

Deja Vu

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/265632) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/265632>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Counterstrike
Characters:	Peter Sinclair , Luke , Nikki
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2011-10-16 Words: 5,820 Chapters: 1/1

Deja Vu

by [JJJunky](#)

Summary

Peter is taken and it's up to the team to find him before it's too late.

Déjà Vu
By JJJunky

The limousine rounded a corner. The lights of Paris winked out as though they'd been turned off. Tall trees lining the narrow road formed a canopy enveloping the vehicle in a shroud.

Alexander Addington sighed contentedly. For the first time since his wife's abduction, he was taking a few days off. A long weekend at his godson's chateau in Montfort l'Amaury was exactly what he needed. He loved the work the Counterstrike team was doing. It was the only thing that gave him purpose since Chantal's disappearance. But, it wasn't always easy on the heart or the mind. Even their successes often incorporated a degree of failure.

Relaxing into the plush leather seat, Alexander surreptitiously studied the man beside him. Peter Sinclair needed this holiday even more than he did. Though the younger man's stoic features hid his pain, Alexander wasn't deceived. When a recent hostage situation had gone bad, Peter got caught in the middle. Instead of feeling justifiably proud of the nine lives he'd saved, all he could do was dwell on the one he hadn't. In the month since the end of the crisis, the ex-Scotland Yard Inspector hadn't smiled once. Obviously he needed time to heal, both physically and mentally. In bringing down the perpetrator, he'd taken a bullet in the abdomen. It was three days before the doctors cautiously agreed that he would survive and another week before they upgraded him to stable. When they released him this morning, it was with the stipulation that he got plenty of rest and a minimal amount of exercise. Five days in the country was Alexander's way of insuring the patient followed the doctor's orders.

A thin beam of moonlight reflected off the shiny black surface of the car when it emerged from the arboretum tunnel. It was a perfect night, not too cold, not too warm. An encouraging start to their holiday, Alexander decided. If only Peter would try to relax.

High beams from an oncoming car momentarily blinded him. With a screech of tires, the vehicle suddenly swerved in front of the limousine. Bennett stomped on the brakes and spun the wheel sharply, trying to avoid a collision.

Caught off-guard by the unexpected turn of events, Alexander slammed against Sinclair. He heard the younger man grunt in pain at the contact. His hands grasping to find something to hold onto, Alexander slid off the smooth leather seat onto the floor. Before he could regain his balance, his door was thrown open. He only had a moment to wonder how the intruder had unlocked the door, before a hand reached down and pulled him roughly from the vehicle. He struck out at his assailant with fists and feet. Fingers twisted his tie, cutting off his air. Black dots floated in front of his eyes as he fought for each breath. His arms and hands went limp. Almost unconscious, he was thrown to the ground like a discarded bag of garbage.

Panting, his vision blurred, he could see Bennett slumped over the steering wheel. Something wet on the other man's forehead glistened in the moonlight. Alexander could only hope that his faithful retainer was only unconscious.

Movement on the other side of the car drew his attention. He heard the loud slap of flesh meeting flesh. A scream of pain was followed by a loud groan. Even in a daze, Alexander knew the sound had come from Peter's lips.

Each breath coming in a short, hard gasp, he struggled to his feet. Dragging his maimed right leg, he inched toward the car. Two men dressed all in black circled around to the front. Peter's limp body lay slumped between them. Hurrying to their own vehicle, they threw Sinclair into the back seat, before scrambling in behind.

Unable to believe that his worst nightmare was being repeated, Alexander screamed, "No!"

A rear window opened. A hand emerged. The gun in it was clearly visible. A shot echoed in the still night.

Alexander's right leg gave out beneath him. In shock and surprise, he watched blood gush from a hole in his calf.

Rubber squealed on pavement. The car that had ambushed them turned in a tight circle and roared back down the road.

A shaking hand trying to staunch the flow of blood, Alexander shook his head and cried, "Not again! Dear God, how could this happen again?"

Satellite link

Nikki Beaumont sat up in her chair, surprised by the summons. Exchanging quick glances with Luke Brenner and JJ Johnson, she leaned forward and punched the button on the keyboard to complete the link.

"What's up, Chief?" Luke asked, crossing to perch on the edge of the desk. "I thought we were on vacation?"

"Holiday's over. I need you back here immediately," Addington ordered.

Noticing how haggard the older man appeared, Nikki frowned, "What's happened?"

"Peter's been kidnapped."

Without a word, JJ rose and headed for the cockpit. He would learn the details of the abduction, later - after he turned the plane on a heading for Paris.

Surprise siphoned the blood from Nikki's face, "By who?"

"That's what I want you to find out," Addington replied, barely holding his raw emotions in check.

"How did it happen?" Luke demanded.

"He was taken from the car on our way to Montfort l'Amaury."

Nikki was immediately struck by the similarities between Peter's abduction and Chantal Addington's kidnapping. Sympathy audible in her voice, she asked, "Are you all right, Sir?"

Closing his eyes, Addington bit the edge of his bottom lip, "I was shot in the leg. Bennett was struck over the head. He has a slight concussion."

Though it wasn't his physical well-being she had inquired about, Nikki was shocked to hear of the older man's revelations, "Shot! Why aren't you in hospital?"

"The bullet went straight through," Addington soothed. "It's hardly more than a flesh wound."

Looking like a caged lion, Luke asked, "What can we do to help find Pete?"

"Go through his files," Addington suggested. "Find out who has a grudge against Peter and what their status is."

"He's an ex-Scotland Yard inspector," Luke pointed out. "That could be a long list."

"Then you better get on it."

Link out

Nikki stared at the blank screen feeling fear coil inside her like a rusty spring. She was so scared. None of the situations they'd been in previously, not even the close calls where they'd barely escaped with their lives, had made her feel such terror. In each of those cases, they'd been a team. Now, the brains and the heart of that team was missing. Could they operate without him? Would she fail the most important person in her life? The man responsible for giving her life meaning. Alexander Addington controlled the purse strings, but it was Peter Sinclair who commanded her devotion. He'd made her use her skills to help people instead of taking advantage of them. She had never felt so fulfilled. Even when she was in danger, she was happy. She owed Peter so much.

"Where do we start?" When he failed to get a response from his companion, Luke jabbed her in the shoulder. "I said, where do we start?"

Rubbing her arm with one hand, Nikki punched at the buttons of the keyboard bringing Peter's file to the screen. "Here," she said, paging forward.

He awoke to pain and the iron taste of blood in his mouth. He wasn't surprised. It had been his constant companion since the day he'd been shot. The same day he'd let a hostage die. Ironically, the physical wound was healing faster than the mental one, or at least it had been before he'd been punched in the stomach.

Opening his eyes, Peter strained to see through the darkness that enveloped him. Failing, he let his other senses garner the information he needed to access his position. Rough hemp scrapped the tender flesh of his wrists and ankles, telling him he was a prisoner. His eyes

were uncovered, which meant his captors didn't care if he saw their faces. This told him they intended to kill him. Who were they? The question went unanswered.

Peter flashed back on the assault. Bennett's door had been flung open the minute the limousine shuddered to a stop. Before the older man could react, he'd been struck on the head with the butt of a pistol. The ease and speed in which the locked doors had yielded to the intruders told Peter he was dealing with professionals. While he had fought to extricate himself from beneath Alexander Addington's flailing body, his employer had been dragged from the car. Peter reached for his gun, but the action was halted by a fist to his abdomen. Doubled over in pain, another punch to his jaw had laid him out. Only partially conscious, he hadn't resisted when they confiscated his weapon and pulled him to his feet. They'd unceremoniously flung him into the back of their vehicle. A roaring in his ears had drowned out all sound, except the muffled crack of what could've been a gunshot. It could also have been an engine backfiring. At least, that's what he wanted to believe. Why stage a kidnapping and then kill the golden goose? They needed Addington alive to get their ransom.

Despite a crushing headache that made it difficult to think, Peter was aware of how similar his abduction had been to Chantal Addington's. Was it deliberate? Or a coincidence?

He shifted trying to ease the inferno that raged in his stomach. The narrow couch felt firm against his back, but wasn't long enough to accommodate his height. It smelled musty as though it hadn't been used in a long time. He panted as the renewed pain of his wound gripped him in a vise. His breathing sounded loud, seeming to echo, making him believe the room was large with a high ceiling. Not the typical hideout for kidnappers and terrorists.

"I know you're awake, Mr. Sinclair. It's time you faced your adversary."

Curiosity rather than fear made Peter obey the order. Turning his head, he regarded the man outlined in the open doorway. He couldn't see the face. The short rotund figure blocked most of the light from the hallway. It didn't matter. Peter knew who it was. On the wall behind his captor's head was a familiar painting. Even without seeing the signature, Peter knew it was a Constable. The swans swimming lazily near a water wheel had the same soothing effect on him as a Gainsborough.

"Aren't you going to demand to know what's going on?"

Peter reluctantly returned his attention to the little man in the door, "That's rather obvious, isn't it?"

"Oh, I forgot," the man sneered, "you're so smart. You know everything."

"Not everything." Peter swung his feet to the floor and sat up. He bit down on his lip as the movement increased the fire in his gut. His voice strained, he continued, "I don't understand why you had to make the kidnapping so similar to Mrs. Addington's. It's like putting salt on a wound."

The man clapped his hands excitedly, "That's exactly what I intended. It was my idea. Rather brilliant, if I may say so myself."

"What did Alexander do to make you hate him so?"

"He tossed me aside. He doesn't have time for me anymore."

"His work is all consuming. It's the only thing that's kept him sane since his wife's abduction."

"To the exclusion of his godchild?"

"To the exclusion of everything and everybody, except his daughter."

"He has time for you."

"Because I'm part of the job."

"No," the man stepped inside and flicked a switch on the wall. Light flooded the room. "There's more. He never sends me any money now. How am I supposed to live?"

Momentarily blinded by the sudden illumination, Peter ducked his head. Squinting, he allowed his eyes to slowly adjust to the light. "Have you thought about getting a job?"

"No Boiteux has ever worked. I don't intend to be the first."

"Has a Boiteux ever gone to prison? Because that's where you're going, Henri."

"Monsieur Young assures me that my identity will never be revealed."

Peter groaned softly and folded his bound hands protectively across his abdomen. Once the spasm receded, he gasped, "I knew you were selfish and lazy, Henri. But, I never thought you would be capable of murder."

"Mais non," Henri excitedly shook his head. "Monsieur Young has promised me no one will be killed."

"If that's the case, what's to keep me from telling Alexander and the police who kidnapped me?"

The ingenuous face twisted with dismay, "That's why he didn't want me to confront you."

"But you just couldn't resist gloating," Peter disgustedly sighed, shaking his head in disbelief. He was going to die because this idiot couldn't follow a simple order. Why hadn't this Young guy put the bastard on a leash? Unless, he knew exactly what Henri would do. In fact, counted on it. It certainly gave him a good excuse to eliminate the hostage once Peter's usefulness was over. It was always safer to dispense with any witnesses. Peter almost had it in him to feel sorry for Henri. He too would be considered expendable once the money was delivered. The fool had just forfeited both their lives.

Alexander stared at the computer screen. Tears blurred his vision making the words dance in an incomprehensible display. It didn't matter. This lead, like all the others they'd pursued, was going down a dead end street. He was finding it difficult to concentrate. A vague idea played at the edges of his thoughts, but every time he tried to focus on it, he slammed into a wall of pain. It wasn't the bullet wound in his leg that ached so, it was his heart.

He remembered the first time he saw Peter Sinclair. The Scotland Yard inspector's arrival provided the first ray of hope he'd had since Chantal's abduction. It wasn't Sinclair's position or reputation that had filled Alexander with confidence. It was Peter himself. Despite his failure to locate Chantal, Alexander's faith had never wavered. The whole concept of the Counterstrike team had been built around Peter Sinclair's abilities. Without him, they weren't a team. They were individuals trying to finish a difficult task.

Alexander knew the exact minute Peter had become so important to him. It had been the moment he had set eyes on the younger man. Some might argue that it was because he was so vulnerable at the time. Alexander knew different. Next to his daughter, Peter had become the most important person in his life. Would his heart irreparably shatter from this latest strain?

"Father?"

Blinking rapidly to hide his tears, Alexander lifted his eyes to his daughter's concerned face, "You look tired, Darling. Why don't you call it a night?"

"It's five in the morning, Father," Suzanne Addington gently admonished, her gaze resting briefly on the face of the clock on her parent's desk. "You've been working all night. You know the doctor said you were to get plenty of rest."

"Dreams don't allow me to sleep for long," Addington softly revealed. "Sometimes, I see your mother's face pleading with me to save her. Sometimes, it's Peter's unconscious body. Did I tell you there was blood on his shirt? I think they may have reopened his wound when they hit him. How long have we got before they kill him or he bleeds to death?"

Suzanne put her arm around her father's shoulders, hugging him gently to her, "Peter is very resourceful. He'll find a way to escape or at least to tell us where he is so we can help him."

Sad eyes focused on his young daughter's face. Not so long ago, he'd been just as naive. Right now, he wished he still was. Then, he might have felt optimistic too.

It was getting harder to breathe. A sharp stabbing pain in his abdomen accompanied every breath. How much longer did he have, Peter idly wondered? It'd been hours since Henri's visit. Light seeping from beneath the curtains told him it was morning. If they didn't hurry, they'd lose their bargaining chip. Not even Alexander Addington would pay for a corpse.

The door to his plush prison flew open, slamming into the wall. Peter winced as he imagined what destruction had been wrought on the fine old moldings. It was obvious his captor didn't have any appreciation for antiquities. The baseboard they had just treated so cavalierly was constructed in the 16th century. It had survived three hundred years of war, environment and

children, only to succumb to terrorists. That, Peter realized, was a sign of the times they lived in.

Distracted by his speculations, it took him a few minutes to focus on the man leaning against the door jam. When he finally did take notice, it was a few minutes more before he could find his voice, "David?"

"Hello, Sinclair."

Relief washed over Peter at the sight of the inspector who had taken his place when he left Scotland Yard. He hadn't expected to be rescued so quickly. Maybe he wouldn't die after all.

"Don't get your hopes up, Peter," David Young advised, accurately reading the younger man's face.

Realization filled Peter leaving a bitter taste in his mouth, "You're Henri's partner."

"Give the man a Qpie doll," Young applauded. "You always had the answers. It was hell to follow in the footsteps of the great Peter Sinclair."

"Is that why you've betrayed your oath? You couldn't take the competition?"

"I could take it!"

Peter could hear the pearly white teeth grinding in the square jaw of his former associate. That, combined with the stormy countenance on the pale face belied the older man's statement. Rather than antagonize his captor, Peter said, "Since you didn't kidnap me for personal reasons, you must've done it for monetary gain."

"Too bad your cleverness didn't keep you off a deserted country road."

"I haven't been at my best lately. I never expected to be betrayed by Addington's godchild or a former colleague."

"Knowing how you work has given me the advantage."

Peter smiled grimly, "You might be able to anticipate me, but don't even think you can predict what my associates will do."

"I've been following the exploits of your Counterstrike team." Young relaxed in a plush chair facing Sinclair, "Without you, they're a boat without a rudder."

"You're sure of that?"

"I wouldn't have done this if I hadn't been."

Peter stared unblinking at the rogue Scotland Yard inspector. Though he'd trusted Luke and Nikki with his life many times over, he wondered if they hadn't finally met their match. Their endeavors would follow the lines of a terrorist style kidnapping, the similarities to Chantal

Addington's abduction guaranteed that. They would never suspect the sophistication offered by an elite law enforcement agent.

"Enough of this chit-chat," Young rose from his chair. "It's show time."

A hand wrapped around Peter's upper arm and dragged him to his feet. Caught by surprise, a soft moan escaped Peter's lips. Dizziness made the room spin as he fought for control. Nausea made his stomach churn. Wrapping his arm around his aching gut, he desperately fought to prevent his muscles from contracting in an attempt to purge an already empty stomach. The pain of such an action would be excruciating. His entire concentration centered on his ordeal, he barely noticed the ornately decorated corridor he was dragged down to reach their destination.

They eventually entered a room at the far end of the hall. Its contents were all too familiar to Peter. A chair had been placed in front of a dirty bedsheet that was suspended from the ceiling. A camera and some computer equipment that looked strangely futuristic in the historical surroundings was lined up along one wall.

Young pushed Peter into the chair and handed him a slip of paper, "This is what you will say. You deviate from the prepared text by a single word and I'll shoot you. Don't think I won't. I'd rather spend the rest of my life as a poorly paid Scotland Yard inspector, than an abused prisoner on Her Majesty's moors."

Peter couldn't fault the man's logic. He might be greedy, but he wasn't stupid. Nodding his understanding, he faced the camera. When the red light came on indicating that they were transmitting, he read, "Alexander, you are to transfer twenty million American dollars to this Swiss account, 7916325. If confirmation of receipt is not received by this time tomorrow, I will be killed."

The red light dimmed as the camera was switched off. The entire transmission took less than fifteen seconds. Not enough time to even begin a trace. It didn't matter, Peter ruefully acknowledged. He would bleed to death long before the twenty-four hour deadline elapsed.

Alexander stared at the blank screen. This couldn't be happening again. He had to escape.

"Father?"

Suzanne's quivering voice brought Addington back. He couldn't leave yet, not until his responsibilities were met.

"At least we know we have twenty-four more hours," Luke encouraged. "We should be able to find Peter before the deadline."

"We don't have twenty-four hours," Nikki's softly accented voice contradicted.

Luke rubbed tired eyes, before pointing to the computer screen, "Weren't you listening . . ."

"I was listening," Nikki snapped, irked by his cool aloof manner. "I was also watching. Did you see how pale Peter was? How he was sweating? That he seemed confused?"

"Yeah. So?"

"Those are all signs of blood loss. He's bleeding, probably internally," Nikki impatiently explained.

Suzanne frowned, "The doctors stressed that Peter was to take it easy."

"He's going into shock," Nikki finished her explanation. "We don't have twenty-four hours. We may not have four hours."

Luke's face became an expressionless mask. Only his eyes showed the extent of his pain. Sitting behind the table he'd appropriated as a desk, he opened a file, "Then we better get back to work."

"Reviewing Peter's cases isn't getting us anywhere," the young Frenchwoman shuddered at the realization.

"Whaddya wanna do, Nikki," Luke sharply replied, his curt voice lashing at her, "give up?"

"Of course not."

"Well then?"

"We're missing something," Nikki insisted, tossing her hair back in a gesture of defiance. "What would Peter do if he were here?"

Her gaze resting with concern on her father's slumped shoulders, Suzanne said, "He'd review the events leading up to the abduction."

"Yes," Nikki smiled encouragingly. "Then that's what we need to do."

Slapping the folder with his hand, Luke angrily denied, "There's nothing to discuss. The doctors said Pete needed a vacation, so the Chief decided to take him to the country."

"To Henri Boiteux's chateau," Suzanne detailed.

"Who else knew?" Nikki whispered.

Puzzled, Luke asked, "Knew what?"

Understanding making her eyes glow, Suzanne knelt beside her father and forced him to look at her, "Who knew you would be on that particular road on that particular night?"

"Only the people in this room," Alexander softly replied.

"And Henri," Nikki quietly reminded him.

Intense astonishment touching his pale features, Addington shook his head, "He's my godchild."

"Who hasn't worked a day in his life and is always looking for an easy way to get money," Suzanne bitterly outlined.

"My own godson wouldn't do this to me. I know I've been neglecting him lately, but he's still your mother's great nephew."

A flash of anger twisted Suzanne's pretty face, "You've always been blind to his faults, Father. All he ever wanted from you was your money."

"Suzanne . . ."

"Whoever did this," Nikki gently interrupted, "also had to know the specifics of Mrs. Addington's kidnapping. Would Henri have that information?"

"He might," Alexander reluctantly admitted.

Nikki tapped buttons shutting down her computer screen, "I think we should pay Monsieur Boiteux a visit."

"If you're wrong," Luke impatiently ripped out the words, "Pete's dead."

A chill hung on the edge of his words. Nikki swallowed hard, before lifting her chin and boldly meeting his gaze, "I know."

The cool night air invaded the room, making Peter shiver. He was finding it increasingly difficult to concentrate. He wished he had a pen and paper. In one of his more lucid moments, he'd realized he'd never thanked Alexander Addington for giving him the opportunity to fight crime without the rules and regulations that had bound him as a Scotland Yard inspector.

He'd spent the long day reviewing the cases they'd been involved in since the Counterstrike team was formed. Despite what had happened with the hostages the month before, he'd realized they'd made an important difference. He'd made a difference. This knowledge made it easier to die.

"Everyone clear on the plan?" Alexander asked, his eyes resting first on his daughter before settling on Luke and Nikki. Bennett answered by putting one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the gear shift. Waving toward the limo's door, Alexander ordered, "Out you go, Suzanne."

"Father," the young girl protested, "please let me go with you."

Alexander gently held her hand, "If we learn that Henri's behind Peter's abduction, someone has to call the police and an ambulance. That someone is you."

"Couldn't Nikki or Luke . . .?"

"We've been over this," Luke impatiently interrupted, "Nikki and I have to find Peter while the Chief keeps Henri busy."

"All right," Suzanne unhappily agreed, stepping from the vehicle and taking shelter in the shadow of the tall stone fence that surrounded the estate. "Be careful."

Bennett shifted into gear and pressed the gas pedal. The limousine picked up speed until it reached the edge of the neglected lawn. He stopped the car and waited patiently for his passengers to exit.

"If Peter knew we were letting you do this," Nikki said, putting her hand on Addington's knee, "he would kill us."

"He'd understand that I couldn't wait in the office when I could do something to help save his life. We've both been in that position before."

Nikki sadly smiled, before following Luke from the car, "Good luck, Monsieur."

"To all of us," Alexander agreed.

He knew he should be, but Alexander wasn't nervous as the car continued down the long driveway to the house. He was too ambivalent to be afraid. If they were wrong about Henri, Peter would be dead. They had just about run out of time already. But, if they were right, he'd been betrayed by his own godchild. As painful as that knowledge was, Alexander prayed they were right.

The car stopped in front of the massive front door. Alexander leaned forward and put a hand on Bennett's shoulder, "You stay here."

"Sir," Bennett protested, "according to Mr. Brenner and Miss Beaumont, I'm to accompany you inside."

"I'm changing the plan."

"Sir, I hardly . . ."

"Contrary to what Luke and Nikki might think," his tone indicating he wouldn't tolerate any further disagreement, Alexander emphasized, "I call the shots in this organization."

"Yes, Sir," Bennett unhappily acknowledged.

Squeezing his faithful friend's shoulder, Alexander opened his door and stepped out. Stiff from the long drive, he took a moment to flex his muscles before limping to the entrance. He raised his hand to lift the heavy knocker, when it was torn from his grasp. Composing his face, he let his eyes rest with equanimity on his godson, "Hello, Henri."

"Uncle Alex!" Henri nervously greeted him. "After what happened last night, I wasn't expecting you."

Not in the mood to exchange pleasantries, Alexander pushed past the younger man and entered the house. "I need to talk to you, Henri."

"Of course, Uncle Alex." A twitch at the corner of his right eye belied Henri's meek acceptance.

Alexander saw no reason to prevaricate. They didn't have time. More precisely, Peter didn't have time. "Did you kidnap Peter Sinclair?"

"W - what?"

"Tell me!"

"Well, ah, no."

Applause echoed in the foyer. Turning Alexander faced a man only a few years younger than himself. Tall and slim, he looked to be in exceptionally good condition. Not the type of person Henri usually associated with.

"A nice decisive answer, Henri," David Young mockingly praised. "I'm sure you've convinced Mr. Addington of your innocence."

"Who are you?" Alexander asked, angered by the intrusion.

"I know you're wearing a wire, Mr. Addington. But it doesn't matter now. My name is David Young. I'm your godson's partner in crime."

Though he was surprised by the easy confession, Alexander didn't waste time, "Where's, Peter?"

"No, no, no, no, no," Young wagged a finger at the other man. "I can't tell you that. You can't have everything your way."

"Right now, you're only facing kidnapping charges. If Peter dies, it'll be murder."

Young pulled a gun from the holster strapped to his shoulder, "Either charge will put me in prison. Do you know what they do to coppers who've gone bad in prison?"

"It isn't very pleasant," Alexander conceded. "But you should've thought of that before you broke the law."

"It was a foolproof plan."

"That's what criminals always say."

"Where did I go wrong?"

"Henri was the only one outside of my staff who knew we'd be on that road that night."

Young shook his head, "Peter was right. I did underestimate his associates."

Lifting the gun, Young thrust it into his mouth and pulled the trigger.

The loud retort almost deafened Nikki. She pulled the earphone from her ear and rubbed the aching organ. Her horrified eyes found Luke's. Her heart pounded so hard in her chest it hurt.

"I'm all right," Alexander's reassuring voice came across the line. "Young shot himself. Unfortunately, Henri fainted, so we still don't know where they're holding Peter."

"While you're trying to bring Henri around, we'll start looking," Nikki suggested. "Don't worry, we'll find him."

Reeling in the rest of the rope they'd used to enter the third floor bedroom, Luke said, "You go right, I'll go left."

Nikki nodded agreement. Quickly exiting the room, she turned right and started checking every room on the floor. She had to force herself to slow down and really search. She wouldn't be doing Peter any good if she overlooked him in her haste.

The last room was locked, raising her hopes. With skilled fingers, she picked the lock. Disappointment gripped her when all she found was antique furniture.

"The police and an ambulance are on the way," Suzanne's encouraging voice advised. "I'm coming up to help you. Have you found anything yet?"

"There's nothing on the north wing of the third floor," Nikki said, her stomach churning with anxiety and frustration. "I'm heading down to the second floor."

Breathless from her long run, Suzanne panted, "Bennett and I will start on the main floor."

Though the number of searchers had doubled, Nikki didn't slow her pace. Running down the stairs, she yelled, "Peter?"

There was no answer. She hadn't really expected one. She'd only hoped.

"I found the room they used to broadcast their ransom demand," Luke called, waving at her from the other end of the long hall.

Nikki felt as if a hand had closed around her throat. The news meant Peter had to be close by. With renewed optimism, she continued her search. Opening the door of the next room in her path, her hand scrapped along the wall looking for the light switch. Partially blinded by the bright lights, it took her a few moments to realize that what she had thought were rags on a settee was actually a body. Stumbling across the room, she choked, "I found him. I found, Peter."

"I'm on my way," Luke acknowledged. "Is he alive?"

Her mind a crazy mixture of hope and fear, Nikki knelt next to her friend, "Peter?"

"Hi." He tried to smile at her, but it came off as more of a wince.

Tears of pleasure found their way to Nikki's eyes. "You hang on," she whispered, taking one of his hands in both of hers.

"I'm trying." His voice was thick and unsteady.

Nikki clamped her lips, imprisoning a sob. They couldn't have come so close only to lose him now. She couldn't bear it.

Smells, characteristic of a hospital, filled Alexander's nostrils, making him shudder in remembered fear. They'd come so close to losing Peter - again. Only this morning, a long week after his rescue, his condition had finally been upgraded to stable.

The last seven days had been hell for Alexander. It had scared him, enough to wonder if he wanted to continue the work they'd started. Was it time to disband the Counterstrike team?

"Hello, Sir."

Limping across to the chair next to Peter's bed, Alexander was relieved to see a little color in the pale cheeks. "How are you feeling, Peter?"

"I'm not ready to run the marathon yet," Peter teased, "but then I never could."

A weak smile curved Addington's lips as tears clouded his vision. He had begun to think he'd never see Peter's smile again. "That's an old joke."

Frowning, Peter softly asked, "What's wrong, Alex?"

"I've been thinking," Alexander admitted, lowering himself with difficulty onto the hard chair, "I think you were right when you suggested we disband the team."

Peter shook his head, "I was wrong, Sir. Lying on that couch, I couldn't do anything, except think. I realized that what we were doing was important."

"More important than your life?"

"Yes. I wouldn't want to continue to do it if it wasn't. When I failed to save all the hostages, I buried myself so deep in recrimination, I'd almost forgotten what we set out to do."

"The opportunity to do things your way," Alexander remembered.

"Doing things my way may not always be the right way . . ."

". . . but its better than the wrong way."

Peter sheepishly nodded, "We've made an important contribution, Sir. We can't stop now. The job's not done yet."

Leaning heavily on his cane, Alexander rubbed tired eyes, "I'm not sure if I can continue." Raising his eyes to meet the younger man's, he admitted, "When they kidnapped you, it hurt. Almost as much as when they took Chantal. I learned one thing from this, I'm not as strong as I thought I was. I'm not strong enough to watch you die."

"You're stronger than you think," Peter gently contradicted, his face displaying the uncanny awareness that had disappeared when a hostage died. "You kept going when you lost your wife. My death might slow you down for a time, but it won't stop you."

His jaw clenched, his eyes slightly narrowed, Alexander pleaded, "How can you be so sure?"

"Because you know what we do is important. Nothing must be allowed to stop it. Not even death."

"Or taxes?" Addington said, a weak smile finding its way through the mask of uncertainty.

There was a depth to Peter's smile that had been missing for too long, "That would be asking for a miracle."

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!