

**Disclaimer:** I don't own Castle.

**Summary:** Kate tries to get Lucy back and finds it's not as easy as she thought. A bit of a mix of Angst and Humor. Kate is a bit OOC here but I blame the wine!

A/N: Me again! No idea what's going on. I should be working on learning Android development and yet, the ideas just won't let go!

### **"I killed Lucy"**

Rick opened the door of the loft and was immediately met by an unwelcome sight. The boys and Lanie were sitting on the couch with Kate, laughing and sipping wine. Well, at least Jenny was here, maybe someone would be nice to him. He sighed internally as he glanced at the pyramid on the counter. For the last few days even his home wasn't a place he could escape all the Richard Castle bashing anymore. He fortified himself and put the smile his mother taught him for when dealing with bullies.

*"Don't give them the satisfaction of knowing how much they hurt you Richard."*

"Hey, I wasn't expecting company."

"Hey babe," Kate smiled at him. Oh how he loved her. He would endure what he imagined would be an awful night for her. For that smile. "We decided to unwind a bit after work."

"I see, why don't I prepare you all something to go with that wine?"

"No need Rick," came Linus's voice just to remind Rick that he lost his only supporter. "I've already ordered Chinese. Wouldn't want to give everyone food poisoning."

"Good one!" Espo crowed as the boys and Lanie laughed at the quip.

"I thought you were a good cook," Jenny said confused.

"Just Linus's humor," Rick shrugged. Because he was. He knew he liked to make the same joke about his mother but the fact was she was an awful cook, always had been and he had to compensate and learn at a young age if he wanted to eat anything that wasn't burned. And normally he wouldn't care about a joke, normally he would joke just right back but the last six months the tart comments were coming in a nonstop flow. And, at least if the problem was just that he was the butt of the joke he could let things slide but he now knew that was not the case. After his temporary separation from Kate the boys and Lanie were clear where they stood, where he stood. And where he stood was outside the circle of friends.

After almost eight years he was still just the annoyance they tolerated because of Kate. The boys had kicked him out of Halo night. Ryan had let him know he had better not show up at the baby shower and Lanie... Well, Lanie was never the warmest towards him. He always accepted she was Kate's best friend but still, she didn't have to be that harsh. The comment about it always being his fault cut because guess what? Hey, he wasn't the one who said he needed some me time and was really conducting an off the books investigation. But he loved Kate, and he couldn't lose her and he knew she only left to protect him. And at least now they were working together, realizing they couldn't keep doing this. Lying to each other to protect each other. And they were her friends, had her back, he had to give them that. So he would

smile, and be a gracious host and probably destroy his teeth as he gritted them together to bite back what he really wanted to say. For Kate.

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He had been off, all night. The person he talked the most with was Jenny and she couldn't really blame him. When Jenny pointed out he was a good cook she had one of those "Aha," moments, as if you had been running around in the dark and suddenly the lights went on and you started seeing that what you thought was a table was really a chair. And she saw that what she hadn't bothered noticing before, what she thought everyday harmless ribbing, joking around to lighten what was a hard job had only one focus, one subject. Every single joke, every single comment was directed at her husband, at a flaw of his, at something he'd done badly. At something he'd screwed up and she saw how he smiled but the smile never reached his eyes. She saw how he used any excuse to be away from the group. He took the food, he plated the food, as soon as everyone had eaten he started putting the dishes in the dishwasher while they chatted and joked around he made sure to stay in the periphery and even so, he didn't manage not to be the butt of the joke. By the end of the evening she felt awful and could almost kiss Jenny when she said they needed to go home which in turn instigated Javi and Lanie to go too.

Once she shut the door after the goodbyes she turned around and saw Rick folding a dishrag and smiled at him. She wanted to do something to make him feel better.

"Hey," he smiled at her and at least this was an honest one. Full of the love he felt for her, but it was also a sad one, a tired one and that cut deep into her heart. "I'm beat. Gonna go take a shower," he said coming forward and kissing her forehead and she just stood there. Unable to move or comprehend what the hell had happened tonight as Linus piped up.

"Don't fall in there Rick! At your age breaking a hip could be dangerous."

She saw him stiffen but continue without a comment and she just moved without knowing what prompted her, but she did. She got Linus, and went to the bureau where she had stored the user manual and she was bringing Lucy back. Because after tonight she realized that the only times she heard someone saying anything nice to her husband it had come from the machine.

She heard the shower being turned on and she sat on the table and started by flipping the same switch that turned the OS from Lucy to Linus.

"Hello," she heard the OS say. "I'm Lucy. What's your name?" she smiled relieved.

"Hey Lucy, welcome back. Rick missed you."

"I haven't been anywhere. This is the first time you switch me on."

"What?" she asked aghast. "No, you've been Rick's OS for months. I changed you to Linus but now you're back."

"When you reset the system's profile you reset all settings. Recordings are stored but any other data, learned behavior, preferences are restored to the factory settings."

"You mean you don't remember his coffee preferences?"

"No mam. You need to set all that up again."

Oh my God! She really did kill Lucy! His only friend!

“But you said you have recordings stored right? Can’t you learn from them?” she begged. She needed Lucy back to how she was. She knew Lucy didn’t like her, and she wasn’t being paranoid. She now knew, from reading the user’s manual, that the OS was programmed to use certain words to ascertain if a person was someone the owner was in good terms with or not. She imagined a lot had been said about her around the OS during their timeout period lumping her in the not good terms category. She had used that feature to punish Rick for treating the OS like part of the family when setting Linus up. She didn’t mean to keep it up, she just wanted to teach him a lesson, play a practical joke on him. She hadn’t realized the others were being mean to him too.

“Sorry, privacy settings stop me from using recordings as a behavior learning data base. Only live feed that is not being recorded can be used to store preferences and other such behavior that cannot be shared with a third party,” the OS said in a practical tone.

*Noooooooooooooooooooooo!*

Xxx

Rick came out of the shower more relaxed. At least he had that, a good shower. He was still not in the mood to be all romantic. He was sorry he cut Kate off so abruptly. He saw she had wanted to say something. Probably get some naked time. She was always in the mood for some fun after a night with friends and normally he would be more than happy to oblige. But tonight had tried his patience. Lanie and the boys seemed to have been on fire only egged on by the stupid OS. Linus. He really hated that the OS was named Linus like his lion. Something that to him was related to his first success, to him going from Ricky Rodgers, outcast, to Richard Castle, published writer.

He stopped abruptly at the sight of his wife in tears on the bed and instantly panicked. What happened? He knew he took longer in the shower than normal. He just needed some time to himself. He never meant to hurt her.

“Kate,” he instantly rushed to her side seating next to her and brushing a strand of hair.

“What’s wrong sweetheart?”

“She’s dead!” she sobbed and Rick’s heart dropped. This was also sometimes the result of drunk Kate. He hadn’t thought she had drunk that much, but sometimes, when she passed a certain limit she went from happy drunk to sad drunk and would wallow in her mother’s death. He gathered her in his arms and stroked her hair gently.

“I know sweetie, I know,” there wasn’t much he could say. He just had to show her he was there for her.

“I killed her,” okay. That was new. There were times Kate felt she failed her mother, especially when Bracken was still running around but being guilty of her death... That had never happened before.

“Of course you didn’t sweetie,” he tried.

“Yes, I did. And all to pull a prank on you! I’m an awful person!”

What? Now she just wasn’t making any sense.

“Coonan and Bracken killed her. You were just a kid, how could you have been responsible?” he said firmly. This was getting out of hand.

“What are you going on about?” she asked between sobs.

“What are you talking about?” he asked completely confused.

“Lucy! You were right! I tried to get her back but when I changed her to Linus all the settings were wiped out. All your preferences you spent months teaching her!”

Yeah, he knew that. He loved new gadgets and he had extensively researched the Home operating systems before he chose Lucy because the box had said: “A friend who’ll know you better than yourself.” He had really needed one then, even if an artificial one.

“That’s okay sweetie,” he tried to sooth her. He wasn’t stupid, he knew Lucy was a machine. He knew how pathetic he was that the only person he could talk to was a machine prograded to make him feel better. He had known back when he bought Lucy, but desperate times call for desperate measures and he hated being alone in the loft. The absolute silence. No one to talk to.

“I killed your only friend!” she cried.

“She’s not my only friend,” he said, because yes. He might have had a rude awakening about the boys but the boys weren’t his only friends. They weren’t even his best friend. “You’re my friend. My best friend.” And yes, he needed more than just her. He needed to make some changes in his life. He had been right before this LockSat mess started when he had decided to concentrate on the PI firm and not the precinct. Kate was moving up the chain and his life couldn’t revolve around hers. He understood that now, he needed a life of his own. Friends that were his friends and not hers. So that when he had a problem with her, he had someone to have his back, to hear him out.

“S’not enough. I’m so sorry!” he sighed and pulled her back. He realized that she wasn’t drunk, she was genuinely sorry and he was kind of happy she was. He had been hurt when she had changed the settings and was glad she saw that without him having to tell her. Sometimes he felt she took him for granted and when she realized that what she’d done was not ok on her own he felt better.

He had to admit, to himself at least, that he had known there was a possibility Lucy would have lumped her on the bad people category because of how the OS worked. Everything he had vented to the OS and the conversations he had with his mother or Alexis around Lucy. Not to mention whatever his mother and Alexis may have said. He knew his mom did tough love. Sometimes he wished she didn’t, but he knew her comments were designed more for him to pick himself up than because she really thought he had been the one in the wrong. So he knew that there was a chance unkind words had been said about Kate around the OS when he wasn’t around. And the little part of him that was still upset at the lie Kate told him, at the time she let him think he had done something wrong, hadn’t made sure that the OS knew she was one of the good guys. Hadn’t been completely upset the OS was giving her just a little taste of what the boys and Lanie had been dishing out for the last six months. Had even felt a little happy that someone, even if that someone was a machine, was defending him for a change. And he was a bit ashamed of that, because that hadn’t been right either. So he cupped her cheek with his hand and made sure he had her full attention.

"You're right. I need more friends, real friends, than just my wife. And I've been meaning to talk to you because.... we were right when you became captain. I can't just keep shadowing you and I need to reclaim my life. Have a life that is separate from you. Not because I don't love you," he pressed on firmly at the devastated look she gave him. "Working with you has given me some of the best years of my life but I'm not Kate. Working with you. Take this last case for instance, we almost didn't work together. And that's normal. You're captain now. You have other responsibilities and I'm so proud of you for that. I always correct people when they call you detective," he was glad to see a small smile. "And at first I thought working with the boys would be the same. But, our timeout showed me that as much as I may have thought they let me in. That I was part of the team--"

"You are," she insisted.

"I was your partner. Of that I have no doubt," he told her. "But no, I see now, that I was just kidding myself, the rest of them, they haven't let me in. They still just tolerate me. They may even like me. But when push comes to shove, I'm still an outsider. And I need somewhere I'm not an outsider."

"What are you saying?"

"The PI firm is doing well. Haley is a good detective and as much as I hate to admit that Alexis has grown up and that she hasn't decided for a safe desk job. I so understand your dad now," he grunted and she let out a choked laugh. "She is amazing at this and I kind of liked working cases with her. I think I need to focus on that. I'm still going to investigate LockSat with you and if you need me on a case I'll be there in a second. But I think I need to get my own posse."

Kate nodded and leaned forward to hug him. "I'm sorry I didn't notice how bad things were. I'm going to talk to them."

"You shouldn't have to Kate. They shouldn't have taken sides."

"I know, I'm still sorry. But Rick."

"Hm."

"Don't hold back because of me. I know you take what they dish out because of me. I saw that tonight. But don't anymore okay? Answer back."

"I don't want to make things awkward."

"They already are for you. At least this way, maybe they will see what they are doing. Maybe they'll change, because I think you're wrong babe. I think they are your friends too, they just don't realize what they are doing."

"Okay."

"And sorry about Lucy."

"I'm sorry too. I should have made sure she wasn't treating you badly. What do you say this time, we set her preferences together?"

"Yeah, I'd like that."

He felt her smile on his chest and he smiled back, because, yeah, things weren't perfect, but they rarely were, but if she was happy, if Alexis and his mother were happy, he felt he could take on the world. And he was ready to. Richard Castle PI was coming.

### **The end**

A/N: This is just a short one, not meant to resolve anything but because I really felt Kate had killed Lucy!

A/N: So, I've decided to show the confrontation with the boys so I could set them in the right path.

### **"Chapter 2"**

"Hey, thanks for meeting me here," she said with a smile as she led everyone to the armchairs around the office in the Old Haunt. Rick was right. She shouldn't have to talk to them. They should have picked up on this on their own, but she also believed they didn't realize what they were doing and there was just so much that could be explained by the "wall of blue", especially after all the times they claimed Rick was one of them. So shouldn't the "wall of blue" apply to him too? She knew she was partly at fault, especially with Lanie who was her best friend and not so close to Rick. If she had explained what was going on when they announced they were back together, even without involving them in the investigation, maybe her reception of Rick would have been different. But the boys claimed to be his friend too, and Rick was right, they shouldn't have taken sides.

"All these years coming for drinks here and I never knew Castle had such a nice office," Lanie hummed. "What did you need girl?"

"I wanted to tell you guys something, and I need you to promise me you'll respect when I tell you I can't answer you something."

"Is this about why Castle hasn't been around lately?" Ryan asked interested. He had always liked Castle, admired Castle and he had done some soul searching with Jenny's help after the other night's impromptu party. He hadn't understood at first why Jenny was so mad when they got home. But then Jenny started listing all the jokes they had thrown around and how every single one of them was at Castle's expense. Then she asked where Castle had really been during the baby shower and he cringed. He knew Jenny liked the writer. They bonded over being spouses of cops. About worrying every time their spouse left the house, so Ryan had known that Castle and Kate's separation wouldn't have been enough for Jenny not to invite him. But he had to take Kate's side. So he told her that Castle had a book tour. Except apparently, thanks to smartphones, Jenny had done a quick visit to Castle's website on one of her frequent trips to the bathroom and found out the writer hadn't had any signings outside of New York since October and hadn't had any signings on that particular night. To say she had been angry was an understatement. So Ryan had to confess, about how they took Kate's side and then Jenny asked:

"And why?"

"Well, she's our friend."

"I thought he was too."

“Yeah, but we’ve known her longer.”

“Two years.”

“What.”

“You’ve known her two years longer than Rick, who you’ve known for almost eight years. I’d say that after eight years those two shouldn’t count as much. Did she ask you to take sides?”

“No.”

“Then why did you?”

And he honestly hadn’t had a good answer for that other than because that’s what they did. They had then talked about everything that had been going on at the precinct lately and he realized he hadn’t liked the person he had become in the last six months. Jenny had been right. The second they knew about the separation, he automatically blamed Castle and never even thought of just treating them both equally. He forgot his friendship and his admiration. When Castle had singled him and Javi out in his speech to all those important people he had been so touched. Castle could have talked about so much else. He had been a writer for almost 25 years by then. The time he spent with them was only a third of the career that was being honored that day, and yet he didn’t talk about Derrick Storm, the series that made him, or his fellow writers. He talked about them, the precinct family. Called them brothers in arms. He felt ashamed for not having his back lately. He shook his thoughts away as Kate answered the question.

“Yes,” she nodded. “I’m going to explain to you why I left him. Or at least what I can explain.”

“What do you mean, what you can explain?” Espo asked suspiciously.

“Rick didn’t do anything wrong,” she said firmly looking at them and especially giving Lanie a long look. “I know what you said to him Lanie. But that’s not true, especially in regards to our temporary separation. I lied to him, to you all really. I said I needed time to get my head straight but in reality I was doing an off the books investigation I didn’t want to involve any of you in.”

“What investigation?” Espo sat up straighter.

“I can’t say Javi. My reasons for keeping you all in the dark are still valid. I shouldn’t have lied to my husband. I should have trusted he would stay away from the investigation, as he has since he found out.”

“Since he found out?” Ryan asked curiously.

“Right after our anniversary he figured out what I was doing. And he forgave me, and he agreed to keep the ruse of our separation and stay away from the investigation. We’ve found out recently that his missing time was connected with what I am investigating and we’ve, I’ve changed my mind about keeping him out of the investigation, and that was why we decided to stop the ruse, but we’ve been back together since right after our anniversary.”

“So Svetlana...” Espo asked.

“Me,” she shrugged. “Just like he is Dr. Livingstone. I notice none of you brought him up,” she raised an eyebrow. “Why is that? Why did you accuse him of cheating, when for all intents and purposes I had left him months before and yet you’re okay with me seeing someone else?”

After all the years he more than proved he loved me?" she wanted to tell them that Rick would never cheat. Of how Meredith cheated on him and so after being on the other side, he had vowed never to do that to anyone.

After Rick proposed on the swings that day, she had apologized again about not involving him in the decision about the job in DC and they had spoken about their insecurities. He had talked about how he had wanted the whole shebang from the start, but was worried she wasn't ready and that he had jumped the gun before, in his previous marriages, and didn't want to screw things up here by rushing into things and she had spoken of her doubts and of how they had started when Meredith said that they had separated because he didn't share. Rick had rolled his eyes and had admitted to not letting Gina in, but not Meredith. He told her Meredith was a very fun person to be around but she was also very self-absorbed and had never been interested on what he had to say. He also confessed that she cheated on him with her director and that that was why, both times Kate had been with someone else, he had backed off. Even disliking Josh, he wouldn't do that to him. Or even to Demming, who Rick admitted to being jealous of but that he was a good guy in the end. Apparently, they'd crossed paths at the precinct other times after their break-up and had talked more than just polite chat. They'd never be buddy-buddies but Rick admitted he'd never given him a chance. Josh he refused to give a chance to because to him, Josh had everything and kept choosing to leave. She shrugged because she really didn't care if they liked each other or not. Josh was in the past. And what was important here was how the fact that the boys thought he'd cheat on her had hurt him, but she wouldn't break his confidence by telling them about Meredith. "I saw the bruise you left behind Javi."

"We had your back," Espo answered automatically.

"Yeah," she nodded. "And you turned your back on him. Tell me Espo. In the eight years you've known him when has he turned his back on you?"

"Er- I what?"

"When you fought with Ryan? Everyone knows Rick gets along better with Ryan. Did he turn his back on you when you fought with the one he got on better or did he congratulate you on passing the Sargent's exam?"

"He congratulated me," he whispered.

"And when you and Lanie broke up. Did he stop talking to either of you, did he start treating either of you like crap?"

"Now Kate," Lanie started.

"Am I lying? Did you three not give him a hard time during our separation? Did you not tell him not to screw up *again*?"

"Of course, he's Castle," Lanie shrugged as if that was a given.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" Kate asked angrily.

"Kate, he doesn't mind," Espo tried to defend them.

"Yeah he does," Kate nodded sadly. "He just doesn't say anything because he loves me and doesn't want to make things awkward. But you know what? The other night was a shitty night for me. And you know why? Because of the abuse heaped on the man I love more than life. I

don't understand how you didn't see on his face what you were doing. He was giving you his press smile and that after all this time you don't know the difference is just sad. And you know what else Javi? Since we're on the subject, you're always so fast to turn on him. From the second you saw that video you turned on him. After witnessing six years of his love for me. After knowing he would never willingly hurt his daughter and mother."

"He was placing the bag on the dumpster!"

"What if someone had threatened Alexis, me, Martha? What do you think he would have done?"

"Anything," Ryan answered. "You said you found out about his missing time."

"Yeah, I did. He was protecting me. And he asked to have his memory erased, you know why? To protect *me*. The man who always needs to know the story. A man for whom his mind is his livelihood asked to have his brain messed with, for me. How about that Javi? Lanie? How horrible of him, right?" she snapped sarcastically.

"Okay, girl. I get you're upset," Lanie tried to placate her but Kate cut her off.

"Yeah, you damn right I'm upset. I knew I was going to hurt him when I left him but what I hadn't known was how you would hurt him. I thought you'd all have his back too and you didn't," she said and she had to stop to swallow back the tears that wanted to spill. She would not cry. This was about Rick, about making them see what they'd done.

"Do you know what he told me?"

"No," Ryan said as all three shook their heads like little toddlers.

"That he is just the annoyance you tolerate because of me," they had talked more while setting Lucy up and her heart had broken when he used that phrase. When he told her about Lanie's comment and how when she had panicked and slapped him so the boys wouldn't suspect them he was hurt that they would automatically assume he had cheated on her. How Lanie had also told him that Kate had *chosen* to believe him about his missing time.

*"That's something I don't understand Kate. I've heard that from you too. That you **chose** to believe in me. When ballistics came back on Vulcan Simmons, when we found that laundry lady saying you held her at gun point, I never **chose** to believe in you, I just did. I never even considered there could be another option. Yet, everyone kept telling me I had to just accept what was happening because you chose to believe me. Like that gave you a free pass for everything because you were being so magnanimous. And I'm not saying I didn't screw up not coming to you about whatever I was investigating, because I think I did, I think we both did. And I'm glad we're working on that – but that was why I was so worried about you forgiving me. Because I never thought that you leaving me, that the lie you told me, gave me a free pass. So why doesn't the same apply to you?"*

And she hadn't had a good answer for that, because he was right, everyone, including herself, acted as if she had the right to do whatever she wanted because once upon a time he had been a playboy. Because he had disappeared without explanation. Rick was a pacifier. He didn't like conflict, he liked everyone to be happy, so he swallowed a lot of his feelings. She had noticed that throughout the years. How he deflected at times just so they wouldn't fight. And when he came back, he had tried his hardest to get things back to normal and had never really brought up the fact that she had hurt him too. When he woke up thinking he was still on

his wedding day to find out two months had passed and she had started with the accusations. But they had talked about that too.

*"I was so confused and scared when you said I lost two months Kate. I pride myself on my memory, always have. How I can retain the smallest of details from a conversation that happened months, years before and yet I couldn't recall two months of my life and had no time to process it because the love of my life was treating me like a suspect. Accusing me of things I thought you knew I would never do. I was still in a hospital bed and had to figure out how to defend myself to you of all people, and that hurt Kate. That hurt a lot. And that everyone keeps saying that excuses whatever you do and how you chose to believe me...If the positions had been reversed, when the positions were reversed...I wouldn't and didn't care what the evidence said because I know my character, I know **you** and I would know that the evidence didn't make sense for the story, and I thought by now you and the boys knew that too. But you don't."*

And he had been right, he wouldn't and at first, she hadn't, when she saw the video. And she told him that and then told him about the two months of no leads, of everyone saying he had left of his own volition. Of finding the fake Jenkins and the tent and being so confused too. She didn't excuse her actions, because as he laid them out to her, so logically, she saw the flaws in her reasoning, in the evidence that was presented, in the fact that she knew him and should have just believed in him, period. Like he had always done for her. But she wanted him to understand how she had felt at the time so they could move forward. So they could try to be better from now on and that was what she wanted for him and their friends too, especially the boys. And she wanted them to understand how he was feeling too. How they were making him feel.

"That's not true," Ryan cried out immediately. "He's our friend."

"Yeah", Espo nodded emphatically as did Lanie.

"Then you're doing a crappy job of showing it," she said simply.

Espo shifted uncomfortably. He didn't know what to say. She was right. Yeah, he had Beckett's back but not Castle's. He was starting to feel ashamed and cringed as he remembered Castle asking if he was okay about Sonia. Just hours after he, Lanie and Ryan had made fun of him for being to blame for everything.

"Look, we've talked about this the other day. And I know he can defend himself if he has to but I need to make sure this doesn't happen again because, I'm ashamed to confess, that I hadn't realized how bad things were for him until the other day. He forgave me for leaving and we went back to being together and he never brought up how hurt he was, and he never complained about the hard time you were giving him. Quite the opposite, he even got a stethoscope to--"

"Ew, captain, no need for details," Espo and Kevin cried and Lanie said, "I'd like some details. What? I've always wondered. He has a good reputation and he sure as hell knows how to write a sex scene. That has to come from somewhere."

"Lanie! That's my husband! And, yes," she nodded her face heating up as Lanie smiled knowingly. "Back on topic. Rick is easy going, he just takes everything with a grain of salt and lets things slide but that doesn't mean they don't hurt him, and we need to be more careful. All of us. I've realized we've gotten used to making him the butt of the joke and we've crossed the line from harmless ribbing to abusive and I am asking you to pay more attention. Don't just

slip into old habits. I know we make jokes to lighten the load, and that's okay, as long as we make sure everyone is still laughing, as long as we make sure we don't single one of us out. Because we have guys, we've singled him out. Most of the times one of us make a joke he is the subject of the joke. And we need to stop that. He has been a part of the team for eight years. That's four times the difference from how long you two have been partners and how long you've known him," she pointed at Javi and Kevin, "from how long we've known each other. I'm pretty sure those two years shouldn't be counting so much anymore now."

"Jenny said the same thing," Ryan spoke up. "The other day. She was furious. I...I lied to her. I told her Castle had a book tour and that was why he couldn't come to the shower. She told me to invite both of you even though you were separated."

"And she was right. And if you had to choose, considering I'm not a baby person and he is, he'd have been the better choice. Did you know he got you a baby bulletproof vest, and light sabers and I don't know how many other things that Alexis and Martha vetoed? They're all home. He was really excited about the new baby. You know he adores Sarah Grace. How many times hasn't he offered to baby sit? Who do you think takes care of her when we do? I'll tell you, not me."

"I hadn't known all that," Kevin said ashamed. "And Jenny was so angry, she thought we were exaggerating and she checked out his website and found out I lied and well, Jenny seems all nice and sweet but you don't want to see her angry. We talked a lot and you're right. I had already figured that out. I had decided I'd try and make things better but he hasn't joined us in cases this week."

"There were no cases that required his help this week. They were all easy and none of them were Castle flavored. Rick and I talked. Before this whole mess started, when I received the notice of the command, we had decided he was going to focus on his PI business and we've talked again. He is doing just that. He'll still come if we need him, but as he pointed out, he let his life revolve around mine and when we hit a rough patch he ended up with no one in his corner. He needs friends, not just buddies. Friends that are his friends not mine. His words," she said to stop their protests, "If you don't agree then you need to show him. And that's not my job. That's yours, but I'm letting you know, I won't tolerate any abuse towards my husband anymore."

"Yes, captain," Kevin nodded and she smiled. She kept her glare longer on the other two even though they nodded promptly, so they'd know she meant business.

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"Halo night?" Rick asked skeptically.

"Yeah, you know. This Friday," Ryan said with a smile.

"Last I checked I've been banned," he said simply.

"We want you back," Espo said uncomfortably.

"Because I'm back with Beckett," Rick stated simply and the other two looked at each other. This was not going well.

"No," Espo prolonged the vowel looking at Ryan who said:

"Look, Castle, Rick, we've been real jerks with you."

“Beckett talked to you,” Rick said knowingly crossing his arms and surveying the two detectives.

“How did you know? Did she tell you?” Espo asked.

“Contrary to popular belief, I’m not stupid,” Rick rolled his eyes. After his talk with Kate. After her blessing to take the boys to task, he found that his patience had dwindled. He had been really hurt by their attitude. He had really felt like the boys were family and he hated the fact that he still felt that way towards them. You can’t just switch your feelings off no matter how upset you are with someone. So when he realized that the friendship was one-sided he had to admit he fell in a bit of a depressed state that he tried to hide. Trust had been broken. But now he wasn’t just going to let them back in as if nothing happened and he wasn’t going to give up his plan of reclaiming his life. He even had an idea he wanted to run through Haley. Yes, he was, let’s say, unorthodox, but his second brush with Slaughter told him that there was more to Slaughter than what he had thought. And Slaughter was in hot water in the PD, so maybe he’d be interested in a career change. Of course, they would have to work some kinks out, but maybe all Slaughter needed was someone to believe in him. Eight years ago, Rick himself had been a very different man.

“Look, Castle. We screwed up,” Ryan said honestly. “Real bad and the truth is, we needed a wakeup call. But we got one and I’m, I’m ashamed of how I’ve been acting and am here asking for a second chance,” he finished with his head raised high.

Rick had always liked Ryan best. Ryan was more open, more of a kindred spirit to Rick than Esposito, than even Kate. They were both dreamers and that was why Ryan’s attitude had hurt more than Esposito’s. He’d come to expect the aggressiveness from Esposito, and even Lanie. Every single time there had been a problem between him and Kate, Espo had immediately sided with Kate and against him. No questions asked. He knew Esposito had believed he had walked out from his wedding on his own volition from the start and he only changed his mind after being presented with the evidence. He hoped, over the years, the ex-marine wouldn’t do that, but the fact is he wasn’t surprised one bit. But Ryan had been in his corner on several occasions when he had been in the doghouse. Ryan had accepted him sooner, or so he’d thought and Ryan was married. When Kate had walked out, Rick had thought Ryan would have been someone to help him. To understand what he was going through because Ryan understood having found the love of your life. So yes, Ryan had hurt him. Like Kate had hurt him. But just like he had wanted Kate back, he had wanted Ryan, his friend back too. So very cautiously, he accepted the olive branch being offered.

“Okay. I’ll go.”

“Great,” Espo lifted his hand for a high-five but Rick just looked at him.

“Not there yet. Maybe one day.”

“Good enough for me,” Ryan nodded knowing this would take time. That they would have to show him through time that he was their friend, and maybe one day they’d be back to how they were the day of the Poe’s pen award, or maybe stronger, because now they knew what not to do.

**The end**

A/N: Now this is the end for real. After several great ideas reviewers gave me, thank you so much by the way, I wanted to show Kate taking the boys and Lanie to task. And I wanted to show Rick and the boys getting on the right track. But I also don't want to sound like a broken record so I don't want to extend this too much. I think I've showed the possible future, leaving what happens from now on to everyone's imagination.

I also haven't showed any interaction between Lanie and Rick on purpose. A reviewer, very wisely, pointed out that Lanie has always been Kate's friend, best friend. So, while her comments are hurtful, the real problem for Rick here would have been the boys.

I hope you enjoyed and thank you so much for the great support!