

## Cleaning Up

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Rating: P14

Contents: Some people need a gentle push into the right direction. And some people needed a kick up the backside. Kate Beckett was the latter. But she wasn't a hopeless case. Following up 2x24 A Deadly Game.

Disclaimer: It's all Andrew W. Marlowe's and his team's. They do a good job, although I was very angry with them for that ending of S2...

Author's Note: I know, I'm really late with that one... really, really late... but it took me ages to finish it and I just didn't want to waste an almost finished story, so I wrote what was still missing and... yeah. Hope it still finds some readers, despite being so... "outdated".

About the little change of canon... call it artistic freedom. Or maybe more Shipper freedom ;)

Kate Beckett had never felt so stupid in her entire life. There she was, alone on her way to leave the precinct and head home for another lonely evening and then another lonely weekend, after she had broken up with Tom Demming because she thought one Richard Castle would wait for her, even though she had turned him down more than once and in more than one way in the past weeks.

She was the perfect example that those overly romantic Hollywood movies were completely unrealistic. The man who had just courted you wouldn't wait when you took another; he would move on. Depending on the point of view, Richard Castle had courted her - at least that was what her colleagues and friends sometimes subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle - the last applied especially to her best friend Lanie - told her. But she had chosen another man, thinking that the thing with Castle would never work. He was a ladies' man, and he wasn't the type for a real relationship. She needed someone she could rely on, someone who wouldn't leave or disappoint her.

Well played, Kate, she thought - because just at this very day, she had proven that she was the last one to ask for reliability, leaving the man who probably honestly loved her for another one who now was going on vacation with his *ex-wife*. Funny how things worked out in the long run.

The precinct was almost empty when she left; she hadn't wanted anyone to see her head home alone. She hadn't yet told anyone of her break-up, not even Lanie, needing the time to come in terms with her decision. And after what had happened with Castle before he left just proved her in holding back the information about this development.

The elevator seemed to take half an eternity to arrive and Beckett sighed deeply. There was the solitude of her apartment waiting for her, and although she didn't feel like having any company right now, she strangely enough also didn't want to be alone. Human minds were confusing, really, she thought and shook her head.

The "ding" of the elevator relieved her from her line of thought, or more, nonsense, and she straightened, putting on a mask that showed no emotions, in case someone was riding with her.

She hadn't expected this possible person to be Tom, of all people. They looked at each other for a short, but very awkward moment before she entered the elevator.

"Hey..."

"Hey."

"Tom-"

"I thought you were with Castle. Heard something about a party?" Demming said, his voice strained as he tried to keep it cool while inside, he could have exploded with emotions. Hell, he could have cried. He loved that woman; he knew the moment he met her he would have no chance but to fall hopelessly in love with her. He also knew that she had never been entirely his, right from the beginning, but he had been convinced that sooner or later, she would be. Obviously, he had been wrong.

"The party's over," Beckett simply stated and almost prayed for the elevator to arrive fast or at least for someone else to join them. Her prayers, however, were left unheard.

"Then why aren't you with Castle?" Tom saw no reason to beat around the bush. He had lost the woman, and he had decided not to fight for her because he rather saw her happy. But right now, she wasn't happy, and he swore to himself that if this was Castle's fault...

"Why should I? He left early, needs to prepare his vacation in the Hamptons. I'm pretty sure Gina keeps him on a short rein, now that she has him back, and he certainly has still a lot to do before he leaves," Kate explained. It sounded like she was talking about the weather, but her face and her monotone voice told Demming clearly that she was acting on auto-pilot while her mind was miles away.

"Who's Gina?" he wanted to know, and finally, she looked at him.

"His ex-wife. His second ex-wife, and his publisher."

"He didn't take you with him?"

"Why should he?" Tom couldn't believe his ears. Perhaps he was wrong about her reason for breaking up with him, and perhaps he was wrong about her feelings for Castle. Perhaps. However, he was quite sure that he wasn't.

"You didn't tell him!?"

"Tell him what?" Beckett asked, confused, and frowned at him.

"That you broke up with me!" Demming answered, a bit louder than he meant to, and breathed in deeply when he saw Kate's shocked face. "Sorry."

"Why should I tell him, Tom? It's none of his business."

"I think it became his when you dumped me for him," he argued. Beckett knew exactly what he was talking about; but then, she also didn't know. Or didn't want to know. "Stop lying to yourself, Kate. Everyone can see it. Everyone can see how much you like that guy. As your angry and hurt ex-boyfriend I have to say - he doesn't deserve you. But then, I'm not blind either, and as much as you like him, he returns your feelings. That, too, everyone can see. And I hate to be so sure of it, but he's exactly the man you need. And maybe, but only maybe, even love. So go to him and tell him!"

He hadn't moved, hadn't touched her, but it felt like he'd just shooed her out of the elevator with all force he could come up with. He was right; she knew that. That didn't mean that she was ready to admit it to herself. But then, she owed Tom that much. And she owed it to herself.

"Thank you," she whispered just as the elevator doors opened on the ground floor. She stepped out and headed for the doors, but before she could leave the building, she looked back one last time. And she could have sworn she saw a tiny smile on Tom's lips.

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Beckett reached the apartment building Castle was living in with his mother and daughter in record time. But the closer she came to her actual destination, his apartment's door, the slower her steps became. What should she say? What tell him - and *how* tell him? She pondered about it the whole way up to the highest floor and through the long corridor to his door. With her fist raised to knock, she stood there, still thinking, contemplating.

And then her heart sank when she heard a female voice, never even thinking about that there were two women living with Castle. Two women who, as a side note she tended to ignore, she loved like family. The only thought in her mind was that he was probably - *of course* - with her.

Kate let her hand fall down beside her. This was such a bad idea, wasn't it? She would only get hurt. He had Gina. He was going to the Hamptons for the summer with her. She would only make a fool of herself.

On the other hand... she had made a promise. Consequences be damned, just this once, she thought, and raised her hand again, this time knocking. The door opened within seconds.

"Hi. What are you doing here?" Castle looked genuinely surprised.

"Hi. You're... alone?"

"When was I ever alone in my own home?" he joked, then stepped aside to let her in. Hesitantly, she entered the apartment. Within barely a minute, her courage had almost vanished. Again.

"Just asking, because I heard voices," Beckett explained, absent-minded, as she tried to calm herself down. Tom's words still rang in her ears. She had to get through with this. To the end and whatever the outcome was going to be.

"You hear voices?" Castle repeated in a teasing tone. However, sensing that something was up, he turned serious. "Was just my mother. She'd wanted to be gone by now, but she can't decide what to pack and, you know... well... you know my mother." The dark-haired woman couldn't help but smile at his expression of confusion with just a bit of desperation when he tried to find the right words. When she simply nodded, he continued, "So what can I do for you?"

"I... I was just on my way to... I just happened to be in the neighborhood and..." She groaned. Why was it that words were so much easier said in your mind than in reality? "I broke up with Tom." She could have sworn that she saw his jaw fall. In slow-motion.

"I'm sorry to hear that," was the first thing that came to his mind, though he couldn't stop himself from adding a mumbled "I think." the moment the information arrived in his brain.

"The thing is, Castle, I... I just met him and we, well, talked, and he said something that might be... right." There was a moment of silence between them, a moment that stretched into seconds, then minutes, and neither said anything; they just stared at each other. Just when the silence and accompanying tension became unbearable, and Kate was about to blurt out what she had wanted to say at the precinct already, she heard a voice from behind.

"So are you gonna tell him, darling, or do you let him guess?" A Martha, packed with two suitcases, who had obviously overheard the little conversation - some would call it non-conversation - came down the stairs, looking expectantly at Kate and her son.

Oh how she wished it was that easy. Just tell him. How could that be so hard? Yes, right, there was this thing with hurt feelings.

Before she could find an answer, Castle laid her an arm around her shoulders and guided her to his home office, telling Martha, "If you'd excuse us, mother," before closing the door behind them. Then he looked expectantly at Beckett.

"I think you should know that Tom told me... that Tom thinks I broke up with him because..." the normally tough and quick-witted detective now fiddled with the hem of her top like a 12-year-old school girl.

"Of me?"

Like someone had just pressed a button for frame-by-frame view, the world slowed down. Extremely. She thought could even hear her own breathing slow down while it, to her mind, should have sped up. Their eyes locked while her thoughts - and his, too, as far as she could tell - were racing. She didn't know where, she couldn't even grab a clear thought, but she knew there was a total chaos in her head. She wanted to answer - now or never something inside her screamed - but she couldn't think of the right, the appropriate words. So she simply closed her eyes and nodded.

"So, is he right?" There was nothing teasing in his voice, nothing humorous. Castle was serious; he almost sounded a bit anxious.

"Does it matter?" Once the ball was set rolling, the topic named, it for some reason seemed so much easier to talk about it. "It wouldn't change anything, wouldn't it? You have Gina, and it's good when you're happy with her, becau-"

"What? No!" he suddenly interrupted her. "No, we realized during our nightly talk that we make much better business partners - and friends. We don't work as a couple. I don't think we ever did." He laughed. "Wish I had known that earlier, would have saved me a lot of money." Beckett smiled at that, but then became serious again.

"So... why are you going to the Hamptons with her, then?"

"We both need some vacation, and I need to finish a book. Besides, I don't want to go alone, mother and Alexis have other plans, and Gina has an, let's say, *acquaintance* up there. So we share a car and she'll have an eye and probably some torturing instrument on me so I won't mess up her schedule." The dark-haired police detective stared at him incredulously. Had she really heard what she thought she had just heard?

"No second honeymoon?"

"Nope."

"No sharing of hotel rooms?" He raised an eyebrow.

"No..."

"No long walks along-"

"Kate, you don't need to use your police routines on me," he chuckled, but his laughter died when she grabbed his lapels and pulled him into a hungry kiss. All nervousness that had been there before was forgotten. She had gotten answers to questions she would never have asked since she wouldn't have seen any sense in asking them.

"On the other hand, if *this* is part of your police routine...", he joked lightly when they parted for air momentarily.

"Oh, *Ricky*, just... shut up." He complied immediately - and finally used his mouth the way she decided she preferred the most - he kissed her senseless.

... And in the back of her mind she wondered if Montgomery would mind her taking a few days, or maybe weeks, off.

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