pulls away from the kiss. "I should end up in the hospital more often."

"No you shouldn't."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Ooh, nice," Amy says, tugging Jake's lunch tray towards herself. "Canned peaches."

"And salad!" Jake says. "Here, mm, delicious. Cucumber. And--something else green. Is that kale? I don't actually know what kale is, but it sounds awful."

"Of course you left everything that was once part of a plant, and not made in a factory from chemicals," Amy says.

"I don't know what you mean." Jake runs one finger around an empty pudding carton and licks at it hopefully.

Amy finishes the peaches, and the salad, and the apple juice, and Jake tells her about a robbery call he took during his weekend, at a *clowning supplies* store, and Amy laughs until she almost chokes on juice. At the end of the story Jake looks down and Amy follows his gaze, and hey, look at that: her hand is back in Jake's.

"So," Jake says, "what about the bet?"

Amy's competitive spirit rises into her throat in protest for a second. But only a second.

"I don't know," she says. "Do you retract your call of annulment?"

Jake raises his free hand like he's in court. "I swear on John McClane," he says. "Retracted."

"Then I will take my weekend shifts back," Amy says. She's going for magnanimous, but some of the enthusiasm leaks into her voice. Damn it. Jake squints at her.

"Maybe I'll keep them," he says. "As a romantic gesture."

Amy groans. "Fine, I admit it, I love work. I want my weekend shifts back."

"You can have half of them," Jake says. "We're married, remember, I own half your stuff."

Amy narrows her eyes. "Okay, then I own half of yours."

"Tushy," says Jake, grinning.

"Touché."

"Whatever."

"Ahem," says Captain Holt from the doorway. It's not even close to a throat-clearing; there are bonus prim syllables to the word. *Ah-hem*. He usually deploys the word like that for spirit-crushing sarcasm purposes but right now, Amy thinks, he's probably trying to be tactful.

"Captain," she says, sitting up straighter in the hospital chair. Should she salute? Would that be--get a grip, Santiago, of course that would be weird.

"Santiago, I thought perhaps you might accompany me back to the precinct now," the captain says. "We do have a number of members of Jack O'Grady's organisation to question."

"I should really--" Jake starts, clearly on the verge of vibrating right out of the bed.

"No," says Captain Holt quellingly. "You will stay in that hospital bed, Peralta, even if I have to handcuff you to it."

"Kinky, Captain," Jake says. He starts to smile and it morphs into a yawn so wide and musical that Amy nearly yawns herself. She remembers suddenly that Jake didn't sleep at all last night; he was too busy sneaking around nightclubs and being an idiot.

"Get some sleep, Jake," Amy says, with a final squeeze of his hand. "I'll see you later."

Back at the precinct, the air already smells of whatever Boyle's decided to heat up for lunch, and Gina's wearing her creepy pair of headphones in the shape of stylised animal heads. Apparently they're supposed to be cute. Amy can never shake the feeling that the kitten is about to open its half-moon eyes and scream.

"Gina," Captain Holt says. "Gina." He puts one hand in between Gina's eyes and the screen of her phone and moves his fingers through a painstaking series of positions.

Gina blinks and lifts the rabbit-headphone away from her head, glancing up at them.

"Yes," the captain says. "I have learned to spell your name in sign language. In future, if you see this combination of hand motions, please assume I desire your attention."

"Actually," Gina says, "you spelled *Gima*, but sure."

"Hmm. I will practice my consonants," the captain says. "In the meantime, I need the files from the Hargreaves murder sent over here. And, much as I appreciate the display of irony, those efficiency statistics that I asked for last week are still not on my desk." He heads into his office and closes the door.

"Finally," Gina says. "Does he think I can just drop everything? I'm in the middle of some *very* serious frexting with my boyfriend. It's like sexting, but you can only use gifs from 90s TV shows to express your deepest, darkest desires."

"Firstly, ew. Secondly, you can say his name now," Rosa says. "We all know who he is."

Amy glances around the room to make sure the boyfriend in question is nowhere to be seen before she speaks.

"I have to ask. Savant? Gina, he's like *twenty*."

"Uh, yeah," Gina says. "Do you even remember twenty-year-old guys, Amy? I mean, maybe you don't, you were probably busy playing bridge and crocheting when everyone else was enjoying their twenties, but *trust* me. If you even *say* the word 'sex' you can get them to do anything."

"But--"

Gina raises a blithe hand. "An. Y. Thing."

A sudden, familiar slick of loathing coats Amy's spine, like grease down a griddle. Her shoulders fly up and she looks suspiciously around.

"He's here," she hisses. "He's in the building."

"Oh, yeah," says Rosa. "Major Crimes want to be buddies, now that you've taken a big chunk out of O'Grady. Don't worry," she adds, bumping Amy's shoulder in the Rosa equivalent of an effusive hug. "The captain's already told us he's not going to let you be Vultured. You and Jake did good work on this one."

"Please, please. Hold your applause!" comes the hated voice, from the entrance to the bullpen.

"Literally nobody would applaud you. Ever. For anything," says Rosa, as the Vulture oozes up to them.

"Detective Diaz. Still burning for my animal magnetism?"

"I'm going for lunch. I hope you step in a manhole and get eaten by alligators," says Rosa, in parting.

The Vulture turns to Amy. "Santiago--"

"Don't," Amy says. "Can't we just be civilised adults and work together on this? We get the credit for taking down O'Grady and his drug operation, and Major Crimes gets all the information you guys need to go after the gambling syndicate that's bankrolling him. Win-win. No need for juvenile insults."

"Of course, of course. I was just going to ask how married life was treating you," the Vulture says. "So? How is it? Are you ready for a little extramarital activity yet?"

"Oh, God," Amy says.

"Married to Jake Peralta? Come on, you must be feeling the three month itch."

Amy steps close, until they're nose-to-nose; or they would be, if her nose didn't come up to his chin. Nevertheless. She channels her inner Rosa, imagines there's a knife in her hand, and narrows her eyes to slits as she stares up at him.

"If you think you stand a chance of laying a finger on *either* of our asses," she hisses, "you had better think again, buster. I will reach down that cesspit of banal gloating you call a mouth and wring your stomach so hard you'll be peeing acid for a *year*."

When she plays that back in her head, it sounds a bit more anatomically implausible than she'd hoped, but that doesn't seem to matter. The Vulture's mouth is stuck halfway between a smirk and a frown.

Amy presses her advantage. "Are we clear?"

"Alright, alright," the Vulture says, stepping back. "Marriage has changed you, Santiago."

Amy gives him her sunniest smile. "Let's get to work."

Predictably, given who she's working with, most of the afternoon is a similar mixture of satisfaction and aggravation. It's not made any easier by the fact that Amy's running on only the vitamin-containing parts of a hospital tray, plus a hard-boiled egg that the sergeant makes her eat when she's close to throttling the Vulture in a hypoglycaemic rage.

When the asshole's finally swaggered back to his own part of the city, Amy rests her head on her folded arms and groans into them.

"Santiago?"

"Yes!" Amy leaps out of her chair. "I was not sleeping, sir. I am--constant vigilance. The constant vigilante? No."

"That's very comforting," the captain says. "We will all sleep soundly in our beds. My office, please."

"What is it?" Amy asks, when she's seated in front of his desk. "Please don't tell me Organised Crime wants in on the O'Grady case as well. We can handle it, sir, I promise."

"I received a phone call a few minutes ago," the captain says. "Did you list me as a reference on a request for transfer to the 61st precinct?"

"Yes, but I--they called you?" Amy asks. "Already? I only put that application in yesterday. They haven't even called *me*."

"Apparently," the captain says, "the formatting and font selection on your CV were so exemplary they wondered if you might have some kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder. They wanted to talk to your current superior officer."

Amy beams. "I am very committed to aesthetically pleasing margins, sir."

The captain removes his glasses. Amy feels her smile dim.

"Why do you want to leave this precinct, Santiago?"

This sounds like one of those questions that isn't really a question, but a test.

"I don't!" Amy says. "I mean, I did. But I didn't *really*, I was just...not coping well with...my emotions?" she hazards, hoping it's the right answer. "I'll withdraw the application. And the other two I sent."

Captain Holt replaces his glasses, pulls a folder on his desk closer to him, and flicks through it. In the difficult dialect of the captain's body language, this is either a dismissal or a strategic pause to allow the person on the other side of the desk to worry themselves into betraying something.

Amy waits, and eventually Captain Holt looks up. He clasps his hands in front of him.

"As it happens," he says, "an acquaintance of mine is the captain at the 9-6. He has recently told me that he is looking for a new sergeant, and asked me if I have any recommendations."

Amy's mouth goes dry. "A...sergeant? Me?"

"The pay is essentially the same as that for a detective second grade," the captain points out. "But from the many, many times you have expressed a wish to become a captain yourself, I think it is safe to assume you are hoping for a supervisory track in your career?"

"Of course, sir," Amy says.

"Have you sat the promotion exams?"

"I've been--no. Not yet."

"You wanted to wait. You wanted to be perfect," Captain Holt says, and Amy sags in relief.

"Yes."

"Santiago," the captain says. "Sit them. You will do very well."

Amy smiles, weak with pride, and her heart pounds. A *promotion*. Captain Holt wants to *recommend her*. But--

"Thank you, sir. But Peralta and I have--sorted things out, now. More or less. I love working here. With you. I don't want to leave."

"Santiago," the captain says, holding his hands folded in front of his mouth in a way that Amy is *almost* sure means he's smiling. "I am going to give you two lessons drawn directly from my own life. Are you listening? Do you need, perhaps, a notebook? A quill?"

Yeah, definitely smiling. Amy tries and fails to care about the gentle mockery, and pulls her chair even closer to his desk.

"I don't need a notebook, sir," she assures him. "I am all ears. I will remember your lessons like--like wax. Please, lay your wisdom words on my ear wax."

"Ear wax."

"Yes!" Amy says. "Wait, no. Ew."

"Shall I continue, Detective?"

"That's probably best," Amy says in a small voice.

"First of all," says Captain Holt, "it is best not to work in such close proximity with your significant other, *especially* if you are in direct competition with them. Not if you want the relationship to survive. And, because I feel this needs to be stated in your case: this is not a challenge. You will make yourself miserable if you force it trying to prove me wrong."

Amy folds her hands tightly in her lap. Captain Holt seems to be waiting for some kind of acknowledgement, so she nods.

"And secondly," the captain says, "you have to move on if you want to progress your career. Do not have your very first position of authority be over people you've worked with as equals."

Amy tries to imagine giving orders to Rosa. "That makes sense," she says.

"This may help you to reach a decision," Captain Holt says. "Captain Marconi and I have been planning a joint taskforce to catch a crew of professional thieves whom we suspect have begun operating in this corner of the city, after they evaded police for a full year in Los Angeles. It's actually why Marconi was approved for the funding to expand his precinct staff. He needs a new sergeant to report directly to the officer leading the taskforce, and to liaise effectively with the 9-9."

"Liaise," says Amy, slowly.

"Yes," says Captain Holt. And he's--yes! He is *actually smiling at her*. Amy is so happy she can feel the entire English language turning to a gushing stream of gobbledygook in her throat; she stands up before too much of it can escape.

"Thank you. Sir. So much. Yes. Can I think about it? I'll think about it. And thank you."

"Stop bowing, Santiago."

"Sir!" Amy manages, and scurries from the room.

"Hey, there she is!"

"Jake!" Amy says. "What are you doing here? You're supposed to be in the hospital."

"Yeah. Because you fainted," Rosa says.

"I slept for six hours," Jake says. "And then Dr Jameson said I could leave!"

"You told her about the dream, didn't you," says Amy.

"I did not," says Jake. "My dignity is intact. As are my ribs. And my ankle's fine, look, I've got this!" He extends his lower leg, which is wrapped in a black brace like a ski boot. "Pretty cool, huh?"

"You can't chase perps with that thing," Rosa says.

"Hey," Jake says. "Don't insult the boot. It's amazing, it means I don't need any stupid crutches. Plus: who wants to help me spray-paint it silver so I look like a cyborg?"

"Ooh, me!" says Boyle. "I do, Jake."

"Excellent. We are absolutely doing that. Tomorrow," Jake says. "Right now, I am here to escort my gorgeous and dearly beloved wife home. Like a normal married person."

"You're being weird," Rosa says. "Does that mean you two are done being morons about your feelings now?"

"Yeah," Amy says, feeling shy under the sudden wash of attention from everyone in the room. "I think so. Please don't punch me through spacetime, Rosa."

Jake puts his hand in his pocket. "Here, darling, I bought you a present at the hospital gift shop. It cost me all the money I had on me, which was almost a whole dollar."

"Jolly Rancher chews?" says Boyle. "Jake. If you're going for romance, you could have at least tried to find some salty Dutch licorice, also known as *salmiak*--"

"Watermelon," says Amy. "You remembered."

"Um, you told me a story involving bright red vomit," Jake says. "Of course I remembered."

Jake's being just as obnoxious as he was at the start of the bet, but Amy can hear the warmth there now; she can see everything, right there in his face.

She thinks about her grandmother, and about John McClane. She thinks: be brave.

She takes the candy, steps close, and kisses Jake, standing there in the middle of the precinct while everyone they work with watches. And whistles. And, when Jake wraps an arm around Amy's waist so he can keep kissing her, actually *applauds*.

"What's going on?" says Hitchcock, when they break apart. "Why is this exciting? They've been married for ages. Right?"

"He has a point," Jake murmurs.

Amy laughs. Jake's eyes are bright and there's a giddy warmth like good tequila burning all the way from her lips to her stomach.

"Okay," she says. "Escort me home."

"Or," Jake says. "I know it's a Tuesday, I know you like to do your menu planning and clean your kitchen on Tuesdays. But what the hell. Date night?"

"Sure," Amy says. "Date night."

"Awesome," Jake says, and extends his arm like a gentleman. "I hope you like the subway."

Amy rolls her eyes. "Let me get my bag."

"I'm thinking...guacamole," Jake says.

"Is that sex code?" Gina calls after them, as the elevator doors are closing. "Be safe, babies! Be safe!"

It's not sex code--*ew*, who would use that word for that purpose, anyway? They go to Babs's restaurant, and they order the guacamole, and Amy steals most of the tortilla chips and Jake removes all the jalapenos from his nachos and tips them onto Amy's plate. And afterwards Amy keeps her hand in Jake's, because there's finally no reason to let him go, and takes him back to her apartment.

"Oh, man, I'm so glad your building has an elevator," Jake says, wincing. "Amy, I don't know what you had planned, but I am not sure how much more standing I can do tonight."

"That," Amy says--floating on that warmth that's half real tequila, now, but still half the memory of his mouth, the hungry burn of her skin everywhere it's *not* pressed against his--"is not going to be a problem."

Jake looks at her. Amy looks back.

"Amy Santiago," Jake says, eyes wide. "Look at *you*, putting out on the--wait, what am I talking about, how many dates have we been on by now? So many. But who's counting? I mean, I definitely wasn't."

"Seventeen," Amy says

"Eighteen," Jake says at once. "Wait, are you including this one?"

Amy pulls the band from her hair, letting it fall around her shoulders. "Jake," she says.

"Right," Jake says hoarsely. "Yes."

The only thing that Amy knows about Jake and sex is that, by his own admission, Jake is up for pretty much anything in the bedroom. The thought makes Amy a bit anxious, actually; she wonders if he knows a whole lot of advanced sex moves that she's not gotten around to learning yet.

But--she knows more than that, doesn't she? She knows that kissing him is still easy, still feels like something that she was born knowing how to do; that she's been walking through her life with the knowledge tucked away inside her, and now she's found herself exactly where she should be, like a key in a lock. She knows that Jake is funny, and generous, and that he makes her see the fun in pretending; not in any big way, but just enough to relax. Letting herself be the kind of woman who would push him down onto her bed and remove his shirt with teasing fingers, shivering when he sucks gently at the skin of her neck, and then undo the fly of his jeans and start to tug them down his hips.

"Right," she says then. "Um. Boot?"

"Ugh, I take it all back, this boot is the worst," Jake says, struggling into a sitting position. "Okay, we can do this. It's just velcro."

Between them they wrangle the straps loose and ease it off over Jake's foot--Jake gnaws at his lip and creases his face up, but doesn't say anything--followed by his jeans and underwear. Amy's so busy being practical about it that it doesn't quite register until she turns back from putting his clothes in a neat pile, and wow. That is--a lot of naked Jake Peralta. On her bed. She swallows, twice, before she can speak.

"You were right about the shape of that bruise," she says, tilting her head to the side to get a better look.

"Amy, don't take this as me pressuring you in any way," Jake says, "but I am so turned on that I am probably going to die if I don't get to touch you in the next thirty seconds."

"Doesn't the boot need to go back on?" Amy says. "If the point is to keep your foot in position."

"Amy," Jake says, looking wild.

Amy crosses her arms. "What did Dr Jameson say?"

"Okay, one, no fair bringing Dr Jameson into this. And two, I'm sure it's fine! I'll just put it back on again afterwards, and *ugh* no, nope, should not have moved that leg."

Amy giggles. "You are so bad at being injured. Here, hold still."

Weirdly, strapping Jake's swollen ankle back into the boot feels more intimate than removing his clothes. They're both laughing a bit by the time she's done, and Amy's feeling bold. She puts a bit of a sexy dance into it as she removed her own pants and unbuttons her own shirt;

Jake lies back on the bed and makes an attempt at wolf-whistling that makes her laugh even more, and then she climbs onto the bed and sits astride his hips in just her bra and panties.

"Hey," she says.

"I. Wow," Jake says.

Amy exhales and lets herself look with intent, look with *want*, at the width of his shoulders and the dip of his throat, the way humour tucks dimples into his cheeks. His lips are plush and slightly parted and he's--

"God," Amy says, appalled. "You are *ridiculously* hot. When did that happen, by the way? I swear you were not this hot last year."

Jake's expression is flickering between smug, and stunned, and delighted. He slides his hands up Amy's thighs, up her back, to her shoulders, and then pulls her down and kisses her until she's buzzing and breathless.

"Are you kidding?" he says then. "Look at *you*, I don't know how I got any work done sitting across from you."

"You got work done?"

"Ha ha," Jake says, and Amy unclasps her bra. "Ha," he trails off.

She leads his hands to her breasts, grinds down against him with tentative little waves of her hips. She takes hold of his face and kisses him again, lush and slow, letting herself get lost in it.

It's not perfect. Sex is never perfect. More than once Amy knocks her foot too hard against Jake's and both of them wince at once. She accidentally drops the condom down the side of the bed, leans over and hunts for it; when she rights herself, triumphant, her hair's a mess and her hands are dusty and Jake's laughing again with his kiss-bitten mouth, his eyes gone dark with how much he wants her. They realise pretty quickly that she's going to have to stay on top for logistical boot reasons; then, when Amy's abs and thighs get tired, she lies on her side, feeling swamped and loose and heady with pleasure, while Jake pushes slowly into her from behind and his teeth scrape her shoulder, his hand stroking over her clit in circles. His fingers stutter whenever her hair gets up his nose and makes him sneeze, but it's still incredible, still winds her up like a clock until she's ringing, shaking, squeezing around him and crying out.

For Amy, sex has been good, it's been great, but--she's always had that edge of nervousness, like part of her is watching to make sure she's doing it right. She's never felt like *laughing* during sex, until now. Not like this.

Afterwards she feels like she did on the last day of summer vacation when she was seventeen, when she worked herself into a frenzy of anxiety about starting college and swam fifty laps at the outdoor pool, then dragged herself out onto the sun-scalded concrete and lay there, panting and drained and heavy in the limbs, but with a freshly quiet mind and the pure conviction, even if it was fleeting, that everything was going to turn out well in the end.

Jake is stroking his hand absently over her hair, his other arm tucked around her. Amy inhales the smell of his skin and listens to the friendly thud of her own heart as it slows down from where it's been racing.

"Oh my God," Jake says finally. "I will never move again."

"Are you okay?" Amy says. "Did I get you in the ribs with my elbow when, you know--"

"When I made you come for the second time?" Jake says.

Amy flushes and her mouth feels numb; her whole body gives a little shudder of joyous memory.

"That," she says.

"No," says Jake. "Though really, it could have been the clumsiest sex ever--"

"Jake!"

"It wasn't!" he says hastily. "You're a lot more coordinated than I would have guessed from how terrible a dancer you are, but--seriously, I wouldn't have cared. It's you." He tugs her even closer and ducks his head to kiss her, catching her lip briefly between his. "Amy, I am so completely into you, it's crazy. You're all I want."

Crazy romantic, Amy thinks, and feels her heart shiver beneath her ribs with how good this could be. Is going to be.

"And I want you to know something," Jake says. "Amy Santiago..."

"Yes?" Amy says.

"I am seriously reconsidering all previous titles for your sex tape."

EPILOGUE: HI, HONEY

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

(ONE YEAR LATER)

"I," Amy calls, "am going to *murder* Garcia."

"What," comes Jake's voice from elsewhere in the apartment, over-dramatic albeit intriguingly muffled. "I can't have a felon for a wife! I'm a cop."

"Nobody will find the body," Amy says grimly. She unlaces her shoes and kicks them off. "And I think the statute of justifiable homicide really should be expanded to include detectives barely out of the academy who spill their poutine all over the murder victim."

"Sergeant Amy Santiago, are you actually arguing with the finer points of criminal law?"

"Justifiable," Amy insists.

She never should have introduced Garcia to Boyle's blog. Who buys *poutine* in Brooklyn? And she has no idea how someone that clumsy made it through the police academy without tazing himself in the face. There was gravy in the stab wound. Forensics will probably kill her most junior detective if Amy doesn't get there first, and they *really* know how to make a body disappear.

"Now, now," Jake calls. "What Would Raymond Do, remember?"

Amy moves through to the living room, which looks--as Jake has previously pointed out--like the set of a film called Craftnado. She dumps her bag and moves aside a pile of legal pads and silk flowers so that she can perch on one corner of the coffee table.

"You're right. If Captain Holt solved his problems by murdering his most annoying detective, you wouldn't have lasted a week."

"Me?"

"So, how was your day off?" She picks up the Dreaded Wedding Phone and blinks at the number of missed calls. "Are we eloping to the ski fields of New Zealand?"

"Simon Braithwaite had a traumatic experience with a polar bear in New Zealand," Jake says at once, from where he's slouched deep in the corner of the sofa. He has his hands draped over his face like a swooning maiden. "He would never go back there."

"Jake, I don't think there are any polar bears--"

"Here's an idea," Jake says. "How about we just pin people's names to the corkboard and then throw darts at it to decide who isn't invited?"

"...yeah, okay," Amy says.

Jake pulls his hands away from his face. "Wait, are you serious?"

Amy tears a fresh sheet of paper off the nearest legal pad and starts writing names in circles, like a miniature outline of a case. "Bet I can hit more than you."

"You're on," Jake says. "And for the record, this is only happening because you have so many cousins."

Amy rolls her eyes. It's not like it's her fault that her family is huge. Besides, Jake's mother keeps calling with more names, too; half the Jewish population of Brooklyn apparently needs to come along and watch Ruthie Peralta's little boy get hitched to a Cuban shiksa.

Not legally hitched, of course, but...officially. White dress and hired DJ and never-ending headaches about the guest list and all.

"Okay," Jake says, when they're standing in the middle of the room, darts poised. Amy's laid out a piece of gold sample ribbon that has something to do with either bouquets or centrepieces on the floor, as the line for them to stand behind. "The first seven names we hit get scrubbed off the guest list and then we will *finally* be at three hundred and we can start writing out the invitations. Go!"

Amy throws her first dart with one hand and jams her other elbow into Jake's side, hard. Jake yelps in outrage, but Amy's already squinting and lining up her second dart.

The contest deteriorates from there.

Amy wins, five to two.

"Yes!" Amy does one of her most dramatic fist-pumps, mostly out of gratitude that she can now tick the little box next to *guest list* on the long, long list titled TO DO FOR WEDDING. But also because she won. "I'm claiming a point!" she declares, and snatches a pen up from the floor.

She adds a tally mark to the AMY side of a different piece of paper. This one doesn't have a title, but they've agreed that whichever of them has the most points by the day of the wedding gets a free favour or dare, to be cashed in at said wedding.

"I'm thinking, first dance song," she says sweetly, as she turns around again. "I have so many ideas."

"No! We agreed!" Jake says, aggrieved. He steps closer. "Taylor Swift, why are we even discussing this, you *cheated* with your elbow just then."

Amy laughs and doesn't say anything else, because Jake's arm is sliding around her waist and he's pressing her against the wall next to the board.

"Hey," he says. "I love you."

Amy can't believe she ever thought he'd be casual with those words. The way he says them makes her feel breathless, excited, and safe.

"I love you," she says.

Jake's face always does something amazing when she says it, and this time is no different. His happiness is like summer heat radiating up off the sidewalk, and his mouth is just as hot when it finds hers. After less than a minute Amy's knees are feeling wobbly, the wall doing most of the work of holding her up, and they're kissing with enough intent that she's wondering if they might need to pull out the *other* tally sheet, the one that lives in the shoebox under the bed, and which is similarly untitled but refers to, well. Something else.

("Unfair," Amy gasped, when Jake first came up with the idea for this tally. "You can make me--I mean, I can--")

Jake lifted his head from between her legs and Amy couldn't stop the little whine of complaint that slid out of her lips. Jake's hair was a mess and his mouth was all--and Amy had never been so turned on in her *life*, but, of course, they were going to argue about this.

"Uh," Jake said. "Did you just *complain* about multiple orgasms? Did that just happen?"

Amy's neck was hot. All of her was hot. She tried to muster the energy to put her viewpoint forward, but really, all she wanted was for Jake to shut up and keep going.

"I'm just saying--"

"Oh my God, *Amy*--")

At this point Amy realises that Jake's only got one arm still around her, and the other one is adding tally marks to his side of the sheet.

"Cheat!" she accuses, pulling away.

"You cheated first!" Jake says, holding the pen above her head as she lunges for it. "You know you did, you--ow, Amy, *ow*. That's it, I'm calling Luis, I'm demanding arbitration--"

Amy takes his face between her hands, kisses him firm and laughing and assured. She loves the way his mouth gentles at once as he captures her upper lip between his, the way his breath catches and his body sways against hers, the easiest dance in the world.

There's a faint clack as the pen hits the floor, and Amy smiles against her husband's mouth. She'll get it later.

There's plenty of time.

AND WE'RE DONE. Thanks for reading, everyone, especially those who sat patiently through the exam-induced hiatus, and those who commented along the way. Your enjoyment and feedback means the world to me.

I'm on [tumblr](#), come say hi :)

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