

## The Art Of Fire

Author: CK

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Summary: Fire is an art of nature. Able to bring life; able to destroy it. And able to melt souls together.

Disclaimer: CSI:NY is legal property of CBS, Anthony E. Zuiker and his writers, as well as Polydor. I think they're doing a good job; but they definitely they could do better. For example by bringing Stella back...

Author's Note: If you've already started doing something you usually wouldn't do, you can as well go on with it. Well. I usually don't write sequels to my stories. Can't remember having done it even once in the past. But being the shipper I am, and loving Stella/Mac as I do, I thought I should maybe, this once, give it a shot.

*This is a sequel to my story Ignition. You will need to read it first to understand this story.*

"Hey, grandma," the young woman greeted when the older one opened the door. She stepped up, hugged and kissed her grandmother, and smiled when her white curls tickled her a bit. She'd always loved her grandmother's full and soft hair; she'd used to play with it a lot as a child. It was one of the many memories she held dear in her heart.

"Hello, love. Come on in, I just got some coffee ready. You can as well join me if your grandpa leaves me alone." The young woman looked at her confused.

"Why, where's grandpa?"

"Someone needed his expertise at the lab," the older one sighed before shaking her head with a fond smile.

"Didn't he retire, like, over twenty years ago?" It was a rhetorical question, really.

"It's your grandpa we're talking about, dear," the white-haired laughed. "So, tell me," she continued while pouring the coffee into cups, "why did you need to come here and talk to me so suddenly? You sounded a bit... upset on the phone."

"It's... Well, I can't believe I never asked that before, but... how did you and grandpa get together? You two seem like the perfect couple, but mum once mentioned that you had to go a long and hard way to find your happiness."

"So, did your mother, yes?"

"Yes. And then, this morning, I found pictures where you don't look so happy at all. When I asked mum, she told me that this is your story to tell. You know, I always thought you and grandpa had the perfect fairytale romance and..." She trailed off when the elder woman took the pictures from her granddaughter and studied them. At first, she wasn't so sure where they had been taken; but then it all came back to her. The dinner at the Messer home, three years after she'd left New York. She had completely forgotten about these pictures, that there had been taken

photos at all; photos that showed all too well how much resentment as well as anxiety there was between her and the man she now called her husband...

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"How did we get to this point?"

"I don't know. I guess it all started with the evening when you seduced me." There was the hint of a grin tucking at the corners of his mouth, and she looked away to not let herself get infected by it. She wanted to stay serious; although she felt everything, just not serious.

"I seduced you? It was your lips on mine, if I remember right."

"Sorry to disappoint you, darling, but it was definitely the other way around. You know I'd never have been so... so..."

"Yeah?"

"Well..."

"Spontaneous?" She giggled a little when he huffed. "Acting on your heart's desire?" Mac Taylor knew their little game was over when he heard her voice soften with her last words.

"I'd never have been so brave as to act on my heart's desire. But I'm very happy that in the end, my heart got what it wants."

"I love you, too," she said gently and shyly stole a kiss from the man sitting next to her. Her blush matched his when the people around them cheered. She would still have to get used to openly showing her affection, her love. By no means was she shy in general, but when it came to them, to her and Mac, it was entirely different for Stella Bonasera.

But no. Not Bonasera. It was Taylor now. As of this day, she was a married woman; married to her best friend of over fifteen years, to the father of her four year old daughter, the person she'd been through thick and thin with, through ups and downs; the one she trusted more than anyone else. And the one she loved more than anyone else, save for her daughter of course. He was a part of her life, had been for so long. He was a part of her.

Stella looked around and shook her head in disbelief. This was her wedding. Had anyone told her that they'd one day come to this point, she would simply have laughed. And five years back, even *bitterly* laughed. Yet it was true. After everything that had happened, after all these obstacles, they'd finally found what she strongly believed was their tell-tale Happily Ever After.

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The road had been rough, to say at least. While Mac admitting - to Stella, but more so, to himself - that his feelings for her went deeper than close friendship had been a start, it had also been only this and nothing more. A starting point for something new; a new territory they both first needed to gain experience in.

The week following their *second first* kiss - this time one that didn't lead to a one night stand, but to, as they both hoped, a future together - was the very definition of heaven on earth. They learned to love showing their daughter what having a mommy *and* a daddy could mean, and showing themselves what loving each other openly could mean. And maybe they even fell in love - for real, without doubts and hesitation. They used the days to get to know each other completely anew, to be a family, be a couple. They made love to each other, again and again, but sometimes also only lay together, talking quietly or simply savoring the presence of the other and the silence they'd then rediscovered to be comfortable.

But the day came when Mac had to return, for the moment at least. There was work, there were cases and a whole lab waiting for him. And for Stella as well. Life-changing decisions weren't made in a day; even though right then, it was exactly what Mac, what both he and Stella, would have wanted to do. Just leave everything behind and start a new life as a normal family.

If only they weren't so damn responsible persons.

Their daughter Eleni didn't like it that Mac left again after two weeks. Didn't like it at all. She made a fuss Stella had never before seen with her daughter, and neither she nor Mac were able to calm the little girl down. At the airport terminal, half an hour before Mac had to leave for New York, the lovers and parents found themselves confronted with the whole impact of decisions they had made and would have to make, and also with the fact that they shouldn't take too much time for it. There was certainly someone who was even more impatient and eager for them to become a real family for good.

Good things mustn't be rushed - after all, Rome wasn't built in a day either. But then, one should think that building a family life would be easier than building a whole empire. It wasn't. Quite the contrary. And Mac and Stella really learned to hate those phrases the one or other person brought up to calm their impatience a bit. It didn't help in any way; it only made it worse.

With every passing week, every passing month, the yearning for each other became stronger; still, they both agreed that they didn't want any half measures.

They had soon decided that Stella would come back to New York. It was her home, and to be honest, despite all her career chances, she had never really wanted to be anywhere else. Growing up in an orphanage had taught her to appreciate every little piece that felt like family. And her friends in New York were family.

*Mac was family.*

The problem was - there was no job for her in the Big Apple. After she had left, Jo Danville had taken over her position, and due to the city's financial shortage, it seemed impossible to create a new job, a new position for her. But Stella was no one to play the good housewife and mother. She needed the work. Surely Mac was the last one to not understand her; still, it slowed them down in their planning and it was eating at both of them.

After four months anger and frustration, emotions they'd held back the whole time to don't make things more complicated, finally broke free and resulted in their first serious fight as a couple.

Hadn't it been for Eleni back then, it would all have been over right then and there, as Mac and Stella suddenly felt too tired to fight this fight for their love and happiness anymore. They felt alone, they missed each other, but also blamed the other in their emotionality, what made them drift apart dangerously. Still, they held on, for their

daughter's sake; it was her who, to most parts, prevented that fragile relationship of - and love between - her parents that had had to survive so much doubt and anxiety in the time since their reunion after Stella's three year absence from being abandoned.

In the end, and with some additional clear words from Danny and Lindsay who gave them a good piece of their minds, the couple overcame yet another obstacle, another rock on their road, ultimately and definitely recognizing that precious thing they had, and that it wasn't worth to have it destroyed by some random relationship problems; or organization issues, for that matter. They'd overcome worse; they'd dealt with so much in about fifteen years of friendship, of companionship. Tired or not, they couldn't give up; they owed themselves, their little family, that much.

It was, however, more a good amount of luck than any initiative from their side that helped them to solve their biggest problem of Stella's expected unemployment. Jo, getting back together with her ex-husband, took a - perfectly timed - job offer from the Washington Crime Lab; not least because she wanted to see an end of this martyrdom Mac and Stella were putting themselves through. And the couple was incredibly grateful for it; so much that they even helped Jo moving to D.C., much to her amusement and against her protest.

From there, it was easy. Sinclair, although not exactly happy about the relationship, allowed Stella back in her old job as Mac's second-in-command. The team was excited to have the Greek-Italian woman, her knowledge and abilities and enthusiasm, back, and the whole dayshift team seemed to work together more effectively than ever before.

Stella and Eleni moved to New York within the shortest time possible, and together with Mac into the house the couple had bought only weeks before. They soon found out that, while their tastes when it came to furnishings and decoration weren't the same, they still found enough common likes to not have an interior based on half-hearted compromises. It were those small things that assured them even more - if possible - that they belonged together.

One year and a half they lived together, as a family, two lovers with their little, adorable daughter. But Mac felt that there was still some small thing, another step in their life and relationship left. They never talked about the possibility of marriage, content with what they had. On the other hand, however, they both were the types of person who sooner or later needed to settle down, with everything it included. They were in a relationship, lived together, had a child - but being married was also a part of it.

Mac contemplated for a while about whether he should do it and ask Stella, and then about the when and how. Eventually, at least half the decision was made for him. And he was probably as surprised by it as she was.

The Big Question came the day after Eleni's fifth birthday. Many things before had changed a lot, but this one day was the ultimate turning point for Mac. The birthday preparations - making food, decorating the house, thinking of games - and party itself, when they entertained the children and tried to avoid as much chaos as possible, felt so normal and ordinary like nothing else in his entire life before - and because of that, it was more special than anything he would have been able to imagine. Or maybe not able to imagine.

On the next day, he organized for Eleni to spend the night at the Messer home, and prepared some nice - and romantic - surprise for Stella: A sleigh ride through a snow covered Central Park, dinner in a glass dome overlooking the city, a ring, and a proposal. Mac was barely able to finish the question before she said yes, tears and endless happiness sparkling in her eyes.

Feeling that they had wasted too much time already anyways, the wedding followed only a good three months later on a sunny and surprisingly warm April day.

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"You can't be serious, can you? Aren't you a bit too old for this?" Despite his reproachful words, Mac's voice was still filled with love and tenderness, making Stella return from her journey through her memories to look at her protesting husband. She laughed when she saw Eleni sitting in his lap and hugging him tightly, obviously not willing to let go of him.

The girl loved her dad. As soon as she'd been able to understand it, her parents had explained to her that Mac was her father. Their daughter had been joyous, and while she couldn't really grab the meaning of her parents' words - Mac had been her dad to her all along, so where was the difference? - she at least knew that he would now stay with them, that the three of them would be together. And she had never wished for more.

Unfortunately, some slightly annoying traits stayed with her as she grew older, and even though Mac was with them permanently; especially her playing the little monkey clinging to daddy whenever she was supposed to leave him. And right now, Eleni was meant to go with the Messers. It was way past bedtime already for the kids - not only Eleni, but Lucy Messer as well - and Danny had volunteered to bring the two girls home so his wife could stay a bit longer at the wedding party.

"Matya mou," Stella began as she slipped into the chair next to her husband's, "didn't you want to show Lucy your new doll you got from your grandma?" Two big blue eyes looked at her from a head still lying at Mac's shoulder, and a thoughtful expression appeared in them. After a few moments, Eleni nodded, let go of her father, and walked over to Lucy.

"C'mon, we can play police," she exclaimed when she approached the other girl.

"She's totally her parents' daughter," Danny, who had till then silently watched the scenery, deadpanned, and Lindsay chuckled.

"That she is. One day she'll make a great CSI," she commented, but closed her mouth quickly when she caught Mac and Stella's almost shocked expressions.

"Eleni will have a nice, *not* dangerous job, I hope," Mac insisted, and though he smiled, there was something in his voice that obviously wanted to nip the idea in the bud. His girl would never hunt the city's scum. No, she would have a nice job that wouldn't put her life in danger on a daily basis. He would make sure of that.

"Thank God there's still some time before she'll have to decide about that," his wife tried to calm him down, recognizing the look on his face. The one that said, *I'm ready to fight*. When it came to Eleni, he wasn't different from most loving and caring dads out there - he wanted to protect her, and he would do anything to keep her safe. It was just another reason why Stella loved him so much.

"Alright, we'll leave, then," Danny announced, effectively shifting the others' attention away from what was obviously a bit of a sensitive subject. "You two have said goodnight? Lucy?" His daughter shook his head and ran over to her mother to tell her goodbye and goodnight, before returning to her father. "All set?" was the next

question he had for the two girls, and both piped a Yes, before each of them took an offered hand of Danny's and the three walked to the Messer's car.

Stella, Mac and Lindsay watched silently as Danny and the children vanished through the door that led to the parking lot. Only when they were gone, Stella quipped, "That's going to be a rough night for him.", and the other two laughed.

A few hours later, and although the party was far from being over and the guests didn't have any intention of ending the night already, the newly wedded couple found it about time to leave. It was shortly after midnight - and they certainly wanted to have some time to themselves in their first night as a married couple.

"Lindsay?" Stella approached her younger friend who was sitting at one of the tables and watching some people on the dance floor, a glass of red wine in her hand and a content expression on her face. She looked up when she heard the other woman's voice.

"Hey, you two! You're leaving?" she immediately understood when Mac came up behind his wife and put an arm around her waist.

"Yes. It's about time," the Greek responded and gave a little, but meaningful grin.

"You two have a wonderful night. Eleni can stay until tomorrow evening, if you want. I'm sure the girls will find enough to keep themselves busy," Lindsay winked, and Stella smiled.

"Thanks, Linds. For everything."

"No, don't thank me. You two are finally together and happy. If anything, that's the biggest Thank You I could ever have gotten from you."

"You're a hopeful romantic, do you know that?" Mac remarked good-naturedly.

"Guilty!" Lindsay exclaimed at that, and the three of them laughed. Then the newly-weds hugged their friend.

"Good night. And don't worry about anything here, we've talked to the owner, he'll be here till everyone's gone and take care of everything." The red-head nodded and squeezed Stella's hand gently; then she watched the couple head out.

Stella and Mac probably could have guessed it - and yet it was a surprise when they came home and found the way to their bedroom as well as the room itself decorated with rose petals, white and red scarves, and even candles. Whoever was responsible for this had left only minutes ago - and the couple assumed that Lindsay had a good part in that whole idea.

"That's some serious case of B&E," Mac couldn't help but joke, and Stella gave him a half amused, half playfully reprimanding glare.

"I need to find myself a more romantic man," she teased when she wound her arms around his neck and nudged his nose with hers affectionately.

"Too late for that, my love," her husband whispered. And then he claimed her lips with his in a kiss full of love, passion, and promises.

Once, Mac had taught her the difference between sex and making love. He was the first man to make her truly understand it.

Stella liked it gentle and slow, but she also sometimes didn't mind it a bit rougher - with a little struggle for power and dominance. For some reason, it had always been like this with her former partners, and she had never complained.

He, however, was not that kind of man to play such games. His touch was so gentle, so feathery light, and so completely different from what she was used to. He worshipped her, caressed her, he explored every last inch of her skin, touched and kissed it until she was writhing beneath him and thought she'd go insane. It felt so incredible, and she never wanted it to end. He defined "special" every night they spend together anew; he showed her how it felt to be loved unconditionally over and over again.

And still, if possible, in their first night as newly wedded couple, this feeling was increased even more. Stella knew she'd never forget it. Despite all the wonderful memories of even more wonderful nights they'd already made, and she was sure would make in the future, this clichéd one was the very definition of special. It was breathtaking, in every sense of the word.

When they lay in each other's arms hours later, sated after their love-making, Stella decided that there wasn't a single thing in her life she regretted anymore, as every hurt and every tear still had led her to her happiness in the end...

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"Grandma?" No answer. The older woman was far away, lost in her thoughts. "Granny!" Her granddaughter tried again and finally got her attention.

"I'm sorry, love, I guess I got a bit lost in my memories," Stella chuckled and looked slightly apologetically at her daughter's second child. Eleni had given her two grandchildren - a boy and a girl. And while she loved her grandson, it was Tessa who she always has been closest to, while Tessa's elder brother Colin used every minute he got to spend with and learn from Mac.

"A bit, huh?" Tessa laughed lightly. "A bit surely explains the now-cold coffee." She grinned when her grandma's eyes widened in shock. But before she was able to say anything, her granddaughter already continued and demanded the promised story. "So, are you gonna tell me how you and grandpa got together or not?"

"Of course, my dear." Stella took a deep breath, searching for the right words to start with. And then she began her story. "Right from the very beginning, the first moment we met, there was some kind of fire between us. We were a perfect match - only at work of course, he was happily married, after all. But back then, it was more a fire of professional companionship, one that made us melt together and form a perfect symbiosis, before it grew into a wonderful friendship..."

And so Stella Taylor told the story of her and Mac; a story that was the one of a two year old Greek orphan whose early life's tragedy in the end brought her not only the man of her life and husband of now almost forty years, but - maybe even more importantly - the best friend any person could imagine.

For Stella, the relationship between two people had always resembled a fire; the brighter and hotter it burned, the more intense the relationship was. For her and Mac, there had been this guiding flame throughout the years, growing stronger and withstanding every storm, every rain fall; resulting in an unbreakable bond of two souls melted together, two souls belonging to each other undeniably.

When she had learned one thing in her life, then that the connection between two people that burned the brightest was the one that grew out of friendship and respect.

And that love born out of a deep friendship was the true art of fire.

The End

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*For those who are interested - a little timeline:*

- *Stella left New York in May 2010*
- *Eleni was born January 15th, 2011*
- *Stella and Mac meet again in Summer 2013 / around June*
- *they move in together in September/October 2013*
- *they get married in April 2015*

*And as we know from the show, Stella was born in 1975, Mac on Nov. 1st, 1965.*