

Special Minisode - Make a Wish by Ceridwyn, Part 1

Thanks to betas, Skeeter451, Commasplice, and Calliopes_Muse, and to Ceridwyn for giving us another Otaia Christmas. FYI, this is separated into two parts because of its length. Don't forget to click the link at the bottom to go on to Part 2.

Rating: R-ish for an Otaia "After Dark" scene that's not cut away. :D

Episode 7 - "The Study of Butterflies" by CharmedLassie will be up next Sunday.

Enjoy!!!

Boxes of Christmas ornaments and decorations were strewn around the living room, on the floor and on the table as Emma sought out her favorite ornament, a rather simple red ball, with her name embossed with glitter. Finding what she was looking for, she jumped up and went into the kitchen. Not finding her mommies there, she frowned slightly, wondering where they had gone.

"Mom? Ma? Where are you?" the girl asked, realizing that they probably hadn't gone too far as she could smell the cookies in the oven, and she knew Natalia wouldn't let them burn.

Stomping her feet in the back porch to clear the snow from her boots, Natalia shivered.

"Hey, sweetie, did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yep." Emma tilted her head to the side slightly. "What were you doing outside?"

"Just giving your mom a kiss. She had to make a run into the Beacon to pick something up."

Emma's inquisitive mind seemed to be working something out in her head. "But it's Christmas Eve. I thought she brought everything home with her."

"She thought so, too. But she got a call from Greg saying there was an emergency." Natalia thought, hoping that Emma might drop the line of questioning. When Olivia had gotten the call on her cell half an hour ago, Natalia was curious about what was going on, but her partner had demurred. Since she had the sense that nothing was wrong, she decided not to question it. Olivia would tell her when she was ready. Of course, Natalia considered, the last time Olivia was so secretive on a Christmas holiday, the older woman had managed to procure the piece of doorframe with Rafe's growth markings from her old Chicago apartment. Natalia smiled brightly; she still hadn't managed to find out

exactly how Olivia had managed that feat. The gift had been so thoughtful that it still brought her joy every time she saw it, which given its position in the upstairs bathroom, it was a constant pleasant reminder. Now though, Natalia mused fondly, the chart also held the markings of Emma's growth spurts over the past two years, and soon Francesca's would be added, Natalia mused fondly. How time flies.

The ding of the timer on the oven brought Natalia out of her thoughts as she smiled at her older daughter. "Em, do you want to get one of the cooling trays for me? We'll get these cookies out of the oven and put the next ones in."

"Can we put red and green sprinkles on them?" Emma asked eagerly.

"We sure can." Natalia grinned. "Are you going to take some with you over to your Daddy's tonight?" Since the threat of Edmund still lingered, Phillip had decided that he and Beth would host a Christmas celebration at the Spaulding Mansion. There would be plenty of security guards to look after the children, which would put many parents at ease.

"Do we have enough?" the girl asked curiously. "Because James sure can eat a lot of them. Peyton, too, even though she's not supposed to have too many sweet snacks since she is still little."

Natalia laughed. "Well then, you can tell your big brother that if he likes cookies so much, he should learn how to bake them himself."

Grinning, Emma said, "I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon." Helping Natalia put the cookies up on the rack got Emma thinking about something she wanted to ask. "Ma, do you know where the ribbon is? I wanted to put a fancy ribbon on the presents."

"Hmmm, I think it's next to the box with the craft supplies, Em."

"Thanks! Can you help me?"

"Sure. Let me just get the next batch of cookies into the oven and we'll clean things up first, okay?" she finished putting the dollops of cookie batter onto the tray as Emma moved to get the supplies that she needed. Resetting the oven timer, Natalia moved the dirty dishes into the sink to wash.

Emma was sitting at the table, kicking her legs back and forth as she wrapped the ribbon around the package like Natalia had shown her. She had scrunched her face, pulling her lower lip against her teeth as she concentrated on tying a knot on the soft present. It wasn't working the way she wanted to and she sighed.

Watching her daughter from her place standing against the doorframe, Olivia decided to help her girl out of her misery, and she spoke up, “Hey, Bean. Do you want some help with that?”

“Mommy! When did you get home?” Emma turned her face to greet her mother’s.

“Just now. I had to pick something up from the Beacon,” Olivia responded with a smile.

“I know. Ma told me,” Emma said quietly as she turned to figure out the puzzle that was the ribbon that didn’t want to tie properly.

“Don’t you want to know what it is?” Olivia grinned, feeling as much a kid as Emma did with presents. She hadn’t had much time for Christmas previously. For most of her middle daughter’s life, it had been just the two of them. Then she had gotten sick and she really hadn’t felt much like celebrating. She doted on Emma on the holidays but she hadn’t really felt the joy of them until Natalia entered their lives. Olivia smiled, counting her blessings; an extended family that she cared about and cared about her. Despite the challenges of the past couple of years, Olivia didn’t think she would change anything, even the things that hurt because it had brought her, Natalia and their families together. They were happy and stronger than before, and that was something Olivia didn’t think she would ever have.

Feeling her mother’s excitement, Emma nodded vigorously and dropped the package onto the table as she ran into the living room. Standing in the room was her big sister, Ava with a package that she held out for her. Emma ran over and gave her sister a big hug. “Merry Christmas, Ava!”

“Hey, Jellybean. Thanks for the great hug. Merry Christmas.”

“Yep. Big hug for my big sister. Do you want some cookies? We made them this afternoon.” Emma grinned.

“Sure, but don’t you want to open your present first?”

Emma looked to her moms to find out if it was okay. “We were just going to open presents tomorrow.”

“I think Mom and Natalia would be okay with this one. It’s a special one from Rafe,” Ava said with affection for her younger sister evident in her tone.

Emma’s eyes lit up. “Rafe?”

“He sent the package to me at the Beacon.” Ava nodded as she looked at her watch.

Emma took the present from her sister and sat down on the floor in front of the Christmas tree. As she tore through the brown paper, she smiled as she found a tan t-shirt and a pair of personalized dog tags. Lifting them up, she saw a note fall from the shirt. Curiously she picked it up.

Emma,

Hey Bean, I thought you might like a shirt like we wear sometimes when we're working.

I hear that you're learning martial arts; maybe by the time I get back you'll be ready to kick my butt, which I'm sure your mom might find ironic. Anyway, I was in the shop on base a couple weeks ago and saw this and thought of you. Though we're not related by blood, you're my little sister as much as Francesca is; never forget that.

*Love, your big brother,
Rafe.*

"Mom, what does ironic mean?" Emma asked.

Olivia closed her eyes as she laughed into Natalia's shoulder. *Trust that Emma would focus on that out of the entire letter. How exactly would she explain this to her daughter,* Olivia wondered. Imploringly, she looked up at her partner.

Natalia wrapped her arms around Olivia as she looked over at Emma. "Sometimes it just means that it's something different from what was expected, or the opposite of what was meant or intended."

Emma thought about that for a minute, her face scrunching up in a way very much like her mother's when she was trying to puzzle something out. Sometimes, Emma realized, adults don't make much sense. If they wanted to say something, just say it. Shaking her head, she focused on the items Rafe sent her, fingering the dog tags then smiling as she put them around her neck. The necklace settled against the coin pendant one he'd given her the year before. Maybe later, she would put the two items on the same chain.

Olivia looked over at her eldest daughter, noting again that she was looking at her watch. "Ava, do you have somewhere you need to be?" She knew that Phillip's invitation had extended to all of Olivia and Natalia's family but knew that they still had an hour and a half before they had to be over there.

"No. That's the second part of the Christmas present," Ava said coyly as she pulled her laptop out of her bag. She directed them all into the kitchen and booted up the laptop on the table. A few clicks of the trackpad and she had her Skype program up and running.

Typing a few words into the chat section, she smiled as she awaited the connection to start. When it came, she clicked on the video component.

“Hey, Ma, Olivia, Ava, Emma! Merry Christmas everyone,” Rafe said jovially.

Natalia covered her mouth with her hands, overcome. She hadn’t expected to talk to Rafe until the next day. “Raphael Rivera, you’re making me cry.”

“Sorry, Ma.”

“No, sweetie. They’re good tears, I promise. How?” Natalia felt Olivia’s arms wrap around her waist from behind, and she relaxed into her partner.

“I emailed Ava the other day. She mentioned you’re all headed out to Phillip’s, so I figured I’d get a call in today.”

“I got my present today. Thank you, Rafe!” Emma said as she proudly held up her dog tags that were on her chest.

“I’m glad you like them, Emma.” Rafe ran a hand through his shortened hair. “Ma, Olivia, I also have something for you that I sent to Ava, but she’s not to give that to you until later.”

“Rafe, you didn’t have to do that,” Olivia said gently, even though she was equal parts touched and curious.

Reaching around to scratching at the back of his neck in a familiar habit, Rafe paused and then spoke, “Yeah, I did.”

They got talking about various things, but kept it light in topics, and then Rafe started asking Emma what she thought she was going to get for Christmas presents; her enthusiastic replies sent the adults into various states of mirth. Finally they wrapped up the conversation, with a promise to talk again soon as it was getting time to get ready.

Ava packed her laptop into her case and turned to give her mother and Natalia a hug. She was about to head into the living room when she stopped suddenly. “Oh, I forgot I’ve got the gift from Rafe for you two.” She turned around and pulled a thick envelope from the side pouch of her case. “He made me promise that you wouldn’t open this until tonight.”

While Olivia’s natural curiosity fought to get the better of her, Natalia took the envelope and held it out of reach. She directed a sardonic look directed at her partner. “Later. I’ll make it worth your while.”

"I'll hold you to that," Olivia near growled in her love's ear. They became so lost in each other it took a loud cough from Ava to change their focus.

"Your children are present. I'd suggest getting a room, but you have one upstairs and we wouldn't have a hope of getting there before midnight or without psyches damaged from parental sex."

Olivia stuck her tongue out in response.

"Real mature, Mom," Ava said laughingly.

"Fine. Go get your sisters all ready for the night, and Natalia and I will get stuff packed up down here to take with us."

"If I come back down and find you two canoodling, I'm taking Emma and Francesca to the Beacon overnight."

"I'll take a rain-check for another night though, if you're offering." Olivia grinned lasciviously over at Natalia then curiously at her eldest.

"Mom. I don't need or want details."

"That's good. You're not getting them." Olivia made a shooing motion at her daughters. "Now, go get ready."

"Come on, Jellybean. Let's go get Francesca all bundled up." As the two sisters headed up the stairs, Ava asked her sister what she was wearing for the Christmas party. At the girl's response, Ava laughed. "No, sweetie, I don't think you should wear the shirt from Rafe tonight. How about a nice dress to show off for your daddy?"

In the living room, Natalia picked up the brown wrapping paper and folded it over, intending to toss it into the new paper recycle bin on the back porch; the bins for paper and plastic recycling had been one of Emma's ideas for the house that had come from her science class. She headed into the kitchen, depositing the wrapping paper, getting the cookies packed away in plastic containers, and then making sure she had food for Francesca to pack in the baby's carry-all. She'd been mostly quiet since Rafe's impromptu video call, and she'd focused her energies in getting things ready to head to the Spauldings.

When she'd run out of things to do, she stopped, resting against the countertop, head bent forward. She hadn't noticed Olivia had come into the room until she felt her

partner's familiar hold around her abdomen and nuzzling of her neck. She let go of the tears that had been threatening to fall since she entered the kitchen.

"Sweetheart," Olivia said softly into Natalia's ear. "Shhh. I've got you." After a few moments she spoke again, "Rafe?"

Natalia nodded, and then with her voice no louder than a whisper, she spoke. "I hate that he's so far away on Christmas." Natalia turned in Olivia's arms, wrapping her own around the older woman's neck, bringing them closer. Resting her head against Olivia's chest, she could hear the reassuring, regular rhythm of her partner's heart.

"I know it's hard for you. I wish I could make it easier for you." Olivia gently rubbed her arm in circles on her partner's back.

Natalia pulled back and placed a hand along Olivia's face. With a reassuring smile, she said gently, "You do. Every single day you are here for me. Every day Emma and our family are here."

Olivia pulled Natalia back against her chest and placed a kiss against her partner's temple. They stayed that way for a couple minutes then pulled back. Smirking, she said, "We better get moving before Ava comes down and we get another ribbing."

"Just wait until she finds a love of her own. Then it's payback time," Natalia quipped.

Reaching down, she gave Natalia's hand a squeeze before leading the younger woman through the living room and up to their bedroom. Olivia grinned. "I do love your devious side."

Jason and Kevin had been teasing their younger sister on and off throughout the day to the point that Blake had sent them out in the small backyard to wear off some energy. It was Clarissa's birthday and for most of the day the girl really hadn't had a good time.

Blake was feeling like she was overwhelmed with the boys being home. She wished she had a stronger sense of control over their behavior. They didn't seem to listen much to her, especially when Doris was around. It was becoming more frustrating. However, this was Christmas and Clarissa's birthday, and she was determined to make the best of it.

Looking down at her watch, she realized how late it was getting. She packed up the gift exchange packages and placed them into the duffle bag. Doris was coming over soon before they were all to head over to the Spaulding mansion, and they were going to do a small birthday celebration for Clarissa. She knew it was hard for her daughter having a

birthday on the holiday, because sometimes she felt the girl was short-changed, so each year she tried to make sure they did something completely separate that had nothing to do with Christmas.

When a distressed Clarissa arrived in the kitchen a few moments later, Blake was going to ask her why hadn't she gotten changed yet until she noticed her daughter's expression.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

"I can't find the shirt I wanted to wear!" an exasperated girl responded. "I've looked everywhere!"

"Did you check the laundry room?" Blake asked curiously, knowing that her daughter was often as absentminded as she was at times.

Clarissa rolled her eyes, this being a familiar exchange. "Yes, and my closet, under the bed, in the dresser. I said I checked everywhere."

"All right, honey. I'll go take a look," Blake said just as the doorbell rang. "Clarissa, can you get that? It should be Doris."

"Fine," the girl said resignedly. She liked Doris, but her annoyance regarding her shirt was compounded by her brother's teasing. Opening the door, she put a smile on her face as she greeted the other woman.

"Happy birthday, Clarissa. How are you?" Doris seemed to pick up that that was all as it seemed with the girl.

Clarissa shrugged her shoulders. "I've been better."

Doris stopped her movement of placing the present on the front hall table at Clarissa's slightly melancholy tone and she took a closer look at Blake's daughter. "Clarissa?"

"Bad day," was all the girl got out before her mother came back into the room.

Holding up the shirt Clarissa had been looking for, Blake raised her eyebrow when her daughter hadn't been happy with the item located. "Want to know where I found it?" At her daughter's shrug, she continued, "Laundry room, in the dryer."

"Thanks Mom," Clarissa said, sighing as she retrieved the shirt from her mother and headed down to her room.

Doris turned to Blake with a concerned look. "What was that all about?"

“The boys have been teasing her all day, nothing malicious but annoying. I finally sent them outside. I don’t know if this makes me a bad person or not – I love my kids, all of them, it’s just that I got used to having just Clarissa around with the boys over in Europe at school. I didn’t know things with them had gotten this out of control and it’s hard trying to reel them in.” Blake ran a frustrated hand through her wavy red hair. “I have a feeling it’s only going to get worse before it gets better.”

Doris put a hand on Blake’s upper arm, rubbing her thumb up and down. “Look it’s not easy. I know it’s not exactly the same situation here, but remember how much of a pain in the ass Rafe was, especially with Olivia? It’s going to take some time.”

“I guess.”

“Do you want me to check with Remy and Cyrus about trying to get the boys involved in something physical over at the gym? Focus their energies on something else?” Doris asked her gently.

“Really?” Blake looked almost pathetically grateful for the suggestion. “I never thought about anything like that.” Covering Doris’s hand with her own, she smiled and reached up to give her a little kiss. “Thank you.”

“Okay, since this is supposed to be about Clarissa’s birthday before she comes back I wanted to give you something before the party at the Spauldings,” Doris said. Fishing a small package out of her jacket pocket, she handed it over to the other woman.

Lighting up like she was a kid at a candy store, Blake took the offered item and quickly unwrapped the covering paper and looked at the plain white box. She was curious indeed. Gently prying off the lid she looked in and saw what it held and she laughed heartily.

Doris frowned slightly, a little taken aback with the response. “Okay, that’s not the reaction I was hoping for.”

“You will in a moment,” Blake said as she went to retrieve the gift she had for Doris from the counter. Handing it to the other woman, she smiled as she waited for Doris to open it.

Peeling back the tissue paper in the bag, Doris located a small package. Pulling it out and opening it, she put a hand to her mouth, barely containing her own chuckles. “Looks like we had the same idea,” Doris quipped as she held up a key ring with a solitary key.

“That we did,” Blake said with some mirth. “You’re welcome to use that when you want to come over. No excuses needed.”

Doris pulled her into a hug, and kissed the top of her head. It meant a lot to her to have someone she could depend on and share things with that didn’t involve hiding behind political walls and subterfuge. That didn’t mean it wasn’t going to be easy, but at least she acknowledged that sometimes the best things in life were definitely worth fighting for.

Pulling back after a moment, Blake smiled up at Doris. “We should clean up the packages before Clarissa comes back in. This bit of time before the party should be about her.”

“You know?” Doris started. “I had a friend in college whose birthday was between Christmas and New Year’s and got fed up with having to share a birthday with a big holiday, so she started celebrating her half-birthday in June. Maybe that’s something Clarissa might like to do; make a whole day that was only about her.”

“That’s a great idea. We can mention it to her,” Blake said as she went to the kitchen, indicating that Doris should follow her. Pulling the cake out of the fridge, she lay it on top of the counter and put some candles on it. She then covered it before Clarissa made her return.

The chime of the door rang and Blake turned her head in the direction of the front entrance. “Hang on, I’ll get that.” Making her way toward the door, she was surprised that the guest had already entered. “Mom?”

“Hey Blake.” Looking over her daughter’s form, she acknowledged the other woman, “Hi, Doris.”

Turning her attention back to her daughter, she smiled and asked, “So, where’s the birthday girl?”

“She’s upstairs getting changed, after a minor clothing catastrophe.”

“Catastrophe?” Holly asked curiously with a smile.

“She couldn’t find one of her favorite dress shirts that she wanted to wear tonight.”

“Ahhh,” Holly said nodding. Smirking she added, “Let me guess – laundry room?”

“How did you know?”

“Been there, done that.” Holly chuckled as she made her way into the kitchen, depositing a bag with Clarissa’s birthday presents on the counter.

Clarissa returned, hair brushed and wearing one of her favorite dressed-up outfits, and smiled at her mom. Then she smiled even bigger upon seeing her grandmother.

“Happy Birthday, darling,” Holly said.

“Hey, sweetie, can you go call in your brothers?” Blake asked her.

With an aggrieved sigh, the girl looked up her mother. “Do I have to?”

“Yes,” she drawled. “Come on, the sooner they come in and get ready, we can celebrate your birthday.”

“Yay!” Clarissa ran to the back door and on opening it, she called out, “Hey Dumb & Dumber, Mom said get in here.” After no response from either of them, she added, “There’s cake.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place?” Jason asked as he came up the deck stairs and in the back porch.

“What flavor is it?” Kevin added looking at his brother.

Clarissa shook her head, “It’s chocolate, and it’s mine, so if you don’t like it, too bad. I’ll bring some of it to the Spauldings to share with Emma, and you won’t get any. “

“Ooooh, Emma...we’re so scared,” Kevin teased as he and Jason pushed their way through the door, dumping their boots and jackets in the middle of the back porch.

“Boys, quit it. And hang up your coats,” Blake said sternly. When one of them was about to make a retort back, she raised her eyebrow and glared at them until they complied.

“Fine,” they both harrumphed. “Now, where’s the cake?”

Interjecting, Holly said sternly. “Hey, it’s your sister’s birthday. Show some respect.”

“Sorry. Happy Birthday, Clarissa,” Kevin said under duress. “Can we have cake now?”

“Go clean up first,” Blake told them.

Both the boys shook their heads, but headed down the hall to get changed and then wash their hands and face. Before long both were back in the kitchen awaiting a piece of cake.

Blake lit the candles. They sang 'Happy Birthday' to Clarissa and then they all dug into the chocolate cake. Once the dishes had been put away, they set up so Clarissa could open her presents.

Even though Company had been closed to the public since four that afternoon, Buzz was busy cleaning and making sure the storage bins were fully stocked for the next opening. Lillian had gotten all her work done getting tables prepped and was now propped up at the bar having a cup of tea and reading one of her favorite books, a spy novel Buzz gathered from the title of the book. The ringing of the bell over the door alerted them to the arrivals.

"Hey Pop, you're still here?" Frank asked, stomping the snow off his shoes at the entrance. Eleni was right behind him and joined her former father-in-law and Lillian.

"Yeah. Just wanted to make sure everything is all ready for the next shift." Buzz ran a hand through his thinning hair and looked over at them. "You folks all set to head out to Phillip's?"

"Yep. Did you need me to bring anything out for you?"

"No, it's all good. Phillip and Beth have got the food all looked after and we have the presents ready to take with us."

"All right then."

The door chime rang again as Marina entered and stopped as she looked around and saw her mother.

Huffing her displeasure, she went over to the bar. "Hi, Grandpa, Lillian, Dad." Ignoring Eleni, she went around the bar into the kitchen, only to have her father follow her.

"Marina -," Frank started, his voice lowered.

"What, Dad?" Marina asked as she went through the fridge in search of some leftovers she could take with her for her shift at the SPD.

"Look, would you do me a favour and cut your mother some slack?" Frank was getting frustrated with his daughter's continued disrespect of her mother.

"Why, what has she ever done for me, aside from giving birth to me?" She kept looking at containers, pointedly trying to ignore the disappointed look in her father's eyes.

“She has loved you every moment since you were born.”

“She has a funny way of showing it. Dumping me as soon as it became inconvenient to her,” Marina said closing the fridge door and leaning against it. Looking at her father with an incredulous expression, she started, “I mean, really? You, Alan-Michael, Dylan, and who knows what other himbos walked through the door?”

Frank slammed a hand down on the nearby counter. “Marina, stop it, that’s enough! We’ve been through this several times. She’s your mother. If you refuse to be happy for me and nice to her, will you at least be civil and not downright rude?” Running his hand through his hair in frustration he added, “I thought we got past this stage when you were fifteen.”

“Really, Dad?” Marina asked sarcastically.

“Marina, you’re behaving like a spoiled teenager when you’re a grown adult. And maybe that’s my fault, but I’ve had enough.”

Seeing as how she wasn’t going to get out of this discussion without some sort of conciliation, she responded with, “Fine. I will try.”

“That’s all I ask.” Frank let out a long sigh.

“Just don’t expect any miracles,” Marina said mostly under her breath. A little bit louder, she asked, “Do you know if Grandpa has any more of that beef stew left?”

Absentmindedly, Frank responded, “I think so, unless he was serving it up at lunchtime.”

“Okay, thanks. I’ll keep looking,” Marina said as she turned over to a second fridge. Looking back over her shoulder at her father, she tried to shake off the disagreement with her father. “I didn’t have time to make something earlier to take into work with me this evening so I figured that since there wasn’t anything going on at the station, I’d take a break and check out some leftovers.”

Curiously, Frank asked, “You’re working tonight?”

“Someone has to,” Marina said in a slightly derisive tone and shrugged her shoulders. “Everyone else, it seems, will be over at the Spauldings’. Shayne’s taking Henry over to be with the other kids, so I figured I may as well take the evening shift, give some of the other folks with kids an evening off.”

“You know, you could have asked to have it off. I’m sure we could have found someone to work tonight.”

Marina looked around the second fridge and found what she was looking for. Taking the leftovers out and placing them up on the countertop, she grabbed a take-out container and dished out a serving for herself. Not looking up, she responded, “Dad, I’m quite sure there are a few people there that aren’t going to be particularly fond of me being there, so just leave it be. Besides, Shayne and Henry are going to be home after the party so I’ll still get to spend Christmas with my little boy.”

“All right, I guess,” Frank said, a bit dejected that his whole family wouldn’t be together.

Marina turned to face her father again. “Have a good time. Take lots of pictures of my little sister and Henry.”

“Will do.” Frank backed out of the kitchen back into the main area of the restaurant to find everyone looking at him.

“Everything okay back there?” Buzz asked, after having heard the raised voices a few moments before. Frank gave a wave of dismissal. “Yeah, things will work out on its own, I think.”

Buzz wasn’t so sure about that, but he decided to let it go for now. “So, are we all ready to head out?” Buzz asked.

Frank and Eleni looked around, checking that packages were all in order, and then Frank popped his head back through the kitchen door. “Marina, we’re all heading out. Make sure you lock up when you’re done.”

“Actually, I’m all done, so I’ll walk out with you.”

Frank waited for his daughter to pass by him then moved through the restaurant to the exit. Pulling the door shut, he locked it and checked the Holiday Hours of Operation sign was still on the door: *Closed for Christmas. Reopening on December 26th 9am-7pm.*

“Emma, are you ready?” Olivia called out to her middle daughter from the kitchen. Walking to the entry to the room, the girl had her jacket on and her backpack over her shoulders. She sighed. “Yes, Mom. I’ve been ready for like forever.”

Natalia giggled at Emma’s response. “Well, you’re ahead of your mother.”

Olivia sighed. “Speak for yourself.”

“Oh, I’ve been ready for like forever, too.” Natalia grinned and she saw Emma’s responding giggle. She looked up and saw Ava enter the room with Francesca all bundled up in her arms.

“She’s all set. I put a couple extra diapers in her bag just in case,” Ava said smiling as she handed her over to Natalia. “Now, I’ve just got to grab my coat and purse and I’ll be set as well.”

Emma stopped for a second and turned to her mother. “Mom, did you pack Clarissa’s birthday present in the bag, too?”

“Yep. All in,” Olivia said looking around. “I’m just going to make a run through to make sure we’re not forgetting anything. Bean, you’ve got your pajamas packed in your backpack?”

“Uh huh. And books.” Emma grinned, and then stopped to think for a moment. “Is Aunt Leyla going to the party?”

“She’s meeting us there; she was going with Jonathan and Sarah,” Natalia responded.

“Okay, we have the Christmas presents, Clarissa’s birthday presents, pajamas for the kids, and Francesca’s supplies. Am I forgetting anything?” Olivia asked, not missing the slightly annoyed frown that crossed her eldest’s face when Natalia mentioned who Leyla was going with to the party. She raised an eyebrow at her daughter wondering if she was going to make anything of the situation. After a moment, at the shake of Ava’s head, Olivia nodded.

Seeming to miss the unspoken conversation between her mother and sister, Emma grinned and called out, “Camera!”

Grinning at her daughter and her love of taking pictures, she sent the girl off. “Go get it, Em. You can put it in your backpack.”

“Yay!”

“All right. All packed up. Let’s get a move on.” Olivia grabbed the SUV keys off the counter; she’d booked one of the Beacon’s four-wheel drives for the night as there was snow expected that night and Olivia didn’t want to tempt fate. They got everyone out of the house doors locked, and then loaded everyone and their belongings into the vehicle. As she got Francesca into her car seat, she looked over to Natalia. “We really need to look at getting one of these SUVs for the family on a full time basis. Especially with all the stuff we’re starting to cart back and forth now, and extra passengers.” It was getting

tighter packing stuff into her Nissan or in the back of Natalia's older car. "We can trade in either yours or mine."

"If you're looking at trading or selling the Nissan, Mom, I could buy it from you," Ava noted as she climbed into the back seat between her sisters.

"We'll see. Remind me another time." Getting in the car and starting the ignition. "Okay folks, we're off to the lion's den."

"Mommy," Emma giggled. "We're just going to Daddy's."

Olivia looked over and shared a grin with Natalia. She had to admit, if it hadn't been for Natalia's influence and care that Olivia's friendship with her ex-husband might have never been repaired. It had taken a long time for her to accept that Phillip's motivations and life had turned around. It took almost losing him both as a friend and as Emma's father before she began to rebuild her trust in the man.

As Olivia drove up to the Spaulding mansion, the house was lit up with lots of tastefully placed Christmas lights and wreaths hanging from the pillars at the entrance, and the poles along the curved driveway. One of the security guards directed her to a place to park the vehicle and as they exited the car, Emma's eyes lit up and a large smile crossed her face as she took in the scenery.

"Wow, Mommy, isn't it beautiful?"

"It is, sweetie. Can you grab your backpack for me and we'll get it over your shoulders?"

"Merry Christmas, ladies," the guard greeted them. "Do you need any help?"

"I think we've got it all," Natalia said as she picked up her daughter from her car seat. "But thank you, Keith."

The man smiled at her. He'd only met her a few times as she'd dropped Emma off at her father's, but he appreciated that she'd taken the time to learn his name. "You're welcome, Ma'am."

"Please, just call me Natalia," she said as she smiled. "Have many arrived yet?"

"Just Mr. Billy Lewis and his wife so far, Ma'am...I mean, Natalia."

"Thank you. Merry Christmas, Keith. All the best to you and your family," Natalia said before turning to head up the walkway towards the front of the house. Noticing that only Emma was next to her, Natalia turned back to look at Olivia, who had a rather bemused look on her face. "Are you coming?"

"Not yet, but maybe later if you're good," Olivia said under her breath as she smirked at her partner. The comment resulted in an elbow landing against her side from her eldest daughter.

"Can't leave you two alone for a minute," Ava said, shaking her head even as she smiled. She was really glad that her mother had found the happiness she'd been looking for.

"Not if I can help it." Olivia's eyes sought out the deep brown eyes of her partner and they stood locked into that shared glance.

"I'd say get a room, but I know Phillip has lots of them in that house. Try to avoid his library this time," Ava quipped as she quickly maneuvered up the driveway. Turning around, she noted the mock shocked look on her mother's face and laughed. Putting a hand on her sister's back she led them up the steps. "Come on, Bean."

Natalia laughed as Olivia pulled up alongside her.

"You'd think she knows us so well," Olivia said as she joined her partner in laughter. "By the way, how do you do that with remembering the security guard's names?"

"I asked one time. It makes a difference when people acknowledge you by name," Natalia said, smiling as they joined their daughters on the top step.

Emma stepped up and pressed the door bell and it was quickly answered by her father, who turned and picked her up into his arms.

"Merry Christmas, Daddy!" Emma said, smiling widely.

"Merry Christmas, Jellybean," he said, giving her a hug and putting her down on the floor in the foyer, and then welcomed the rest of the Spencer-Rivera clan. "Welcome ladies. Come on in." He extended his arm through the front hall where he directed them where to hang up their coats and place boots.

As the evening progressed and more people arrived, the volume of conversations and laughter increased. All sorts of food and drinks had been prepared and served for the children and the adults. Inside the large living room, the fireplace was decorated with bows and garland and small ornaments adorned the marble mantle. Many of the guests were mingling, while others stayed in groups of two or three. A few of the children had

gotten together to play a board game, while James had snagged Blake's boys into the games room to play some video games to keep them out of trouble after he'd caught them trying to explore the house on their own.

In one corner, Reva was talking with Jonathan and Shayne as Colin sat on her lap and Henry on Shayne's; Sarah had elected to go over with Emma and Clarissa. Josh and Billy were sitting on some chairs near the fireplace talking about business. Ed Bauer was standing talking with Lillian and Buzz. Matt, Rick and Mindy were talking with Danny and Michelle; their children playing nearby. Remy and Christina stood with Clayton talking with Bill, Lizzie and their son. In another area, Ava stood talking with Ashlee and Daisy, both of whom had come home for the holidays. Trying to avoid looking over at the Boudreaus and Lewises because it still hurt years later, Ava glanced over to where her mother and Natalia were talking with Doris, Blake, Holly, Anna and Callie. Ava decided it was probably time to deal with the pain of losing Max by finally making an appointment to see Dr. Boudreau.

Frank and Eleni stopped speaking with Buzz and Lillian when Frank heard a familiar voice and laugh and his head turned quickly around to see Dinah talking with her mother entering the room from the hallway.

"What's she doing here?" Frank asked in a loud and annoyed voice. People turned from their conversations to look at him.

Shayne Lewis stood to head in Frank's direction, trying to cut him off at the pass before things got heated. "Frank?"

Frank's started to grow aggravated. "She's should be behind bars." If it were up to him, Dinah Marler would be locked up for life. It stung his pride that she'd skipped out of the country before he had the chance to arrest her for the death of the fake Edmund. He'd already added onto the murder charge a charge of evading police authority.

Doris and Beth turned in his direction. Looking over at her work partner, Beth stepped forward and pointedly said, "Frank, you do remember that she was released on bail until the trial. As long as she doesn't leave the county, she's free to move around as she pleases."

"And what's to stop her? She disappeared before," Frank responded sarcastically.

"I've surrendered my passport, Chief Cooper, as a show of good faith," Dinah said calmly as she stood just inside the room entrance. She refused to get into a shouting match with the man.

“As if that means anything,” Frank grouched. “With your contacts you could find another one pretty easily.”

Buzz came up and put a hand on Frank’s arm, trying to calmly bring his son down from the building confrontation.

Turning around to face his father, Frank said, “No, Pop. She needs to be in jail. She can’t be trusted.”

Even though Dinah was a friend, Olivia stayed out of this argument. The other woman had plenty of people in her corner and she nodded her head in Dinah’s direction that she supported her. Many of them had been through the similar conversation at Francesca’s birthday, and Olivia refused to be baited into another argument with Frank today. Speaking of support, Olivia noted Phillip come up from behind her heading towards Frank.

“Frank, I suggest you calm down. Dinah is my cousin and I invited her here for this Christmas celebration,” Phillip said calmly, but his steely blue eyes narrowed at the other man.

A derisive expression crossed Frank’s face. “And I suppose you paid her bail?”

“Not that it’s any of your concern, but yes, I did.” Phillip’s arms remained by his side, but the slight clenching and unclenching of his hands were one of the few outward signs of his displeasure.

“Figures.” Frank snorted. Despite the tentative truce between the Spauldings and Coopers that had been built over the past two years, the decades old animosity sometimes reared its head on occasion. Frank’s distrust of the Spaulding fortune and influence went deep.

“Frank, this is a Christmas celebration with friends and family. You are dangerously close to being asked to leave.” Phillip was fast losing his patience, but refused to be baited into a physical altercation with the police chief.

“What, you’re going to physically toss me out yourself, or will one of your lackeys?”

Buzz stepped out in front of his son, and pulled at his arm. In a steady voice, he said, “Frank, stop now.

This is neither the time nor place to have this argument. We are guests here tonight. Don’t ruin this.”

When he noticed Frank seemed to be standing his ground, he added, “Frank, your daughter and grandson are here, and they can see you getting more and more agitated.

They won't understand what's going on, but everyone else can. Do you really want to continue this now?"

Frank sighed and ran a shaking hand through his hair as he looked around the room; first at his daughter who'd curled up tightly into Natalia's arms, the little girl's face tucked against the woman's dark curls; and then he glanced over to Henry who was timidly tucked against Shayne's side, looking back at him. After a moment he looked around the room, seeing the attention he had drawn to himself during the argument, none of it good; young and old alike were disappointed in him. Blowing out a long breath, he stopped and looked over at Phillip and then Dinah.

"This isn't over, not by a long shot. However, it won't be tonight." Heading towards the front hall, he spoke, a little calmer, "I'll see myself out." He looked over at Eleni expectedly then huffed when she shook her head indicating that she wasn't following. "Fine." Frank moved to the closet and retrieved his leather jacket and left the house.

There was almost a collective sigh of relief from the room as the click of the door came. Buzz turned towards Phillip, Beth, and Dinah. Lowering his head slightly for a moment he raised it apologetically. "I'm sorry folks. I really don't know what's gotten into him lately."

Whispering into Olivia's ear, Doris said, "A bug up his ass, probably."

This had the fortunate, or unfortunate, response of Olivia cracking up laughing. When people turned in her direction wondering about the bout of hilarity, Olivia shrugged her shoulders, trying to calm her mirth. "Sorry, Buzz."

"No, that's okay, Olivia," Buzz responded with a smile. He hadn't heard what had struck the woman's sense of humor, but at the moment, he didn't care – just that it had. "It's a joyous sound and something that we need right now."

Olivia nodded, not sure she could respond without bursting into another round of laughter.

Leaning over, Buzz smiled and softly asked her, "I probably don't want to know what started that, do I?"

"No." Olivia smiled affectionately at the older man.

"If you want to hear her laugh like that some more, I've got a few jokes to tell," Billy Lewis called over the conversation, which led to a few laughs and a few groans from the room's attendants.

“Dear, I think we want people to enjoy themselves, not run screaming out the door,” Vanessa responded to her husband. Giggles around the room could be heard in response.

“At least they’re clean ones,” Billy retorted.

“I’ve heard your clean jokes, Billy,” Josh said with a big grin. “I’d run screaming.”

“Billy, I have a better job for you,” Phillip said as he smiled. At the other man’s quirk of interest, Phillip continued, “It’s a big one, but I think you’re up for it. This job requires a clear voice with lots of care to tell such an important story.”

“Sounds like a big order,” Billy commented wryly, watching as Phillip went to pull a well used book from one of the shelves and handed it to him. “A big order indeed.”

Billy Lewis cleared his throat as he opened the book, and began to read *The Christmas Story*. As the story progressed, families drew closer to each other around the fireplace and Christmas tree; younger children lying in parent’s laps, older children sitting nearby.

“Look at the child as the angel told us,” the shepherds said, “Let us explain”, a bright light appeared out of the heavens.

We were greatly worried and afraid but an angel appeared and told us, “Fear not: I bring you good tidings of Great Joy for all people.

Today! In the city of David a Savior is born, Christ the Lord.

You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.”

Then there was a heavenly multitude in the sky praising God and singing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

“Oh what a blessed child this is! What a Beautiful night! We will not stay long but we had to come and see the miracle that was told us. You understand?”

“Yes,” Mary replied, “This is a wondrous miracle!” Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

“We will be off now, we must get back to our flock. Thank You!”

As they went, they rejoiced and told everybody they met about the miracle that took place that night.

A couple days later when the streets of Bethlehem soon returned to normal Mary and Joseph found a nice place to stay. They were so happy for all that the Lord had done!

When the story finished, Billy closed the book gently, glancing around the room at the families and found joy in his own, and being thankful as he could have been lost to them not so long ago.

Noticing the restless (and in a few cases, sleeping children), Beth chuckled. “Actually, as it’s getting late and the younger kids are getting more tired, how about we do their gift exchange now?”

“That sounds like a great idea,” Natalia responded, already feeling the weight of her tired daughter in her arms.

When the invitations for the Christmas party had been sent out, they’d asked the families with young children, infants and toddlers to mark the outside of the packages with age-appropriate gifts, and those with older children to do the same. Phillip and Natalia had decided in advance that Natalia and Olivia would look after the gift exchange presents for the infants and toddlers, including Francesca, and Phillip and Beth would look after the ones for the middle-age and teenage kids, including Emma.

Handing their daughter over to Olivia, Natalia joined Beth over near the Christmas tree. They went and gathered the presents into different groups. While they were doing that, Phillip called for James to bring Blake’s twins down for the presents. They started with the youngest kids, handing the presents to the parents and some of the kids that could open them. Gradually all the presents had been given out, child and adult alike. Springfield’s residents were surprised, amused, and occasionally confused.

“And what exactly am I supposed to do with this?” Reva asked as she held up a cordless electric drill.

Doris leaned over and casually commented in Olivia’s ear. “Well, you know what they say about women and power tools? Mind you, the idea of her playing on our team scares the living hell out of me.”

Unfortunately for Olivia, she happened to have a mouthful of very good vodka in her mouth at the time, and her friend’s comment resulted in Olivia choking on the liquid.

“Olivia?” Natalia was quickly checking her partner over as others looked in their direction wanting to make sure the other woman was going to be all right. “Are you okay?” Natalia asked, picking up one of Olivia’s hand with her own, and placing her other on her partner’s cheek.

After several more attempts to clear her throat, she nodded at her partner affectionately before turning a glaring look at Doris. "Warn a girl before you say something like that," Olivia said, still coughing slightly.

Doris held up her hands in supplication and tilted her head, but a smirk still remained on her face.

"I'm fine, everyone," Olivia said with more conviction than she felt, but she didn't want all the attention directed on her any more than they already had. Resting back against the chair she was sitting in, she pulled Natalia against her. As everyone returned to their previous conversations, Olivia looked down at her watch.

Phillip, still looking over at his ex-wife to make sure she was okay, noticed she was checking the time and he wandered over in Olivia and Natalia's direction.

"Have somewhere more important to be, Olivia?" he said with a smirk, even though he knew the reason. She had called him earlier to tell him of her plans and had asked if he minded keeping the girls overnight and dropping them off in the morning for them to open presents at home at the farmhouse. He was only too happy and honored that she had asked.

Olivia smiled. "In fact, I do."

"Olivia?" Natalia turned her head to meet her partner's eyes.

"Everything all set up?" Olivia asked Phillip.

"Em's got all her stuff in her room and we put the extra crib in the room as well. We could have put Francesca in with Peyton, but Emma insisted on having her sister with her."

Grinning, Olivia responded, "Of course she did."

"What's going on, Olivia? Why are the girls staying here over night?" Natalia asked a little concerned; looking back and forth between Olivia and Phillip. She was sure that it was more than just the security precautions they'd been taking since Edmund had disappeared from the hospital.

"I have a question to ask you," Olivia said gently, taking Natalia's hand in her own and rubbing circles against the back of the hand with her thumb. "I was wondering if you would like me to accompany you to the Midnight Mass service at the church."

Tears began to track down Natalia's face as she took in Olivia's invitation. Slowly she wrapped her arms around her partner's shoulders and nuzzled her neck.

"A good surprise?" Olivia grinned, though she knew Natalia couldn't see her expression.

"Very good." Natalia drew back from her partner slightly to look into her face. "I love you, *querida*."

Olivia leaned forward and met Natalia in a loving kiss. On releasing her partner's lips, Olivia pressed her forehead against the younger woman's. "It's almost time to go, so why don't you go get Francesca settled and I'll get Emma into her pajamas."

After a few moments, they gathered Francesca who'd fallen asleep in Ava's arms, and Emma, who'd been coloring in some new books with Clarissa and Maureen.

"See you in a few minutes," Emma said to her friends. It was a late night but she'd been having fun, especially when James was showing her some new games earlier. It reminded her of when Rafe would do the same when he came home. Idly she ran her fingers over the dog tags and coin pendant she'd added since she'd opened the package earlier; her brother may be far away, but he was still here in spirit.

Blake and Doris stood as well. "We should get going as well," Blake said as she looked over at her daughter and saw the drooping eyes despite the girl's attempt to keep them open. As for her sons, she figured she'd get them out before they could do too much damage. "We'll just wait until Emma gets back so she can say good bye."

Over the next hour, Phillip and Beth said good bye to most of their guests, especially those with small children. A few remained and shared stories of the past year with hopes and dreams for the upcoming year.

The snow that they were expecting earlier had just begun to fall, laying a fresh layer over what was on the ground, making for a very picturesque appearance as Olivia and Natalia pulled up to the parking lot in front of the church.

Already, the sounds of the Christmas carols could be heard from outside as they made their way up the steps. Natalia reached out and wrapped a gloved hand in Olivia's and looked over at her. "Thank you, again."

"You're very welcome." Olivia smiled. "I wanted to be here with you tonight."

As they crossed the threshold into the gathering area, they spoke with some of the other parishioners, greeting them and wishing them well. As they got closer to the entrance to the body of the church, they met with Father Ray, who seemed surprised to see Olivia with Natalia.

"It's so good to see you, Natalia," Father Ray spoke as he shook her hand. "How are you?"

"I'm good, Father. Thank you." Natalia nodded. "I may not have Raphael home this Christmas but I have my family here, which means so much to me."

"I'm glad," Father Ray said tightly as he looked over to Olivia, whose hand still rested within Natalia's free hand.

"Good to see you, Father," Olivia said with a polite smile.

"You, too. Take care." His attention was diverted as another family came up to meet with him, so he left the two women to proceed into the church.

Quickly as they entered, they met with Sister Anne, who was handing out programs to the Mass. Handing the programs over to one of the other volunteers, she turned and enveloped Olivia and Natalia in hugs. "I'm so glad both of you could make it."

"You knew she was going to come?" Natalia asked Sister Anne about Olivia. She smiled at her partner's thoughtfulness.

Sister Anne smiled. "I knew. Olivia called me the other day. I think she was rather nervous." Shooting an amused grin at Olivia, she continued, "The church won't blow up if you decide to come in the doors on a regular basis, you know."

"Shhhh. Don't say things like that. With my history, it will be a jinx," Olivia said, half as a joke, but she wasn't entirely sure that bad things wouldn't happen. History has a tendency to repeat itself, and while she had never been responsible for a church exploding before, she was always sure something bad was going to come her way, just as things were going well for her. However, tonight, she was going to be there for Natalia. She still wasn't sure she had faith in any higher power or anything, but she did have faith in Natalia and everything her partner had done for her since she came into her life. *I might even remember some of the rituals of the Mass from when I was little.*

"No jinxes here, Olivia. You're welcome, just as any other parishioner. We all seek answers, just not always in the same place or same being," Sister Anne said gently. "Now, I must help give these programs out. I will see you later. Take care." She wrapped them

both in a quick hug again, before retrieving the programs from the volunteer and smiled as they walked hand in hand down the aisle.

The Mass had been beautiful, Olivia acknowledged. The sounds of the instruments and the voices of the choir blended so nicely with the decorations and created an ambiance that was soothing. When she had been a child, being dragged to the church by her mother, she grew to dislike going, especially as she grew older. She saw how her mother had clung to the words of the island priest, picking and choosing which teachings to follow and force on her kids. At least that's how Olivia had seen it at the time. It wasn't like she was suddenly going to find religion by being here with Natalia, that wasn't her, but she did appreciate how much the church meant to Natalia, and she'd found an uncanny friendship with a nun that she'd never dreamed of having. She'd held Natalia's hand through most of the service, which had gained a few raised eyebrows, but for the most part, people kept to themselves. Olivia had even surprised herself to be caught singing along with one of the hymns she'd remembered.

When the Mass was over, they filed out of the church. Natalia had gotten in the car as Olivia took the scraper out of the back seat to clear off the windows from the dusting of snow. Tossing the scraper back into the vehicle, Olivia climbed into the driver's seat and started the vehicle.

Turning to face her partner, Natalia gave her a tired smile. "Thank you, so much."

"You really don't have to thank me. I wanted to do this with you." Olivia picked up Natalia's hand and placed a kiss into the palm. Looking into her partner's eyes, she leaned in to give her a kiss. She'd had only intended it to be a short, gentle kiss, but it had grown significantly to a very passionate kiss. When she pulled back, she looked at the desire that passed over Natalia's features, and she grinned widely.

"Much as I would *love* to explore the lovely large back seats in this SUV, I don't think doing so on Christmas Eve in the parking lot of the church would be a very good idea."

Natalia sighed as she tried to get her breathing back under control. She'd almost thought to heck with that and was tempted to pull Olivia back there to give it a try, but her partner was maddeningly right; it was neither the time nor place to make love with her, as much as she wanted to. Besides, she could imagine getting caught by Springfield's finest having sex in a car on Christmas at the church. Fortunately, that image alone was enough to calm her hormones – at least until they got home. Then, it was going to be fair game. *What Olivia did to her...*

Pulling up to the farmhouse with a fresh blanket of snow covering the ground and the white Christmas lights that Olivia had hung over the porch it gave an ethereal glow to the house. The chill in the air caused their breaths to plume and they wrapped

themselves up in each other for a moment to enjoy the quiet atmosphere. Despite their jackets and being bundled together, Olivia started to feel a slight shiver from her partner, so she turned and opened the front door, guiding her into the house.

Once inside, she removed their coats, placing them on the hooks, turning off the outside lights and locking the doors, she then pulled Natalia into the kitchen, starting the kettle for some tea to warm them. Reaching over on the counter, she turned on the small radio they usually listened to during breakfast, or when Natalia was cooking.

“Dance with me,” Olivia said, holding her hand out. As Natalia stood and came into her arms, they moved slowly to the music.

*Make a wish
Take a stand
You know I'm trying hard to understand
I'll open my eyes,
Breathe the air
I got these dreams that I'll take you there*

“You are my wish,” Olivia whispered into Natalia’s ear. “My dreams, and my reality.”

The whistle of the kettle blew alerting them of the boiled water. Slowly drawing apart, Olivia leaned into kiss Natalia. She then turned and poured the hot water over the teabags and grabbed some cookies from a container on the counter. Guiding Natalia over to the kitchen table, she handed the other woman her mug and cookies then got the milk from the fridge and honey from the cupboard. As she sat down, Olivia noticed the envelope Rafe had sent to Ava for them.

Gingerly picking it up out of curiosity, Olivia ran fingernail under the edging and lifted the seal. On a plain sheet of paper was a handwritten note addressed to them both.

Dear Ma and Olivia,

I know I haven't always been the best son; I've disappointed both of you many times over. I know I can't erase the hurt I've caused. If there's anything this past year has taught me, it's that life and the time we have in this life is precious. From Grandpa Alan to the friends I've lost in battle, it's made me appreciate that I do have my family and friends that I care about and who care about me.

I look at my friends here; many have families, but there are others that have very little outside the Army. I've got a great bunch of guys here in this platoon, but it's not the same as being home with you all.

I know you're getting married soon, and it wasn't that long ago that I was furious with you being together, but I've had time to grow and realize a few things; number one was that I was being an ass. Sorry, Ma, but I was. I wish that I could be there for the ceremony, but since I can't, and even though you wouldn't need it, I give you both my blessing for a beautiful marriage and a wonderful life together. Take care of yourselves, and my sisters.

Talk to you soon,

Love, Raphael

By the time Olivia finished reading the letter aloud, both women had tears freely rolling down their faces, without an attempt to wipe them away. She lay the letter down on the table and enveloped Natalia into a tight hug, letting the emotion wash over both of them.

"That was..." Natalia started, but was feeling overwhelmed. "I can't believe he wrote that."

"I can," Olivia said, taking her thumb to brush at the tears still rolling down Natalia's cheeks. "It was beautiful. And I can believe it because you are his mother. You taught him well."

"Not always," Natalia said wryly.

Olivia smiled at her, acknowledging her statement. "We try to do what's best for our children. We teach them what they need to know and how to respond in situations, but sometimes life is a crap shoot. Sometimes things are beyond our control. But we remind them that they're loved, we hope that what we teach them can make a difference."

"I love you, Olivia; your wit, your intelligence, your strength, and yes, sometimes even your humor."

"You do find me funny," Olivia said with a big grin. "I knew it!"

Natalia rolled her eyes, and then she leaned in to kiss Olivia, starting slowly and building to a fevered pitch. As the kiss slowed down and broke, both of them fought to control their breathing. Natalia slid her hands down Olivia's arms to wrap her hands with her partner's, leading her quietly through the house, and up to their bedroom.

Closing the door behind them, Natalia dimmed the lighting. Slowly she turned around and removed Olivia's dress jacket and folding it over a nearby chair. The rest of her pantsuit followed until the woman stood in a matching dark green lacy bra and panties. Natalia looked over her partner's body with desire.

"I think someone's over dressed," Olivia said, closing in on Natalia, wrapping her arms around her and unzipping her dress. Slowly drawing the dress down her partner's body, Olivia followed the movement down with her mouth, kissing a path down her neck, over breasts and along her abdomen. The dress pooled on the floor and Olivia guided Natalia over to the bed. Drawing down the sheets and blankets, Olivia sat on the edge, bringing Natalia to stand between her legs. She kissed at Natalia's neck as her hands explored Natalia's back, reaching up to unhook the other woman's bra. Sliding the straps down Natalia's shoulders, Olivia then lifted a hand to run a fingernail over a revealed full breast. She could feel Natalia shiver under her touch and then a low moan as she drew a hardened nipple into her mouth.

"Olivia," Natalia whispered hoarsely. Her knees felt like they were going to give out from under her. She placed her hands on her partner's shoulders in an attempt to steady herself, but instead she felt her body being lifted onto the bed, lying atop her partner. Taking in the sensations, Natalia stayed still a moment until the need to move against her grew steadily. She began to kiss along her partner's neck and up her jaw before laying claim to Olivia's lips as her hands reached behind the other woman to release the bra hooks. She took a moment to push herself up and remove the bra, tossing it over her shoulder to fall on the floor. Returning to Olivia's lips, Natalia growled out, "I need you."

"You have me," Olivia responded as she drew the brunette's lower lip in with her teeth. Breast to breast, her body felt like it was on fire, and this was one fire she aimed to stoke for the rest of her life. She rolled over onto her side and then pushed up on the bed, bringing Natalia with her. Hooking her fingers into the band of Natalia's underwear, she pushed them down as far as she could, then she brought her foot up to take them down the rest of the way. She rolled them both over until she was partially lying over Natalia, one thigh pushed against Natalia's center. Raised up on her elbows, she trailed kisses along the brunette's face and rubbing their breasts against each other causing a very pleasant friction. Lowering herself onto Natalia, she allowed her hands to wander, crossing the other woman's sides and up her torso to come between them to caress the underside of her breasts.

Olivia's passion was growing and, she acknowledged, so was the wetness between her legs, with an ache that needed to be addressed. However, she was determined to address her equally wet partner. As one hand continued to massage and tease Natalia's breast and nipple, her other wandered down her torso to curve against the brunette's center. Rubbing her fingers over an already engorged clitoris, she began to add some pressure behind her strokes.

"I...I want you inside. Now...Olivia," Natalia groaned out, barely able to speak coherently.

Wanting to give her partner everything she wished, Olivia slid two fingers into Natalia's sex, slowly pushing and pulling her fingers through wet ridges and silken walls, building a rhythm steadily increasing the pressure, using her thigh as a counter lever. Sliding her fingers out, she gently added a third finger and pushed hard against the inner walls. Even as she continued the steady movement below, she lifted her body slightly then leaned down to capture a hardened nipple into her mouth, sucking and laving the nipple. Not wanting to leave the other breast unloved, she brought her other hand up to roll and massage it until the woman below her was writhing in passion. Before long, she could feel the contractions of Natalia's inner walls against her fingers, and then the brunette's body grew taut with tension before collapsing back onto the sheets. Climbing back up alongside her partner, Olivia lay against her, gracing her shoulders and then her neck with light kisses before claiming Natalia's lips with her own.

They took a slight rest before Natalia turned, her body pushing Olivia over onto her back. She looked down at her lover and smiled radiantly. "That was amazing." Leaning down and kissing Olivia, she began to move her lips over the older woman's face and down her neck. "You make me feel so beautiful. And now, I want to show you exactly how wonderful you are."

Making her way down Olivia's chest, she slid her fingers over her breasts causing the older woman to push up into her hands. Rolling the nipples between her fingers, she created the friction bringing them into stiff peaks before removing one of her hands and covering the nub with a heated mouth, sucking on the nipple. Pushing her hips downwards she began to slide her clitoris against Olivia's, rubbing back and forth, their mutual wetness continuing to grow. With her hand on Olivia's chest she could feel the other woman's heart beating strong and steady but quickly. Feeling her partner's legs come up and wrap around her thighs, keeping her close and the pressure of the friction tighter, and she noticed her own climax was rapidly rebuilding. Releasing Olivia's breast from her mouth, Natalia pushed her torso up, causing her clit to press directly over Olivia's. Keeping her eyes open, she looked down at the passion-darkened green of her partner's eyes gazing back at her and then she let the wave of her orgasm pass over her, as she felt the tremors coming from Olivia beneath her.

Not having the ability to speak at the moment, Olivia drew Natalia back against her as their breathing and heart rates tried to return to normal. Feeling the coolness of the air against their sweat-soaked skin, Olivia pulled the sheets and duvet back over their bodies.

"Merry Christmas, sweetheart," Olivia said softly against Natalia's lips.

"Feliz Navidad, cariño."

Nothing further was said as they slid into slumber, content and quiet as they waited for morning to come and the children to return to open presents.

OVS Minisode - Harsh Words, Soothing Sounds by Skeeter451

In honor of today being the International Day of Femslash, Team OVS has a minisode to kick off our planning for Season 3. Look for a few more between today and the first episode in mid-January, and maybe a few other surprises. ;)

Harsh Words, Soothing Sounds

by Skeeter451

Olivia turned her gaze away from the blue sky the private airplane was jetting through when she heard a soft snore from the woman sitting next to her. Reva had earlier made sure she was buffered from Jeffrey, using Olivia, Jonathan and Anna as barricades to keep her husband at bay. Olivia had seen the hurt look in Jeffrey's eyes as the man took a seat at the back of the plane and to her surprise Olivia couldn't find a shred of sympathy in her heart. While she knew she'd do anything to protect her family, she felt that running away and leaving them alone would be the worst possible choice. So many times in the past year, Edmund could have struck against Reva and Colin despite Anna's and Jonathan's vigilance and Jeffrey would have been too far away to help them. No, she thought as she unbuckled her seatbelt and headed for the mini-bar near the small galley, leaving her family alone was not an option she'd ever take.

"Make me one?" a voice said to her left as she pulled a couple of small bottles of vodka from the drawer of liquor. "Your martinis are always the best," Jeffrey complimented.

"Sure," she said in reply and silently began adding ingredients into the mixer. She could feel Jeffrey's lingering gaze on her face as she worked.

"So is this the reception I'll be getting in Springfield?" he asked when she handed him his drink.

Olivia postponed her answer until she had taken a sip of the chilled liquid. The feel of the tangy saltiness burning its way down her throat had always given her strength. Finally she looked up directly into Jeffrey's eyes. "No, Jeffrey," she said. "It'll probably be worse."

"Oh?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes," she confirmed. "You not only abandoned your wife and child, but your job as well. Crime has been on the increase in Springfield, most likely due to Edmund and his goons. You've not only let your family down, Jeffrey, but the people who elected you to help keep them safe."

"Olivia..." he began, but she cut him off with a sharp wave of her hand.

"One of my employees is dead, Jeffrey," she said. "Beaten and murdered by the man you have failed to catch over and over again. A young woman with a bright future in front of her sacrificed her life to protect two little girls from a monster while you were drinking margaritas in a Mexican cantina. So yeah, Jeffrey...don't expect a tickertape parade when we get home."

"Olivia, I'm sorry..."

"I don't want to hear it, okay?" she said, bitterly. "Your apologies aren't worth all that much right now." She thought she'd return to her seat, but then she remembered something. "Oh, and Jeffrey...?"

His troubled eyes rose questioningly.

"Everyone knows," she said simply.

"Knows what?" he asked, his brow furrowing.

"Everything," she replied. "What happened back on San Cristobel. What you did to me the night Ava was conceived."

His mouth opened in shock.

Olivia nodded. "I remember seeing Anna that night," she said. "But I had blocked out the memory, along with most of the horror of that night. But she told us how she tried to get help for me and how later she confronted you and how you and your father helped get her away from her father and Edmund."

"Everyone knows?" he asked.

"Yes, Jeffrey," she said. "It's no longer a family secret." She chuckled ruthlessly. "Secrets never last long in Springfield anyway."

Leaving him behind with a stunned expression on his face, she finally returned to her seat. Taking another drink, she closed her eyes in appreciation at the alcohol and then finally set it down on the divider between her and Reva. Glancing up, she found Anna looking at her from the opposite seat. With a glance at her nephew sitting next to the detective, Olivia noted he was as sound asleep as his mother.

"Hey," she finally said quietly to Anna. "Thanks for the rescue, by the way."

"It was nothing," Anna replied. "You were doing fine all on your own."

Olivia shrugged. "Spencer luck," she said. "But it usually only gets me so far and I have a feeling it was starting to run out back there."

"Still," Anna shrugged. "Just doing my job."

Olivia contemplated the Asian woman several long moments. She smirked inwardly as Anna fidgeted uncomfortably in her seat.

"What?" she finally snapped and Olivia's smirk finally emerged.

"Sorry," she said. "Just thinking. Seems you've been 'doing your job' with regards to me for a very long time."

"I did what I had to," Anna shrugged again and looked out the window.

"Did you?" Olivia said and when Anna returned her gaze to her she continued, "I mean you turned your back on your father and your home. I know that's not something someone from an Asian family does, even on San Cristobel."

"I had to," Anna said. "What my father did was wrong. What he's still doing is wrong. That's why I must stop him. My honor demands it."

"It was more than just for your honor's sake, wasn't it Anna?" Olivia asked, her tone soft.

Anna narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Come on, Anna," Olivia said. "Looking back – which until recently was something I never did very often – I realize that you had feelings for me. I remembered the way you used to look at me at school. I never paid it any mind, but there was something there."

After a few moments of silence and Olivia wondered if the detective was going to deny her observations, but then Anna finally said, "That wasn't why I did it."

"Maybe not," Olivia said. "But it was the reason you were there watching out for me that night, wasn't it?"

Anna sighed. "That was then, Olivia...a very long time ago. Things change."

"And yet you're still watching out for me," she persisted.

"And your family...and Jeffrey's and nearly everyone else in Springfield," Anna said angrily, but softly so she wouldn't wake the sleepers.

"You love her, don't you?" Olivia asked suddenly.

Anna blinked at the quick change of subject. "What?"

"Doris," Olivia said. "You're in love with her now, right?"

"Doesn't much matter, Liv," Anna said. "She hates me."

Olivia laughed mirthlessly. "Oh, she might think she hates you right now, but she also loves you. That's the problem and that's why she's hurting so much."

"So that's that," Anna said bitterly. "She'll never trust me again."

"Trust is a funny thing, Anna," Olivia said. "There's a small part of me that still doesn't trust Natalia, for when she left me without a word, but the happiness and joy she gives me now overshadows that small bit of mistrust."

"How did she get you to trust her again?" Anna asked with curiosity.

"Sheer stubborn will and persistence," Olivia chuckled. "Also...I had a good friend telling me I should give her another chance. For my own happiness, if for nothing else."

"Let me guess who...Doris."

"Got it in one," Olivia said and then was silent for a few moments. "So I owe her a chance at her own happiness. Do you want me to talk to her? Maybe see if she's willing to give you a second chance?"

"No!" Anna said strongly, but quietly.

"Why not?" Olivia said softly.

"I'd like you to, Olivia," Anna finally said. "I really would, but I don't want to pressure Doris in any way or you to pressure her, even though you're her best friend and just want what's best for her." Anna paused as she leaned her head back against the seat and let out a rueful chuckle. "You know, it's kinda ironic. I only got close to Doris so I could get close to you and your family. I wasn't supposed to fall for her and from the intel I had on her, I never expected her to fall for me. She was a player, you know?"

Olivia nodded. "Love 'em and leave 'em Wolfe," she smiled. "Made it easier for her to hide in that oversized closet with the really bad blazers inside of it."

"She just got to me," Anna said. "I wasn't prepared for how...*special* she is."

"She's very special, Anna," Olivia said, thinking about the unlikely friendship that had cropped up between herself and the mayor. "She even came out of that closet for you."

"She did," Anna said. "So maybe now she can find someone else who is better deserving of her. Someone who won't use her or lie to her. And until this thing with Edmund and my father is over, she's better off...safer. My father wouldn't hesitate to hurt her if he knew it would hurt me."

"There is that," Olivia said, pinching her nose. "All right, I won't say anything to Doris, but if you change your mind, let me know."

"Thank you, Olivia," Anna said.

"Yes, thank you, Olivia," Reva said, her eyes still screwed shut. "Now will you two shut the hell up and get some sleep?"

Olivia rolled her eyes and just shrugged at Anna. Turning to the window, she again thought how good it was to be going home to her family.

OVS Minisode - What Is It You Want?

By: GayParis and Calliope's Muse

Note: A mini-sode occurring in OVS Season 2 during Episode 8: "The Likes of Which You'll Never Know."

Natalia was gone. There were no words, no goodbyes. She had promised she'd never leave again. It was different this time, of course, because the leaving wasn't of her own doing. In a way, that made it worse. I walked through the silent house checking on our two little girls. Both Emma and Francesca were sound asleep, but sleep eluded me; had been for weeks. Even cookies and milk couldn't ease my fear and anxiety. Settling down on our bed, I could sense the warmth and comfort of Natalia settled by my side. It brought a faint smile. I hadn't washed the sheets since she disappeared. I leaned over and pulled her pillow to me, breathing in her scent. My chest clinched in remembered ache, but it was quickly replaced by a smile that blossomed as I recalled the beautiful, indulgent smile on Natalia's face and the twinkle in her rich brown eyes.

It was the last coherent thought I had.

Emma slid up quietly beside me as I sat on the couch trying to decide on what kind of wedding cake I should order.

"Natalia's sad," Emma spoke quietly, her bottom lip pouting slightly.

"No, baby," I responded, trying to reassure my daughter, as well as myself, that Natalia was just overwhelmed by all she had to do before the wedding. In an effort to distract both of us, I asked Emma what kind of cake she thought Natalia would like...cupcakes or a tiered chocolate crème.

"She's crying, Mommy," Emma insisted.

With that I chucked the brochures and headed upstairs.

Emma was right; Natalia was crying. Tears clouded the dark chocolate eyes I've come to love and were staining the cheeks that I wanted to caress. I wanted to make all her problems, fears and sadness go away. I wanted to hold her in my arms. Is forever too long?

"What's wrong?"

"I want the one thing I can't have," Natalia responded. She was barely holding herself together as she fumbled with the lace sleeve on the wedding dress. For a moment, I watched her shaking hand trace the lace, the glittering of the engagement ring that Frank gave her last week seemed insignificant on her slender finger but it mocked me all the same.

Not quite registering what exactly she wants, I felt a little dense. After all, we've been dancing around our feelings...or rather more specifically not saying what we've been feeling for months, so the meaning behind her response didn't even cross my mind. The possibility of

her words having anything to do with us seemed utterly laughable, until she repeated her answer, looking up at me with such desire that I felt burned by the intensity of it.

"What do you want?" I asked; my voice was muffled and I hoped the nervousness I felt would limit the stuttering. I think I know, I pray I'm correct, but what if I'm wrong? What if she doesn't feel the same?

As I started to fumble with the dress, our hands met over the intricately embroidered neckline seam. Closing my eyes over the intensity of the moment, I recalled the morning we went to pick out some dresses. As Natalia had stepped from the fitting room she had looked exquisite; the dress caressing every curve and the subtle neckline offering a hint of cleavage.

"Liv...I...you know...this thing," Natalia stammered, her words incoherent. Frustrated by her inability to say what she wanted, she swung her arms as if in a game of charades.

I sighed wistfully as I couldn't remember her ever calling me Liv.

"Mommy, Natalia. Come downstairs now," Emma said as she raced up the stairs to Natalia's bedroom

Neither Natalia nor I noticed Emma show up until she called our names. I love my daughter dearly, but she does need to work on her timing. Natalia looked alarmed and pushed past me, and I followed immediately behind. It seemed like that has always been my response to her...two steps behind and left in her wake, sometimes figuratively and more often literally.

A myriad of emotions rankled through me. Standing in our kitchen was Frank with a cocky grin, and Rafe who looked slightly bewildered. Natalia lunged for Rafe and embraced him, sobbing and trying to talk at the same time.

Rafe turns and looks at Frank before saying, "It's because you two are getting married."

Still crying, Natalia reluctantly let go of Rafe and rushed to hug Frank. "You did this?"

Frank acknowledged her happiness. He looked down; then straightened as he spoke brightly at his bride-to-be. "Yes, I knew you would want Rafe to give you away."

Frank hasn't looked in my direction, and I know why – he's lying through his teeth.

Natalia looked for me. Finding me behind her, she pulled me closer.

Natalia anxiously looked at Frank as she spoke. "But, you said we could have a long engagement, you know..." She stopped, at a loss for words as she looked between Frank,

Rafe and me. When Frank suggested that they get married that afternoon, Natalia reached down and grabbed my hand in a death grip. "This afternoon? I'm not ready."

"You're as ready as you'll ever be, Ma," Rafe says with a keen look in his eye. "Someone in this room loves you."

Natalia gazed back at me.

I haven't said a word; honestly, I'm not sure what would come out if I could find a few words. It was like my world was crashing down around me.

"No, I'm not ready," Natalia finally says.

I let out an audible sigh. I wasn't ready either. I watched as she took Frank's arm and led him into the living room.

I stood, rocking on my heels, trying to make small talk with a young man I didn't know all that well.

"Frank's a good guy, eh?" Rafe looked to me for affirmation.

I shrugged.

The sullen couple returned. Frank was unhappy because Natalia wouldn't marry him post haste. Natalia was still reeling from the turn of events. There would be no wedding today. Trying to bait Natalia into changing her mind, Frank told her that Rafe's leave could be rescinded at any time.

Noticing that Natalia was fussing over her son, I pulled Frank aside and asked why he was in such a big hurry for a wedding.

"I want us to be together," Frank responded like an giddy puppy.

Does he mean together...together? I wondered as I pulled him into the pantry room hastily.

Tugging on the lapels of his suit jacket, I cornered him, and asked, "Is that why you want to marry her this afternoon?" My fury and queasiness grows over the visualization of his intentions. Shaking my head to rid it of the unwanted images, I tugged harder at his jacket. "Answer me." Though I hadn't raised my voice, I had made it clear that he had better be forthcoming with a response.

Angry and now defensive, Frank roughly pulled my hands off his jacket and pushed me back. "Mind your own business, Olivia."

I pull at his sleeve. "I'm not done."

Natalia ruins the perfect storm brewing within me. "Hey, you two, what's wrong?" Her innocent eyes dart between the two of us. It gives Frank the opportunity to wiggle out from under my grip. Quickly, he defuses the situation and ushers Natalia outside. Rafe dragged his bag upstairs with Emma following behind. Through the window in the kitchen, I could hear Natalia tell Frank she'd call him later.

The kitchen that has always been the center of warmth in the farmhouse was now bathed in a chilly silence. Settling into a chair at the table, I started ruminating through so many thoughts that did little to dispel my anxiety. When Natalia told me she had slept with Frank more than a month ago, it was done with a teary confession as she was afraid she'd disappointed herself, me, her God. She'd cried as she said, "I slept with Frank, but I don't know why because I don't love him."

I settled into my chair at the table, ruminating over my options. As far as I know, she hasn't slept with him again, given how badly she felt after the first time. I know I've fallen in love with her and I'm sure that she feels the same, but some days I don't know. But what I did know was this, if Natalia knew he was even hinting at marrying her just to be together in the biblical sense, she'd go ballistic. I'm so confused, and angry at Frank for his audacity.

A little while later, Natalia came back in looking preoccupied. I couldn't say I blamed her either. Without a word, Natalia had placed a plate of cookies and a glass of milk in front of me, but the way my stomach was rolling itself in knots, just looking at them made me nauseous. However, given that they were her warm, chewy chocolate chips, made with love, I took a bite. Ironically, it did help. She sat down across from me, head in her hands, and in my mind, we were sitting on the sofa as we had after the conversation about her sleeping with Frank. I wanted to finish our conversation but it didn't really seem like the right time.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I asked her as I lay a hand on her arm.

"Not now. Thank you, though," Natalia responded then got up and headed into the living room.

When next I looked up, Natalia was moving through the kitchen, retrieving her coat from the hook on the wall. Her eyes looked glassy and reddened as if she'd been crying. "Where are you going?" I asked curiously. "I worry about you, you know."

She said she needed time and space. Well, damn. As I banged my forehead against the door, screw time and space was the last thing on my mind.

Doris was poking through the Mini-mart, adding items to her cart as she went when she spotted Natalia enter. After a moment of watching the other woman wander aimlessly through the market, Doris approached her. "Natalia," she started and waited until she had the younger woman's attention. "By now, you got the good news."

Natalia looked at Doris's cart of junk food and smirked.

Unapologetically, Doris smirked back. "I like snacks."

"Hello, Doris." Natalia looked into her own cart and sighed at the fat-free sour cream and low-fat ice cream. "Yes, Rafe is home for a little while." She hadn't smiled all day and for once as she thought of her son, a big grin erased the solemn look that had permeated her face for longer than she cared to think. "Frank got him early release from prison," Natalia said as she blew the wispy bangs out of her eyes. "He's such a good man."

Doris looked a little perplexed. "Frank?"

"Yeah, he told me all about it. Been working on the deal for months."

"Frank?" Doris growled. She was not at all happy. Why the hell is Olivia letting Frank take the credit for this? Time to take things into her own hands.

Doris grabbed Natalia's coat sleeve and pulled her behind the shelf lined with condoms. Natalia glanced at them, all brightly colored and boasting that Trojans are America's #1 brand, and the Magnum size is for the well-endo...she shuddered and turned back to Doris.

"Frank is full of C.R.A.P." Doris didn't see the necessity to be polite in this instance.

Natalia was stunned.

The older woman continued, "It was Olivia who got the ball rolling. Mel and I helped." Doris studied the oblivious woman standing a few inches in the front of her. So help me, she's almost thinking out loud, I can't see what Olivia sees in her.

"Olivia?" Natalia finally spoke, then waited for some response from the other woman. "Olivia got Rafe out?"

"Olivia would do anything to make you happy." Doris said with a bit of wistfulness as she threw another bag of chips into her basket. "But, you know that...don't you?" She gave Natalia an inquiring look. "Then again, perhaps you don't."

"The Little Mermaid," I said, resigned to the fact that it's one of Emma's favorite movies. I sighed as I set up the DVD, but right now I didn't care what we watched since I couldn't concentrate anyway. Natalia had been gone for almost two hours and I was past worried. I'd left two texts and three voicemails; she must have turned her phone off. I just hope that's all it was. What a mess!

I had to admit that The Little Mermaid had some good music. "Kiss The Girl." Had I done that when I wanted to, perhaps we would not be in the twisted situation we're in now. As Emma began to sing along at the top of her lungs, I made a decision, I wiggled off the couch and made my way upstairs. The words to Under the Sea feeling entirely apropos as I feel like I'm drowning in my own thoughts and fears. Knocking on Rafe's door, I ask him to keep an eye on Emma because I had to run out on an errand.

I set the brake, climbed out of the car, and reluctantly entered the side entrance of the church. I assumed Natalia would go to church, but I was wrong. It was very quiet, ghostlike. I looked at the stained glass windows depicting the Stations of the Cross. My mother made us pray them every week. I hadn't prayed them in almost twenty-five years, but at right then, I offered up a prayer to the heavens that Natalia was safe.

The next place I headed to check out was the children's playground that Emma loves. Looking around the empty park my glance turned towards the swings Natalia favored. Usually, I'd push her as high as my second-hand heart could handle but without her, there was no point. Turning towards the gazebo, there's still no sign of her. Unlike me who's first choice at this point would have been to head to Towers, I seriously doubted Natalia would head there to drown her sorrows. She was more likely to do so with a pint of mint chocolate chip ice cream. I sighed, trying to think where else she might have gone. Company? With any luck, she headed there to dump Frank.

The restaurant was pretty quiet, only a couple customers remaining in a back booth. Figuring I'd just get a cup of coffee and a muffin before I head home, I slid onto one of the bar stools. Looking down at my shaking hands, I figured that decaffeinated was probably a better bet. Sighing, I took my phone out of my pocket to dial Natalia's cell another time. Direct to voicemail. Damn it. None of the staff were around so I headed around the bar to help myself when I heard voices coming from the kitchen.

"You did what?" Buzz asked; his voice sounded harsh.

"Pop, I just want to be with her again."

Buzz fired back. "Listen up. You told me just the other day that Natalia said it couldn't happen again."

Frank was whining, and it made hearing his response difficult.

"Frank...she said no to sex. When a woman says no, you have to respect that," Buzz continued, clearly frustrated by his son's behavior.

My ear is now plastered to the kitchen door. That bastard!

"I know, Pop, but I thought if we got married then it will be okay with her...you know, with the church and her religion and all."

Before I knew what happened, I'd burst through the kitchen doors. From the reactions of the two Cooper men, I'm sure I looked like a crazed woman, and they were likely right on the mark there. I was furious, and sure as hell I wanted to pound the hell out of him. I grabbed the nearest item I could get my hands on. Rolling pin? I glared at Frank, making sure he understood my intentions. I wanted to kill him. Sigh. Natalia would not want that. At least I could hurt him severely for even attempting to do that to Natalia.

Shaking the raised rolling pin in my hand, I growl, "Frank, so help me God, I will kill you if you do anything to Natalia she doesn't want."

Frank put the huge butcher block table in the middle of the room between us, but it was pretty inconsequential. I went after Frank and Buzz wasn't far behind me.

"You crazy bitch!" Frank picked up a pot. "Since when have you become Mother Theresa?" A smirk crossed his face as he raised the pot at me. "It was good, Olivia. Real goooood, she knows how to satisfy a ma..."

I swung blindly with the pin, bracing myself on the island that separated us, and managed to whack his shoulder. He slammed the pot down on my wrist.

Fuck! I screamed and for a fleeting moment I thought about how bad this was for my heart, the racing adrenaline pumping through my veins. "You conniving son-of-a-bitch," I ground out. "All you want is...is..." I can't finish the thought, much less finish the sentence. "You bastard!" Any reasonable expectation of decent behavior from Frank had vanished and I really wanted to hurt him. Pushing myself off the carving table, I stepped forward. "You don't deserve her!"

With an angry scream, I again launched myself at Frank and for a moment, I reveled in the look of fear on his face.

Jerking awake, the sudden rush of adrenaline from the dream made me shaky and panicked. I looked around the room frantically as my bearings returned and I realized where I was and what had just happened.

Slumping back to the bed, I took several deep calming breaths. It didn't stop the rising sobs from breaking free as I rolled over and curled in on myself.

The empty pillow beside me only made the tears flow freer, and I screamed into my own pillow. Natalia had been gone three weeks, two days, and seventeen hours, and I was becoming exhausted from the lack of sleep. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't seem to relax enough to sleep. I kept thinking that any minute she'd come back through the door. Every time the phone rang, I jumped, assuming it was Frank or Anna with bad news.

I couldn't let my mind invent the worst scenarios. The evidence pointed to Natalia being kidnapped, and the mental images of what could be happening to her at that moment were too much for me to bear. I'd go crazy thinking about it.

So, I did the next best thing. Something I had been doing every time I had this dream. I closed my eyes and created my fantasy ending. I couldn't remember exactly when this particular dream started, but it was obviously after Frank proposed to Natalia. Dreams being what they are, my mind filled in missing pieces that didn't happen, like Doris telling Natalia the truth about Rafe's release, or adapted months of conversations and confessions to the new reality in my mind. I smirked a little at the "realistic" image of a terrified Frank running away from me. If I had ever really taken a rolling pin to Frank, I was certain Natalia would have been furious. It wasn't like I didn't want to though. God knows, Frank Cooper was at the top of a long list of people I'd love to pummel, but I wasn't that person anymore. Natalia had changed me, made me a better person in a million different ways. Now, I thought first about how it would affect our relationship and our family before I sought revenge. That change was no small feat, but Natalia had managed it without me even noticing.

Sighing, I remembered what came after I woke up, though I had only managed to sleep through the whole dream once.

Buzz intervened and stood between Frank and I. "Stop. Just stop. Both of you."

I slumped back against the large refrigerator and the rolling pin dangled from my left hand. My other wrist felt as if it had been broken. Damn.

"Olivia. Outside, now," Buzz said, his tone was severe and brooked no refute.

Dreams being what they are, I wasn't sure how I ended up at the hospital or how Natalia was suddenly there. I guess in the magical world of dreams missing people suddenly answer their phones. If only it was that easy now or back when Natalia had taken off for the convent to reach her. I always seemed to be running after Natalia. Maybe that's another reason I love this dream. I smile a little and let my mind wander back into the dream.

"Not good, Olivia," Dr. Rick said as he prepared a cast for my right wrist.

Natalia hadn't said one word to me. I'm not sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing at this point.

"You could have had a heart attack. It was stupid," Rick admonished.

"It wasn't stupid to defend her," I spit back as Dr. Rick wrapped my wrist in gauze. I closed my eyes as he began to hum. Please get this over with soon.

"We'll finish this discussion at home," Natalia spoke quietly, clearly not wanting anyone in the vicinity to hear a public argument on a private matter.

"Lucky you, Olivia," Rick said drolly, as he rolled his eyes, and kept wrapping.

Natalia stood quietly nearby as the cast was fitted, and when I winced, she began rubbing a soothing hand up and down my back.

I smiled at her, taking comfort where I could.

"This is not over; it was still a stupid move, Olivia," Natalia said with quiet condemnation.

It was late when we got back to the house, most of the lights were out, save for a couple. Rafe had tucked Emma in and she was sound asleep. She had called Rafe from the hospital. She didn't tell him much, but she didn't want him worrying either.

Looking back and forth between his mother and I, Rafe decided that there was a conversation that needed to happen and he didn't need to be here for it, so he decided to head out to see Daisy for the evening.

After he left, Natalia headed to the kitchen, stating ostensibly as she went, "I'll heat us up some lasagna."

Sitting on the couch, I'd intended to review some paperwork that I'd brought home with me last night, but after a moment, I couldn't stand the silence so I headed into the kitchen.

Perhaps it was a bit like a bull entering a china shop, but I needed her attention. "I'm not wrong." A beat. How profound was that. "I'm not stupid," I continued.

Without turning around, Natalia responded, "I didn't say that you were." She placed a slice of the lasagna on the plate and held it out, waiting for me to take it.

"You should have heard what he said about you," I said indignantly.

She beckoned me to sit, then quietly spoke, "I did."

Jesus. What? When? She heard him? That had to hurt.

"I heard it all, Olivia."

I felt like a petulant school child. Why couldn't she see that I did it for her? I pushed the food around my plate.

"You need to eat," Natalia spoke as she seemed to notice I hadn't touched the food.—

I pout. "Frank deserved a kick in the balls."

Natalia banged her fork down on the table. "Olivia, come with me." Ignoring the cast, she pulled me towards the couch, and gestured for me to sit. It took her a few moments, but then she looked over at me.

In that time I wondered how much longer this day would go on; surely to God, there's a finite period of time. I waited for her to gather her thoughts.

"Why didn't you tell me that it was you who got Rafe out of jail?" Natalia asked, genuinely curious.

I didn't expect that question. "Does it matter? He's out and heading to the halfway house. That's all that matters."

She shifts closer to me, taking my hand in hers. "It matters to me," she said softly.

"I know how painful it was for you...him being away in that hell hole." I began to tear up, remembering her sadness. "It hurt me to see how upset you were every time you saw him. I couldn't stand to see you so unhappy." She shifts closer still, her slender fingers running through my unruly hair. I'm woozy. Is it the pain pills or being so close to Natalia?

An uneasy silence permeates the air. Natalia is squirming, seemingly ready to divulge some distasteful information. "Remember the day of Coop's funeral? Everyone was so upset." I remember so well, we fought and then Phillip showed up. "I...went to help Frank pack up Coop's things..." A pained look crosses her face. She rubs her thumb over my hand.

"Please." I pulled back a little. "I don't want to know." That had to be the day she slept with Frank.

She reached out, caressing my cheeks. Her tears were falling freely now, but she smiles fondly through them. "I didn't love him then, and I don't love him now. I can't marry someone I don't love. But, you...you're always comforting me and protecting me. Defending my honor."

I brushed a tear away with the thumb of my uninjured hand. "I always will, Natalia." In spite of the cast, I manage gathering her in my arms. She nuzzles into my shoulder, and my senses are immediately on overload.

"Please don't hate me," her warm breath whispered against my neck, sending a delicious tingle through my body.

"No one could ever hate you." I rustled my lips in her hair. "I don't hate you; I love you. I'm in love with you." Those words, that I had rehearsed repeatedly, had banished from my mind and heart, had sworn I would never utter, naturally rolled off my tongue. I said it out loud.

Natalia leaned back and gazed adoringly at me, tears staining her face. "I love you too. So much." A slight smile crosses her face. "I love you, Olivia. I'm so in love with you. I love you." Her dimples explode with joy. It's like she's trying the words on for size.

She sniffled. "This morning, the dress...I came so close to telling you, but I couldn't say the words." I leaned towards the coffee table and then handed her a tissue. "I don't know when it happened." She wiped her nose and sniffled again.

"Maybe we were getting Emma ready for school, or just sitting around talking, but I realized..." She began to cry again. I stroked her luxurious lavender-scented hair to calm her.

"What?" I ask. "What did you realize?"

She shrugged adorably. "That you're my family...that you're everything to me."

I leaned back against the couch with my feet on the coffee table. I pulled Natalia half way on top of me. I'm groggy from the pain pills, but I wanted to hold the moment forever. Her hand rested over my heart, not in a sexual way...like she has a great reverence for the nine ounce muscle beating in my chest.

"I think I knew back then..." She tapped my chest gently.

"I don't know either. Somewhere along the way you went from being my housemate, Emma's other mommy..." I get emotional thinking about it. "The person who gave me Gus' heart." I kissed her forehead. "You became the woman I love."

She looked up at me with a look in her eyes I hadn't seen before. "Say it again; please say it again." Her words fuel the feelings deep in my belly, but it was too soon for that I tell myself. I said it again though.

Natalia sighed dreamily, "I like the sound of that...a lot."

For a split second, her eyes locked on my lips. I matched her stare and felt my stomach flip in anticipation. She bit her bottom lip - a habit when she's nervous. I tugged at her chin and leaned closer. "Let's seal tonight with a kiss."

A deep growl emanated from this wisp of a woman who had stolen my heart and had filled the emptiness in my soul. Natalia didn't hesitate; she took my face in her hands as our lips meet. Her lips were sublime, soft and plush. Her tongue circled my upper lip, teasing me to open to her. Our kisses become passionate, desperate.

She pulled away with a gasp. "Why did we wait so long?"

I shrugged as I pulled her close. "Let's save that conversation for another day. I'm sorry, but I need to go to bed." I straightened the blanket and couch pillows while Natalia goes through her evening house check. She helped me up the stairs, hesitating at the top.

I wanted more, desperately, but the pills were stronger than my will power. I pouted, whining a little as she tugged on my fingers. "I don't know if I'm ready for anything more tonight."

She refused to let go of my hand, guiding me towards her room. I stopped outside her door, forcing her to look at me. Our eyes locked again. "Please."

Finally, I feel my mind quiet down as sleep begins to claim me. It didn't matter that much that the last part was embellishment and fantasy. Those confessions were some of the best memories I hold of us. It won't be enough. It doesn't bring her back. But, for a moment, it does remind me of what I'm fighting for. It'll give me the reason to wake up in the morning, to kiss our children good morning, and to push forward in finding the woman I've fallen in love with.

This...just this, I want more than anything.

OVS Minisode: The Good Assistant

Title: The Good Assistant

Author: Geekgrllurking

Disclaimer: Guiding Light and its characters are the property of Telenext and Proctor and Gamble. For entertainment purposes only, no infringement intended.

Rating: NC-17

Words: 2000

AN: This minisode takes place after Season one, Episode 14, The Road Less Travelled, with Olivia spending long hours at the Beacon making up for some lost time while she had been in Mexico with Reva.

AN2: For all my favourite OVS horndogs out there, you know who you are...

It was not easy being Olivia Spencer's assistant.

Keira had been rushing around all morning, trying to get the month end reports and statistics ready for Ms. Spencer to review and sign some of the paper work that had built up over the few days she had been away in Mexico.

Not that Ms. Rivera had done a bad job, far from it in fact, but there were some things that only her mercurial boss could actually take care of. She had never worked with Ms. Rivera before this but the other staff had nothing but good things to say about the woman who had worked her way up from being cleaning staff at the hotel. And while some of the more discourteous staff members had hinted that Ms. Rivera had slept her way to the top, Keira doubted that very much. Having spent a few days working in close proximity with her, she personally had nothing but glowing things to say about working with the kind woman.

As for Ms. Spencer...well, there was a reason the staff called her the 'Dragon Queen'. The woman fairly spit fire when she was angry about something. Keira didn't know how Ms. Rivera had lasted so long at Ms. Spencer's side. It truly must be love.

Getting up from her desk, Keira gathered the papers she needed her boss to look at. A short trip to the photocopier room earlier had been a nice break, but her tummy was starting to grumble. Lunch was definitely calling her name. Maybe she could escape to the kitchen and see if her friend Kim had anything new and tempting for her to taste test down in the hotel kitchen. Smiling at the thought, Keira wandered towards the door and tapped lightly, before entering her boss' office, files at the ready in her hand.

"Keira?" Olivia looked up, inhaling sharply as if startled, her hands gripping the edge of the large oak desk. "I thought you were at lunch."

"Oh, I had just dashed up to the photocopier room for a bit, but I wanted to finish up these reports before I left." Keira glanced up at her boss. She looked a little flushed. "Are you okay, Ms. Spencer?"

"I'm fine!" Olivia snapped and then, realizing that her tone was a bit harsh, smiled to take the bite off her words, although she was all but grinding her teeth together. "Just fine. Thanks." She shifted a little in her chair and nodded her head a little awkwardly.

Keira frowned and paused a moment, not quite sure she believed her boss, but she knew better than to question her too much.

"Say!" Olivia squeaked and jumped a little in her seat. "Um, why don't you take an extra long lunch. On me. As a thank you for recommending your friend for the new executive chef position. We can take care of that paperwork later, after we've both had...something to eat." Olivia's eyebrows rose slightly and she bit her lower lip.

"Okay," Keira smiled broadly. "Thank you."

Olivia waved a hand nonchalantly and then wiggled a little as she rolled her chair closer to her desk. Keira shook her head at the slightly odd behavior, but simply headed for the

outer office. With one hand on the door knob, she turned back again, seeming to startle the other woman.

“Um, did you want the door left open or...?” The lanky blonde let her voice drift off in question, as she noticed her boss was even more flushed looking and was starting to perspire. Funny it didn’t feel that warm in the office, maybe it was a hot flash. Ms. Spencer seemed a bit young for that though.

“Closed please, Keira. And if you wouldn’t mind just turning the lock on the handle, I have a ton of work to plow through and without you out there guarding the door, I’ll be interrupted every two seconds,” Olivia tapped her fingers on the desktop anxiously. “Thanks.”

“Very well.” Keira smiled and pulled the door behind her as she left the office. Her boss was most odd sometimes...

Olivia waited for the door to slowly swing closed, sitting calm and collected until the moment she heard the lock click into place. Then, and only then, did she release the throaty groan she had been holding deep inside.

“Oh, God, Natalia...”

Gasping for air, Olivia tilted her head back. Her lover was trying to kill her, she was sure of it, torturing her in the most delightful way for leaving town with Reva for so long. Rolling her chair back just far enough, Olivia snaked a hand down and ran long fingers into the thick dark hair of her lover pressed tight against her. Her black pencil skirt was bunched around her waist and Natalia’s fingers inched them even higher, in her quest to gain more access to her body.

Those sweet lips glistened, having almost pushed her over the peak just before Keira had entered the room. It had been so close...

She glanced down, her breath hitching as dark eyes looked up at her, mischief dancing in their depths. Olivia’s body responded immediately, tensing and bucking slightly as Natalia just moaned softly against her, the vibrations almost overwhelming against her needy clit. Olivia shivered, desperately wanting more. Soft dark hair tickled against her skin, the length at just the right angle to provide a seductive caress against her bare thighs, curls that were inviting her hand to drift through, which she did, guiding Natalia back down to where she needed her most.

“Natalia,” Olivia panted and shifted back in her office chair, spreading her legs wider to give her lover more room, opening herself even more. “Please, I-I need...”

“What do you need, baby, hmm?” Natalia hummed softly in response, as she nuzzled close and turned her focus to a very stiff clit, her tongue dipping into the moist heat, lapping at the moisture there, before sucking and flicking mercilessly against the nub. Beneath her Olivia writhed with pleasure, her every touch pushing her partner closer to the edge. Natalia hummed again in disappointment, before pulling herself away from her lover’s tempting body, Olivia joining her with a groan of her own. “Oh, so close, I know...”

Natalia smiled as Olivia growled and rolled her hips in response to her teasing, drawing her attention back to her lover’s predicament. This little fantasy experiment had been fun, but now it was more than time to take care of business, to take care of her lover. Natalia took in the delicious sight of her disheveled partner, the pleasant flush to her cheeks and the wild look in her eyes, wondering how Keira hadn’t clued in to what was going on right in front of her

“Mmm... that was a pretty close call with Keira,” Natalia leaned forward, all but crawling up Olivia’s sleek form before settling on her lap and claiming the soft lips before her. “Your theory that good girls are naughty girls that don’t get caught seems to ring true. We may need to test it a few more times though just to be sure...”

“Lucky me.” Olivia murmured, barely able to string two words together, enjoying the taste of herself on Natalia’s lips. The brunette pulled back and grinned at her, as her hand moved down between their bodies, finding and cupping Olivia’s center intimately before slowly circling and playing with her sensitive clit again. Olivia twitched, her whole body arching against sweet curves, her gasp of pleasure stolen by Natalia’s crushing kiss.

Growling softly, Natalia moved along a flushed cheek, before finding a delicate earlobe to suck and nibble on. Distracted by her movements, Olivia gasped with pleasure as she was suddenly penetrated, taken quick and hard. Natalia moaned softly in sympathy and angled deeper, stretching and filling, claiming her as her own. She started to pull back, before taking her again, and then again, slowly building an irresistible rhythm.

“God!” Olivia thrust back against the invading hand and groaned praying there would be no more emergencies or interruptions. She felt her lover dip her head, and nip at the now thundering pulse point jumping at the base of her neck.

“Mine...” Natalia’s words were barely heard, murmured against her overheated skin, but they hit Olivia low and intimately. Her body clenched in anticipation, with desire. To take and be taken, claimed and being claimed. It was almost overwhelming, the wave of love and belonging that washed over her.

“Always.” Olivia whispered back, agreeing wholeheartedly. She belonged to only one woman, now and forever. Natalia ground down, thrusting deeply, both women very aware of how close to the edge Olivia was.

“Be a good girl now and come for me,” Natalia asked, whispering hotly into the curve of her lover’s ear, sucking on the lobe once more. “Come.”

“Oh my guuh...” Olivia gasped as the quiet words registered, exactly what she needed as her body responded, clenching and tensing, as an irresistible wave of pleasure suddenly crashed over and through her. Shuddering hard, she gripped at the arms of her chair, knuckles white and held on for dear life. She bucked, crashing and thrusting against her lover, over and over. She barely recognized the breathy cries coming from her own mouth, as she gave in to Natalia’s sweet demands.

Her racing heart slowing, Olivia noticed Natalia’s back was pressed against the desk, and she was all but wrapped around her, gently dropping soft kisses into her sweat damp hair. Shifting back a bit, she felt Natalia’s strong hands ease from her body and gently cup her still throbbing center, soothing her as the last aftershocks pulsed through her spent body. Snuggling closer she burrowed nearer, snuffling along the collar of her shirt, soft kisses against the damp skin she found there.

“God, I love you.” Olivia sighed, spent and sated.

“I love you too, sweetheart.” Natalia murmured into thick honey-blond hair, before putting her arms around Olivia’s neck, Natalia simply held her close, listening quietly as her partner caught her breath again, lazily tracing abstract patterns along her back. They both ignored the telephone that started to ring behind them and then finally stopped. Natalia sighed softly. The real world was nipping at their heels.

“You are in such trouble later tonight, missy...” Olivia murmured weakly as she tried to pull herself together, her mind still scattered and her body still buzzing, attuned to Natalia’s every touch. She wanted to take her right here and now, but a vibrating BlackBerry somewhere behind her demanded she get back to work. And she wasn’t quite sure Natalia would be able to handle being bent over her desk and fucked senseless.

Not yet, anyway...

“Promise?” Natalia chuckled as she slowly untangled herself from Olivia’s warm curves. The throbbing in her own body picked up at the prospect of continuing this later, and long into the night if she was lucky. She pressed their lips together one final time, the need to touch her still incredibly strong.

“Oh yeah. You can count on it.” Olivia grinned as Natalia stood and took a deliberate step away before starting to help her button her blouse back up and straighten her skirt. Before she knew it she was completely put back together.

Natalia sighed quietly, enjoying the freshly ravished look of her lover, the mussed hair, slightly swollen lips and a beaming smile. A blush rose to her cheeks, knowing that some of the staff might clue in at some point to what they had just done. Noticing the twinkle of joy in Olivia’s eyes, Natalia realized she didn’t really care what anyone but her lover thought. And if she was going to work at the Beacon more, then the staff would just have to get used to it.

After all, a good assistant always knows how to anticipate her boss’ needs. And while it wasn’t always easy being Olivia Spencer’s assistant, Natalia was definitely up for the challenge...

OVS Minisode - Supernova Smile

The Otaalia Virtual Season minisodes are representations of the talent of our writers and artists. These minisodes may or may not be actual scenes or plots that will be a part of the regular OVS episodes.

Author: Chrissie aka itsalovestory

Title: Supernova Smile

Disclaimer: I don't own anything but my imagination. Characters belong to Telenext/P&G.

Fandom: Guiding Light

Pairings: Olivia/Natalia

Rating: NC-17

Summary: Olivia feels the warmth of her supernova smile.

A/N: This minisode takes place during Season 1, Episode 2's “A Helping Hand” in Act V.

A/N2: I'm a lil' nervous posting this, but thanks to the other members of OVS for being so supportive of me joining their lil' universe.

Natalia's eyes darkened as Olivia teasingly removed her clothes, slowly and methodically. She hoped she would never grow tired of the sight of Olivia's bare body and naked soul - or her touch.

“Oh God,” Olivia breathed as Natalia slid closer to her and took off her panties, ripping the flimsy fabric apart in her quest to have more, feel more of her lover. Olivia gasped at the passionate boldness of her lover, hoping she could always garner such responses from Natalia. Moving back to the bed and her waiting lover, Olivia lay herself against Natalia's skin once more, their bodies melding together as best as Natalia's pregnancy would allow.

Relishing the feel of a naked Olivia, Natalia sighed, “Oh Olivia. My love, you feel so good.” She brought their lips together for a hard kiss, demanding entry to Olivia's sweet mouth almost immediately. Long moments passed. Teeth clashed and tongues crashed against each other.

When they finally broke apart with a wet pop, Olivia was panting heavily. “I love you,” she whispered, opening her eyes to look into Natalia's own. She reverently ran her fingertips over the smooth plains of her lover's face.

Opening her eyes, Natalia looked up into jade depths, her heart fluttering at the love and desire that was found within. “I love you, too, querida. Now...” She looked longingly at Olivia and demanded firmly and adoringly. “Please,” she pleaded on a whisper. “Make love with me.”

Olivia happily obliged, leaning down and capturing Natalia's lips again. They kissed, bruising but not a battle. Kissing her way down Natalia's body, Olivia enjoyed the gasps and groans she drew from her lover. She flicked her tongue in Natalia's bellybutton, eliciting a rather loud and long moan from Natalia. “Look at me, Natalia,” she demanded sweetly, settling between Natalia's lean legs.

Natalia gazed at Olivia, a nervous and yet excited smile playing upon her lips.

“You are so very beautiful.” Olivia closed her eyes briefly, shuddering with the emotions Natalia inflamed in her. She opened her eyes once more, staring into the smoking depths of her lover, her life. She ran her hands softly over the swell of her belly, then lower pushing Natalia's legs apart further. “I want to love you, *all* of you.” Her eyes ran hungrily over Natalia's body, full and round and so lovely. She couldn't wait to experience this new thing with Natalia. Olivia stared longingly at the thatch of damp, wet curls between Natalia's thighs.

Seeing where Olivia's gaze landed and stayed, Natalia shifted her legs, widening them. She lifted her hips as Olivia lowered her head, her intent clear. “Yes, Olivia,” she pleaded on a pleasant whisper. “Oh God, yes!”

Olivia's tongue slowly stroked against her warm, wet flesh. She drew the taste, the very essence of Natalia into her mouth, murmuring out, “Delicious.” She savored the

experience, committing it to memory. There was nothing like that first taste. There was nothing like Natalia, her heart. Who knew the one to break it would be the one to repair it? From Gus to now, everything was heartbreaking and yet, ultimately, soul-mending. Perfect pieces of themselves fell into place within the other.

Natalia's gasp brought Olivia back to the present. There would be plenty of time for thought later. Now, there was only touch, only taste, only smell. Her nostrils flared as she inhaled the scent of Natalia's arousal. Her mouth watered with the eagerness to taste again.

And, so she did.

Olivia couldn't get enough. Over and over her tongue licked at the sweetness of Natalia. Her taste buds delighted with the banquet that she granted them. Her lips pressed intimately against *those* lovely pink lips in the sweetest of kisses, growing more and more demanding as Natalia's hips began to move.

Natalia was close. Of all the things that Olivia had learned in their brief time as lovers, that was her favorite. When Natalia was close to orgasm would have to be the most perfect thing she had discovered thus far. Her groans would grow louder. Her hips would frantically chase the feeling in the pit of her stomach. Her head would fall backwards, and her chest would carry a pink blush. Olivia looked up.

She was definitely close.

Natalia's breasts beautifully bounced. Her new butterfly necklace twinkled in the light, fluttering against her chest. She hoped she would always feel those butterflies inside from Natalia. "I want you look at me, Natalia. Look."

Natalia finally opened her eyes. Olivia noticed with a smirk that they were black with their desperate desire. She reached up and pinched one perfectly plump and rosy nipple. Natalia hissed.

Thrashing her hips vigorously, Natalia pleaded, "Oh please, Baby, make me come."

Olivia was shocked and turned on at the same time at Natalia's boldness. "God, yes!" Olivia groaned happily, lowering her head once more. Never taking her gaze away, she took Natalia's needy clit, stiff and swollen, into her mouth finally.

Natalia struggled to keep her eyes open, but she did. She could not pull her eyes away from the sight of Olivia feasting on her most intimate place, hungrily and hurriedly. She felt the pleasure build and build as Olivia so tenderly made love to her.

Her lips fastened secure and tightly around Natalia's clit. Olivia stared entranced as Natalia's gaze grew cloudy. Although the white lights twinkled around their bedroom, making everything glow, Olivia did not think anything could compare to Natalia. When Natalia finally came, she shouted her name. Olivia was overwhelmed by the explosion of stars in her lover's eyes and the warmth of her supernova smile.

Kissing Natalia softly against her belly, Olivia rubbed her nose lovingly against the smooth and tight skin. She whispered gently to their baby, "I love you." She closed her eyes, cherishing the joy she felt inside. After several deep breaths, she crawled up behind Natalia and spooned her from behind. Murmuring gentle words of adoration, Olivia held Natalia tenderly, amazed at the power of their love.

A few moments passed.

Natalia could hardly believe what had just transpired. Part of her, in the hidden recesses of her upbringing, told her she should be guilty. But, all she could feel was happy. Olivia had loved her so tenderly, so wonderfully that Natalia had no frame of reference. She only knew that no one would ever make her feel so adored as Olivia would.

Turning around in Olivia's arms, Natalia quickly pulled Olivia's face down into a deep kiss. Tongues brushed hungrily against each other again as Natalia shifted on top of Olivia. She kissed her neck down to her breasts, pink, proud nipples begging for her touch. Bending her head, Natalia took one into her mouth, sucking quick and hard.

Olivia hissed as Natalia's teeth scraped against her sensitive flesh. Grabbing a handful of her lover's dark tresses, Olivia held Natalia close as she worshiped her breasts. "Oh, Natalia," she groaned as Natalia moved between her legs. She spread them wide, willingly, giving over control to Natalia once more. She was the only one she'd ever give control, too.

Natalia kissed along every piece of skin she could find until she met the most warm and wet place. She used her thumbs and spread Olivia open, gazing at her intently and adoringly. Licking her lips, she placed a kiss at the juncture of Olivia's thighs. Soon enough, Natalia used her tongue and teeth and glorious mouth to bring Olivia to unimaginable heights.

But, to Olivia's astonishment, Natalia did not stop. She did not relent in her pursuit to pleasure and love Olivia. Natalia slid in two fingers, pumping slow but steady into Olivia's sex. She brought her higher than before and still higher yet, coaxing Olivia's body to follow her to completion. Olivia began to cry, no longer able to contain the happiness and awe she felt. Natalia scooted up next to Olivia, pulling the still shaking woman into her arms. She ran her hands up and down her back, soothing Olivia as she sobbed.

Olivia sniffled. Staring into Natalia's eyes, Olivia *felt* all the love the younger woman possessed for her. Overwhelmed by the warmth in her heart and body, Olivia kissed Natalia hard, putting all her words into actions. She was tired. "Well, that was..." Olivia whispered, using the last of her strength to roll away from her lover so she could hold her in her arms again.

"Yeah, it really was..." Natalia agreed, smiling proudly and turning, propping her head up on her right hand. "Not bad for a pregnant lady."

Olivia could only laugh.

OVS Minisode - Family Bonds

The Otaia Virtual Season minisodes are representations of the talent of our writers and artists. These minisodes may or may not be actual scenes or plots that will be a part of the regular OVS episodes.

Author: Calliope's Muse

Title: Family Bonds

Fandom: Guiding Light

Pairings: Olivia/Natalia

Rating: NC-17

A/N: An OVS minisode that falls between Season 2's Episode 6 "Friends and Lovers" and Episode 7 "The Study of Butterflies." Early in Act 1 of Episode 7, a letter from Rafe is referenced, but we never learn what that letter contained. Now we do...

A/N2: Pardon any grammatical or similar errors. Time got away from me this week, and I haven't had a chance to have this minisode beta'd by the team.

Natalia shivered as she stepped quickly outside for the mail then hurried back inside. Closing the door, she rubbed her arms and walked over to Francesca's high chair. The little girl was watching her mom intently and curiously, and when Natalia leaned down to say, "Burrrrrr, it's cold out there, Sweet Pea!" the toddler kicked and giggled excitedly.

"Oh, you liked that, did you?" Natalia tossed the mail onto the kitchen table and went to tickling her daughter and making silly noises that caused Francesca to squeal.

Natalia stood back up straight, smiling happily. Turning to look at the clock on the wall, she startled at the time. “Baby girl, you’re momma is going to be home any minute now! Let’s see if dinner is ready.”

“Perfect,” she murmured to herself.

She turned off the oven and looked at the table. The plates were set and the tea was made. There was nothing left to do but wait for her...fiancé to get home. Taking a seat at the table, she pulled the mail over closer and smiled again as she let the word – fiancé - bounce around in her head. She really liked the sound of it in reference to Olivia, but “wife” was even better.

There was a nervous but excited flutter in her belly, and instinctively she put her hand on her stomach. It was hard to believe that in just a couple of weeks she’d marry Olivia Spencer. This was a road she never expected to travel, but she thanked God every day that He brought Olivia into her life. Everything that she had now – the family, the home, the love – she would have never had, never known, without Olivia.

Sighing contentedly, Natalia shuffled through the mail, setting aside bills that needed to be paid and putting junk mail in a pile. A small envelope with a familiar script stopped her. She ran the tips of her fingers over the ink.

“Raphael,” she whispered.

She could tell by the look and shape of the envelope that it was probably a Christmas card, and she probably should wait for Olivia to be there before opening it. But, it had been so long since she’d heard from him that she couldn’t stand to wait. Ripping open the seal, she smiled at the card cover. Rafe always picked the funny cards, never the serious ones that made her cry. He liked to make her laugh so the sillier the card, the better.

Opening the card, she read the handwritten message:

To my family (yeah, you too, Olivia!), Merry Christmas! Tell Munchkin to save me some red velvet cake and give my littlest sister a kiss. I love you all! – Rafe

A picture was included along with a folded note. Natalia held up the picture and had to bite her lip to keep from crying. Rafe stood next to a tank with his rifle in one hand and his arm around the shoulders of an Iraqi girl that was probably just a year or two younger than Emma.

“Mijo,” she brought the picture to her lips and kissed it, then held it to her chest, fighting the tears that threatened to fall.

She fought the tears off and put down the picture. She picked up the folded letter and opened it. This one was just for her.

Dear Ma,

I can't tell you how much I miss you. It feels like it's been forever since we talked, but I know it's only been a few weeks. My squad has been in some remote locations and signals are really weak out here. Everyone's missing their families. I figured if I can't talk to you that I can at least write.

I wanted to let you know that I'm really, really sorry that I won't be there for your wedding. I'm sure it's hard for you to believe, but I was looking forward to walking you down the aisle. What a difference a year makes, huh? There's still a part of me that can't believe I'm okay with you marrying Olivia, but I've seen the proof of her love for you and I know it's genuine. I was always the one to protect you, and after Edmund went nuts and shot up the town, I wanted nothing more than to stay in Springfield and protect you. That's what I did. That's who I was...who I am. I never told you, but for a while, I considered going AWOL. I know, it's crazy talk. But, see, you have Olivia, and I know that she'd rather die than let anything happen to you. I don't care what anyone says, Ma, you and Olivia are meant to be together.

I can't walk you down the aisle, but I hope you know that I'll be there in spirit. Well, technological spirit, but still...LOL!

I hope you like the pic. One of my buddies took it. I would have more for you, but it's hard to find time to get them developed here. The little girl in the picture reminded me so much of Emma. Not in looks, but in spirit. She was always so happy and had such a beautiful laugh. Yeah, you probably just noticed I said that in past tense. No one told me that her parents were possibly tied to Al Qaeda. They wouldn't let me near the car even after the fire went out. I'm glad it was quick and I hope she didn't feel any pain. Her name was Ayisha.

Oh, you'll never guess who contacted me...Uncle Leo. Yeah, just out of the blue. I'm guessing Abuela gave my email to him. It's nice to talk to someone who has been in the military, especially family. He's had it hard though. He can't find work and his disability pay only covers so much. He's pretty angry too, but I can't really blame him. Hopefully, I'll never know what he's going through.

Well, it's time to hit the sack. Give my love to everyone.

I love you!

Your son,

Rafe

The crunch of gravel in the driveway let Natalia know that Olivia was home. She brushed quickly at her eyes and grabbed a paper towel to blow her nose. She made a mental note to say a special prayer for not just Rafe and Leo but little Ayisha too.

Olivia breezed through the door with several shopping bags in hand. She walked over and gave Natalia a kiss, scrunching her eyebrows together when she pulled back. Her partner tried to not let it show, but she could tell that Natalia had been crying. As Natalia began to flitter around the kitchen, dishing up plates, Olivia decided to let her concerns go. She'd have time to talk to her later.

"Is Emma here?" Olivia asked as she walked over to Francesca who was reaching to her with grabby hands wanting to be picked up. She set down her bags and obliged her daughter, picking her up and giving loud kisses to her cheek.

Natalia looked over her shoulder and smiled at the image. "Nope, she's at Phillip's and Shadow is with her. The dog trainer is going through some runs that she wants to teach Emma to do with Shadow."

"Oh good! I need to hide some Christmas presents," Olivia laughed and tickled her daughter's belly, "Oh, yes I do! Oh, yes I do!" Francesca fell back in her arms, giggling and laughing. When Olivia stopped, the little girl reached up for her mom's hand and pulled it down to her belly again, trying to get her to keep playing with her. "You come with me, chickadee, and tell me where to hide your sister's presents."

"Don't take too long! The food will get cold," Natalia called to her partner.

"Okay!"

Later that evening, Olivia walked back into the kitchen where Natalia was washing dishes. Why they even bothered having a dishwasher she'd never know! Natalia always did them by hand. She walked over to the sink and picked up a towel to begin drying the dishes.

"Francesca's asleep?" Natalia glanced over at her partner.

Olivia smiled. "Out like a light. I tell you, we are never, ever getting rid of that little musical seahorse that she sleeps with. It puts her right to sleep."

The brunette laughed. "And she could just be tired with the way you play with her."

“Hey, if it makes it easier to get her to go to sleep, I’m not going to argue.”

Natalia bumped her with her hip and laughed as she put the last dish in the drain. She took the dishrag to wipe down the table as Olivia continued to dry the rest of the dishes. Olivia glanced over her shoulder and saw Natalia take the note paper out of the card and set it on the table for everyone to see. She had shown Olivia the Christmas card from Rafe over dinner, but she didn’t offer up the letter. Her gut told her that the letter was what had made Natalia cry.

When she finished drying the last dish, she turned around and watched as Natalia carefully placed the picture of Rafe and a little Iraqi girl in front of it.

“That’s a good picture of him. He looks so grown up there,” Olivia commented.

Natalia nodded as she looked at the picture. Suddenly, she started crying and Olivia immediately went to her and wrapped her in her arms. “Hey, what’s wrong, baby?”

She could feel Natalia burrowing against her, trying to get closer. She pulled Natalia a little closer and whispered softly in her ear, “Talk to me.”

Natalia didn’t pull back, just continued to hold Olivia close. “Her name was Ayisha. She was killed, along with her parents, in a car bombing. Rafe said that the little girl reminded him of Emma.”

Closing her eyes, Olivia understood better why her fiancé was so upset. Wrapping Natalia into her arms even more securely, her protective desire to get as close as possible to her hurting lover, she kissed her tenderly on the head. “We’re all okay, sweetheart. We’re here. We’re safe. We’re together. Nothing will tear this family apart...ever. If anyone ever tries, I’ll die trying to stop them.”

Remembering that Rafe had said almost the same thing in his letter, Natalia shivered. He was right. They were meant to be together. Olivia was meant to be her wife and always had been.

Turning her head to the side, Natalia ran her tongue up along the side of Olivia’s neck, savoring the salty taste of her skin. When she reached her ear, she nibbled at the lobe and she could feel Olivia’s nails dig into her back. She hissed a little at the pain, but she didn’t mind. At least she knew she was alive. Natalia reciprocated by biting gently at the tender spot below Olivia’s ear.

“Oh God, ‘Talia!” Olivia fisted her fingers in Natalia’s long dark hair and pulled her head back. Without hesitation, she kissed her lover hard, her tongue seeking out Natalia’s.

Natalia pushed back too. Her hands frantically yanking Olivia's t-shirt out of her jeans and scraping her nails along her lower back. Olivia groaned and her hips instinctively thrust against Natalia.

The frenzied kisses continued, as they sought any patch of skin their mouths could find – neck, ears, shoulders – before coming back to where they started, tongues dueling and lips swollen.

Natalia leaned back, resting her forehead against Olivia's, panting hard. She reached down and pushed at the waistband of her pants. "Make love to me, Olivia."

Olivia reached for her hand to stop her. "Not here."

For a moment, they stopped and looked at the other, silent messages passing between them. Natalia saw the raw and primal look in her lover's eyes, and she immediately that she didn't want to wait a moment longer before knowing Olivia in every way possible.

Natalia took Olivia's hand and backed away. "Come on."

The darkness of the bedroom was welcoming, but for what she wanted, Natalia needed the lights on. She walked over to the bedside table and flipped the switch. A soft, golden glow enveloped her, casting the rest of the room and Olivia in shadows. She turned and pulled her shirt off over her head.

"It's in the closet," Natalia said, gesturing with her head.

Olivia couldn't resist a mischievous smirk. "How appropriate. Are you sure? We were going to save it for the honeymoon."

Natalia shook her head, feeling her heart warm with the truth of her words. "Every day is a honeymoon for us because we're already married in here." She placed her hand over her heart. "Please, I want this with you."

The electric charge of Natalia's words hit Olivia hard, and she had a hard time even breathing. Images of Natalia's naked body below her, writhing in ecstasy, made her head spin and her body ache.

"Hello, Earth to Olivia," Natalia waved her hands and giggled. She loved taking Olivia by surprise.

The normally sexually sophisticated and smooth woman rolled her eyes at her before walking over and into the closet. She came out with a bag and walked over to the bed to

stand in front of Natalia. She self-consciously dropped the bag on the bed. Natalia was biting her lip nervously and Olivia shook her head.

“This is silly. We don’t need,” she glanced over at the bag and gestured comically with her hands, “this...thing...to, you know. Do we?”

Natalia’s dark eyes watched her for a moment before she shook her head, a small dimpled smile appearing. “No, we don’t need this, but there’s a big difference between needing and wanting something.”

Olivia swallowed as Natalia reached out and began unbuttoning her jeans. She continued talking as she pulled the zipper slowly down. “I need you, Olivia. Your warmth, your love, your very presence in my life...everyday. I need our family and our children. I need you in my bed, holding me tight. Without those things, I don’t think I could breath.”

Natalia slipped her hands inside the waistband of Olivia’s open jeans and pushed down until her hands gripped the soft flesh of Olivia’s ass. “But what I want, Olivia, is to feel you on top of me, inside of me, loving me so completely that I don’t know where I end and you begin. I want everything with you and I want to know what it’s like to be loved by you in every way possible.”

Olivia’s jeans fell to the floor in a whoosh and without preamble, Natalia’s fingers were between her legs, sliding in the copious wetness that her words had created. For endless seconds, Olivia allowed herself to get lost in the feeling of Natalia’s fingers, but just as she felt the tingling of her building orgasm begin, Natalia stepped back.

A playful and naughty smirk danced on Natalia’s face as she reached in the bag. Pulling out the box, she handed it over to her partner. “You figure this contraption out, and I’ll get undressed.”

Olivia raised an eyebrow and looked at the box. “I think you got the better end of this deal.”

“You’ll get yours, baby. Don’t worry.”

That thought and the accompanying image stopped Olivia in her tracks. There was absolutely nothing she could say to that. Instead, she quickly began to open the box. Forgoing the directions in hopes of speeding things along, she stepped into the harness. Before she could finish getting the straps properly tightened, Natalia had flung her clothes across the room and was reaching for the other half of the items in the box.

Olivia couldn't help but smile at the adorable blush on Natalia's face as she held up the dildo shyly. Natalia swallowed a little as she looked up at Olivia. "It's bigger than I thought it would be."

Worry crept into Olivia's voice. It would really suck if they were ready but couldn't do it. "Too much?"

Natalia knew she was beginning to freak her partner out, but her heart was racing in her chest and not in a bad way. God knows she was terrified, but she was wildly excited too. Olivia hadn't even touched her, but she was shaking in anticipation and the longer she imagined what this would be like with Olivia, the harder the throbbing between her legs became.

Natalia shook her head and motioned to Olivia with her free hand. "Come here."

Somehow Olivia managed to move her legs that felt like jelly, and she knew she was shaking. She watched as Natalia ran a hand over her hip and tugged her closer. Slowly, Natalia pushed the dildo onto the base of the harness. Olivia gasped when her partner added slight pressure to the base making it ground into Olivia's clit.

"That was dirty pool, Rivera," Olivia growled.

Natalia glanced up through hooded and mischievous eyes. "That was the intention."

"God, I love you," Olivia whispered in amazement, a hand reaching out to stroke a soft cheek. She smiled as her touch made a dimple appear.

Natalia reached for the bedside table drawer and pulled out the bottle of lube they'd bought in Chicago along with the toy. "Show me, querida."

She flipped the top open and squeezed a small amount on the tip of the toy standing proudly before her. With more confidence than she realized she possessed, she used her hand to coat the dildo with the lube being sure to give the base a gentle push. She smiled as Olivia's hips pushed back.

The image of Natalia stroking the toy was too much for Olivia. She took all she could before grabbing Natalia's wrist to pull her hand away from the slow torture the friction was causing. She leaned over and pulled Natalia into a fierce kiss, trying to convey all of her emotions with it. Sometimes the feelings Natalia elicited in her were so overwhelming she didn't have words for them. All she could was try to show her, but even that seemed inadequate for what they shared. It went beyond anything she'd ever known.

Falling back to the bed, Natalia deepened the kiss and pulled Olivia down between her legs. The cool, firmness of the toy surprised her causing her to break the kiss with a gasp. "Oh...um..."

Olivia rose up, bracing her hands on either side of Natalia's head, concern lacing her voice. "Are you sure about this? If you're not, it's..."

Natalia shook her head, smiling, and leaned up to shut Olivia up with a kiss. "Stop worrying, Olivia. We're getting married in a couple of weeks. Now show me why, okay?"

Feeling Natalia's long legs wrap around her was all the remaining encouragement she needed. Reaching down between their bodies, she positioned the toy, and never breaking eye contact with her fiancé, she eased forward. Natalia's beautiful brown eyes, so full of love and trust, fluttered and closed, and Olivia was transfixed.

A breathless sigh, full of pleasure, escaped Natalia's lips, "Liv."

The feeling of anticipation Natalia had experienced since making the decision to try this new adventure with Olivia was nothing compared to the reality. Ever since their trip to Chicago and the impulsive purchase, she had imagined what this would be like, feel like, with Olivia. She had no idea. There was nothing in her experience to compare it to. Yes, she had been with men and knew the physicality of sex, but now she knew...without a doubt, that being truly in love with your partner made all the difference.

Olivia was her soulmate, her partner and future wife, and her best friend...her family. She felt the power of the bond between them as Olivia nuzzled lovingly along her neck, panting softly, as her hips steadily and slowly moved the toy in and out. Natalia wrapped herself around Olivia more, her hands taking in the movement of muscles in Olivia's shoulders and back then lightly scratching her nails down until she reached the round globes of flesh of Olivia's ass, pulling her lover closer and deeper into her.

"God, Liv! Please...", Natalia begged for the release she felt building, yet she didn't want it to end.

A rough groan broke from Olivia, "Talia."

"Lean back a little," Natalia whispered.

Olivia rose up on her hands and looked down at Natalia. Her hair was fanned out, looking wild and untamed, framing a beautiful face flush with desire and passion. For a little over a year, they'd been lovers, but she still found it hard to wrap her head around the fact. It seemed like she'd spend an eternity dreaming about moments like this. It was still hard to believe they were here, that this was real. She closed her eyes for a moment,

thanking Natalia's God or whoever, whatever, was in charge for blessing her with this woman.

"Open your eyes, baby. Look at me," Natalia's sweet voice beckoned her. Opening her eyes, she looked down to see Natalia reaching between them and touching herself.

"Dear God," Olivia groaned.

Natalia spoke in gasps as she edged closer to orgasm. She couldn't believe she was doing this, openly touching herself as Olivia watched. "Don't...stop," a long pause, her head rolling back as Olivia plunged in deep. "Yes...like that...harder...faster."

Olivia could never deny her beautiful partner anything. Leaning back, she wrapped her hands around Natalia's hips to keep her in position. When she looked down, she caught the first glimpse of the dildo buried deep inside Natalia. The image made her feel lightheaded. *Unfuckingbelievable*, she thought.

"Look at me," Natalia commanded.

Glancing up, her eyes, like her soul, locked with Natalia's. Time seemed suspended as they got lost in the moment and in each other. There were no sounds save for their breathing punctuated by the soft, wet sounds of their lovemaking, until Natalia let out a loud groan, her back lifting and arching making her hips ground down hard against Olivia. A surprising wave of pleasure hit Olivia hard causing her to shake as it traveled up her spine.

"Oh my God!" Olivia cried out, her body going limp as she fell into Natalia's arms.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, wrapped up tightly together, as the last pulses of pleasure ceased and their breathing slowed. Olivia sighed contentedly, nuzzling and kissing along Natalia's shoulder and neck, enjoying the feel of Natalia's hands as they gently roamed up and down her back. When Natalia released a little moan, Olivia worried she may be crushing her partner so she pulled out and rolled off to the side. She took a moment to reach under the covers and undo the harness, tossing it on the floor beside the bed.

Natalia reached for her and pulled her into a tender kiss. They both pulled back but kept their legs entwined and as close as possible. The gentle caresses were causing their eyes to become heavy with sleep.

"I love you...so...much," Natalia's words, though not unusual at all, stirred Olivia to alertness. She could see in the light that Natalia was barely awake and hardly aware of the weight of her words. The force and emphasis on the last two words were unusually

powerful even in their most passionate moments. It reminded her of what had transpired earlier that evening to get them to this point.

Rafe's letter.

Olivia pulled her fiancé impossibly closer, kissing the top of her head. Natalia was worried and afraid, plain and simple, for their son. There were no guarantees that he'd make it back in one piece, much less alive, and knowing Natalia as well as she does, Olivia was sure that it drove her partner to emotionally react in a way that ensured her family knew they were loved. No wonder Natalia felt the need to be particularly open and close with her tonight.

She placed soft kisses to Natalia's head, snuggling into Olivia even more, and she whispered into Natalia's hair, "He'll be okay, sweetheart. Everything will be okay."

She felt Natalia nod a little against her as she closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

OVS Minisode - Handprint on My Heart

The Otaia Virtual Season minisodes are representations of the talent of our writers and artists. These minisodes may or may not be actual scenes or plots that will be a part of the regular OVS episodes.

Title: Handprint on My Heart

Author: A. Magiluna Stormwriter

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Rating: PG13

Pairings: Olivia/Natalia

Date Written: 24 December 2011

Word Count: 1648

Summary: A Christmas Eve interlude between Olivia and Natalia.

Spoilers: Takes place between the final act and the epilogue of OVS Season 1's episode #5, "Our Christmas Present".

Warnings: No standard warnings apply.

Website: ShatterStorm Productions – Doggie Duo

Link to: <http://bdkk.shatterstorm.net/>

Archive: ShatterStorm Productions & Otaia Virtual Season only...all others ask for permission & we'll see...

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Author's Notes: I'm used to being the continuity beta for the OVS, so getting to write a minisode is kind of a thrill for me. The title and inspiration for this story come directly from a status post from Gregory Maguire on Facebook, with a secondary inspiration coming from the "For Good" song from the musical *Wicked*. I'd had another idea planned and started, but when I read that status update and saw the Bible verse listed [found here], this idea came to me. And before I forget, the link for the charm I used is here.

Dedication: My muses, for always coming through in the end...

Beta: [calliopes_muse](#)

"Handprint on My Heart"

By A. Magiluna Stormwriter

In the end, Ava had been enlisted to help get Emma into bed; the young girl was far too excited for Santa to come to admit that she was tired. It took a promise of Ava reading her favorite story to finally get Emma to admit her exhaustion and head upstairs to get ready for bed. Ava followed her sister a moment or two later to do the same, but waited for Emma to be gone before speaking to her mother.

"There's a bag in my room," she said softly, leaning closer and glancing around suspiciously. "Presents I found for both Emma and Francesca. I knew you and Natalia would have Santa covered for them, but I couldn't help myself. Can you make sure they get under the tree with the rest of the Santa presents while I read Emma to sleep?"

Olivia's eyes misted up at the obvious love her eldest daughter had for her younger two. "Yeah, I can do that," she said, pulling Ava into a tight hug. "You probably know this already, but I'm going to say it anyway, and you can expect Natalia to repeat it when she finds out. You didn't have to do it, but I'm glad you did. Now, go get into your jammies and read to your sister."

"Yes, ma'am," Ava replied with a mock salute. "The sooner you get Santa's presents out, the sooner you can unwrap Natalia, right? Or will she be unwrapping you tonight?" She waggled her eyebrows, and then headed up the stairs with a laugh.

Natalia passed Ava on the steps, having checked on Francesca again, and stared after the younger woman curiously. When she turned her gaze to Olivia, she was shocked to see how red her lover's face was.

"Do I want to know what just happened?" she asked as she came to stand next to Olivia.

"I'm going to kill her," Olivia muttered, cheeks still burning from her daughter's teasing remarks. She cleared her throat and scrubbed her hands over her face before meeting Natalia's confused gaze. "Let's just say that she's having far too much fun teasing me about my sex life."

At that, Natalia's cheeks darkened to match Olivia's. "You taught her too well, Olivia."

Olivia chuckled, shaking off her embarrassment, and leaned over to press her lips to Natalia's. "You're probably right. I wonder if Emma and Francesca will learn the same tricks from me."

"Not if I have anything to say about it," Natalia replied with an impish grin. "I happen to want to keep both of our girls innocent and sweet forever." And then the grin faded. "I don't want them to grow up."

"Neither do I," Olivia murmured, lost in memories of Emma's childhood for a moment. Shaking her head, she squeezed Natalia's hand and started heading up the stairs. "Wait here. Ava has some Santa gifts for the girls. I'll get them while she's reading to Emma, and then we'll put them out with our Santa gifts."

"She didn't have to do that!"

Olivia smirked and nodded. "And I told her that, as well as telling her that you'd say that. But this is Ava and she's as stubborn as her mother is."

"Don't I know it," Natalia muttered as Olivia headed upstairs.

Hearing Ava's voice coming from Emma's room, Olivia poked her head in to watch her older two daughters for a moment. Emma's eyes were already closed, her body curled on the bed next to her sister, clutching Ava's hand to her chest. Ava's eyes were already

starting to droop, but Olivia knew she'd finish the story, even if it meant that she fell asleep upon uttering the final words.

Satisfied that Ava and Emma were all right, Olivia then moved to check on Francesca. The baby was sucking on her fist, but slept deeply. Olivia ran gentle fingers over the tiny head, love for her children threatening to overwhelm her. She took a deep, calming breath and left the nursery. Stopping in her room to grab something before getting the gifts from Ava's room, she headed back downstairs just as Natalia was coming back into the living room with the gifts they'd already purchased, wrapped, and had Doris sign as Santa. Thankfully, Doris had signed a few extra tags, just in case they found something else at the last minute, so they could replace Ava's tags with ones that matched the rest of the sizable haul.

It took several moments of comfortable silence for Natalia and Olivia to set out all of the gifts and fill the stockings. Once everything looked the way Natalia wanted it, she reached for the camera and began to snap a handful of shots.

"What are you doing?"

"I'd like to have a good memory of how this looks before Jellybean wreaks holy havoc on the presents," she replied with a dimple-inducing grin, and snapped another shot. And then she turned and took a picture of Olivia laughing. "And that's for my personal album."

Olivia moved to take Natalia in her arms, foreheads resting together. They stood there for several moments, just drinking in the solitude and the love permeating the entire house. Natalia shifted to rest her cheek over Olivia's heart, further soothed by its steady beating.

"Come here," Olivia said eventually as she pulled back to smile at Natalia. She took the other woman's hand, leading her to the couch. They settled together easily, Natalia gravitating to Olivia's side automatically. "I just wanted to sit here with you for a little bit while the rest of the house is quietly sleeping."

"I like that idea," Natalia replied and leaned up to kiss Olivia's cheek. "Thank you, *querida*."

"Anything for you."

Natalia turned to face Olivia at the huskiness in her tone. She studied her lover's face, let herself get lost in the depth of those green eyes. So many intense emotions flitting in them, and all Natalia could do was hold on and enjoy the ride. Their heads leaned toward each other, inexorably drawn together until lips brushed against each other. But

one touch wasn't enough. Olivia's hand moved to cradle the back of Natalia's head, holding her close as their lips met again and again. When a tongue glided across lips, it took a moment for Olivia to realize it was her tongue, not Natalia's. Not that Natalia was stopping it from happening; in fact, she parted her lips in encouragement.

"God, I love you," Olivia finally whispered raggedly against Natalia's lips, their foreheads once again resting together.

"So kissing me made you find religion?" Natalia asked, struggling not to smirk too broadly when Olivia spluttered at her in confusion. Only when Olivia's surprised laughter erupted did she join in.

"I can't believe you just said that!"

Natalia leaned in to press another kiss to Olivia's lips. "Clearly your sarcasm knows no bounds in who it will affect and when," she teased, biting her lip when Olivia's hand in her hair tightened ever so slightly. Their eyes met again, and she smiled broadly. "*Te quiero*."

"I love you, too," Olivia replied, then fingered the charm bracelet on Natalia's wrist. "I know I said I was going to give you a new charm for your bracelet each year, and there was one already on your bracelet, but this just seemed right somehow." She dug into her pocket and pulled out a small box that she held between them.

"Olivia, this is too much," Natalia said and took the box, but simply held it in her hands. "You don't need to buy me things to prove you love me."

"I could say the same thing, you know," came the soft reply. "Besides, this is something I wanted to do. It came to me in a dream, and I just had to do it."

Natalia nodded and carefully unwrapped the box. She ran a fingertip across the deep blue velvet of the box's exterior, unwilling to open it just yet. Eventually curiosity got the better of her, and she opened the box. Nestled inside was a small charm of a hand with a heart cut out of the palm. Natalia watched as Olivia reached into the box and pulled out the charm, attaching it to the bracelet. She then took the box from Natalia and set it on the table.

"I will not forget you," she said, stretching her hands out between them, palms up. "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

Natalia felt tears welling in her eyes as she recognized the quote. "From Isaiah, right?" she asked, voice rough with emotion. When Olivia nodded, she took both of her lover's hands and pressed a single kiss to the center of each of her palms. "Thank you, Olivia."

"I love you, Natalia. You mean everything to me."

"And you, and our daughters, mean everything to me."

They came together for another kiss, tears mingling on their cheeks.

Olivia smiled and caressed Natalia's cheek. How had she ever thought she could live without this wonderful woman in her life? "And now we should probably get to bed ourselves. Jellybean's going to be up early to get her presents from Santa."

"And Sweetpea will be up early for her breakfast," Natalia added with a wry grin as she stood. "And no matter what you may say, she only likes her breakfast from the source."

Olivia followed her up the stairs with a dopey grin on her face. "And you love every second of it, admit it."

"I will never deny that I cherish every moment I get to spend with our girls."

They checked in on all three of their daughters before stepping into their own bedroom. In no time, they were changed and curled up together under the covers, Natalia's head resting over Olivia's heart again.

"Merry Christmas, Olivia."

"Merry Christmas, Natalia."
