

WARNING: There is mention of suicidal thoughts. Not much but still better safe than sorry.

A/N: This is AU. Here Espo and Ryan were with Castle in the observation room during 47 seconds and Castle did not show up at the scene with a blond on his Ferrari. While I enjoyed his passive aggressive behavior on the show I also felt it took away a lot of Becket's need to apologize. I liked that she did in the end. But at the time I thought they were turning things around so he'd be the one in the wrong. Kind of like in the end of S2, which I never understood. She had been dating Demming for almost a month, so why couldn't he move on? So yes, timing sucked but, seriously? Everyone gets angry with him for leaving when for weeks she's the one kind of pushing him away? So, I wanted to do something different here despite the fact that I adore the show, and I really like where they were at the end of Season 7. Hope they get back to that. I think they had both grown up and was looking forward to see how they progressed as a family handling cases and little Castles – and regardless of the Fillion critics, a big part of why I feel he is more real is because he isn't hunky buff anymore. Makes me believe in someone with an actual life history and an adult daughter more. And I still think he is handsome and charming despite being overweight. He's a big guy, he can pull some extra weight without much problems (would help if they stopped putting him in jackets two sizes bigger to hide and end up making things worse. Saw him in a properly sized jacket the other day, he looked good). Not to mention he is a great actor. Just check out Firefly. You will never confuse Malcom Reynolds and Richard Castle as the same person. He portrayed them completely different to the tone of voice he used.

Okay, sorry for the rant. I've been having the bad luck of landing on a lot of fics that complain about the weight gain and I like when the actors aren't perfect models. Makes me hopeful for life, you know. Seeing them more real. Anyway. Hope you enjoy!

“For Life”

She opened the door slowly. She still had the keys from when that Serial Killer blew up her apartment and she spent weeks in the guestroom while looking for an apartment. He never asked for the keys back. He was just there for her, when she needed the most, like always. And she has started noticing that she hasn't been there for him and that needs to change. She never wants to see that look on his face again, and worse of all, know that she caused it.

He started pulling away a couple of weeks back and she knew the exact moment she noticed it but not when it happened. She found out today. It was in the middle of the protest bombing when he first pulled back. When she first looked into his face and saw utter hurt and devastation. She'd seen that look before. At the book signing. She watched him from afar before she approached, before the hurt became anger and she watched as he signed book after book as if he was on an automatic pilot. As if he was a million miles away. Gave one fake smile after the other. Because she knew his smiles like the back of her hand and she knew the fake ones, the ones that were for the benefit of the press or someone else he wanted to deflect. They never reached his eyes. Because when he smiled for real, the whole room brightened up as if he was contagious, larger than life, and that day he wasn't. That day he was hidden behind the stack of books and for the last two weeks he's been hidden behind the stack of files. There has been none of his outlandish theories that she knows he throws out there to see her smile or roll her eyes. No, his input has been short and to the point. Very valid, as she always knew he was. He always gets to the right point, he just likes to flourish the point beforehand. Illustrate the story. Not these last two weeks. He was the one to figure out that

the numbers meant a diplomatic pouch. Something about research. But he never said anything about conspiracy theories in a case that was ripe with the possibility. That alone let her know that things were bad.

Today, after DI Hunt left she asked where Castle was, she hadn't seen him after the arrest and Espo said he saw him leave. Espo, who usually keeps to himself asked if she knew what was going on.

"I'm worried," he said. "He hasn't been himself since he left the observation room on the bombing case. And I know Alexis and Martha have been away since then. Something about a trip to Europe before Alexis's graduation. I think he wanted to get her to relax after such a hard case."

She had turned around sharply because for the first time someone was pinpointing a moment for when this all started.

"The observation room?"

"Yeah, we were watching you break that kid, remember? The one claiming amnesia. And you had him, and Castle had been leaning on the glass, you know, with that look he has when he knows you're about to get what you want. Like he couldn't be prouder of you or something and then suddenly he pulls back and mutters "*She remembers*" and walked out. Ryan and I called him back but he just went on. Left the building. Kate, why did he think you didn't remember the shooting?" Espo asked and the use of her first name told him he was worried. Worried for his friend.

"I—" he knew, he knew she'd been lying to him. God what did he think? She needed to see him, explain. "I have to go," she hastily grabbed her bag and started leaving.

"Are you going to fix this?" he called after her.

And she turned around lost, "I hope I can." And left. Came straight here. She thought of knocking but didn't want him to avoid her so she used the key instead. The key that never left her keychain. The apartment was plunged in darkness and if not for a soft light coming from his office she'd think no one was here. She walked there silently hoping she'd find him but the studio was dark too. The light was coming from his computer which was still on. She walked around the desk and saw the white screen of the word application, she was going to keep looking but the name Rook caught her attention. She didn't know what Castle was thinking but she knew that a sure way to gauge his mood was by his writing. Yes, the situations were fictional and designed to keep the reader hooked but if she learned anything from reading the end of *Heat Rises* is that if you knew him. If you knew what was going on in his life you could tell why he came up with those situations to the dot.

She quietly lowered herself and scrolled the document up and started reading. And the more she read the more her breath caught on her throat the more her heart broke for the man she loved because he had just written himself out of his story. He had killed Jameson Rook in a random mugging. Something that was insignificant and pointless and only happened because Rook had been distracted about thinking how he was in Nikki's way and how she didn't love him back. The last thought before Rook died was the worst for Kate because she hoped for dear life Castle didn't think that about her, that he didn't believe that, so she got up with the words "She'll be better off without me" seared into her brain.

She needed to find him. Where could he have gone? She was about to leave and have someone ping his phone or something. Maybe try the Old Haunt when she heard the soft breathing. She looked over the door to his room. She'd of course seen the room from this room. The door was always open when she'd been here, and the bookshelf as a wall was very aesthetic but let you see a lot. But the room was dark. She hadn't thought anyone was inside. She walked to the door and slowly pushed it open. Despite the darkness of the room the lightning from the storm raging outside let her see the figure hunched on the corner of the room. She knew he hadn't seen her. Knew he hadn't noticed he wasn't alone because in the four years they'd known each other he had never let her see him this vulnerable and she knew he would have put up a front if he'd noticed she was there. He was seated on the corner of the room, his head bowed down and knees drawn up. His elbows on his knees cradling his head, and she wanted to rip apart who broke him this way, except she was the one who did. So she walked forward and kneeled in front of him grabbing his arms. They were freezing, his clothes were soaked. Not as if he'd just come out the rain but as if he'd clearly been in the rain and not changed since he arrived here. She now noticed the chair had been damp through her jeans, but the shock of what she read made her not care. He had walked on the rain, come home and written himself out of her story, ripped himself out, with no hope for coming back and then he'd hunched here in the corner.

"Castle," she called softly trying to move his arms.

"Go away Kate, please," he begged in a broken voice and she wanted to sob, instead she said unsteadily.

"I can't do that."

"I can't Kate, please I can't do this anymore. I tried once. I—" he looked up and the amount of hurt in those blue eyes cut her like a knife. "I want you to be happy, but I can't just stand there and watch. I tried with Demming and Josh...I even tried moving on, with Gina. I tried so damn hard and I couldn't. I can't anymore Kate, please don't make me."

She had been angry at him for being with Gina, for not calling her. Because she had dumped Tom for him, but he hadn't known had he? He had just tried to give her what he thought she wanted. Space to be with Tom and instead of telling him, of telling him to dump Gina. That they hadn't worked once and they wouldn't work again, she attacked him. Arrested him. Not this time. There have been too many misunderstandings. Too many times they didn't say what they were thinking. Too many innuendos and too little direct talk.

"I don't want you to go Rick. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I lied. I heard you and you...you saved me Rick, you gave me a reason to hold on. I think I dreamt you know...while I was out...and I dreamt of you, telling me you loved me and of us being happy...and I woke up and I asked my dad to call you because I wanted to see you so badly but then...you showed up and I chickened out because. You don't love by half do you Rick?" she asked and ran a hand through his cheek and damp hair. He was looking at her as if he didn't believe what he was hearing and she plowed on. "And you deserve so much better than me."

"I only want you," he whispered.

"I know, but I wanted to be more than what I was. Broken. Because you were right. I've been hiding myself and trying relationships with men I don't love so I can keep a foot out the door and I knew I couldn't do that to you, because I've loved you for so long, and I knew that you

were for life Rick. That when I started with you there would be no going back and that scared the shit out of me, so I lied. But I've been working on it, I have. I'm seeing a therapist I'm trying to make myself whole for you."

"Why can't you let me help you? That's all I've ever wanted."

"And who helps you?" she asked and he made to open his mouth but he couldn't could he? Because she knew that as much as he talked to Martha and Alexis he also shielded them from a lot. Protected them. Who protected him? "I want to be someone you can count on Rick not just someone who leans on you. I want us to protect each other." She leaned forward and touched his forehead. "I love you. I love you so much and you can't give up on me now Rick. Not when I'm getting there." His breath shuddered.

"I-"

"I read what you wrote. You killed Rook, he's you...please tell me you'd never..."

"I wouldn't do that to Mother and Alexis," he said quietly.

"But," she added because she felt the but. She felt the fact that Martha and Alexis were the only thing keeping him here.

"But sometimes I just can't breathe Kate, sometimes I just want to go to sleep and never wake up again."

Her breath hitched in her throat at the thought of her life without him. Of his absence, of never being able to see him again and the urgent need to make sure he never felt that way again overcame her. "No, if you ever feel like that again. You promise me," she made sure to hold his head in a way he couldn't escape. "You tell me. We work this out together."

"Even if I feel this way because of you?" he asked honestly. Not to hurt her. But because right now, they were raw and honest with each other.

"Especially," she said and she kissed him, and he responded like she knew he would. Because that kiss they shared last year, was the best of her life and she knew he'd be the best of her life for the simple reason that they were meant for each other. He pulled back.

"Kate, we can't-"

"Yes, we can Rick," she cut him off.

"No, I can't start something without complete honesty between us," he said straight to her face and got up.

"I am being honest Rick," she said but he just extended his hand.

"But I need to show you something," he said simply pulling her up and leading her to his office. She didn't want to read that scene again. She wanted that scene deleted but he didn't go to his computer he went to his smart board and he clicked on a file with her name and a digital murder board with all the evidence from her mother's case showed up. Everything they have collected, everything put up and organized.

"Rick? I know you've been investigating-"

He pointed at a question mark, "This man called me soon after you went back to work. I don't know his name, nothing. Just that he is a friend of Montgomery's. Montgomery sent him a file,

a file that incriminates, I mean I think incriminates, but if not, at least a file that damages whoever is behind all this. And he has been using that file to keep you safe, as long as you don't investigate the case. He contacted me to, to make sure you didn't," he said in a rush as if confessing a horrible sin. "I haven't stopped but, I did Kate, I stirred you away because the worst day of my life was that shooting. Was seeing you fall."

"That was the worst day of my life," she said overwhelmed. Someone had a file? Someone knew who was behind all this? And if they made the fact that the investigation had to stop to keep everyone safe why hadn't Castle stopped? Didn't he understand?

"Well, yes, getting shot ranks right up-"

"No, you idiot," she cut him and he looked surprised. "Do you know how many times I woke up in a sweat because you were faster?"

"I tried to be Kate, I'm sorry-"

He was a moron and she had to stop him so she continued, "And you got shot instead. You died! Do you think I wanted that? You to die from a bullet that was meant for me! For you to die any way!"

"I put you in the crosshairs!"

"How exactly did you do that?"

"I pushed you to investigate your mother's case, you had given up."

"No I hadn't!" she cut him. "That's what I told everyone so they'd leave me alone. Stop hovering, worrying. I never stopped." She confessed for the first time. "I always had her case in a box in my apartment. Looked over the files every now and then and not a clue. You helped me."

"If I hadn't,"

"I would have still found something. Eventually. Maybe a lot later, and then, then there wouldn't have been anyone to pull me down. You saved my life. You gave me a reason to hold on and you pulled me down. Do you really think that sniper missed, no his shot would have been an instant kill if you hadn't pulled me down."

"I don't understand. Are you angry-"

"I'm furious Castle," she said walking towards him and he nodded dejected. "I'm furious you'd risk yourself this way. You'd leave me in the dark with no way of knowing you were in danger. This stops now. We're partners," she grabbed his head by the sides and repeated in a softer tone right before kissing him. "We're lovers. I love you and right now, you're all I want and care about."

He enveloped her with his arms and repeated the words she had yearned to hear since the day of her shooting.

"I love you Kate. I love you."

The end

A/N: hope you enjoyed.

