

Disclaimer: I don't own Castle

Warning: mention of violence. Unlike my other story, I've rated this T because I didn't go into the details of the violence. There I actually showed the scene. I received some reviews for my other two Castle stories saying they didn't need to be rated M, I am assuming because there was no sex scene, but I disagree. Mature content doesn't equal sexual content. Mature content is anything you think that young minds shouldn't be reading willy nilly and I find that a violent scene or mentions of suicidal thoughts are something that should be taken with caution. So that is why I rated those two stories as M and not this one.

A/N: I seem to be on a roll using Josh as a scapegoat. Poor guy. And I actually liked him on the show. I mean, before he tried to punch Castle. The only problem I had with him was he wasn't Castle.

"Priorities"

"Beckett," she answered her phone curtly as she always had. She was in a mood and whoever was calling better not be piling up more crap on her. She was nowhere in her LockSat investigation, which meant she was nowhere nearer to going home to her husband who she missed like air.

He hadn't been around this last week, and she hated herself for being upset about it. She was the one who told him she needed time and space, and here he was respecting her wishes for the first time since she walked out of their home without giving him any explanation and she was upset because she hadn't seen him. Because she was secretly glad he was trying to insinuate himself into cases every chance he got no matter what she said, at least that way she got to see him.

She had hated herself last week when she had told him she needed to get her stuff. She had seen his hopes rise at her mention of calling him and his face crumble when she stomped on his huge loving heart. She had to remind herself, she was doing this to protect him. She had to remind herself that when he placed the fake smile on his face. Yes, she had walls, and she used her intimidating stance to protect herself and not let people in. But so did he. She took a long while to differentiate the real smile from the one for the public. The one not to let anyone on he was hurt or scared. But she did now, and she had seen both in a matter of seconds, the real one when she said she was about to call him and the mask to protect himself, from her. She wondered if that was why he wasn't around. She had thought he'd understand her gesture of leaving her favorite t-shirt behind, for him. To let him know she'd come back, as soon as she could. That she loved him.

"Captain Beckett, sorry to interrupt. This is Mike Specter from Lockhart and Associates. My client has requested to talk to you."

"Your client?" she asked. She knew who Mike Specter was. He was one of the top defense attorneys in town. Why would a client of a defense attorney request to talk to her? She ran a quick check on the cases that were on trial and was quite sure Specter was not the defense attorney for any of them.

"Yes, Dr. Josh Davidson--"

"Excuse-me Josh is your client?" What had Josh gotten himself into? Why did he need a defense attorney? She hadn't talked to him since she broke up with him over four years ago.

“Yes, Dr. Davidson was denied bail on his assault charges due to his current position with Doctors Without Borders and he thought you may be of help-“

“I’m not going to get Josh out if he was denied bail,” she said indignantly. Assault charges? And he thought what? He could call in a favor. Denying bail made sense. Josh spent more time out of the country than in. She bet he did have the connections to flee if he wanted to.

“Look, Captain. I advised my client against contacting you considering who the victim is and the reasons he assaulted him. But Dr. Davidson is convinced you’ll help and ordered me to contact you. So here I am, fulfilling my duties. Dr. Davidson is currently awaiting trial at Rikers.”

“I’ll go see him,” she answered. She knew she had dealt poorly with him. She had used him as a placeholder. She saw that with the help from Dr. Burke. She had been upset at Castle for leaving with Gina, which Dr. Burke also showed her was irrational of her. Castle couldn’t have known she had broken up with Tom and she had rebuffed him at every chance. But she still had been upset and Josh had been fun and uncomplicated for a while, so why not. She shouldn’t have. She ended up hurting both Josh and Castle. So she felt she owed him at least to see why he had contacted her after all these years. She was in for a shock.

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She had waited for him to enter the visitation room and had been uncomfortable at the smile and look he gave her when he entered and as he sat in front of her.

“Hey, Kate,” he said with a smile that transmitted too much familiarity. As if he thought they were still together. She tried to stay professional.

“What did you want from me Josh?” she asked and he tried to move his hand forward to take hers but was warned by a guard as she quickly removed her hands from the table. What was going on here?

Josh glared at the guard and then turned to her, “I thought you could drop the charges Kate.”

“Drop the charges?” she asked confused and a bit angry at his presumption.

Who the hell did Josh think she was? Why would he think she could or even would drop whatever charges he was being accused of?

“Yes,” he smiled. “After all, I was just defending your honor. I’m sure there’s something you can do.”

“You were defending my honor?” she asked skeptically and her tone must have shown because Josh became more serious and spoke as if explaining to a toddler not to put their finger on the power outlet.

“Kate,” he sighed.

She bristled at that. He often used that tone when they were together. She couldn’t help but compare him with Castle. Castle never spoke to her as if she couldn’t understand what he was saying even if he was trying to explain something she wasn’t getting. Like why Nebula 9 sucked, in his opinion.

“He put you in danger, ruined everything, disappears on your wedding day, convinces you to marry him and then dumps you before you even completed a year of marriage. I had to teach him a lesson.”

Her blood ran cold. Josh's assault charges were against Castle? He had attacked Castle? Where was Rick? How hurt was he? Why hadn't anyone contacted her?

"He didn't dump me," she hissed angrily starting to get up.

"Kate, be realistic--"

"No!" she slammed her hand on the table angry. She was tired of having to tell everyone that Castle hadn't done anything wrong. Why did everyone assume he was in the wrong? Her breaking his heart wasn't enough? Everyone else had to turn against him too? "He didn't do anything wrong. All he ever did was love me more than anything. I screwed up and even if I hadn't. Even if he had been the one in the wrong, you still had no right to touch him. You want my help? Here is my help, I guarantee you that I will do everything in my power to make sure you get the maximum sentence for your crime!" And with that she walked out. She needed to find her husband. Now his disappearance from the precinct took a whole new level. He wasn't respecting her request, he just couldn't come and try to win her back. She choked a sob, he never needed to win her back.

Xx

She had gone first to the loft. Before she left Rikers she found out that Josh had been arrested five days earlier. Five days. Five days ago Rick had been hurt and she just went on with life none the wiser. The whole point of her leaving was to keep him safe and then he is attacked, hurt, because she left him. Because Josh felt himself in the right to go teach Rick a lesson.

She had tried his cell phone, Alexis's phone and even Martha's but no one answered. She was scared to find out why he didn't answer. Was he that injured that he couldn't answer his phone five days later?

Alexis and Martha she figured didn't pick up for the same reason they didn't call her when he was hurt. And she couldn't blame them. In their position, she wouldn't be very happy towards the person who walked out on her father/son and then whose ex-boyfriend decided to attack him.

So she needed the insurance information. She needed his card number and she knew the card number came in the bills. She was his wife. She had rights. The insurance company would have to tell her which hospital he was in.

She opened the door and saw the loft was a mess. Rick was very neat. Despite his childish and excited manner, he always kept his home and his office ordered. But there were dishes in the sink piling up. Dishes on the table. Every day things thrown around that usually he would have already put away.

She realized that he had to be home. There was no way Alexis and Martha wouldn't have seen to cleaning the house for his return if he wasn't. Plus, their housekeeper came twice a week. She would have been here in five days.

She entered the office and smiled as she spotted her desk. Tucked in the corner facing his. He had gotten rid of the couch just to get her the desk. She had tried to tell him he didn't need to give up his office, his den. The place where he wrote since she had a desk at the precinct but he had insisted. For when she brought work home. Or even just to surf the net.

"If you prefer I can put a chair right next to my desk," he had winked at her. *"I like the symmetry."*

She shook her thoughts away and walked to his desk, to where she knew he kept the bills. However her destination changed as she quickly moved towards their bedroom when she heard some cursing from the bathroom. She wasted no time. She knew that voice. That was her husband. Her heart lifted a bit even as she found odd that Martha or Alexis weren't running at the sounds. When he broke his kneecap, they only left him alone after a couple of weeks. Once they were absolutely sure he could handle himself without their hovering. Despite Kate's presence. Now he was here alone. That had to mean he wasn't that injured. Right?

"Great," she heard him mumble. Why hadn't he answered the phone? She turned the corner and saw him instantly. Any relief she had felt fled. He was shirtless and she could see the myriad of bruises marring him. Plus the band around his torso that clearly indicated broken ribs. He also had his arm on a sling and was wincing heavily as he tried to lower himself to grab the fallen bottle.

"Let me," she automatically moved forward and stopped at the look he gave her. Fallen bottle completely forgotten.

"Did you forget something?" he asked. No hello. How are you? Oh, by the way, someone beat the crap out of me and I didn't call you. No, she couldn't go there. He had every right to be angry. She was the reason this happened.

"Why didn't you call me?" she accused. Well, she had had good intentions and she almost managed not to let her temper get the better of her. Her temper was just faster than her brain.

"Excuse me?" he hissed at her.

"I found out today that you were assaulted five days ago Rick. Five days! Why didn't you call me? Why didn't you pick up the phone when I called you today?"

"I was showering. It might have escaped your notice but showering isn't the easiest of endeavors in this situation," he snapped back. Oh, he was done walking on eggshells. She walked out on him. No explanation, no timeline, just another "wait for me". He had done everything in his power to try to find out. To try to win her back. Not for one second regretting humiliating himself for her. Having to endure everyone's looks of pity when she rebuffed him yet again, and their suspicious looks when he claimed not to know what happened. Wondering what he'd done wrong. Assuming he was the one in the wrong. He was getting tired of that attitude from everyone, a little support would have been nice. He was getting tired of the fact that the only support he got was from a machine that he had to program to support him and was getting tired of being without his wife.

So all he wanted to do was get some pick me up Red Velvet cake from that bakery he liked close to the Hospital that had treated her. Which unfortunately is where Dr. Motorcycle Boy worked. But he was down, and that cake always made him happy, and instead of cake he got a freaking chair. Yes, because Dr. Motorcycle Boy had forgone fists. He just swung a chair around. He ended up with a concussion, a broken arm, and his dominant one at that, which made getting things without dropping them harder, and broken ribs. And then she comes here and snaps at him? Really? Enough was enough!

“Exactly my point. Why are you here alone? You need help!”

“Well, last time I checked I live alone!” he snapped back angrily and he almost stopped when he saw the hurt in her eyes and her snapping her mouth closed. But he couldn’t. She needed to understand, that either they were married and her problems were his and vice versa or they weren’t and she couldn’t demand to know when he had a problem and not share hers. “And I’m not about to make my mother and my daughter upend their lives for me. I can handle myself.”

“So you sent them away,” she accused crossing her arms and he crossed his good one over his sling. Oh no, she didn’t get to be all righteous!

She saw the moment he went from offensive to defensive when he tried to cross his arms and put that little boy’s scowl he has. When he knows he is in the wrong. And sure enough the exact same phrase he said when he started getting fed up of the hovering, before the boredom settled in, when he broke his kneecap, came out of his mouth.

“I can manage. I’m not an invalid.”

She took a deep breath, because, somewhere in the recess of her mind she knew she had started this all wrong, and she tried for a new tactic.

“You should have called me,” she said gently.

“Why? So you come. You take care of the infirm and then you waltz out of my life again. No thank you. I live alone now, I have to learn to take care of myself alone.”

That cut just as deep as when he pointed out he lived alone the first time. Because somehow she never thought that. She was coming back, but the truth was that for the last month that was exactly how things were for him. He lived alone. Something he hadn’t done for over twenty-years. And sure, he didn’t need anyone taking care of him when he wasn’t injured. He actually was the one doing the caregiving. Making the food, doing the groceries. Yes, he liked to play. Yes, he joked Alexis raised him. But that wasn’t true. He was the caregiver in the family, and he craved that, and the company. He hated when the house was quiet. But now he was here alone.

“No, because I’m your wife. And I love you and I don’t want to see you get hurt. I left to protect you-“

“From LockSat.”

“Yes- what?”

“Yes, imagine that. I have a brain,” he said sarcastically. Because he did. Of course the first thought on his mind when she left was that she was chasing LockSat. Allyson Hyde’s death being too neat. Vikram joining the 12th. He wasn’t stupid, but he also wasn’t 100% sure he hadn’t done something wrong. He never knew with her. After all these years, she still kept secrets. She still held back.

“You can’t investigate,” she started in a panic.

“I haven’t,” he said simply. “I wasn’t certain that was your reason for leaving. And I was more worried in protecting *you* than finding LockSat. You told me someone is already looking for

him. This isn't like Bracken where the case had been filed. Where no one was looking. More qualified people are looking for him."

"That's not – I have to–"

"Have to what Kate? Why? Because your AG team was collateral damage? Because you feel guilty? I understand feeling guilty. But when does the guilt stop? You ran a search on Bracken. We found Bracken because I reopened the case. Dr. Death and Lanie found the connection. Are we all responsible for every reaction other people have to the events that unfold? What would happen if the families of your victims started pursuing their own justice? That's being a vigilante and I remember us stopping one once, before she destroyed her career. You are a cop, a really good one, but you are not equipped to deal with a corrupt CIA agent. Let the people trained for this deal with him. Just like you deal with the murderers and not the families. Let them bring justice to your AG team and anyone else who was affected by LockSat and you bring justice to your victims. Do what you are good doing."

Kate swallowed, because deep down she knew she was being a hypocrite. After all the times she told the families to trust her, let her do her job and now she believed only she could bring down a man a trained spy had been trying to bring down for over a year and couldn't. But something Rick said raised a flag.

"What do you mean protect me? What have you been doing?"

Rick shifted but he raised his chin and she recognized the stance. Whatever he did he knew she wouldn't approve but he was not sorry.

"I had Hayley check on Vikram. For all we know Alyson Hyde was telling the truth about his background. After all, he is the one who decoded the gunmen's phone and pointed us to her. I've also been cultivating a few contacts I had neglected in the last few years. More than just Bob. His term is almost over and if you were really using police resources to run a rogue investigation Kate," he shook his head and she could see the worry in his eyes. "In your first year as Captain...this could ruin you. I needed to have people I can ask favors of if I had to. I even showed up to butter Gates up. I think she was on to me. I tried to tell her I was just happy for her with her promotion. Which I am by the way."

"Rick, my career–"

"Is at risk. If any other Captain had pulled what you did their first day on the job they'd been at least demoted if not worse," Castle said firmly. "But you are Nikki Heat and 1PP needs the good press Nikki Heat brings."

"You don't know–"

"Oh, but I do," he nodded. "Bob was very clear with me that the Brass was not happy they couldn't reprimand you without a public outcry."

"What?"

"They're keeping an eye on you Kate and if you don't toe the line, there's a chance no matter who I butter up to, no matter how much the public mixes you up with Nikki Heat, they will have your badge."

She hadn't known that. She had seen Montgomery and Gates pull rank easily so many times that she thought she would be able to. But they had been Captain for years hadn't they? She

swallowed, she had never thought that far. She had never thought anyone would catch her. She was only worried about LockSat finding out and here he was protecting her, protecting what she thought important to her. Oh, how she loved him. She hurt him and he was still trying to care for her.

“I also tried hiring a security detail but you lost them every time you left for wherever you are staying,” he mumbled and she realized that was the part he thought she’d be angry. Yes, she had seen the security detail and had recognized them from when he hired them for Alexis, right after Paris. They had clearly sent the same agents. She thought Rick had hired them to find out where she was staying but no. He had hired them to have her back since he couldn’t. She kneeled down and picked up the bottle.

She then gently traced the bruises on his chest. “You’re right. I didn’t think this through. But I’m still coming home to take care of my husband and this time I prom-“ she realized she was about to say she promised, she had promised no secrets hadn’t she? So she wouldn’t promise. She would just state, “I won’t walk away again. We’ll figure this out together.”

She saw him inhale but he nodded because Rick was Rick and she had known he would let her back. Because that was who he was, he was forgiving and one day, she hoped to be like that. He finally let his good arm fall, losing the defensive stance and he took her hand. Not looking at her but at their joined hands, he said quietly:

“We can’t just sweep this under the rug Kate. This can’t keep happening. We are married, the time for unilateral decisions is past. Anything that affects us both needs to be decided by the both of us,” he shook his head and gave her a sad smile, “Actually, anything that affects us period needs to be discussed, even if just to have a sounding board, someone to listen while we make a decision. If we don’t share our life, our problems, then, we’re just roommates. And that’s not what I want with you Kate. What I’ve always wanted, since before we were together was the whole deal, the good and the bad, together. Till we’re old and wrinkly and Alexis’s and Cosmo’s kids are jumping around us.”

“Not naming any kids Cosmo Rick,” she said the phrase automatically. She loved when he did that. Talked about kids they would have as if they were a foregone conclusion.

“Worth a try,” he smiled sheepishly. “But I’m serious Kate. Maybe we need help. Maybe we need someone to help us in how to be more open. I love you and I know you love me. That’s not the issue but maybe... maybe both of us don’t know how to be in a relationship. I don’t mean to hurt you Kate but, you told me so yourself, in a radiation tent, you liked keeping one foot out the door.”

“I don’t want to keep a foot-“

“That’s not what I mean,” he shook his head and continued gently. “What I mean is. That’s how you always acted in your relationships before us. And I’m no better. Gina was right when she accused me of not letting her in,” he sighed and he leaned on the counter still facing her. “Meredith hurt me when she cheated on me and just up and left. But worse, she hurt Alexis. And I closed up. I also didn’t let my girlfriends, my wife, in. I tried to protect Alexis, and even me, from what I felt - after Meredith, after Kyra who left for Europe, promised to call and never did – was the inevitable. That they’d just up and leave. But I don’t want to do that to you. But maybe I am without knowing,” he frowned worried.

“No,” she shook her head vehemently. Because he had let her in, he shared his life with her even before they were together.

“But I did Kate. I don’t know why, and I can tell you this with certainty, whatever I did, had to be to protect you, and Alexis and mother, because I just cannot fathom another reason to stay away, but I still did. I chose, unilaterally, to stay away and then to have my memories erased just as you chose to leave now. And that has to stop. For both of us. No matter what good intentions we might have had at the time, we need to stop making decisions for the other. We need to trust each other. Trust that we can make good decisions together. Certainly better than the ones we make alone,” he nodded emphatically. “We really suck at that.”

She snorted, but he was right. And she had known back then, even when she saw the footage of him putting the money in the dumpster, she had known that whatever he was doing he wasn’t running from her but he had to have a good reason that probably involved the safety of those he loved. But that doesn’t mean the decision was smart and nor was hers. She could see that now. He knew about LockSat and yet he hadn’t investigated LockSat, because he figured that she didn’t want him to. So she could have trusted him with the truth. He would have stayed away. Because he might push boundaries but he knows when not to. When to respect her wishes even when they hurt him, even when he has to stay away while she recovers from a gunshot. They needed to trust each other, not only to have each other’s back, to love each other, they already trusted each other that way, but to be able to make smart choices together. Just like he said.

“Okay,” she nodded walking closer and embracing him. Trying to be mindful of his injuries, “Whatever we have to do to get wrinkly together. I’m in.”

He embraced her back and whispered, “I love you Kate. We’ll figure this out.”

The end

A/N: I felt they just glossed over the hurt her decision caused in the show. And then with Castle having been after LockSat since before her they kind of used a cop out. Since they both lied. So they could just go on without dealing with their problems. So imagine that here, yes, they got back together, but they went on to couple’s therapy and actually worked on their problems before they could get their happily ever after.

I hope you enjoyed.