

We never Close

Von VampiresLady

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Kapitel 1:	2
Kapitel 2: Troubleshooting Part II	8
Kapitel 3: Troubleshooting Part III	14
Kapitel 4: Troubleshooting Part IV	20
Kapitel 5: Troubleshooting Part V	26

Kapitel 1:

Ayu & Ihu Productions
CSI: MIAMI
"We Never Close"
SEASON 3: RELOADED

Episode 1
Troubleshooting

The scent of red and gold flowers in early bloom filled the air where it mingled with the joyous songs of the birds that praised the arrival of spring. The first rays of sunlight peeked through the leaves of the trees illuminating the park with a gentle golden light, showing lightgreen grass which was soaked with dark blood.

The peaceful silence was disturbed by the angry dark colors and a small crowd of passengers had gathered around the yellow tape, which had been bared around the crime scene by police officers. None of them cared about the flowers and trees awakening from their winter's sleep or the sun burning down on Miami. All they wanted was getting a glimpse on the two corpses found in the middle of the park that particular morning.

Alexx Woods stared down at the two 16-year-old girls lying side by side and holding each others hands, while Eric Delko walked around them and took several pictures of their dead bodies.

One girl - her name was Julie McMiller - had been a beautiful and very feminine young woman with golden hair and red lips. Her white shirt was ripped open and showed three small holes where the projectiles had penetrated her fragile body.

The bullets had obviously been shot by an automatic 9mm handgun. Alexx knew, because the other girl named Viviane McMiller had her right hand clutched tightly around the handle of the gun. Horatio Caine - who had checked on the girls' IDs earlier - had told her that they were twin sisters, but from the outside they didn't seem to have much in common. Viviane was - unlike her sister - the sportive and tomboyish type with black-colored hair and muscular arms. She was rather masculine, but her lids were covered with dark eyeshadow and some sort of liquid eyeliner and a giant tattoo of an exotic Chinese character showed on her neck.

Alexx kneeled down knowing Horatio was following her every move with his eyes. Carefully tracing the bloodstains on Viviane's face, she tried to reconstruct the event. "Both have defentionmarks on their arms and shoulders. Looks like they were fighting each other. See these hematoma? You get those when you're beaten up by someone." She pointed at a lightblue swelling in Viviane's face waiting for her colleague to say something, but Horatio remained silent.

"This one here", Alexx nodded toward Julie, "was killed by three projectiles hitting the abdomen, the left shoulder and her chest. The bullets penetrated her lungs and uterus, causing several internal bleedings. The scapula broke from the impact of the third projectile."

Eric who although listened to Alexx, kept taking pictures with that familiar *snap* of the camera. He felt like something was out of place. Maybe it was the fact that Viviane

held her sister's hand with her left while the fingers of her right hand were wrapped around the trigger. The fact that they were still holding hands was a sign that they seemed to be very close, but if they were, what could have made them this desperate they would kill themselves or each other? But still, both girls had this peaceful expression on their faces as if they were sleeping. Only their gray complexion and bloodstained skin told the CSI they were dead.

"What about Viviane?" he asked Alexx thoughtfully. "What caused her to die?"

"I was just coming to that," she answered. "Viviane was wounded by a single shot into her heart. She must have had a few seconds left after that, otherwise she couldn't have laid down beside her sister all by herself."

Alexx gazed up at Horatio.

"So, what does this look like to you?"

"It occurs Viviane shot her darling sister before she committed suicide, but let's wait what the evidence will tell us." That was all he said, before he turned around and looked at Calleigh Duquesne, who was collecting the shell casings and the bullet that had been a through and through to Julie's body. Calleigh packed the shell casings into different bags and labeled them. After that she started her search for the missing bullet which lay just a few foot away from the two bodies. Carefully she lifted it up and took a good look at it. "What a beauty," Calleigh muttered to herself.

Horatio shook his head slightly, a small smile tugging on his lips, before he returned his attention back towards Alexx.

"Don't you think it's really odd that someone who wants to commit suicide kills himself with a bullet to the chest? How could she know in which way she had to shoot to make sure she would die? Why didn't she choose another way? Something easier?" Horatio asked her.

It was a shame that those two girls died before their time and he was really curious what had caused this. If he was honest to himself, he couldn't believe that Viviane killed herself, even if it may look like it. He couldn't grasp what was wrong, but evidence did not lie, so they would find out. Horatio glimpsed at Ryan Wolfe who shot several pictures of the nearby evidence to secure a proper and complete sketch of the scenery.

"You go ahead," he shouted at Calleigh, who had asked the young CSI something Horatio didn't catch. Calleigh let out a long sigh, stood up and walked over to Alexx, who was still examining the bodies. She kneeled down beside Viviane and removed the gun in order to take it to the lab. With a few words she told Horatio were he might find her if she was needed. For the time being, all she could do was testing the gun.

After he finished taking pictures, Ryan started taking samples of the blood spatter that where visible on the grass. He had to admit that he was confused how they got this way. As far as he knew you had to shoot from a far distance for the droplets to fall so they created this image. Making a mental note to ask Horatio or Calleigh about this - he couldn't ask them right now because Horatio, Calleigh and Alexx had just taken off toward the lab - he decided not to make any further guesses about this.

Eric packed the camera equipment and stored his toolcase in the back of his car, before returning to the crime scene. He slipped through the near-by passengers and saw Ryan kneeling down and bending deeply over the ground. Eric didn't know, what his colleague was up to, but he thought that their job was done here. All the evidence was photographed, labeled and properly cataloged. What good was this digging the earth?

He shook his head. There was only one thing left to do.

He took off the gloves and walked over to Detective Monroe. The stocky man in his fifties acted as the substitute of Frank Tripp who had left on vacation with his family the previous week. Eric had first met Monroe more than one year ago, but he still didn't like him too much.

The detective was struggling to calm down the woman who called 911, but he obviously did not succeed. The woman was shaking all over and stared down onto the grass. Her lips trembled. *Must have been quite a shock for her!* Eric thought. Monroe nodded as he caught sight of Eric and retreated obviously relieved to be free of this task, so he stepped up to the woman as her dazzled gaze finally fixed on him.

"I..I...", she stuttered.

"Miss Delfino? My name is Eric Delko," he introduced himself in a calm voice, "I'm an investigator of the CSI squad working on the case of Julie and Viviane McMiller."

"So... that are... the girls' names?" she asked in shock.

"The detective told me, you found the dead bodies at 9:14 a.m. this morning. Did you notice anything unusual until you got here?"

"No," she said, her lips were still trembling terribly. "I was just jogging... enjoyed the fresh breeze... I always do that on Wednesdays... and then..."

She stopped and her eyes filled with tears.

"Have you seen'em before? Or did you know'em?" Eric asked.

"No!" she repeated, almost screaming now. "Why are we going through this again? I told the officer everything I know!"

Okay, seems we're not going to progress here too much right now.

"I know, Miss Delfino. I just wanted to make sure, there's anything you couldn't say in front of Detective Monroe. He can be a little... rude sometimes," Eric admitted. A sardonic smile appeared on his lips. "Yeah, he is..." she agreed, tightening her grip. "He's not the kind of man one can trust too easily."

Eric slowly drew a little card from the inside of his jacket and presented it to her. "This is my name and number. Feel free to call me, if you've got more useful information for CSI."

In order to reassure her, Eric exchanged some more words of comfort with Miss Delfino before he could send her home again.

At last he turned around and saw Ryan, who was still watching the stains on the grass. From his face Eric could tell that he was concentrating on something.

"Ey, boy," he shouted as he closed up to him and interrupted his thoughts, "Let's grab our things and follow Horatio to the lab. We're done here!"

Taking a deep breath and stopping himself from shooting a glare at the other CSI for this addressing Ryan nodded and started packing his things. He was still trying to reconstruct the original event, but no matter what, he couldn't come up with a reasonable explanation for some of the things they'd found. At first sight this case seemed to be pretty easy: Twin sisters having a fight and one shooting the other before committing suicide. But he had this indefinite feeling that the more they got to know the less they seemed to know at all.

She made sure the digital connection up to Horatio's vantage point in the theater was clear, so he could watch the autopsy of Viviane McMiller without any unpleasant complications.

It took sometime to remove her strong, dark makeup, but finally Alexx was done and looked down on her pale face, combed back her black hair and thus took a probe of her DNA.

"Alright, sweetheart", she said tenderly although she knew the girl would never respond, "let's see what happened to you"

She tightened her grip on the scalpel and slowly sliced Vivane's epidermis open. Just as she'd predicted, the bullet had splattered her heartmuscles, causing an almost sudden death. *At least, she didn't suffer for long*, Alexx thought. Nevertheless, something made Alexx feel uneasy. She had the feeling that things weren't quite the way they seemed to be and she was determined to do whatever she could to make sure they found out what happened to those two girls.

She told Horatio what she saw, although he watched closely and searched the screen for anything particular interesting or unusual.

"A 9mm projectile, stuck in the right heart ventricle. She must have done competitive sports, her muscles are in great shape. That would explain why her heart could stop a bullet, fired from such a short distance."

Her fingers found Viviane's right hand. They had the colour of cold ashes.

Alexx pulled out a small cotton Q-tip and retained a sample of the powdery residue.

"Here's some gunshot residue left on the hand with which she'd fired the shot, but there's nothing whether on her skin around the wound or on her inner organs."

He nodded and looked at the screen. "Alexx, is there any chance you can give us the closest distance she could have been shot from? And can you tell me something about the TOD?"

Alexx took a bottle out and grabbed her scalpel again to open up the girl's stomach.

"Stomach contents... small pieces of pizza as far as I can tell. Probably the rests of her final supper, but to make sure she hasn't consumed any drugs or chemical material, I'll send this bottle to Eric."

Alexx returned back to Viviane's riven heart.

"From the consequences of the impact", she said slowly while she examined the organ, "I can tell you that..."

She stopped dead in her tracks and looked even harder...

This couldn't be!

After Calleigh got back to the institute she directly took off toward the ballistics research to check on the gun. Beginning her work she extracted all fingerprints she could find on the gun and send those to the DNA lab. As soon as she had finished with checking for samples, she started to disassemble the gun for further examinations. The first thing she actually saw was that just one bullet was missing from the magazine. A thing that just didn't fit into the image of the scene. It shouldn't be right. After all there had been at least four shots and if only one shot was fired out of this gun, which one was it? And even more important, where was the other gun? There had been no traces of another shooter, when they got to the scene so they just assumed that Viviane killed them both. But with what she knew now this could hardly be true. Making notes on this she checked the rest of the gun before she reassembled it.

"So, let's go ballistic", she said joyfully and put on her safety glasses and earlaps. She fired a single shot to compare the bullet and its residue with the one found near their latest victims. She was only slightly surprised to find out that the bullets didn't match. "So, looks like I found the first bullet of your missing gun. Now let's see which one was shot from this one"

Making a few last notes she made her way towards the autopsy theater.

Horatio raised an eyebrow as Alexx stopped her explanations suddenly. He turned to

the screen and tried to figure out what bothered her.

"Alexx?" he asked, waiting for her to continue.

"I'm sorry..."

Sighing deeply she laid down the scalpel, removed the projectile and pointed at the wound caused by the bullet. "You were right. She couldn't have shot herself, otherwise her chest and organs would be far more disrupted and tattered. From the cracks around the wound I'd say she was shot from a distance of 5-10 meters. TOD probably twelve or fifteen hours ago. Makes it approximately 8 to 9 p.m. the previous night."

She gazed up to the window and saw Horatio concentrating on the screen.

"So, no suicide, hm?" Horatio said in a concerned voice "Well then, I'm going to see what Calleigh found out about the gun. Keep me posted."

Eric didn't even bother talking to Ryan as they made it back to their workplaces and Ryan himself didn't try to pull up some sort of non-intellectual conversation such as Smalltalk. Eric wouldn't want to talk to him - that sure was fine with him! He slipped out of the lift and separated from Eric as fast as he could. On his way to the photolab in order to develop the negatives and sketch the crime scene, Ryan finally enjoyed a moment of solitude. Doing things like that wasn't the best way to deal with a problem, but he was glad to be on his own for a while.

He sighed deeply as he let himself fall into a chair which stood in front of a massive desk. The different chemicals to envelope the negatives were all right before him so he took on his gloves and started his work, while his mind wandered.

Ryan knew perfectly well that everyone looked at him comparing him to Timothy Speedle. Even though he never even met Speedle in person, he had come to know a lot details by coincidentally overhearing conversations between Eric, Calleigh and Alexx. Skimming through his memories Ryan could recall a chat of Eric and Calleigh between two cups of coffee, as Horatio had just returned from the Miami-Dade Memorial Hospital. Somehow Speedle had got himself into serious trouble as his weapon had malfunctioned. He was shot down by the agitator, the bullet stuck in his chest. *"How many times did I tell him, he should clean out his gun?"* Ryan could hear Calleigh say in a unfamiliar voice of concern. In Ryan's opinion Speedle must either have got some guts or he was just unbelievable stupid and had been *very* lucky to have survived that shot. Personally he thought it was the last one, but either way both choices were stupid. But Ryan had always kept that to himself, locking up his thoughts and buried them deep down inside. He knew it was better that way then creating more problems as he already had.

When Ryan had had his first day in the laboratory, he could almost grab the tension that was crackling through the air like a high-voltage lightning. By that time, Speedle's state of health had grown even more serious as he suffered under a sepsis that absorbed most of his strength. It took almost two more months until Horatio informed his squad that Speedle was on the way of recovery. So, it was only a matter of time until he would be back in office claiming his old position.

Nevertheless, everyone treated Ryan like he wanted to take Speedle's place. Sometimes he even had the feeling, they thought he shot him personally. Couldn't they see that all he wanted to do was doing his job as a criminalist? He felt no desire to replace Speedle; Occasionally he never even tried to. But that obviously didn't matter to anyone.

As a matter of fact he was still wondering what would happen once Speedle was back.

Would Horatio keep him at his lab or would he decide Ryan was no longer of any use to him? He couldn't tell, but then again he was the only CSI in his squad that Horatio called by his last name.

In times like these, when his thoughts wouldn't let him rest, he really wished he had someone to talk to, but he didn't want to burden his uncle with such stupid fears. He had to do this on his own and even if every little part of his being protested, he would just stand by and watch, as long as it wasn't clear that he could do anything. What else could he do anyway?

Realizing that he had finished Ryan collected the photographs and made his way toward the layout room, where he arranged the pictures until his OCD was fully satisfied and started sketching the scene. While doing this he tried to push his thoughts aside, brooding wouldn't get him anywhere and it certainly would not solve the case, so it was time to concentrate on work...

Kapitel 2: Troubleshooting Part II

"H!" she greeted him as they met each other outside the morgue and her sullen expression told Horatio that Calleigh obviously had no good news. "I checked the gun. There was only one shot fired from the magazine and the bullets didn't match. So we obviously have a second shooter and no idea who he was. And we have no idea if Julie was shot by her sister at all. I'm was just on my way to collect the other bullets. Maybe I will find her bullet there. Otherwise we have a problem." she explained and showed him the notes she had made all through her examinations. "We already know that Viviane didn't shoot herself..." Horatio added slowly. He began to feel very uncomfortable about this case. Apparently nothing was as it seemed to be. "Tell me as soon as you found anything else."

She nodded and smiled slightly. "Will do, when I finish running our gun and the bullets through the database. Maybe we are lucky and the gun was used before."

Horatio nodded slightly in appreciation. "You may do so. Keep me posted."

Calleigh watched H leave and nodded to herself. She really started wondering, what had been going on between those two girls that made them suffer through such a terrible fate. And she hoped that they would be able to find out the truth about their death.

Alexx started smiling as Calleigh rushed into the morgue. She had been nearly finished with Viviane's autopsy when Horatio had left and so it took her nearly no time to move along with her twin sister. She had just removed the bullets and knew that the blonde CSI had come for those.

"Hey, Alexx! Have you got anything for me?" Calleigh asked her in her casual happy tone that never failed to amaze her.

Alexx nodded toward a small and slim plastic box half-filled with bloody water still smiling.

"Two projectiles, 9mm calibre. First one found in Viviane McMillers heart ventricle, second one in Julie McMillers uterus. You'll like them!"

"Yay! That's good news!"

Calleigh happily made her way over to her bullets and took a good look at them. "Like them, Alexx? They are nearly perfect. What about the other bullet?" she stopped and looked at her inquiring.

"Just be patient, honey" Alexx said in a light voice, "I'm cutting my way through her lungs. It must be somewhere in here..."

Placing a spreader between the bones and flesh, Alexx was able to reach the last bullet with her tweezers. She tweaked it out of Julies chest and placed it right beside its brother and sister in the plastic box. "There you go, honey! Have fun!"

"Thanks, Alexx." Calleigh smiled broadly at her, took the bullets and went back to the ballistics to finish her work on them. She really hoped that they would be lucky and find the person who did this.

Ever since Rick Stetler woke up that morning, he felt a strange sensation that nestled in the pit of his stomach and the moment he entered the CSI laboratory, this feeling was getting even worse. His hair had been cut neatly and he wore one of his best suits that particular morning, but that and at least five cups of coffee didn't do much to bolster his confidence.

All night long, he'd prepared himself for the battle that was about to take place, although this was going to be a battle of words rather than weapons. He'd tried to set up a mental defense wall behind which he could hide his emotions and fully focus on his opponent. All he needed to do was wait until he'd crushed his enemy's own barriers, thus he could force his interests and those of the IAB. It appeared to him that this was the true nature of war.

Besides, he knew Horatio Caine and he knew this was going to be dirty anyway.

Take it easy, he told himself, everything will work out fine!

Taking a last deep breath, he grabbed the inconspicuous looking black briefcase that rested on the front-seat beside him and got out of his car. The briefcase contained – amongst other things like a *Pall Mall* cigarette pack, a box of matches and peppermint drops – the personnel file and medical records of Timothy Speedle. As the supervisor of investigation on the CSI squad of Horatio Caine, it was up to him to tell the lieutenant what's going to happen next to his recommended employee.

Straightening his tie, Stetler entered the building, stepped up to the secretary's desk and asked for Caine.

"I'll call him, but it might take some time. We have just started a new investigation this morning." she said.

"Just get him here!" Stetler snorted. He didn't have the time for further negotiations with a subordinate. And really this was far under his dignity, but he just wanted this over and done.

Fortunately, it didn't take too long for Caine to unglue himself from his work and join him in the entrance hall.

"Rick." Horatio greeted him, watching him intently. "How may I help you?"

Stetler tried to ignore the calm expression Horatio's face. It was always annoying how smart Caine could be even when he had no reason to do so. He opened the brief-case and took out the portfolio, trying hard to avoid Horatio's intense gaze.

"I thought you might be interested in Mr Speedle's current condition."

Caine nodded slightly. "What about Speed?" he asked and Stetler knew instantly that he had him truly interested.

"We just recieved a call from the doctor in charge of Mr. Speedle's rehabilitation, ensuring that Speedle did recover so far he could end his convalescent leave within the next few weeks. In fact, Mr. Speedle left the medical center in North Dakota and returned to Miami this Monday."

He handed the records over to Horatio.

Hopefully, Caine didn't know that this wasn't all he came for, but he won't give him the pleasure of knowing what he was up to. It had nothing to do with him after all, at least not directly.

Caine took the files and started to study them a long time before he let his gaze return to Stetler. "That's not all you wanted to tell me, was it?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. Both of them knew it was a rhetorical question.

"What makes you think so?" Rick answered coolly. "Don't think I must inform you on every event taking place in this institution."

"We both know that you would never just come down here to tell me how Speed was doing, bringing me his file and then leave again, right?" Horatio answered calmly. "So why won't you tell me what you really came for?"

Stetler frowned. He absolutely didn't like Horatio. He didn't like him for his talent to read everyone's mind and using the knowledge for his own advantage, for his god forsaken calm and for the fact that he seemed to always get past him. "This has

nothing to do with you." he said tartly using his best *drop the matter* look on Caine. Horatio looked down at the floor for a moment before tilting his head to one side to look at him, a small smile tugging at his lips. "Everything that happens inside my lab has something to do with me."

"Don't you take yourself too seriously!" Stetler snapped suddenly, "This lab is property of Miami-Dade County and no personal belonging of yours, Horatio!" He grimaced unwillingly as he tried to keep control of the emotional breakout that threatened to overcome him at any second.

"I am perfectly aware of that, Rick." Horatio responded.

"So, if you are 'perfectly aware of that'" Stetler quoted his words, "you're also aware that I have no responsibility toward you and that you can not force me to give account to you."

Stetler slightly turned his head toward the secretary's desk and – once again – avoided Caine's gaze.

They both fell silent and seconds turned to minutes before Horatio let out a long sigh. "Very well, but you better don't try to pass something over me, Rick. You might regret it someday. If you'll excuse me, please, I've got work to do back there!"

Relief almost overwhelmed Stetler's body as Horatio turned and walked away.

He waited for Caine to pass the next soundproof door, before he turned to the secretary's desk again. "Can you do me favor? I'd like to leave a note for Mr. Ryan Wolfe. He shall come to my office as soon as possible."

He didn't turn to look back as he left Rick in the entrance hall, but his thoughts were still chasing each other around in his head.

When he'd received the secretary's call, he'd really hoped it would be something trivial, but somehow he already knew it wasn't. And the way Rick behaved was highly suspicious. Of course, they had arguments before, but he could count the few times it had been like this on one hand. Rick had suppressed the true reason for his little visit and tried to hide it underneath a cloak of self-confidence. Even though he tried to keep his cool during their nice and little chat, Rick got furious and Horatio knew he was up to something. The way he refused to tell him the truth was a sign that it was probably nothing good.

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts Horatio went to meet Calleigh in the ballistics research to find out if there were any news about the gun their second shooter used. But they were unlucky this time. The gun had never been used before, thus no suspect or any other useful information had come out of the research and they still didn't know what had happened.

"Calleigh, I want you and Eric to go back to the park. See if you can find our missing bullet. Maybe it can help us." If they could find out in which direction Viviane had shot, they might get a clue of where her murderer had been right before he killed the twins. And that trace might lead them to a sample of the murderer's DNA or other useful evidence.

As he watched Calleigh leave, he couldn't help but wonder again what Stetler wanted. It didn't make him feel any more comfortable that he already knew Rick would decide something right in front of his eyes and over his head and he would get to know about it the moment it would be done.

He better doesn't do anything stupid.

Determined to look into this later, Horatio went to see Alexx for further informations.

Eric collected all other evidence found on the crime scene and tried not to care about Ryan's getaway from the elevator. Besides, he himself had his mind on other things. He was, for instance, rather curious about the samples of the blood they had taken earlier.

Back in the DNA lab, Valera placed a few drops of blood from a blade of grass beneath the microscope as someone brought two bottles with the girls' stomach contents and two different strands of hair Alexx had cut off the dead bodies. The blonde hair was labeled "J. McMiller", the small bag containing the black hair read "V. McMiller". Eric knew they had to compare the DNA from the bloodcells to the DNA contained in the girls' hairs.

The scans of the blood as well as the strands of hair under the microscope told him that Viviane and Julie were a monozygotic pair of twins and thus completely identical in their genes. Only their choice of clothes and makeup differed them from one another. The blood being spilled all over the grass and the girls' bodies only testified that it was *their* blood and no-one else's. But he was stunned when Valera found the rest of a aggressive chemical substance that had circulated within Julie's veins. She took the stomach contents Alexx had extracted from Julie's stomach and let hightechnology do the rest.

Waiting for the printout of the results, she had checked on the gunshot residue found on Viviane's right hand. It belonged to the weapon, Calleigh had just conducted. Although he couldn't believe it: the evidence was telling that no third person was involved in the murder and suicide of Julie and Viviane. But as they knew this couldn't be true. It nearly seemed as if the other bullets just got out of nowhere. Eric hated situations like this. It made absolutely no sense.

Then the prints finally dropped out and he was caught by surprise again.

He gave Alexx a call and put a copy of the results into an envelope addressed back to her. Valera finished her work and took off for her lunch-time. "Thanks! See you later!" Eric shouted after her.

After that, he had just enough time to finish his notes and set the computer options back to normal, as Ryan walked in and asked for the results. Eric handed him another copy.

"I thought you're in the layout room?" he asked.

"I was, but now I'm here and I need these copies to rethink the sketches." Ryan explained shortly. He seemed to be in a hurry, but Eric didn't figure why. Ryan was working so hard, he'd tend to believe Ryan wanted to prove he was better than other investigators. Possibly better than Speed?

Suddenly Ryan's cell phone gave an annoying ring and he picked up the call quickly.

"Wolfe."

Eric fell silent and watched Ryan's face. His colleague frowned and started chewing his lowerlip nervously. His ambitious professionalism seemed to vanish into thin air and was replaced by something that just look like deadly mixture of fear and despair.

"Yeah, I see. Okay, I'll be right with him. Thanks!"

Ryan hung up and noticed Eric's quite interested look. He cleared his throat extensively and roused Eric from his thoughts. The frightened expression on Ryan's face was completely gone and for a second Eric thought he had imagined this. "Thanks for your help. See you later," the brownhaired CSI said quickly before Eric could ask him about the call and turned to the door just as fast as he had rushed into the DNA lab.

Eric shook his head in confusion. Sometimes he really wondered if he ever would

understand Ryan Wolfe at all. He just didn't know how he should feel about him... Only a few minutes after Ryan's visit at breakneck-speed, Calleigh walked in, carrying her toolbox.

"What's up?" Eric asked with a smile.

"Horatio wants us to go back to the park! There's reason to believe the case of Julie and Viviane McMiller just became a double-murder."

Eric raised an eyebrow in interest. "Really?"

"Yeah, really. I can give you further detail on our way back, but for now let's get moving!"

"Alright! But did Horatio say anything about calling the girls' parents? We need to question them too and as far as I know they don't even know about the death of their daughters." She smiled back at him as he slipped into his jacket once more.

"Don't worry about that! H said he wanted to talk to the parents!"

In the early afternoon Alexx had finally finished the autopsy of the girls' and wrote down the reports in her office. Needing a break, she got out of her chair and fetched up a cup of coffee from the dispenser that should help her concentrate on her work. She couldn't help herself though. She pitied the girls and their parents, felt sorry for their loss. Closing her eyes for a moment she thought of her own children. Hopefully neither her kids nor Alexx herself would ever have to suffer from such an ill fate.

When she returned to her desk she found the folder Eric had send.

Although he'd told her everything on the phone, she still felt her heart beat a little faster as she read his notes over and over again.

Her thoughts were finally interrupted when she heard a soft knocking on the door and saw Horatio waiting outside. She waved him in and he made his way over to a chair.

"Anything new about the girls?" he asked her and leaned back.

Alexx combed back a strand of her black hair and fixed her mind on the subject again. There was no point in rethinking her life by now.

"Indeed."

She disposed the coffee cup and stretch out to grab the folder, then handed it over to Horatio.

"I already send Eric all the evidence I could find on either Viviane or Julie. Oh, and I've discovered the meaning of a tattooed Chinese character on Viviane's neck. It has the meaning 'death', I expected something less disturbing... But again it could also be just a symbol for them. During my autopsy on Julie I found a tattoo on her spine. It was also a Chinese character standing for 'life'."

H took the folder and opened it with his famous mime of curiosity.

"Eric said to me that all samples – whether blood or hair – belong to our two victims. But here's the surprise: Julie's stomach contained several pharmaceuticals that require a doctor's prescription. All of them are used to cure the symptoms of leukemia."

When Ryan entered Rick Stetler's office, the IAB agent was standing in front of the window and stared down at the busy street below.

"Sit down", Stetler said when he heard the door close.

Ryan took a seat and watched Stetler turning around slowly, a rather serious expression on his face.

"I hope you understand that the following conversation is to be kept a secret between

you and me, Mr. Wolfe. I don't have any intentions to let Lieutenant Caine interfere in this matter. And he surely would, even if it's just to displease me."

Ryan was not sure if he wanted to know what Stetler was talking about, but he knew that he didn't have much of a choice. So he simply nodded, while making a mental note that he would still tell Horatio if he thought it would be for the best.

"So... why did you want to see me?"

Stetler sat down in his massive and over-sized office chair and looked at him for a while, before he leaned back slightly.

"As you know", he said slowly, "You were given the position as a CSI, because Mr. Timothy Speedle was wounded in a terrible accident. His wound began to suppurate and infected his immune system. The sepsis forced him to resign from his post as a crime scene investigator for the time being."

Stetler looked at him intently, trying to track Ryan's reactions.

"That was 10 months and 27 days ago. Shortly after this, you were recruited by Horatio Caine to bridge the gap until Mr. Speedle is able to return to his post."

Ryan nodded. Even though Stetler still didn't come up with the reason why Ryan was here, the young man had a fairly good idea why he wanted to speak to him.

It seemed like the day he dreaded since he first started at CSI had finally come.

"I can tell by your eyes that you know why I called you", Stetler said with a sadistic smile on his face. "Well, Mister Speedle will be on top of things within the next week. I would have informed you earlier, but he had just returned to Miami two days ago."

All of a sudden, Ryan's mouth felt dry.

Stetler leaned forward and stared at him. *So this was what Horatio called Stetler's do-as-I-say-pokerface*, Ryan thought.

"If I may give you a good advice: Don't tell Lieutenant Caine about this conversation for your own good will. He just recruited you, because no-one else was available and if he knew now, that Mister Speedle is going to return, he will let you drop out of CSI before you can say 'double jeopardy'."

Ryan nodded again and sighed softly. "So what exactly will happen once Speedle comes back?" he asked Stetler. He really didn't know if he wanted to hear the answer, but sooner or later it would all become real after all. So better have some time to adjust.

"It depends...", Stetler said cryptically. "My superiors and I will watch the progress on the McMiller-case and wait, if Lieutenant Caine has anything to say about you staying at his lab."

"Ok" was everything Ryan said before he stood up quickly. "I believe that's all you wanted to tell me? So can I go back to work then?"

"Yes, sure. Go ahead!" Stetler said indifferently, waving him off with one hand.

Kapitel 3: Troubleshooting Part III

"How where her chances to survive?" Horatio asked after a short silence, looking at Alexx expectantly.

"From the amount and concentration of drugs in her blood I guess she was seriously ill. But you must ask the doctor who prescribed these drugs to give you an exact information on it. But it's odd the doctor didn't have the twin sister donating marrow to save her."

Alexx paused and watched Horatio for a while.

"I wonder, what is truly going on. The crime scene just looked just like you said: Viviane shot her sister, then she committed suicide. But the pieces of this puzzle don't fit together at all..."

"Yes, that's true. So, now what we have to do is find the missing pieces."

With that Horatio stood up and smiled slightly at Alexx.

"I will take Wolfe and go to the girls' address. I still have to tell the parents about their death and maybe they will be able to tell us something about their sickness. I see you later."

Navigating Miami's midday traffic seemed like suicide, but Calleigh and Eric finally made it back to the park – thanks to a heroic evading maneuver of Eric's that nearly made them hit a mailbox. "Fortunately, it would have been your own car, if you'd driven us against a stone wall or something," Calleigh teased him while he closed the trunk.

The crowd of curious onlookers that had watched the investigation in the morning had vanished, so they ducked under the yellow tape to enter the crime scene without being bothered. Detective Monroe was still here though and he watched Calleigh and Eric closely while he ate his donut and leaned back against his car.

"So, what do we do now?" Eric asked.

"We do, what we came for: Search my missing bullet. It could be nearly everywhere though. We have no idea where the offender was standing before he shot the girls." Calleigh looked around and smiled slightly. "Looks like we have lots of work to do. I will start over there." With that she made her way to one edge of the bars and began searching for any trace of the bullet.

"Alright then... I'll search the place, where Viviane was shot though!"

Eric put on his sunglasses to shield his eyes from the blinding bright sunlight and walked over to the place framed with white chalk. He tried to reconstruct the shotline... *If Viviane had fallen down right after the bullet hit her heart*, he thought in full concentration, *and if it was a frontal attack, the agitator might have stood over there.*

His feed began to move and suddenly he found himself in front of an old tree with lankily roots and a bark full of rents. "Calleigh?" he shouted in a slow tone, "Did you search the trees?"

He leaned forward to follow the slim chaps on the bark of the tree in front of which he stood.

"Which one exactly?" Calleigh asked in return while looking up.

"This one." He pointed at a small hole in the bark that seemed to be the abandoned home of a bird. "If Viviane had fired the shot toward her offender right where we

found her, the bullet could have traveled all the way here."

He opened the toolbox and pulled out a new pair of gloves, then touched the morbid brims of the woodpecker's hole.

Calleigh collected her toolcase and got over to Eric, where he watched him fully interested. "And? Any trace of my bullet?"

"No, but maybe it didn't hit the bark."

He activated a small flashlight and let a ray of light shine into the hole. All they could see was a dark and gleamy mass that seemed to move.

"Are this worms?" Eric asked.

Calleigh looked over his shoulder before she gave him an amused grin. "Looks like it, if you ask me. Well then have fun"

Eric stared at her and blinked.

"Typical!" he muttered before he got out of his jacket and slowly reached into the hole. He had a feeling like touching something slimy. He could feel the mass of bugs and worms crawl over his fingers while he searched for the bullet. "You owe me one!"

"Sure thing" Calleigh said half laughing. "Just keep searching"

Eric swept some worms and bugs aside, now searching deeper in the tree trunk. Suddenly, something gave a sickening crack and then his fingers touched something hard, something that didn't move.

"Ah, It's coming up!"

He grabbed the cool piece of metal as firmly as possible and – with some effort – extracted it from the backside of the hole. He hurried to knock off a bug that crawled up his forearm and tickled his skin with its antenna.

Calleigh just grinned at him and took the bullet out of his hand. "9mm. Well, looks like we found the missing one! Should we look some more or head back to the lab?"

"Just give me a second," Eric said and flicked away an earthworm.

Calleigh watched patiently as he took a sample of the liquid at the brim of the tree trunk and stuffed it into a small plastic bag. "I don't have much hope, but maybe we can find something that isn't contaminated by insects," he commented dryly.

"It would be good if we have a little luck in this, wouldn't it? Right now we don't know anything at all. I mean we know that Viviane didn't shoot herself and that they were definitely murdered. But beside that..."

"... we don't have anything." he finished the sentence and gave Calleigh a serious look.

"I'll go back to the lab and see, if that bullet you got there hit anything besides the tree and compare it with Vivian's gun." Calleigh smiled at him encouragingly. "Don't you worry too much right now. We'll get him soon enough." She packed the bullet into another bag and put it into her own toolcase. "Oh, by the way, I still have to find out who purchased the gun. We don't know if it was really Vivian's gun or if she had got it from someone else. This might also help. I'll see what I can find."

"You do that," Eric said being totally back to business, greeting Monroe as they passed by on the way back to his car.

"They... they are.. *dead?*"

Catherine McMiller felt pain and grief overwhelming her entire being as Horatio's words violently forced the terrible news onto the stirring surface of her mind. "It can't be!" she screamed, unable to control her voice, "Tell me, this isn't true!"

All this time she had thought the two of them wanted a break and went to have a little time for themselves. For Viviane it wouldn't have been the first time to do something like that, but now she had to ask herself if she could have prevented it.

Maybe if she had been a little more demanding...

She was about to collapse as she spilled dreadful tears and mourned the death of her beloved children and Horatio himself felt a painful stitch in his heart. The loss of Viviane and Julie was nothing but a senseless waste. Jeffrey McMiller who sat beside her on the old-fashioned sofa wrapped his arms around his wife and tried to calm her down in vain.

The family lived in a well-to-do neighborhood in West Miami. Mrs. McMiller had inherited the comfortable colonial style house from her grandmother only three years ago, right after her ex-husband George had abandoned his family, moved to Alaska and left his wife with an enormous burden of debt. Although the family suffered through a hard time, Catherine McMiller - formerly known as Catherine Carson - denied nothing to her daughters and worked in the night shift of the Miami children's hospital to feed her family. Her new husband Jeffrey was a tradesman and worked for 'Advansa WorldWide', a company down at the harbor that shipped goods from all over the world. When their marriage had been contracted almost two years ago he became the new bread-winner of the McMiller-patchwork-family.

"You have to find whoever did this to our girls. They never did anything wrong. They both fought so hard for Julie to get better and now..." He let his hand ran in soothing circles over Catherine's back, while he watched the Lieutenant.

"I promise you that I will find whoever did this."

Horatio looked at the two of them and nodded slightly. He knew they wanted the truth about what had happened. They wanted and needed to know who would have had reasons to do something like that to their children and more importantly why and he was dead set on figuring it out.

Ryan who'd readily agreed to accompany him was in the twin's bedrooms and searched for anything that might help them, but he hadn't called for Horatio and that was no good sign. Their high hopes of getting a new trace seemed to be let down fatally again.

"Whoever did this, he deserves to die..." said Mrs. McMiller after a while, her voice clear but the desperation she felt could still be heard. She was trying hard to keep her tears at bay, but they didn't stop running down her cheeks like a silvery stream of salt and water.

"Please... Lieutenant Caine... is there anything we can do?"

"There is indeed, Madam. Can you tell me anything about what your daughters used to do? Who were their friends? Was there anyone who could have wanted to hurt them?"

Mrs. McMiller thought for a while before she slowly said: "No. Viviane used to be a headstrong rogue. She didn't have what you call friends. The only one she cared about was her sister and she suffered to see her dying. She couldn't stand it that there was nothing she could do about Julie's disease."

She looked up at Horatio and her tears finally dried.

"And Julie... she was quite popular at school. Although she was sick, she joined her highschool's cheerleading team and took piano lessons. She stayed away from ominous people; she did her homework... She worked hard to fulfill her dreams because she knew there wasn't much time left for her. Though... I... remember her being in love with this boy from her school... what's his name again?"

She searched for Jeffrey's eyes and tried to find the truth written within them.

"Sebastian So-and-So... Arnet, I believe... yes, Sebastian Arnet. He's in my daughters' class, but Julie didn't tell Sebastian how she felt about him. She hardly talked about

him either for Viviane didn't like him..."

Horatio nodded in appreciation.

"Thank you, Mrs. McMiller. If you remember something else that could be important please call me immediately. I hope, we have your approval to consult Julie's doctor?"

"Of course you have!" she said immediately and leaned against her husband's comforting shoulder, "Right, darling?"

"Of course. If it helps to find whoever did this" he nodded and squeezed his wife's hand. "Although I doubt that Doctor Corfield can help to shed light on this matter."

"Leave that to us, Mr. McMiller."

The short silence that followed was only pierced by the last desperate sobs of Mrs. McMiller and a faint rustle from Viviane's room as Ryan searched the wardrobe.

"Lieutenant, may I ask you something?" Mrs. McMiller said cautiously.

"Of course, Madam" Horatio answered and looked at her inquiringly.

"Do you have any suspects yet? I know, you just started your investigation on this, but please, inform me, when you got him or her. I want to see the face of the person that slaughtered my daughters, so I won't ever forget it."

Horatio watched her grief turning into rage and anger, a process that seemed all too natural and was more than familiar to him. Old and bittersweet memories crossed his mind and he remembered the dark emotions that rested inside his heart when his brother was killed in the line of duty. Sadness, confusion and anger nearly made him lose his mind and he knew he had to atone for his brother's dark deeds – possibly for the rest of his life.

He closed his eyes for a second and willed the awful thoughts aside before he nodded once more.

"Of course, I will inform you the minute we found your daughters' murderer."

Mrs. McMiller rose from the couch and stepped up to the CSI. Laying a hand on his forearm she gave him an intensive glance. "God bless you, lieutenant."

He smiled softly.

"Thank you, Madam."

That very moment, Ryan returned from the twin's bedrooms and wiped his gloves. He didn't seem all too happy and barely said a word, but he'd been like this ever since they had left the laboratory.

Horatio swallowed and fiddled with the bows of his sunglasses.

"Well, I thank you for your cooperation." he said and struggled through to another faint smile.

Mrs. McMiller lead them back to the hall, gave Horatio a small piece of paper with Doctor Corfield's address and phone number and opened the front door. "We'll keep in touch." Horatio said, then stepped out into the bright afternoon sunlight and put his sunglasses back on.

"Nothing unusual, neither in Viviane's room, nor in Julie's," Ryan explained quietly as they left "Viviane's room was quite sterile. Only a few personal belongings such as CDs, DVDs, books e.t.c., but I found a diary and a photography on Julie's bedside table."

"A photo of whom?" Horatio asked.

"A guy. Short brown hair, muscular stature. Looked like a football player or something."

Horatio frowned and unlocked the doors of his car.

"That could be the guy their mother talked about. His name is Sebastian Arnet."

They drove off to the highschool Viviane and Julie had attended up to the previous day and waited outside the building for school to end. Luckily, some of the students passing the car knew Sebastian Arnet and told them he was still in his P.E. lesson, but it didn't take a long time for Horatio and Ryan to find him.

Sebastian wore a deepblue muscleshirt combined with tattered jeans and carried a bag with his sportswear when he left the building with his team mates. The CSIs waited by the car and finally caught up with him as he separated from his friends.

"Sebastian Arnet? My name's Horatio Caine, Miami-Dade police. I'd like to talk to you about the McMiller sisters."

The color drained from his face when Sebastian's gaze fixed on Horatio's badge, but he recovered his self-possession quickly. He snorted and shook his head in sardonic amusement. "M.D.P.D., hm? What kind of trouble Viviane got herself into this time?"

"We're trying to figure that out," Horatio said dryly and pulled out a photograph of the twins Eric had taken on the crime scene, "They were killed and you might be able to help us finding their murderer."

Sebastian Arnet did not budge while the CSIs took him to the lab and lead him into the interrogation room. Indeed, Arnet leaned back and tried to play it cool. Horatio sat down on the opposite side of the table, Ryan standing right by his side.

After telling Arnet what happened they started questioning him about the twins.

"I heard Viviane didn't like you? Did she have any reason to do so?" Horatio asked calmly as he stared intently at the boy.

"Damn right, she didn't! And all just because I flirted with her precious little sister *once*, can you believe that? Thought she wanted to rip my eyes out, honestly. Scary woman, I can tell you, but next to Julie she was like another person. Calm, funny and totally caring."

"So you couldn't date Julie, because Viviane wouldn't let you?"

The young man nodded. "Yes, wouldn't even let me anywhere near her without glaring daggers at me."

"Do you know if Viviane or Julie purchased a gun?"

"Sure thing I do," he said and leaned forward, his elbows on the edge of the table.

"Viviane came to me one day and flatly told me that she couldn't stand the sight of me and that she would gladly kill me, if I ever touched her sister... and that she needed my help. You have to know that I purchased a gun a while ago, all totally legal, I swear! But, well, I asked her what she wanted with my gun and all she told me was that she had to protect her sister, that her father was crazy and that she feared he would hurt them or something like that. Well... and after that I gave her my gun."

Horatio blinked unwillingly at this words and narrowed his eyes.

"So, you just gave her the gun?" Ryan asked in a voice of disbelief, "I'm rather curious why you gave the weapon away so willingly, although Viviane didn't like you and may have lied to you all along."

Sebastian shifted nervously in his chair.

"Yeah, you got me." he admitted and sweat began to wetten his forehead. "It's just... Viviane could be mean, yes, but only when someone threatened her or her sister. I liked her temper somehow. She really got a fire raging in her soul and I liked that, but she wouldn't wanna hear it, you know. Besides... I mean, hell, everyone knew that guy was creepy. I had no reason not to believe 'er!"

Horatio pulled a photograph of the gun out of a folder and showed it to him. "Is that your gun?"

"Yeah, that's the thing," Arnet said and H looked at the picture again.

"When did she ask you for your help?"

"Tuesday afternoon after school ended. They had an appointment after that as far as I know."

Even though, Arnet had a motive to kill Viviane, whether it was because she wouldn't let him near Julie or because she didn't show much affection for him, Horatio doubted he did it. Either way, Julie was Viviane's tender spot - and the offender knew it. But from what Arnet had told them, probably everyone who knew them were aware of that.

"So, where have you been yesterday evening, about 9 p.m.?" Ryan asked and looked at Arnet with a straight face. "We had a special training for our next match", the young man explained, "And after that I took Pearce and Sykes from my team over to my place. We had supper, played videogames 'til 11 p.m. and then I dropped 'em off at their houses with my mother's car."

Ryan and Horatio exchanged a quick look.

"We'll need a sample of your DNA and your fingerprints for further examination. And it would be kind, if you'd give us your teammates addresses as well."

Arnet nodded and waited for Ryan to secure his saliva sample on a cotton bud and ink his fingertips.

When Sebastian cleaned his hands with a cloth and Ryan stuffed the paper with the fingerprints into the case folder, Horatio got out of his chair.

"Thank you, Mr. Arnet" he said with a smile tugging at his lips as he turned to the door.

It looked like they finally got something to work with.

Kapitel 4: Troubleshooting Part IV

Right before closing time, Horatio ordered everyone to meet in his office to exchange all the details on the case.

He reported to his colleagues what he and Ryan had experienced from the girls' parents and Sebastian Arnet. Derrick Corfield who was responsible for Julie's medication had agreed to meet members of the CSI the next morning, so Horatio passed the task on to Eric and Ryan. "Do me a favor and take a ride to his practice tomorrow morning. This has highest priority."

Calleigh had tested the bullet Eric had assured from the tree trunk and told all of them that it belonged to the weapon they found in Viviane's hand. The other four bullets belong to a similar 9mm weapon, but it had a different caliber.

Horatio looked up at Calleigh. "The two of us will be checking Arnet's alibi. Eric and Ryan, you go back to work, please."

Eric still had to analyze the contamination on the projectile, so Valera joined him in the DNA lab to help him finish the job before they knocked off work. Bending over the microscope, she pierced down on the genetic connections.

"There *is* blood on this bullet. Definitely male," she frowned, "You got something to compare it with?"

Eric nodded his head. "No, not yet!"

He heard a soft knocking on the door and the squeal of the door handle that followed.

"Valera? Could you..." Ryan asked, but his colleague stopped in midsentence and narrowed his eyes. "Oh, sorry, thought you guys were done."

Valera didn't turn her eyes from the sample under the microscope, but a smile tugged at her lips. "No problem, Ryan. How can I help?"

"Ehm, I got this saliva sample from Sebastian Arnet. I need the full program. Maybe we'll be able to find traces of his DNA somewhere it shouldn't be." Ryan explained and placed a small paperbag beside the microscope.

"Yeah, Okay, but I'll need time. Probably until tomorrow. Need to finish this examination first!" she said and glimpsed at the bag.

"First come, first served," Eric added.

"Yeah, sure," Ryan responded, his voice dripping with annoyance, "Well, don't bother 'bout me."

"We won't," Eric said flatly and turned his attention toward a screen that showed a detailed picture of the dark liquid under the microscope. He didn't notice how Ryan opened and closed his mouth several times, as if he wanted to say something and decided afterwards that it would be best not to say anything at all.

The door slammed shut and Eric watched Ryan heading towards the elevator out of one corner of his eye. Ryan seemed to be far away - once again. But this time, he frowned as if he carried a heavy load weighting on his shoulders.

Eric sighed and received a inquiring look from Valera for it.

Checking the time quickly, he hoped she would drop the matter.

"Let's call it a day," he said. "See you tomorrow."

It's been a while since Timothy Speedle had last been to Miami. It felt unusual to be all by himself again without any doctor or nurse swaying around him, but he enjoyed the comforting silence that awaited him at his apartment.

After his parents had picked him up in North Dakota, his mother kept worrying herself sick about him. All of Monday and the first half of Tuesday, she'd help her son unpacking his clothes and personal belongings he had taken with him to the medical center. Almost dragging her out of the flat, his father had managed to give him a break from her mothering. Still, she called him three times the next day just to make sure, he was fine and even though he loved her dearly, everyone would think of that as annoying.

Between her worried calls, he used the time to make his purchases, clean the apartment – though his mother made sure it had been cleaned every fortnight since he' gone – and take a long shower. He watched his lines in the bathroom mirror and for the first time noticed that he'd grown a lot thinner. Touching his chest, he counted every single rib. Even his skin appeared sickly pale in the cool light of the bathroom. Fortunately, intensive physical workouts were a necessity in his job. Some training combined with an enormous extra dose of Miami's sun should help with this.

When he'd finally dressed himself and sat down on the sofa, he thought about supper. He didn't have much verve to cook something extensive, but he could perfectly picture his mother and doctor advising him to stick to a controlled nourishment instead of deep-frozen fast food.

The sudden ring of door bell interrupted his thoughts.

Who could this be?

He stood up and answered through the intercom: "Yes?"

"Speed? This is Horatio. Can I come in?"

The sound of Horatio's voice caught him like a kick in the stomach. The moment felt odd, somehow unreal and for the tiniest bit of a second he didn't know what to do. But still, he couldn't pretend he was not delighted to hear his voice.

He pushed the button and heard the humming that told him the door was open. Then he waited for Horatio to come up to the apartment.

First, he only heard the quiet footsteps on the wooden floor, then he saw Horatio's tall figure appearing in the corridor. A smile spread across Horatio's face and he seemed to move a little faster when he saw Speed standing in the door-frame.

"So you are finally back?"

They stood there and watched each other for a moment that seemed to extend to a lifetime and Speed's heart missed a beat.

"It's good to see you healthy!" Horatio said at last with a heart-warming smile "You had us quite scared you know?"

Speed closed the door behind him.

"Yeah... I know," he admitted slowly and narrowed his eyes before he headed toward the kitchen to fetch to bottles of beer from the fridge.

Horatio stepped into the small living room and looked around carefully. He'd been to Speed's place once, but that was nearly five years ago.

The room looked like Speed had just moved in. Some of the framed paintings and posters that had stuck to the wall for years lay across the floor as if Speed wanted to exchange them. But besides that, everything was in order, but the apartment seemed more like an austere accommodation than a cozy home.

"But I'd expected the lot of you to be less scared and more upset on the circumstances of my... accident," Speed said when he returned from the kitchen and presented a bottle of beer to Horatio. They all had thought they would lose him, when he was carried to the hospital. Of course, they didn't want him to die, but he'd lost quite an amount of blood out there.

Speed popped his own bottle open and lifted it up to his lips to take a huge swallow. It had been more than a year since he had last tasted beer. And at the moment, Speed was thankful for the well-known effect of alcohol.

Horatio took a few sips from his beer, thinking about his answer before turning his full attention on Speed. "You know... we were upset, because it was the second time this happened. You promised us you would take better care... but you know... we can't turn back time and we are just glad you are still alive. It could have been a lot worse and you know it. Just a few millimeters south and the bullet would have been through your heart and... there would have been no chance to save your life..."

Though Horatio seemed calm and collected, Speed noticed the slight quiver in his voice, betraying the older man with his emotions. "We are all just... really glad... But you can expect us to be after you to clean your gun now... Wouldn't want something like this to happen again, would we?"

Speed felt the heat of shame and guilt coming up from somewhere deep down inside him. He had imagined this very moment ever since he had woken from the coma in the hospital and saw Horatio outside the room talking to the doctor in charge.

Horatio hadn't come to visit Speed after that and he thought he was just too busy - or maybe too worried or too upset with him. Speed had tried hard to prepare himself to face H again. He'd gone through the scenario over and over again in his head, but now that it came to it, he had to admit, he was not prepared at all. Horatio still had this fatherly attitude he deeply admired, but right now it made him feel ashamed and guilty for giving all of them such a hard time. Trying not to blush in front of Horatio, he just narrowed his eyes and took another swallow from his beer.

"No, you wouldn't" Speed agreed.

He lead Horatio to the kitchen table and sat down in front of him hoping his cheeks didn't look as hot as they suddenly felt.

"So, how are things going at CSI? Eric and Calleigh told me you got someone new in my place?"

Horatio smiled slightly at him and nodded.

"Yes.. Ryan Wolfe. He was a patrol officer before he joined CSI. Has to learn a few things but he's good at what he's doing. You will meet him when you come back to the lab. I think you might like him."

A sardonic smile came across Speed's face as he thought of what Eric had told him about Ryan Wolfe. And as far as he remembered, Eric didn't seem to happy to have Wolfe at the CSI. "We will see", Speed said cryptically.

Horatio raised an eyebrow at him and nodded. "Yes, we most likely will..."

It was later next day and Horatio was walking towards the layout room where he would meet with everyone. It was time to collect what they knew about this case and get everything sorted out so that they hopefully could find the murderer rather soon. Eric was already in and watched Ryan arranging and rearranging the photos once again in deep thoughts. When Horatio walked in, Calleigh came over from the shooting stand and joined the session. Even Alexx found the time and passed by. Eric caught Horatio's expectant look and sighed deeply before he turned toward the others and started his explanation.

"Well, Ryan and me attended the doctor in charge of the medication of Julie McMiller. He told us that he'd diagnosed Julie's leukemia eight years ago, when she was an eight-year-old girl. She had been under his medical observation ever since. Nevertheless that didn't prevent various stays in hospital."

He paused and waited for Ryan to add something to his words, but he remained silent. "He also confirmed Sebastian Arnet's statements. Viviane often insisted on accompanying her sister and help her to recover."

He placed a portfolio of the twin sisters' medical records on the table, so Horatio, Calleigh and Alexx could take a look at them.

"After Julie's first hospitalization Catherine and George Carson feared their second daughter could have been affected by the disease as well. That fear was appropriate for the sisters are monozygotic twins, meaning they share the same set of genes. Corfield suggested that Viviane shall donate marrow to her sister, but first Viviane had to run through a couple of tests. They proofed to be negative - at least until six weeks ago!"

"So Viviane had leukemia as well? Damn, that's hard," Calleigh said in a concerned voice. "I really understand, if they could not live with that, but still they seemed to fight for they didn't kill themselves."

"That is probably true. Well, when Viviane had been tested negative, Corfiel scheduled a marrow transplantation twice, but both times, Julie's body did not accept the graft. So all he could do was prescribing pharmaceuticals that fight only the symptoms, not the germ of the disease," Eric shook his head and placed another folder on the table. "On to a different subject now. We found DNA on the bullet we got out of the tree at the crime scene. It was male, but whoever did this was not in the database nor from Sebastian Arnet. So, we still have nothing."

Calleigh sighed deeply and looked at everyone before she took over.

"Monroe and I went to the girls' school to see if we can get a few more information's about them, but it was not really helpful. They told us Viviane was very protective of Julie and that they were hardly seen separated... the only interesting thing was that everyone seemed to think that their 'new father' was creepy."

Tipping on his chin with two fingers, Eric stared on Calleigh's report.

"So, do we have any suspects? And what about Sebastian Arnet?"

"He's got an alibi. We checked it. He couldn't have done it. Besides... why would he give his gun to Viviane just to shoot her a few hours later?"

"Eric...," Horatio interfered, "did the doctor tell you if the twins had an appointment the afternoon they were killed? Arnet told me something about an appointment he heard about."

"Well, yes." Eric pointed at his notes. "Julie and Viviane gave Corfield an urgent call, walked into the doctor's practice and fetched up a new prescription for Julie's medication. We also checked on the nearest pharmacies and found a copy of the sales slip. The drugs had been paid with Mr. McMiller's credit card. Unfortunately, no one could tell us who actually purchased them. But from the time on the sales slip it could have been the girls. The only confusing thing is that we found neither pharmaceuticals near their bodies *nor* their stepfather's credit card. So whoever killed them took both items with him. The only other logical consequence would be that someone else purchased the pharmaceuticals. But somehow, I'm not willing to believe that."

"And by the way I looked into Julie's diary and I'm actually rather surprised that they purchased anything with their step-fathers money. From what she wrote it was her mother who always gave them whatever money she got, so that they could buy the medicine. He wouldn't give them anything" Ryan threw in quietly.

"I'm beginning to ask myself, how many pharmaceuticals they purchased," Alexx interjected. She got up from her seat at the door and stepped up to Calleigh's side to look at the analysis of the stomach contents Eric and Valera had done the other day.

"Julie McMiller had an unusual high concentration of drugs circulating in her bloodstream meaning she must have taken her daily dose."

Eric nodded at Alexx' objection. "Yeah, but Viviane was clean. No pharmaceuticals or other chemical material."

"So, she didn't start to take them?" Calleigh asked in surprise. "But why? If they found out that she had leukemia, she should have taken pharmaceuticals, didn't she? I mean from what we heard in school she was rather strict with Julie about taking her pills. This doesn't make sense. No one mentioned her having a disease or her taking pills or anything. But if Julie had known about it, she wouldn't make sure that Viviane also took them, wouldn't she? Something is so not right here..."

They all fell silent for a while, thinking about what Calleigh just said and everyone had to agree that something was definitely out of place here.

And then, suddenly, a dark thought came across Eric's mind.

"What if... what if Viviane had lost her will to live? What if she didn't take the drugs to boost her disease?" He looked at them intensively. "Think about it. Julie was about to die, even her doctor didn't have much hope she could survive! And if Julie was so dear to her, maybe she couldn't stand the thought of living without her sister?"

"That would be rather stupid..." muttered Ryan and received a few strange look for it. Eric snorted silently on Ryan's addressing. *What was he thinking?*

"Well... whatever made her not take her pills, we will have to find it out," Horatio said. "Everything: if they wanted to die, if they were giving up, where those pharmaceuticals are, who took them, which blood we found on the bullet... simply everything. So, let's go"

"And what are we going to do? Check the parents again?"

Eric stared at H, waiting for more detailed orders.

"That's a beginning. Find out why everyone thinks their stepfather is creepy. Check his financial records, history..."

Horatio stopped dead as he saw two patrol officers guiding Jeffrey McMiller down the hall and into an investigation room. Seconds later Monroe knocked on the door and busted in without waiting for an invitation.

"Lieutenant Caine? My men found McMiller speeding on the highway. He had drugs in his car. And as I know he is involved in your current investigation I thought you might want to talk to him."

Horatio nodded and thanked him. "Just hang on for a second." With a serious expression on his face he waited for Monroe to leave and wait outside the room. A new, strange silence covered the room while everyone expected Horatio to say something. Finally, he sighed deeply, collected the folders and turned his attention back on his team. "Mr. Wolfe, you come with me. And you two," he pointed at Eric and Calleigh, "Check him and his car, let's see what we find."

Monroe lead Lieutenant Caine and his colleague Wolfe into the interrogation room and stood aside Caine's chair, always an eye on Jeffrey McMiller. The detective handed the CSI a report on Jeffrey's mad race.

"So, shall we start, Lieutenant?"

Caine nodded slightly watching Jeffrey intently. "So... Mr. McMiller... I believe you know why you are here. How come we found a rather high amount of cocaine in your car? Would you like to explain that?"

Jeffrey shifted nervously in his chair and watched the lieutenant.

"That must have been a mistake! I never had anything to do with drugs. I was just

driving around because of the girls. Had to clear my thoughts, you know?"

He did everything he could to be convincing, but the twinkle in Caine's eyes made it clear that he didn't believe a word he said.

"Yeah, right!" Monroe said ironically, "That's what they all say, when we catch'em."

The detective opened a pack of chewing gum and plugged one gum into his mouth.

"Mr. Wolfe?" Caine said with a threatening undertone, not turning his gaze from Jeffrey. "Do me a favor and take a sample of his DNA and bring it to Valera – I'm rather curious where else we might find his *contaminations*."

Wolfe who had kept to himself suddenly roused from his thoughts and grabbed his toolcase to take the DNA-sample and fingerprints from Jeffrey. The young CSI could see it in his face that he was not very happy about this.

Lieutenant Caine watched as Ryan took the samples from the twins' step-father, then raised a hand and tapped the young man's shoulder. Wolfe bend down and the lieutenant began to speak into his ear. But what both of them did not know about Jeffrey McMiller: He was exceedingly good at eavesdropping. As a matter of fact, eavesdropping had earned him a lot more money than any honorable and upright job. Jeffrey narrowed his eyes and tried to focus on the faint sounds and moving lips. "I want you... Eric's results... find... must be... more to this man than the eye can see." Wolfe nodded in silent agreement, straightened up and left the room in a slow walk. The lieutenant leaned his elbows against the table. Jeffrey gulped down his edginess and tried to read Caine's mind by the indefinite sparkle in his eyes.

"I think, we both know you are lying," Caine told him flatly. "Of course, it could have been that someone wants us to believe you did something wrong, but if you didn't, you won't mind explaining why you weren't telling the truth - or at least not all of it - about your step-daughters, Jeff."

He paused and let his words effect on Jeffrey. "Neither you, nor your wife told us for example that Viviane had leukemia too. Another very interesting point I would love to understand is the fact that the girls thought they had to secure themselves with a weapon."

"I don't even know what you are talking about! *I've done nothing wrong!*" Jeffrey shouted, hot under his collar this time. "Why should they be afraid of me?"

Jeffrey jumped to his feet and the metallic chair slid several meters away from the table and crushed against the wall of glass. Monroe's hand quickly flipped to the holster at his belt. "Ey! You sit down!" he shouted ready to pull his gun.

Seconds passed by in a hurry as Jeffrey looked daggers at the detective. And then, unwillingly, he grabbed the chair and moved it back into position before he said down again.

Caine had just raised an eyebrow at him. He was still calm and collected, but this time the odd sparkle in his eyes struck Jeffrey like a thunderbolt. "Well, we'll see about that. But for the time being, you're going to stay here, Jeff, until I give you the permission to leave this building *personally*. And if I find out that you are related to the twins' murder *in any way*, I'm gonna have your everything for it!"

Caine saw no need to ask his suspect if he'd understood him. His words were as clear as daylight. "Good."

With that the lieutenant got out of his chair and left Jeffrey and Monroe alone.

Boy, how am I going to get me out this time? Jeffrey asked himself.

He never received an answer.

Kapitel 5: Troubleshooting Part V

Monroe and his men had towed McMiller's car into a nearby police garage to protect the evidence from further outer influence.

The patrol officers retreated as Eric stepped up to the metallic silver BMW and put on a new pair of gloves to begin his new task. Carefully he extracted two sets of fingerprints and various partial prints from the steering wheel. Most likely the complete sets belonged to Mr. McMiller and his wife. He also found five different hairs on the front- and back-seats. One hair was black so he assumed it was Viviane's hair. Another had the same golden color like Julie's head. The glove box contained nothing unusual. A lot of city maps, an abandoned pack of cigarettes and three compact discs.

The car was pretty clean. *Too clean for a family car*, he thought skeptically.

Although toddlers and small children made a greater mess than teenagers, two 16-year-old-girls would have left more traces in their parent's car than this.

Eric got out again and asked one of the officers to help me open the trunk.

Ten bags with the weight of one pound each had already been confiscated and had been taken to the lab in a box. Sure enough, Ryan would take the samples of fingerprints, so Eric had no point in bothering about them, so he turned his attention toward the trunk.

The trunk's floor was carpeted with a dark green rug that showed white powder residue at the brim. He ignited the flashlight and bowed down to take a closer look.

He'd suspected the penetrating smell of motoroil or anything, maybe the high-dosed cocaine, but it didn't have the same nuances. He firmly grabbed a knife from the toolcase and began to slice the carpet.

He coughed as the white substance dispersed like dust.

Jumping back, he snorted to keep the powder from entering his airways and blood.

"You're okay?" a policeman asked in surprise and hurried to his side. Waving with one hand, Eric shook his head "I'm alright! I'm alright!"

He rushed to blow his nose and wash away the white dust that threatened to enter his bloodstream.

"More cocaine?" Eric asked himself, dedicating himself back to the task and extracting a small amount of the white powder into a bag.

But - in case it was cocaine under the carpet - why should McMiller hide it like this, when ten heavy bags of pure cocaine lay less secretly in the trunk?

"McMiller's hiding something we didn't consider before," he muttered.

He ducked out of the trunk and closed it.

"All clear, guys, I'm finished!"

Eric knelt down beside his toolcase and started packing the evidence into a paper bag, when - suddenly - another penetrating smell struck him. He wrinkled his nose and tried to figure out what it was and why he hadn't smelled it earlier.

Slightly turning his head toward the car again he caught sight of something that look like water dripping from the underside of the BMW.

He crouched beside the left tire on the backside and ducked down underneath the car's underside. The smell became even stronger.

"Gas", he muttered and reached for his flashlight.

The gasoline dripped out of a damaged conduit right beside the fuel tank.

He got back to his feet and turned to the patrol officer. "Haven't you guys noticed the tank is leaking?"

The policeman shook his head with an expression on his face as if he done something terribly wrong.

"Alright then, let's get the car on a lifting ramp to have a closer look at it!"

Half an hour later, Eric and two other officers trailed the leakage of the conduit and experienced that people always found the most abnormal places to hide their secrets. All upper valves of the tank had been sealed with some sort of superglue and Eric figured that it might be easier to approach the problem from a different angle. Only a few minutes later a young technician helped them cutting a hole into the half-filled fuel tank...

And when they finally broke through several liters of gasoline came washing out – as well as an automatic 9mm handgun.

"Well, that's interesting!" Eric said and picked up the gun, "Calleigh's going to like this one!"

Calleigh propped her chin up on her left hand while she was skimming through McMiller's records. His career was pretty ordinary, but something was giving her the creeps as she read the lines in the database.

Then she caught a name that rang a familiar bell. "What are you doing here?" she asked aloud and full of interest.

Waiting for the printouts she saw a patrol officer coming into the room. He handed over a gun. "Delko found this in McMiller's car. Could be the murder weapon," he told her. Calleigh grinned back and nodded.

"Well then I will have a look at this, I'm done here anyway."

Suddenly the whole case appeared in a different light. None of them had thought the father was involved in such dark business, but obviously that was just the tip of the iceberg.

Eric headed into the lab and took out the bag with the white powdery residue from under the trunk's carpet and placed it under the microscope.

It proved that powder was obviously no cocaine.

Extracting a small amount of the powder, he mixed it with distilled water and several chemical indicators – he couldn't trust his eyes when the mixture in the test tube turned slightly pink. Nevertheless, his eyes widened even more when he read the final results.

Rushing out of the lab in a slow run, Eric began searching for Horatio. It looked like they got more than a suspect when Monroe brought Jeffrey McMiller there.

Eric crossed Ryan's path as he hurried through another glass door and looked around for Horatio. "Hey, boy!" he greeted him, "Have you seen H? Couldn't find him in the interrogation room!"

"No, haven't seen him since I collected the samples. But I'm also looking for him. Maybe he is in his office?"

Ryan raised an eyebrow at Eric and made his way towards H's office. Eric followed and hurried up the staircase right behind him.

"And why are you searching him? Any interesting news?" Eric asked and tried to be kind.

"You could say that! One thing is that McMiller's fingerprints were all over the

cocaine, no surprise there. But what really surprised me, was this..." Ryan handed him a piece of paper, so he could see the results written on it. "His DNA was on the one bullet Viviane shot."

"What places him at the crime scene when the two girls got shot and makes him their murderer!" Eric said thoughtfully, "Now I see why the kids said he was creepy."

He stopped and watched Ryan heading further toward H's office.

"Hey... Ryan", he said, waiting for his colleague to stop as well.

With some confusion Ryan turned around and looked at him questioningly. "Yes?"

Eric combed his hair back, narrowed his eyes and slowly stepped up to him again.

"Well, I just wanted to say...", he began slowly, a nervous smile on his lips.

Just do it! he told himself.

He inhaled the air slowly looked up and straight into his eyes.

"Good Job."

Ryan stared at him in surprise, before he smiled slightly and nodded. "Thank you..."

To say that he was shocked would also have been a total understatement. He'd never thought he would see the day when Eric Delko actually told him he did something right...

But it felt damn good.

"Well.. then let's see H," Ryan smiled back at him.

"Right you are!" Eric agreed and began walking by his side.

An odd sensation tickled in the pit of Eric's stomach. It was a strange feeling and he didn't know what it meant, but he was somehow relieved he'd told Ryan what he'd thought.

Horatio was sitting in his office going through everything again, when Calleigh came rushing in, a huge grin plastered on her face.

"Good news?" he asked her and he couldn't stop the hopeful undertone that had crept itself into his voice.

"You bet," she told him still smiling broadly. "Eric found a gun in the fuel tank of McMiller's car and I compared the bullet with the ones we pulled out of Viviane's and Julie's bodies. It was a match, so, we found our murder weapon. McMiller himself has no criminal track record, but I found several files that struck me concerning 'Advansa', the company he works for."

"What about it?"

"Three years ago the company was involved in an other cocaine scandal. One of the tradesmen has been accused of drug smuggling and dealing. I looked a little further and *bang!* that guy turned out to be McMiller's instructor."

"So, that's how he has gotten attached to the drug dealing business," Horatio guessed.

There was a soft knock on the door and Horatio knew – by experience as well as by intuition – that it could only be Eric or Ryan.

Or probably both.

Eric let Ryan enter first for he was the one with the big news, then walked in himself.

"Hey", he said casually, "Seems like we're making progress! Ryan, you wanna go first?"

Ryan nodded slightly and smiled at him. "Sure, thanks." Ryan hurried to hand his result over to Horatio. "We found only McMiller's fingerprints on the cocaine, so everything he said about being set up is utter nonsense. But the interesting part is that it was his DNA on the bullet."

Eric laid his own printouts on Horatio's desk and waited until he'd finished reading

Ryan's results with a satisfied smile. "And – on top of that – I found another white powder underneath the trunk's carpet. I tested it for drugs... well, it wasn't what I'd thought it might be, but finally everything fits together."

Eric pointed at the readouts of the chemical substance.

"Looks like I found our missing pharmaceuticals. It's the same stuff Julie's been medicated with to cure her leukemia. McMiller must have grinded it with a pestle and hid it under the carpet."

Eric casted a look at Ryan, but turned back to Horatio abruptly as Ryan felt his glance weighting on him.

Horatio nodded at them, satisfaction now written all over his face. "That will be good enough for the jury!" he stood up and smiled. "Looks like we finally got him. Good job, everyone."

"Well, we finally saved the day, didn't we?" Eric asked Ryan with a broad smile curling his lips.

Horatio had left the three of them alone in his office, because he was not interested in wasting time to book Jeffrey McMiller. None of them tried to hinder him.

Calleigh watched Ryan and Eric ever since they had entered the room and she had to admit she was confused. When exactly had they gotten so friendly with each other? And the glances they were shooting at each other weren't any less confusing.

"Of course we did, ever thought we wouldn't?" Calleigh answered Eric's comment laughing. "Maybe we should go out for a drink."

Eric nodded slightly.

"Sure, why not?" Ryan agreed. Even if he was still confused about what had just happened, he had never been invited out for a drink by any of his coworkers, so he was not going to question the offer.

"It's decided, then," Eric said and looked at Ryan and Calleigh one after another, "Haven't been out for a while anyway!" Eric collected the results and piled them besides the keyboard of the PC - they would have enough time to work those out the next day. "So, shall we invite H as well? He didn't join us for quite some time, don't you think?" he asked Calleigh.

"Yes, that's right. Alexx too?"

"Sure... if her husband's willing to look after the kids!" Eric grinned.

"I'm sure he'll love too. Then let's do it like this... I'm going to ask Alexx, you H, right?"

Eric nodded and watched Calleigh leave with a happy smile on her face. He turned to the door and opened it in order to follow her down, when he saw Ryan standing there motionless. "Ryan? You coming?" he asked and his voice sounded far more concerned than he had intended it to be.

Ryan blinked slightly. He had been deep in thoughts while the two of them were talking. He'd heard the concern in his voice, but dismissed it as an imagination.

"Sure," he told Eric, smiled slightly and followed him out of H's office.

Horatio threw the files on the table and a dark expression spread across the lines of his face as he sat down.

"We know, Jeff! We know, you killed Viviane and Julie and we got enough evidence to book you for a lifetime!"

McMiller opened his mouth in order to protest, but Horatio cut him off.

"I just wanna know one thing: Why? They were two innocent girls, both living on the edge of death, so *why* did you shoot them?"

"Innocent? *Innocent?*" McMiller snapped enraged. "That bitch Viviane tried to blackmail me! How dare she! Just because she found some cocaine in my backpack while looking for money she thought, she could do it! I am no man you should mess with and so I gave that bitch what she deserved! And Julie, she was useless anyway. All my wife did was mothering her. It's no loss they are dead!"

Horatio sucked in the air sharply and held his breath for a moment to calm down. The vehemence and fierceness of McMiller's response shocked him, but within seconds that shock evolved itself into frustration and anger.

"No loss, hm?" he said with a sardonic smile and tried hard to keep his self-control "Than it wouldn't be a loss either, if I'll have you and your greed locked up in a nice and cozy 6-to-4 meter cell, would it?"

McMiller frowned at his words.

"They shouldn't have interfered with my business!"

Horatio glared at him. "All Viviane wanted was a last chance to spare her sister's life as well as her own. But you didn't give her the money to buy them."

McMiller snorted. "What makes you think so, lieutenant?"

"Greed can be a powerful, but also a insidious and deceitful ally, my friend. You tasted blood when you started working for 'Advansa' and you took over the drug dealing for you former instructor. But the money you earned from that business was not meant to be spend on your wife and children, was it?. Greed ist what made you kill Viviane and Julie and greed is what will put you in jail. But you will have the rest of your life to think about what you have done..."

Horatio stood, but he didn't turn his eyes from McMiller's face.

"You would have killed them, one way or the other and you knew it. You knew it!"

McMiller stared at Horatio and the lieutenant could see into the very heart of McMiller's depraved soul.

"Take him away!" he said and Monroe firmly grabbed McMiller's arm.

The tradesman put up a fierce resistance, but he knew he was doomed.

As two additional officers entered the interrogation room to get a hold on the shrieking man, Horatio turned away from the scenery and slam the door shut behind him. He just couldn't stand the sight of McMiller any longer.

Alexx was mildly surprised as Calleigh came into her office and invited her out on a drink with the boys. As much as she liked to return home to her husband and children, she did just couldn't refuse the offer.

She took her blazer off the wardrobe. "So, anything more I should know?" Alexx asked Calleigh who had told her the outcome of the McMiller case. "Well... Maybe" she teased her as they made their way to the elevator where they waited for Eric, Ryan and Horatio. "But I'm sure you'll figure it out yourself."

Alexx raised an eyebrow in sudden suspicion. "Really? Why don't you tell me? You know, there's no point in hiding something from Mommy!"

"I know. But a mommy knows her boys, doesn't she, Alexx?" Calleigh said grinning. She just loved those little banter with her old friend.

Alexx smiled broadly back at her. "Sure she does. What a mommy would she be, if she didn't? Besides, where are they?" she let out a long and deep sigh and shook her head in resignation. "Always too late!"

"They are boys!" Calleigh laughed. "It's normal for them to be late, isn't it? Well... for most of them at least."

"Eight you are. Well, we both have our little unpleasant experiences with boys trying

to be accurate, don't we, darling?"

They walked in silence and it appeared to Eric it was the best not to talk for a while to erase this strange feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Passing by the interrogation room, they found H standing at the window watching the first traces of dusk. He didn't seem to happy and all of them could perfectly understand his emotions, sometimes more than they desired to.

Eric stopped dead in a polite distance and pulled up one arm to hinder Ryan from proceeding too.

"H?" he asked quietly.

When he heard Eric's voice, Horatio stopped his musings and turned around, his head cocked to one side. "What can I do for you two?"

"Ehm...", Eric started, "It's just... we wanted to ask you, if you like to have a drink with us? Alexx and Calleigh are waiting for us at the elevator. But we understand, if you don't feel like it, honestly..."

Horatio's gaze shifted to Ryan – who hurried to nod in agreement – before he looked at the floor for a moment.

"I think a few drinks wouldn't be bad," Horatio finally told them and looked up again, fiddling with his sunglasses once more. "Well then... let's not make the ladies wait any longer"

The end of 'Troubleshooting'...

Stay tuned for the next episode!