

All the Trimmings

by Calliopes_Muse

ACT 1

This was so unlike her. Olivia went through about three alarm clocks a year because she pulverized them on chilly mornings like this. Usually, all she wanted to do was huddle back under the warm covers. And more recently, snuggle closer to the warm body next to her. But here she was, less than two weeks away from having her life change yet again with the birth of her third daughter, and she found herself in a new position...awake...early. She fought the groan rolling low in her chest so she wouldn't wake the sleeping woman next to her. Instead, she quietly sat up to turn off her alarm before it had a chance to chirp annoyingly and then leaned over to watch Natalia sleep.

The last few days had been chaotic, to say the least. They had not just one, but two, false alarm rushes to the hospital. The doctor had explained it as Braxton Hicks contractions. They weren't uncommon late in a pregnancy, but they had scared Olivia. The second time it happened Natalia had some spotty bleeding, but the doctor again reassured them both that it wasn't a bad sign and to continue on with life as normal. Olivia brought Natalia home each time, and each time she made her sit on the couch while Olivia made her some tea and wrapped her in a warm blanket. She even built a small fire so they could huddle under the blanket and listen to the soft winds outside bring in the change of the seasons.

Everything was changing - the seasons, their lives, and the depth of Olivia's love for Natalia. She thought she loved her before, and she thought the love could never get stronger; however, when Natalia cried out in pain at the false contractions, and Olivia saw the small hint of blood on Natalia's thigh, the fear of loss, a gut-wrenching rending of her soul, was so intense it took her breath away. Even now, looking down on Natalia's serene features, Olivia's hands shook at the remembered rush of fear.

As she watched Natalia sleeping peacefully in their bed, she pushed away the fear and allowed herself a moment to relish in the warmth that spread through her every time she looked at her lover. She couldn't imagine ever being without this profound feeling of love for Natalia that left her awestruck. Yet it still seemed so surreal at times, and she found herself seeking reassurance in the most tactile of ways by doing what she was doing now, reaching over to brush her quivering fingers lightly over the other woman's swollen belly. The solidity of her and the child inside calmed Olivia like nothing else. Natalia really was

here. She really was back. And she really was hers. Natalia was okay, and Olivia would do everything in her power to ensure it stayed that way.

She was roused from her musings by slender fingers slipping between her own and a drowsy mumble. "Stay."

"If I stay, I'm going to do far more than cuddle, and it'll definitely wake you up." Olivia whispered.

"S'alright. Don't mind." Natalia said.

Olivia smirked at Natalia's semi-nocturnal confession, but the smile quickly faded. "I know you don't mind, but you and the baby need to sleep and rest. Doctor's orders. I'll be back to check on you at lunch. Sleep."

"M'kay."

Olivia brushed dark hair away from Natalia's face, enjoying the heavy feel of the strands teasing the skin between her fingers, until the other woman's breathing deepened. Natalia visibly sank further down into her pillow and the warmth of the bed. Olivia wanted nothing more than to slowly wake her lover up with heated kisses and touches. Instead, she sighed and got out from under the toasty covers, making a quiet but hasty run for the bathroom where she jumped into a steamy shower.

Thirty minutes later, she emerged from the bathroom and dressed in a tailor-fitted tan suit and high-heeled brown boots. Slipping on her long brown jacket from the closet to guard against the chilly fall weather, she looked in the mirror and drew up short. Except for the highlights in her pulled-back hair being slightly darker, she looked almost like she did on the surprisingly cold spring day when, over Gus' grave, she confessed her love for Natalia. Stepping aside, she saw the reflection of the woman in question sleeping soundly in bed... their bed.



It was hard for her to believe that barely six months had passed. So much had happened. So much had changed. Yet things felt exactly right, the way they should be.

She shook her head to clear her thoughts. Natalia was here now. She had come back to her and that's all that mattered.

Putting on the last of her jewelry, she moved to the side of the bed and gazed down at Natalia. Even with her mouth slightly open and a hint of drool on the corner of her mouth, Olivia thought she was the most gorgeous woman in the world. She slipped her hand along a warm cheek, gently caressing the soft skin, her fingers tracing the full lips. With an internal groan, she fought the desire to strip down and climb back into bed, and instead let her "worried partner" side come out and argue that Natalia needed rest more than sex. She contented herself with running her fingers softly along Natalia's cheek and kissing her tenderly on the lips. "I love you."

"Love you too."

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Olivia glanced at the clock on her desk for the third time in ten minutes, finally tossing down the file in her hand in frustration and sighing.

"Fire 'em." Olivia jumped at Doris' voice coming from the doorway.

“What?”

“Anyone who makes you sound like that and fling innocent files at only,” Doris glanced down at her watch, “10:45 in the morning must be fired.”

Olivia smiled at her friend and leaned back in her chair. “It’s not that. Well, not quite.”

The mayor smoothed down the non-existent wrinkles in her tight gray skirt before sitting across the desk from Olivia. “So...spill. What is it?”

Waving a hand in the air at Doris, Olivia feigned nonchalance. “Just want to get home.”

Doris smirked, one eyebrow quirking up naughtily. “Those cookies Natalia bakes must be really good to have you so anxious to get home so soon.”

“You’re horrible, and that’s not it at all.” Olivia shook her head and sipped her coffee, “Poor Natalia can hardly move, much less do...that.”

“Thank goodness I don’t have that kind of lady trouble!”

Olivia let her inner eight-year-old out to play and shot a rubber band at the other woman. “You wouldn’t complain. Trust me, I haven’t.”

Doris’ latent softball skills came in handy as she deftly caught the flying object in one hand. “Please...do tell me all about it, because I just can’t picture your personal Virgin Mary doing anything more intimate than bathing you in holy water. In fact,” Doris stood and grabbed her coat and purse, “you can tell me over an early lunch and a drink.”

“I’d love to kiss and tell with my disturbingly nosy friend, but I really do have to go home to check on Natalia.”

“Augh, that’s just disgusting.”

“What?”

“You are so whipped!”

Olivia shot another rubber band at Doris’ head. “I’m not whipped. I’m worried.”

“Why? She’s not due for a couple more weeks.” Doris shrugged, completely unconcerned for Natalia’s health.

A worried frown creased Olivia's face and she avoided Doris' eyes. "She started having some false labor pains last week."

"Oh. Well, she's obviously okay, right, or she wouldn't be at home?"

Olivia nodded, tapping a pen nervously on her desk. "Right."

"And the baby's far enough along that it would be fine if she delivered early. It's going to be fine, Olivia. Don't worry so much."

Olivia rubbed the bridge of her nose. Her emotions were too close to the surface, and she really didn't want to break down in front of Doris...again. "I can't help but worry. I know the odds are low that anything really bad could happen at this point, and the doctor has given both her and Francesca a perfect bill of health."

"See?"

Olivia leaned forward, resting her arms on the desk. "But I just got her back, Doris." The tears popped into her eyes before she realized what was happening, and she quickly brushed them away. "I just got her back and the thought of anything going wrong is... terrifying." Olivia nodded her head in resolve and continued on, "Only a little while longer. I just have to keep her from overdoing it."

Doris waited silently somehow knowing that Olivia's rant wasn't quite done. Doris smiled to herself when Olivia kept talking. "And it's not helping that Keira is sending me all these health and medical articles about women having babies after 35 with all these medical problems. I know she means well but..."

"Fire the bitch!"

Olivia stared at her friend for a moment, stunned by the absurdity of the outburst, before bursting into laughter. Seconds later, Doris started to chuckle as well.

Finally, Olivia wiped at the tears of laughter in her eyes. "Thank you; I needed that!"

"You're welcome." Doris picked up her purse and walked around the desk to kiss the top of Olivia's head. Olivia smiled up at her friend not letting her shock show at the uncharacteristic affectionate gesture. "Now, go home to your girl. You won't get many more moments alone."

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The drive back out to the farmhouse was idyllic. The fall sky was a startling shade of blue and a light wind dusted fallen leaves across the road and into Olivia's path as she steered her car along the road. She took Doris' advice and left a little early to spend quality time with Natalia and their unborn baby.

When Olivia opened the door, everything was silent until an overhead crash alerted her to the fact that someone was upstairs. She climbed the steps quietly and shuffled down the hall until she was in front of the nursery door, the room that had once belonged to her. She cracked the door open and caught sight of Natalia feverishly reorganizing and mumbling to herself. "No...no there. Maybe here. No, then the diaper caddy will be on the other side of the room."

Olivia swung the door open fully and Natalia immediately stiffened, knowing who was there, without turning around.

"Hi, honey. You're home early."

Olivia crossed her arms. "And what exactly do you think you're doing? The doctor said to rest."

She turned eager brown eyes on Olivia. "I am, by getting ready for our little girl to make her debut. It's kind of exciting, huh?"

"Yeah, it is, but we agreed that we'd work on her room this weekend. There's hardly anything left to do anyway." Olivia came up to her and ran the back of her fingers along Natalia's chin.

"I know, but something...I can't put my finger on it, just isn't right yet. Something doesn't feel right." Natalia spun around to face the room, taping a finger against her lips in contemplation.

Olivia smiled at the realization she was having. "You're nesting."

"No...no, I'm not." Natalia shook her head and adjusted the bedside lamp by a mere fraction of an inch.

"Yes, you are."

"And you're not?"

At that, Olivia sighed, knowing she had probably walked right into a trap.

Natalia's next words confirmed it. "What's with that mile high pile of diaper coupons on the kitchen table then?"

Olivia shrugged. "It's practical though. You can never have too many diapers."

Natalia quirked her mouth and regarded her partner as she took Olivia's hand and came closer. The protrusion of her belly, which seemed to be growing exponentially on a daily basis, kept Natalia from getting as close as she wanted so she tugged at Olivia's coat to bring her face down until their lips met in a kiss.

"I know, honey, but if you keep buying at this rate, we'll have enough for all of our grandkids until they go off to kindergarten."

Olivia smiled at her and leaned down into another gentle kiss, relishing the idea of them old and gray and spoiling a house full of grandkids. When she pulled back, she noted that Natalia wavered a little on her feet. "Whoa, have you eaten lunch yet?"

"Nope, waiting for you."

"Well, come on; let's get you downstairs and off your feet for a little while. I'll make sandwiches for us."

Natalia readily complied and followed Olivia downstairs. Olivia slipped off her jacket when they reached the kitchen and pulled out a chair for Natalia. Natalia didn't sit down right away. Instead she went to the refrigerator and started pulling out condiments, including the new jar of pickles that Olivia had bought the day before then sat down at the table.

"Mmmmm, pickles."

Olivia giggled at her, sliding into the chair across from her. "I got some ice cream too...you know, just to complete the pregnant woman stereotype."

Natalia speared a pickle from the jar and leaned back in her chair, her hand resting conveniently on her belly. "Hmmm, the other stereotypes don't seem to bother you."

Olivia glanced down at Natalia's ample cleavage, reminding her of one stereotype that she was thankful for. "They don't bother me, believe me. Except for that whole 'standing on your feet all day, slaving around the house, nesting' thing when you should be resting. That...bothers me a little."

Natalia watched for a moment as Olivia worked on their sandwiches. "I'm sorry. I guess I am nesting, huh?"

Olivia put the finishing touches on Natalia's sandwich, passed it over, and then held up her thumb and forefinger about an inch apart. "Just a little."

With the overstuffed ham sandwich finally finished and in front of her, Natalia lifted it and took a hearty bite, humming her approval. When she set it down, she looked at her partner nibbling on a turkey wrap.

"Something's just not right here. There's something missing."

Somehow Olivia knew the comment didn't have to do with her sandwich, and she wasn't sure how to really feel about it. She thought this – this home, family, her – was all Natalia needed. Apparently, she was wrong and she wasn't sure she wanted to know what the other woman meant. She got lost in her thoughts and picked at the tomato on her wrap, so she didn't notice Natalia get up from the table.

"I got it!"

Olivia jumped at the exclamation and followed her absent partner's voice into the family room. Natalia was standing in the space by the windows next to the front door.

"Got what?"

"Remember that Christmas tree you got from the Beacon last year?" Natalia's face was glowing with excitement.

Olivia shuffled her feet. "Yeah, you hated it."

"I didn't hate it. It just wasn't homey or..." she smirked at Olivia, "real. What was real was the warm feeling it gave me to have you and Emma here, in this house with our tree and decorations and food. We - the people in this house - make it a home. I want that again this year."

Olivia got it but she was still somewhat confused at where Natalia was going with this. She shrugged her shoulders. "You've got that. We're here. Just like we were last year."

Natalia went up to her and took her hands. "But it's not just us anymore, is it? And the situation is very different than it was last year. We have this little one here to consider and we have to think about the world and life we're bringing her into."

Olivia started to feel a little uneasy, wondering if Natalia was hinting that their family wasn't a good life for Francesca. A moment of panic, borne of years of waiting for flying bricks to hit her in the head, started to set in and tears sprang to her eyes.

Natalia felt a surge of sympathy at Olivia's reaction and moved as close as the baby would allow.

"I told Frank at the ultrasound, before you got there, that I want this baby surrounded from day one by all the people who love her. What better time to start than Thanksgiving?"

Olivia scrunched her eyebrows together. "What?"

"I know what this place needs. I know what I want. A big ol' family dinner on Thanksgiving, right here," Natalia turned, looking at the space currently occupied by two chairs and a small table, "with all of our family and friends to share it. What do you say?"

"Um, no."

"What? No...why no?"

"Because you'll become completely consumed with getting ready for this, and you shouldn't push yourself that much. Besides, Sam and Ava are coming, and that'll be enough to get ready for. We don't need to add more work to it."

Natalia considered the comment and quirked her face in a half-smile before adopting a full-blown pout. "Please? I never got to do this with Rafe. It was always just the two of us, and sometimes I even worked on Thanksgiving so I ended up bringing home leftovers from the restaurants I worked at. I really want to do this for Francesca...for us and our family."

When Olivia still seemed hesitant, Natalia turned the pout into a bright, winning smile. "That's not fair."

"What?" She smiled all the more, knowing full well what Olivia was talking about.

"The dimples. Those things should come with a warning label. You flashed those dimples and batted those pretty brown eyes and half of Springfield fell for you, including me."

"Does this mean that we're having Thanksgiving dinner here?" Natalia bit her lip expectantly.

Olivia threw her hands up in surrender. "As if I have a choice? The dimples have spoken."

Natalia bounced with excitement and kissed her partner thoroughly. "I love you so much, Olivia Spencer."

“Wow, we can have a big ol’ family dinner every week if you keep kissing me like that!” Olivia smiled happily, loving it when Natalia was happy too. But she raised a finger in warning at Natalia. “You have to promise me though; you’ll let me and Emma help you. That you won’t go crazy getting ready for this. Promise.”

“I promise.”

When Natalia added a sexy smile to the already prominent dimples, Olivia held up a finger of warning again.

“Don’t!” Olivia joked then got serious. “Okay, I’ll talk to Keira about bringing in some catering and I can have the logistics guys bring over enough tables and chairs for everyone. Oh, and maybe Greg can get one of his flower-arranging buddies to do a huge centerpiece for the table!”

The more Olivia talked, the more Natalia’s smile faltered. “No...No, Olivia.”

“But...you said?”

“No, we’re having a traditional family dinner here. That means I’m cooking dinner, with your help, of course; you’ll personally invite everyone; and you’ll carve the turkey.”

Olivia spluttered, “Carve the turkey? Why do I have to carve the turkey?”

Natalia smiled lovingly at her partner and kissed her on the cheek. “I cook it. You carve it.”

Olivia’s mouth hung open as she watched Natalia waddle back into the kitchen and sit down to finish her sandwich. She followed her back into the kitchen, slumping back into her own chair, and looked at her smug girlfriend. “There’s a problem with this little plan of yours.”

One dark eyebrow curved up. “Oh really?”

“Uh huh. You’re using this as a roundabout way to do your,” Olivia flailed her hands around her, “nesting thing. When I leave for work, you’ll probably bake fifty thousand batches of cookies or something. You have to promise me that you’ll take it easy and let me and Emma help you.”

“Okayyyyyy.” Natalia dragged the word out in exasperation then looked at Olivia through slitted but amused eyes, “And what if I don’t promise?”

Olivia pushed her plate aside and leaned across the table, propping her breasts up on the table to enhance her cleavage. When she saw Natalia look down and swallow hard, she

knew she had her attention. She stroked one long finger along the other woman's exposed wrist, watching goose bumps pop up along the tan flesh and smiled seductively at Natalia. "Let's just say that with what little time is left between now and when the baby's born, you really don't want to be so exhausted from cleaning and cooking that you can't manage any other activities. Now do you?"

"You drive a hard bargain." Natalia licked her lips and swallowed hard.

Olivia's smile became feral. "Oh, honey, you have no idea how hard I can drive that bargain."

Natalia's breath catching was audible and Olivia couldn't resist her. The sound Natalia was making was a reminder of the sounds of pleasure Natalia made, low in her throat, deep and breathy, as Olivia would make love to her. For Olivia, pleasing Natalia was a drug that had hooked her on the first kiss and right now, she needed to feed her addiction. She stood and moved around to the front of the other woman's chair, kneeling in front of her and sliding her hands along still-shapely thighs as her fingers disappeared under the hem of Natalia's skirt. "Perhaps a demonstration is in order?"

Her lover's breathing quickened and her dark eyes were nearly black with desire. "When do you have to be back in the office?"

Olivia smirked and glanced at the watch on her wrist before sliding her hand under the skirt again. "About 30 minutes."

Natalia closed her eyes, imagining all of the wonderful things they could do in thirty minutes, and her body instantly responded. "Plenty of time."

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Olivia bit her lip and closed her eyes as her fingers traced along the edge of the other woman's panties. She dipped a finger underneath the silky material, brushing the back of her finger along the dampness. She looked up to dark eyes, searching hers, as she slipped the digit into her mouth and moaned at the taste.

Natalia watched as Olivia's finger disappeared into her mouth, and she felt the instinctive clenching of her muscles in response. She never knew what it meant to feel passion for another person. She had loved Gus with an adolescent heart, infatuated and carried away by his attention, and she had cared for Frank and the pain he had felt at Coop's loss, wanting to ease his pain and to drown her unspoken desires for Olivia. But this, the feelings she had for Olivia, she couldn't even find words for. She didn't even care to explain it or understand it. All she knew was her body and her heart were in unison for the

first time in her life, and they spoke a wordless conversation to Olivia, telling her what she desired, what she needed. And the beauty and wonder of it was that the other woman understood this language and read it with ease.

Olivia's knowing touches and sure kisses left Natalia in breathless wonder and absolutely convinced with every movement, every word, every brush of skin that this love between them was their destiny and fate. For Natalia, God had willed this love into existence as sure as He willed the sun to shine. There was no doubt. And in this knowledge, it gave Natalia the assurance to be active in their lovemaking, to cherish it and honor it.

She took Olivia's hand and scooted her chair back, causing Olivia to look at her curiously. "Let's get more comfortable."

Olivia followed her hand-in-hand to the living room until they were in standing next to the couch.

Natalia turned and pulled her into a deep, searching kiss, letting her tongue slowly caress Olivia's mouth. She pulled back and dipped her head to the side, kissing along the older woman's neck and gently sucking on her pulse point.

Olivia's head fell back in response, freely giving the other woman access, as her hands slipped into thick, dark hair to encourage Natalia to explore. And she did. She let her tongue trace the dip in Olivia's throat and nip along her collarbone, before moving up to the other side of Olivia's neck. Her hands moved along her waist, restlessly grasping at Olivia's blouse, as she lost herself in the sensation of the other woman moving against her.

There were many things Natalia loved about Olivia – the fresh, clean scent of her shampoo; the salty taste of her skin; and the low, throaty moans as she became more excited.

Everything worked together in a perfect choreography to cause Natalia to sense the moment inside herself where she could almost hear an internal switch click on telling her that there was no stopping, no going back, and she absolutely had to have Olivia right then and there.

The breaking point for Natalia came the moment that Olivia's breasts brushed against her own, and the sensation sent a jolt of desire down Natalia's spine.

"God, Olivia." She moved back up from the spot on Olivia's neck, just below her ear, and kissed her solidly. She held the older woman in place with her hands on either side of her face as she kissed her thoroughly. "I need you. I want to feel you."

She pushed Olivia towards the arm of the couch until they bumped against it. She pulled back to look into the green eyes dazed by a rush of desire and need.

“Take these off.” Natalia tugged at the waistband of Olivia’s pants, and with help from the other woman, they ended up in a heap next to the couch along with her panties.

Natalia nudged her back until she sat on the arm of the couch. She never broke eye contact with Olivia as she teased her hand along a naked thigh. It wasn’t until her fingers caressed damp curls that Olivia closed her eyes and let her head fall back.

“Natalia.” Olivia’s breathy sigh undid her.

Effortlessly, she slipped two fingers inside, curving up slightly the way she knew Olivia loved. She was rewarded by Olivia’s arms and legs wrapping around her. She pulled Olivia in close to hold her up as her hand moved against her. They had only been lovers two months, but it already felt like a lifetime for Natalia. Yet, a lifetime would never be enough to love the woman in her arms. She swore every time they made love she knew everything about Olivia – every movement, every sound – but she was amazed each time that she learned something new.

Like now, the tilt and erratic movement of her hips told her that Olivia was close, so close, but when the older woman looked at her and worked to focus on her, she read something else in the raw, needy depths of her eyes.

“What you do need, Olivia?”

The older woman, rarely at a loss for words, and certainly not shy about her sexual needs, looked at her with a vulnerability that she could only show to Natalia. She bit her quivering lip as Natalia leaned in and gently kissed her.

“Tell me, baby.”

“More. I need more of you.” Olivia breathlessly whispered.

The moment hung suspended in the air as Natalia registered the request. Olivia’s body shook in her arms, waiting, until Natalia tested a third, and then a fourth, finger.

“Oh God...baby.” Olivia moaned, her head resting now on Natalia’s shoulder and her legs held onto the other woman tightly, pulling her in close. “Faster.”

Olivia reached back to grip the arm of couch and get better leverage as Natalia moved frantically against her.

The pain and burn in her arm was worth it to hear Olivia panting out “fucks” and “oh Gods”. Natalia swore there was nothing more entrancing and erotic than Olivia Spencer on the

verge of orgasm, and the knowledge that she had that power to make it happen, to bring this incredible creature such pleasure, made Natalia feel like she could fly. She felt powerful and strong, holding Olivia up as the other woman's body surrendered to her climax, her head back and her body reaching for the last shiver of release.

Natalia leaned forward, tasting the exposed column of Olivia's neck and tracing a line to her ear. "My God, Olivia. You are *so* beautiful!" Her voice was soft and reverent as she worshipped the damp skin beneath her mouth.

Olivia was slowly coming back down from her high, and she felt a new rush of wetness as the fingers still inside of her began to move again and the hot mouth on her skin became more forceful.

"Baby." Olivia started to protest.

Natalia nibbled at her ear then whispered. "Just one more. Please."

She couldn't refuse her, and her body gave into the demands of Natalia's thrusts. Quickly and without warning, the orgasm ripped through her, stealing her breath, leaving her gasping out, "Oh my God." Over and over again.

Olivia pulled back and looked at the desperate desire in brown eyes. "Get on the couch."

She watched as Natalia stepped back and then turned to follow the brunette with her eyes to the couch. She slid off the arm of the couch and stripped her blouse and bra off, simply watching Natalia as she laid down and hiked up her skirt.

For Natalia, the sight of a bold and naked Olivia standing over her was almost too much to take. Olivia's utter confidence in her sexuality stirred a similar reaction in Natalia, and she found herself brazenly raising her skirt in invitation. When Olivia told her to take off her panties, she started to shake with need.

Then the other woman was there, between her legs, hovering over her and slowly kissing her. Olivia leaned back and lifted Natalia's hips until they made contact. Her eyes rolled back in her head as Olivia rocked against her, building up a delicious friction. She took Natalia right to the edge then broke the contact. Natalia opened her eyes at the feel of fingers tracing down her cheek. The smoky green eyes looked back at her with a fierceness Natalia had only seen in the bedroom and the boardroom. This was the woman Natalia had fallen in love with – a unrepentant and unapologetic force of nature – wrapped in the luscious skin and heady scent of femininity.

“What do you want, baby?” The adoration in Olivia’s voice told Natalia that anything was fair game. There were no limits or impossibilities. Anything Natalia wanted, Olivia would give to her.

All she could think of though was being as close to Olivia as possible. All she wanted was her. “You. All I want is you. Your mouth, your hands. I want to feel you everywhere.”

Olivia kissed her again, and it stirred more than Natalia’s body. It reached into her soul, lighting up the dark places she had closed off for so long, so much pain she had known, was healed by Olivia’s touch. She whimpered as the kiss ended and Olivia’s weight shifted as she moved lower. She needed to be in this moment and feel connected to something bigger than herself, so she watched her. She watched as the dark head moved lower, lifting her blouse and kissing a trail down her stomach. She could feel Olivia’s breath against her skin, and she could hear whispered words that weren’t intended for her but for the little life inside her, making her smile.

The kisses moved lower still, brushing along the inside of her thighs, as hands lifted her hips slightly. And then all thought stopped as Olivia’s tongue nestled between her legs, slowly worshipping and caressing her. Every time they made love, Natalia was reassured all over again that they were meant to be together, that this was perfect and right, because every time they made love, it was like two pieces of a puzzle coming together. Everything made sense in that perfect moment of union.

It was that awareness and knowledge that allowed Natalia to let go in Olivia’s arms, to show her need and desire openly. She reached down and pulled Olivia closer, rolling her hips against her, driving her deeper. It was like she couldn’t get Olivia close enough, but before she could get the words out around her gasps, Olivia slipped her fingers inside.

Natalia let out a long, deep groan and for a second her body stilled then began to rock against Olivia again as the knowing fingers moved deeper and faster. In a matter of seconds, her body tightened as she teetered on the edge with the rush of blood from her extremities racing into the small point of contact where Olivia’s mouth was.

She knew she must have screamed because she looked down to see a smiling Olivia raise up. “Thank goodness we live in the country. That would have required a call to 911.”

Natalia laughed and flopped her head back on the couch, her body relaxed and sated, small aftershocks rumbling through her as Olivia moved up along her body. “You’re one to talk.”

Olivia slid up beside her and propped up on one elbow, smirking. “It’s expected of me though.”

She rolled her head to the side, smiling at the green eyes dancing mischievously. “Well, you know what they say; better watch out for the quiet ones.”

Olivia sighed and curled up against Natalia’s side. “Indeed.”

“Don’t you need to get back to work?” Natalia nudged the head on her shoulder.

Olivia huffed a little and yawned. “I’m the boss. I think I can take a few minutes for a little post-sex cuddle.”

“I won’t argue.”

Quietly, Natalia lay there, listening to Olivia’s breathing even out as she drifted off to sleep. Outside, she could hear the brisk winds buffet the house and the rustle of leaves stirring. Then she smiled contentedly and closed her eyes, kissing the head on her shoulder before letting sleep claim her too.

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ACT 2

The lunch rush at Company was oddly non-existent for a Friday. Certainly, it had something to do with the pelting, icy rain outside. Blake propped her elbow on the bar, sipped her third cup of coffee so it wouldn’t go to waste, and contented herself with the trashiest romance novel she could find. When she first started dating Frank, she thought her interest in those books would fade, since she’d found the real thing again. But she kept going back to read about seduction on the high seas and dalliances at the dude ranch. Sighing, she turned the page to find out that the book’s hero was critically injured in a car wreck.

“Figures,” she muttered. The sudden ding of the bell over the door startled her out of her romance-induced coma. She turned to see Olivia shaking off the rain and offering her a beaming smile.

“Hey, Blake!”

“Well, hey to you too. You sure are chipper for a horribly nasty Friday.”

Olivia shrugged and chuckled a little. “Why, yes, I am. I can’t seem to help it these days.”

Blake finally put her book down and turned to face Olivia, who’d come over to sit on the stool next to her. “Well, that’s just disgusting!”

She turned a confused look on Blake. "What?"

Blake slid off her stool and went around to fill a coffee mug as was customary, even if not always asked for. Everyone just knew that Olivia took a cup of coffee when she came into Company. "You and Natalia...you're just so...disgustingly happy."

Olivia waited a beat, smirking, until Blake had set down her mug and taken her own back up to take a sip and said, "Good sex will do that for you." She effectively dodged the spray of coffee coming from Blake and smiled teasingly. "Oh, wait, you wouldn't know anything about good sex, now would ya, Blakie."

Olivia could see the smile fighting to stay hidden as Blake huffed out. "Hey! I'll have you know that..."

"Have her know what?" Buzz scurried in with an apron on and a clueless look on his face.

Blake smiled sincerely. "That Frank is a great guy, so that makes you the best father ever."

Olivia fought the urge to throw the book next to her at Blake's head and instead turned her best fake smile on Buzz.

"Obviously!" He said before he turned his attention to Olivia and gave her a solid hug. "So, what brings you here, Olivia? How's Natalia? Frank said you all rushed to the hospital the other day."

She toyed with the rim of her coffee cup before looking up at her friends. "Oh, Natalia's great! And she's fine; it was just false labor pains. However, she got this crazy idea, and I've been sent out on a mission to make sure it happens." Blake and Buzz eyed her curiously but silently, encouraging her to continue. "She wants to have this huge Thanksgiving dinner out at the farmhouse, and she...we would love it if you would come. And, of course, Frank, Lillian, and Clarissa are invited too."

Buzz managed to speak first. "Wow, well...thank you, both of you. But we were thinking of just having a quiet holiday dinner at home. Marina, Shayne, and Henry were planning on coming over early in the day. So..."

Olivia held up a hand to forestall the need for an explanation. "No, it's okay. No need to explain. I understand. I really do."

He patted her hand. "I know you do, Liv."

~~*~*

The dark wood interior and soft, sultry jazz music welcomed Olivia as she entered Towers. She walked up to the bar and nodded at the bartender, surprised that it wasn't Jamanda. "Fancy meeting you here."

Olivia turned towards the familiar voice and smiled at Doris, who already looked pretty drunk.

The Mayor moved over to the bar where Olivia was sitting and struggled to sit on the stool next to her. Olivia eventually took pity on her and steadied her at the elbow so she could finally sit down.

Doris motioned for the bartender. "One for her too."

Olivia shook her head at the bartender to decline the offer. "No, that's okay. I have to go pick up Emma from school soon, and I just stopped by to get some dinner for tonight."

Doris smirked at the open door Olivia had given her, and she couldn't resist going through it.

"Awww, poor Livvie. Betty Crocker's not going to greet you with a kiss, a foot rub, and a five-course meal?"

Olivia glared at Doris, but she decided to cut her some slack because she knew the other woman was probably still getting over Jamanda. And being in Towers probably wasn't doing anything except reminding her of that situation.

"I hate to ask, but why are you at Tower's when you could run into your ex?"

"Oh, I won't be running into Jamanda here anymore." Doris stared down into her martini, then looked up at Olivia, her blue eyes sad but amused. "She ran off with the cook."

"I didn't know you had a cook."

The politician almost choked on the big sip she had taken. "Not mine. The one here!"

"Oh...sorry."

Doris waved a hand casually. "Eh. I met someone else anyway."

That kind of response only made Olivia more curious, and against her better judgment she asked, "Obviously, you're not that broken-hearted over the fetus, so what gives? Something has you here drinking away your troubles."

Sighing, Doris said, "I miss Ashlee."

"That's understandable. You've always had each other and now she's away at school."

The Mayor toyed with the toothpick in her glass. "She's not coming home for Thanksgiving. She decided to stay there with Daisy. Apparently, James is taking a trip out there too, so they'll have a grand old time!"

Olivia looked at her with understanding. "I know it's hard, but they have to live their lives, just like we do. She's a college student. It's what they do...ignore us. Besides, there's always Christmas." She chuckled her melancholy friend on the shoulder, but noticed Doris' cheeks were red, and she looked like she was fighting tears.

Olivia sighed. "I'm going to hate myself for this, I bet, but I can't stand it. You can't be alone for Thanksgiving. That's just not right. You're our friend, so come have dinner with us. You can even bring your new...friend?"

Doris laughed out loud at the comment. "Um no, I made that mistake with Jamanda by actually giving a damn. Anna, that's her name, completely understands about me trying to improve my image. She's not putting any pressure on me. It's nice." She caught Olivia giving her an imploring look. "Okay, okay, maybe I'll see if she's free."

"So, you'll come to dinner then?"

"Yes! I'll come to dinner. You're as bad as your girlfriend."

Olivia picked up the dinner order that had been placed in front of her, smiling. "I learned from the best. See ya Thursday."

~~*~*

Olivia tapped her foot impatiently on the floorboard as she waited for Emma to emerge from her school building. She kept herself amused by checking email on her Blackberry every few minutes. And then, just as she became engrossed in a headline news story, a tap on her windshield made her jump. She rolled down her window.

"Ms. Smith," she greeted the principal. "It's good to see you again, I think."

She looked at Olivia with both understanding and concern. "Would you be able to come in for a minute? Emma's teacher just came off bus duty or she would have come out herself. She would like to have a word with you before you leave."

“Okay...sure.” Olivia exited the car and followed the woman across the well-manicured lawn and through heavy metal and glass double doors. Olivia had checked out several different schools in the area before settling on this one. But these schools all looked the same after a while – heavy, metal doors, long, well-waxed hallways, and classroom doors inset at regular intervals. They all smelled the same too – the sharp acidity of bleach that couldn’t hide the smell of musty gym socks and the lingering burnt scent of greasy cafeteria food.

She followed Ms. Smith down the hall to the right, and halfway down the now-darkened corridor, the principal turned to open a door. Seated at a small table, with mini-chairs all around in different colors of the rainbow, was Emma. Her daughter didn’t turn to smile or look up to greet her, but continued to stare at her hands on the tabletop in front of her.

Across from Emma sat her teacher, Ms. Warner, a new teacher hired fresh from the local college. She was an eager teacher. Olivia remembered that from the open house she went to before school started. The woman already had a year’s worth of lesson plans prepared to show all the parents and a very detailed list of supplies each student would need. Who knew that there was an actual paint color called Flamingo Pink - not Baby Doll Pink or Dusky Rose Pink but Flamingo Pink - and that her nine-year-old would need it in order to successfully navigate the third grade?

She carefully sat down in the tiny chair next to Emma, and even managed it with some propriety in her short pencil skirt. She hadn’t expected to get called in to talk to Emma’s teacher today or she would have worn pants.

Ms. Warner nodded at the principal as she left and then smiled warmly at Olivia, her tousled brown hair bouncing around her face, and shook her hand. “Ms. Spencer, thank you so much for coming in today. I really wanted to talk to you because Emma, even though I’ve only known her a short time, has been uncharacteristically quiet lately. Today, impossibly so.”

“Today? What happened today?”

“She hasn’t spoken a word to anyone. She refuses to talk.”

Olivia looked at her daughter. “Emma, honey, what’s wrong? Why wouldn’t you say anything at all?”

Emma didn’t respond, she just fought back the tears in her eyes and looked down at her folded hands. She didn’t want to make her mom mad, but she didn’t know what to say. It seemed like she was getting in trouble these days for first saying something to that kid Kurt and now for saying nothing at all.

When Olivia realized that Emma wasn't going to say anything, she turned back to the teacher. "She's had a tough time lately. We all have, but her grandfather recently passed away. It may just really be hitting her now with the holidays coming up. It has to be hard for her."

"Perhaps that is all it is. I sure hope so." Ms. Warner looked at Emma and tried to make eye contact. "But time does make it better. It can help to talk about it."

Olivia saw the brief, but unmistakable quirk, of Emma's mouth, not in agreement, but in skepticism. Whatever was going on with Emma, it wasn't like her to react so cynically and hopelessly.

"I appreciate you wanting to talk to me, Ms. Warner. I'll see if she'll be a little more talkative at home."

Ms. Warner nodded her head in agreement and thanked Olivia before the mother and daughter left. On the way out, Olivia looked for the principal but didn't see her. She wanted to find out if she had talked to Kurt's parents yet.

After about fifteen minutes of driving, they were on the well-worn road running in front of the farmhouse, and Olivia decided to approach the issue from school with Emma.

"So, tell me, what's up, Bean? It seems your principal and I are getting close to being on a first name basis."

"Do I hafta?"

So, something was up, just like she thought. "I really wish you would, baby."

"Can I do it after I get back from Daddy's?"

Olivia had promised Emma that she could spend time with Phillip over the weekend, and she didn't want to break her promise.

"Okay, but don't think this is the end of it. You pushed that kid down and now this. I know he said mean things to you, and that wasn't right, but I need to understand because I know this isn't like you." Olivia looked at her daughter in the rearview mirror. The girl's eyes were averted, and she was looking out the window.

"Okay, mom."

~~*~*

The Spencer entrance to the house was more subdued than usual, and Olivia noted the oddity of how quiet the house was. Usually, Natalia was bustling around in the kitchen with some kind of wonderful-smelling food permeating every crevice of the house. Olivia hoped to go upstairs to find Natalia resting or napping for a change.

“Go wash up, baby, and get your bag together for your Dad’s.” She hustled Emma up the stairs.

“Okay.” Olivia watched her daughter go down the hallway to her own room.

Olivia opened the door to their bedroom and noticed it was empty, with all the lights off. She narrowed her eyes at the door to Francesca’s room and turned the knob ready to catch Natalia overdoing it again. When she peeked in though, she saw Natalia, seated in the rocking chair she had bought for her, pulled up close to the small white dresser. The brunette turned and smiled, holding up an adorable sleep outfit with footies and duck designs on it. Even the feet were in the shape of ducks. Olivia couldn’t help but smile and imagined Francesca in it.

“Isn’t this the most adorable thing ever?” Natalia hugged it as if the child was already wearing it. “I always wanted a girl of my own.”

Olivia looked up, not because of the woman’s words, but because she thought she heard a soft scuffing sound. But the doorway was empty and she didn’t hear the echo of footsteps, so she chalked it up to imagination and refocused on Natalia. “You have one now.”

Olivia brushed a soft, dark curl of hair from Natalia’s face and leaned over to kiss her gently. Natalia grinned at her. “Yes, I do. I have all my favorite girls with me now.”

“Speaking of which, one of your girls had a tough day at school.”

Natalia pulled a beautiful pink dress from a box and put it on a hanger next to her. “Really? Again?”

“Yep. Seems she was mute today and wouldn’t talk to a soul.”

“Huh, well, that’s definitely not normal for Emma. Then again, neither is pushing another kid down.” Natalia added another outfit to a hanger and handed an armful to Olivia. “Can you put these up for me?”

“Sure.” Olivia took the clothes and ran a hand over a fancy dress, before moving to the closet. “I know, she’s not herself. First, that altercation with that Kurt kid, and now this. I still can’t believe he said that stuff to her. Something should have been done.”

Natalia watched Olivia walk to the closet, before turning back to the pile of clothes in front of her. "I'm sure it'll all work out the way it's supposed to. But you know, she did just lose Alan. It has to be tough. And she's getting to a difficult age."

Walking back over, Olivia leaned against the dresser and looked at Natalia. "Maybe you're right. Maybe she's just overly sensitive now with losing Alan and all of the changes going on in her life."

Olivia held out her hand for Natalia to take so she could pull herself out of the chair. "I'm sure that's all it is. You got dinner, right?"

Olivia nodded.

"Good, 'cause we're starved!" Natalia patted her belly for emphasis and laughed.

A few minutes later, all three sat around the table munching on their dinner and all the while Natalia practically hummed in delight. Emma was still subdued but she ate well.

Olivia was picking up the dirty plates and placing them in the sink for cleaning later when Natalia asked, "Oh, did you get a chance to invite Buzz and everyone for Thanksgiving?"

Olivia grimaced a little. "I did."

"But? I know I hear a 'but' in there."

"They're planning something quiet with just their family."

"Oh." Natalia was a little surprised; she thought Frank would want to do the family thing with his soon-to-be youngest child. "I guess it'll just be us and Sam and Ava then."

Olivia cringed again. "Not quite." Natalia raised an eyebrow at her, urging her to continue. "Um, I ran into Doris at Towers when I got our dinner and..."

"Olivia!"

"Ashlee's staying at school for the holidays!"

"Olivia!" Natalia's tone had taken on an I-can't-believe-you-did-this quality.

"She was drunk and pathetic and...I felt sorry for her." Olivia pursed her lips and looked down. "No one should be alone for the holidays. I've been alone. It's not fun."

Suddenly, she had her arms full of a very pregnant and very emotional Natalia.

“That was so sweet of you.”

“Um, okay.”

Natalia pulled back and looked at her with tears in her eyes. “In fact, I think we should just invite everyone we know. Even people we wouldn’t normally invite. What do you think?”

She turned the rhetorical question on Emma, who was poking a French fry into her ketchup. “Emma, how would you like to invite your Dad over here for Thanksgiving dinner?”

“Really?” Emma squealed.

“What?” Olivia squeaked out simultaneously with her daughter’s excited response.

Natalia added excitedly. “Yeah, Beth, James, all of them can come over.”

“But James can’t be there. He’s going to see Daisy and Ashlee.” Olivia hoped to throw a monkey wrench in with that twist.

Natalia waved the comment away. “Eh, we’ll make up for it with someone else. Oh, I know.” She turned to Olivia. “Jonathan and Sarah.”

Emma squealed in delight, “Cool!”

Olivia looked at Emma with regret before turning to Natalia. “No, not cool. Honey, we talked about this. This is going to be too much for you to deal with.”

Natalia calmly turned to Emma. “Sweetie, go get your bag so we can get you to your Dad’s, okay?” She watched Emma scamper away before turning back to her flustered girlfriend.

“Did you see how excited she was by the idea of her Dad coming for Thanksgiving and then having Sarah to play with? They had so much fun together on Halloween. She hasn’t smiled all night, but this did the trick. If you don’t want to do it for me, do it for her.”

Olivia took Natalia’s face between both of her hands, groaning in frustration yet still lovingly caressing a cheek with her thumb. “I do want to do this for you...and her. For us. I just don’t want you to work yourself like crazy. I know how you get.”

Natalia leaned into the caress, her eyes dropping heavily under the soft, seductive gaze Olivia unknowingly turned on her. “That’s why I have you. You’re my helpmate and my partner and my best friend. We’ll do it together, okay?”

Olivia sighed, knowing she'd just lost this round of battles. All she could do was nod and kiss the woman she loved. "Okay."

~~*~*

Hilda opened the large doors to the Spaulding mansion and ushered the women inside, even though it was unnecessary. Emma didn't heed propriety and took off through the foyer and into the den where she knew her father would be. Sure enough, it was only a matter of seconds before Emma was dragging the tall blonde man out into the hallway.

"Daddy, can we stay up tonight and watch movies? I brought *Cars* because you said you hadn't seen it yet."

He smiled down at Emma, who was practically bouncing with excitement. "Sure, honey, whatever you want to do. Why don't you go take your stuff to your room and I'll make some popcorn?"

"Okay!" In a flash she was gone up the stairs, leaving the grown-ups looking at each other awkwardly.

Natalia was the first to move, and nudged Olivia in the ribs, forcing Olivia to speak.

"Umph! Ummmm, Phillip. We...I mean, Emma and us, we'd like to have you come for Thanksgiving dinner at our house. And Beth, of course." After another nudge to the ribs. "Oh, and Bill and Lizzie too."

He chuckled at his formidable ex-wife being unceremoniously man-handled by the petite woman next to her. "I'd love to, but um, I made special plans for Beth and I. We kind of got back together, so I wanted to do something romantic."

When Natalia finally spoke, her hands were up over her heart. "That's so sweet! I'm so glad you two patched things up."

Phillip looked down, a little embarrassed. "Yeah, me too. I'll tell you what though, I'd love to see my little girl on Thanksgiving, so why don't I come that morning and get her, then bring her back before you guys carve the turkey."

Olivia hesitated. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!"

"Good, because she was so excited about seeing you for Thanksgiving." Natalia smiled.

“Would nine o’clock be okay?”

Olivia looked to Natalia to confirm it before she spoke. “Yeah, sounds good.”

They said their goodbyes and Emma came down for one last hug and kiss before they headed back to the car. Walking down the steps of the Spaulding mansion, Olivia looked over to see Natalia dabbing at her eyes.

“Can I blame this recent emotional rollercoaster on hormones or is it something else?”

“Oh no, trust me, it’s hormones. The other day, I went into Francesca’s room and looked at the little booties we got for her trip home from the hospital, and I sat in the chair and bawled for an hour. And then hearing Phillip planning something so sweet and romantic for Beth. I’m just a sucker for romance.”

“Lucky me.” Olivia smiled at her partner and helped her get in the car.

A few minutes down the road, Olivia took Natalia’s hand. “Are you scared of what we’re getting into?”

Natalia shrugged, seeming to fight for the right words, when the tears came again in earnest. Olivia pulled the car over into a parking lot, unbuckled their seatbelts, and pulled the other woman close. She held and rocked her like that for a few minutes until Natalia got her breath back. She leaned back so she could look into the warm, brown eyes of her partner.

Before she could speak though, Natalia answered her question. “I am a little scared, but I feel really excited too. I’m so excited that I feel almost out-of-control, like I could just float off into space if you weren’t here to ground me.” She looked at Olivia as she said the last part, and an undeniable electricity crackled between them. “Sometimes, I can’t believe that you’re here and that we’re here. That we have this life together. It still amazes me.”

Olivia shifted a little closer, feeling the invisible cord that had always seemed to pull them together tighten. She was drawn to Natalia without even realizing what she was doing. There was a simple basic need inside that compelled her forward. She traced a full lip with her finger, letting the tips of her fingers drift lower, past the buttons and under skirts. She never kissed her, but she watched her and let herself be made breathless by the wonder of her, of them, in this moment.

~~*~*

It was the Monday before Thanksgiving, and Doris was being mocked.

She looked at her phone, sitting beside her so innocent and benign. She tapped the side of her wine glass impatiently before standing and pacing the length of her study. One wall held all of her law books, neatly organized and lovingly cared for. The opposite wall showcased her favorite works from Shakespeare to Hemingway, Brontë to Plath, and a spattering of political memoirs and biographies.

She felt like she had conquered many problems in her time – college, coming out even if it was only to a few people, law school, the political “good ol’ boy” network, and even raising a child – but she was still stumped when it came to women, particularly women she found interesting and attractive.

Anna was certainly one of those women. She was bold and challenging, mysterious and captivating, and damned good-looking. Doris chastised herself for not being able to think of anything or anyone else. At other moments like this, she would have given the whole situation a big old middle finger and just gone down to Ladies Night. She couldn’t do it this time. What the hell made things so different now she wasn’t sure. All she knew was that she hated feeling this way, ineffectual and powerless, so drawn in and unable to fight the pull of this magnetic woman.

With a growl, intended solely for that insecure part of her that still resided far below the surface, the one recently dredged up by the Evil Image Consultant from Hell, she picked up the phone and dialed before she could change her mind again.

Two rings...three rings...shit, she thought, it’s going to voice mail. “Anna Li.”

For three whole seconds Doris forgot to breathe as the crisp, and now agitated, voice filtered over the line again. “Hello!”

“Ummm, hi. It’s me...Doris.”

“Oh, hi. How are you?”

“I’m good. I just...” Doris couldn’t stop her hands from shaking and wanted to slap herself. She’d never acted like this with a woman before. She wondered what the hell was wrong with her? “I called because...oh, this is gonna sound really weird and crazy and...I’m really not weird or crazy, I just...”

A soft laugh came over the line. “Doris, it’s okay. Just say it.”

“Would you come with me to Thanksgiving dinner at a friend’s house? Um, as my date?” A long pause. Doris fidgeted through the long pause and finally broke the uncomfortable silence. “You know what? Forget about it. Just...”

“Wait! Please don’t take this the wrong way, but I can’t,” Anna quickly explained, knowing how it sounded. “I have some work to do.”

“On Thanksgiving. You’re working on Thanksgiving.” Doris closed her eyes and leaned against the large mahogany desk behind her.

“Yes, I am. Not because I want to but because I have to. It’s some reports from my old job. My replacement starts Monday, and I have cases that I need to write reports for. The chief made everyone write these reports for the day when we’d have more staff and someone would take some of our caseload. No one ever took any of mine until now. We were overworked and underpaid, and anyway...let’s just say, I got really far behind.”

Doris looked down at her immaculate heels. “I guess that’s plausible. Still not sure if I buy it though.”

“You don’t have to buy it, but you can let me make it up to you. Have dinner with me?”

Doris snorted. “You can’t have Thanksgiving with me, but you can take me out?”

“After the holidays,” Anna cut her off before she got going.

“Oh.”

Anna’s smile could be heard over the phone. “You know, you’re kind of cute when you’re flustered. How about Monday at eight o’clock?”

“I...”

“Just give me a chance. You won’t be sorry.” Anna’s voice had shifted to low and sultry, and the effect of it reminded Doris of their first meeting. She couldn’t shake the way the woman made her feel. It was exhilarating and frightening, and she wanted it to last forever. And damn if she hadn’t wanted to call Anna the moment she walked out of her house that morning.

“Okay. Eight o’clock it is then.”

“I’ll pick you up.”

“Okay.”

After they said their goodnights, Doris hung up the phone and went to the bar to pour another glass of wine. She saw her reflection in the mirror above the bar and shook her head. "You're in deep trouble, Wolfe."

~~*~*

The mini-mart was unusually busy, even for the day before Thanksgiving, and it was nearly impossible to find a decent parking spot. Olivia had asked Natalia to make a list of the ingredients she needed, but the other woman insisted on going along with her. She glanced at the brunette out of the corner of her eye. Every day the waddle got more pronounced, and her ankles were the size of grapefruits, but Olivia grinned to herself, thinking that Natalia was still the most beautiful woman on Earth.

"You're adorable when you're miserable."

At the words, Natalia glared at her and huffed.

Olivia chuckled. "Hey, you could have stayed home. You're here now, so buck up, buckaroo."

Natalia smirked at her as they got out of the car. "Hmmm, sounds vaguely similar to something that happened after we dropped off Emma."

Olivia strutted a little cockier than usual through the doors of the mini-mart. "Yes, it does. Will you do me one favor though?"

"Maybe."

"I can get around faster without you, so would you just sit over there and let me get everything?"

Natalia looked at the uncomfortable, red wooden booth seats, "I don't know if I'll ever be able to get back up from there."

"That's why you have me." Olivia cocked an eyebrow at her and motioned her to the table.

Natalia sighed. "Fine." She watched Olivia start at the farthest aisle as she flopped gracelessly onto the seat.

Olivia filled up her shopping cart, loading up on all the necessities – sugar, flour, bag of potatoes, box of macaroni, and lots and lots of liquor. She turned the corner and suddenly got a sickening feeling upon seeing Reva in the middle of the aisle contemplating between a box of Ho Hos and Little Debbie Swiss Rolls. She turned to go back the way she came, in order to avoid her nemesis and occasional frenemy.

“Which would you get, Olivia?”

She stopped in her tracks and grimaced, muttering under her breath. “Fuck!” Apparently, it was still barely audible to Reva.

“Ho Hos it is then.” Reva waltzed over and peered into Olivia’s cart. “Awwww, you’re being domesticated. How cute!”

“I guess you could say I’m done with my Ho Ho-lovin’ days.” Olivia fought to find the path to the high road. She looked over her shoulder to see Natalia amiably talking to Jonathan with Sarah and Colin in tow, and she magically found it as she watched Natalia laugh. “So, how are you doing, Reva?”

The other woman seemed to be caught off-guard and for a brief moment, she let the walls drop. “I was doing good. Had just come to terms with the fact that Jeffrey wasn’t coming back, only to have that sense of pain and loss transfer to another person. There are just some people you never get over.”

“He’ll be back. Josh is always true to his word. We both know that.”

Reva nodded. “It’s going to be a long year.”

“At least you know it’ll be over in a year.” Olivia glanced again at Natalia. She tried not to think about the “what ifs” anymore, but it would have been nice to know when, not if, Natalia had planned on coming back. Day in and day out of not knowing had been excruciating. She sighed and looked at a morose Reva. Knowing that Reva was dealing with even a small portion of what she had dealt with a few months ago made her heart ache, and she kicked herself mentally for letting herself get soft.

Reva looked around and saw Jonathan coming up, his infectious smile making both women grin. He gave Olivia a full-bodied bear hug. “Hey there, Auntie O.”

She ruffled his hair. “Hey, handsome!”

He peered into her cart. “Looks like you two are doing Thanksgiving dinner.”

Olivia blushed and smirked at her nephew. “Yes, we are and it just so happens we have several open places still available. Would you two like to bring Sarah and Colin over and join us? Unless you all have plans already.”

Reva shrugged. “Not much really. Jonathan, Sarah, and Colin will be with me, but Shayne’s going to play happy family with Marina and the Coopers. We’ll probably just do something quiet and non-traditional.”

“Well, if you really want to push the non-traditional part of that, why don’t you all come to our house? Emma would love to have Sarah around.”

Reva looked at Jonathan, who looked back at her with that ridiculously cute smile of his. “Okay?”

He nodded his head, and she turned back to Olivia. “Okay.”

“Okay.” Olivia nodded, immensely pleased with herself and surprisingly happy with their acceptance. “Good. We’ll see you Thursday then. Dinner probably won’t be until that evening, but come over anytime.”

Natalia had been watching her interactions with Reva and Jonathan, and now felt her heart speed up as Olivia approached her. A contented sigh escaped her lips. She didn’t think she’d ever tire of looking at Olivia, with her air of confidence and her raw sexuality that permeated even the simplest of gestures. Case in point was how her heart fluttered as her lover slid into the booth across from her and smiled at her. Just when Natalia thought she couldn’t feel anything stronger, a new surge that took her breath away passed through her.

She struggled, but managed to finally speak. “Well?”

“I invited them. They’re coming.” Olivia smiled in self-satisfaction.

“Good.”

Olivia chuckled. “This is going to be one motley crew though. Our family, Doris and her new girlfriend, Reva...are you sure we shouldn’t go for broke and ask Father Ray too?”

Natalia giggled. “Now that would be very interesting!”

“I could arrange it, you know.”

“I’m sure you could, but that’s quite alright.” Natalia grinned at her and then looked in the cart next to them. “You didn’t get the candied cherries?”

“You are not making fruitcake!”

“Why not?”

Olivia looked at her like three heads had popped out of her shoulders, and gestured between the two of them. “Um, hello...fruitcake? That’s just begging for Doris, and now Reva, to make some horrible gay stereotype joke. I can hear it now ‘the fruitcakes are making a fruitcake’!”

Natalia struggled to slide out of the booth and get to her feet. But when she did, she went to the baking section and grabbed the candied cherries then came back to drop them in the cart. “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.”

She watched Natalia turn with the cart and head to check out. “Great, not only are we a stereotype, but we’re now a cliché too.”

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ACT 3

Olivia stretched in bed, reaching out and hoping to find Natalia’s warm curves to snuggle decadently into. They had stayed up late watching for the tell-tale sign that Christmas was right around the corner...a 24 hour marathon of “A Christmas Story.” Olivia smiled in her half asleep state remembering Natalia’s giggle when that kid triple-dog dared Schwartz to put his tongue to the frozen metal pole. Olivia was sure that Natalia would sleep in late, but when she only found a vacant cold space, she sat bolt upright and then sniffed.

“She’d better not be doing what I think she’s doing,” Olivia grumbled and rolled out of bed, pulling her robe on as she went out of their room and down the steps. Sure enough, that strange smell, an odd mix of bacon and citrusy cleaning solution, was spread out guiltily around Natalia as she struggled to maneuver herself around the kitchen, belly bumping into everything everywhere she turned.

Olivia shook her head. “Please tell me I’m having a nightmare and my pregnant girlfriend isn’t on her feet at seven in the morning on Thanksgiving.”

Natalia turned, her face set in refusal-to-accept-guilt mode. “If I do it now though, I can rest later.”

Olivia rolled that around for a moment, her barely awake brain searching for a witty comeback, but failing. “That is logical. However, my dear, you agreed to let Emma and I help you. That does not mean letting us sleep through it.”

The brunette offered a half-smile to her girlfriend, one dimple showing. “But you’re so cute when you sleep.”

“Don’t butter me up with your sweet talk and dimples. It’s too early for that. At least let me have a cup of coffee before you turn on the charm, keep us on even ground here.”

Natalia giggled. “Coffee’s ready.”

“I figured. You’re the best partner a girl could hope for, you know.” Olivia leaned down and kissed Natalia softly on the lips. “But do me a favor?”

Natalia sighed, but before she could say anything, Olivia continued, “Just sit down here at the table, take these potatoes, and peel them. Just sit and work, okay?”

“I think I can do that, but the baby’s been quiet today. When she’s still, it’s hard for me to sit still.” Natalia rubbed her belly and pouted.

Olivia smirked at her as she sat and took the bowl of potatoes. “I don’t doubt that you can sit still. What I do doubt is that you’ll continue to do it while I go get our daughter up so she’s ready when Phillip gets here. Once she’s out the door, I’ll help you, okay? You can boss me around like you’re used to doing. I’ll do all the lifting, moving, standing.”

Natalia huffed, resigned to her fate. “Boss you around, huh? I guess that’s an offer I can’t refuse.”

“That’s my girl! Now don’t move. I’ll be right back.” With that, Olivia grabbed a cup of coffee and headed back upstairs to entice Emma to wake up. On the way, she picked up her cell phone from the coffee table in the living room, quickly finding the number in her list of contacts.

“Get your butt over here, Wolfe.”

“Good morning to you too, Olivia.”

Olivia paused outside Emma’s room, whispering sharply into the phone. “Natalia’s channeling Rachael Ray on crack. I’ve seen this before. Get over here before she breaks out the bleach.”

“She’s your girlfriend; you deal with her.”

“Do not make me call Graham back.”

Olivia smirked evilly when she heard the phone drop, then get picked back up in a rush of expletives.

“I’ll be there in twenty.”

Olivia clicked her phone closed and sighed, her hand on the doorknob. “It’s good to be queen.”

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Thirty minutes later a bleary-eyed Emma slunk into the kitchen, but perked up when she saw they had company.

“Aunt Doris!” Since Halloween, Doris had been known as the “cool” aunt and suddenly all the kids loved her. Emma raced over and hugged her around the waist.

“Hey, kiddo. You’re up awfully early.” Doris gazed over the top of Emma’s head to see Olivia smiling at her daughter.

“My daddy’s coming to get me so we can spend some time together for Thanksgiving.” The little girl bounced over to the refrigerator and got out some juice.

“Honey, you need some breakfast before you go. Here, let me get you some...” Natalia started to stand and was immediately guided back down to her chair by Olivia’s hand on her shoulder.

Olivia looked at Emma, who was watching them curiously. “What do you want for breakfast, Bean? I’ll get it for you.”

“You can cook?” Emma’s question drew chuckles from the other two women.

“I have been known to boil water and not burn it. That should count for something.”

Emma quirked an eyebrow, looking just like her mother. “I guess.”

“So, pick your poison.” Olivia picked up a spatula and waved it in the air.

Emma thought for a moment and then got a knowing smile on her face. “French toast.”

Natalia looked up from seasoning the pot of chopped potatoes in front of her. “Ohhhhh, good choice, Jellybean! Hmmm, I don’t know, Olivia. That’s a tough one.”

Olivia waved her hand. “Pffttt, piece of cake.”

“That would’ve been the safer bet.” Emma and Natalia snickered at Doris’ muttered comment.

Olivia raised an eyebrow and pointed the spatula menacingly. "Two words for you Wolfe: Graham and makeover."

Doris looked at Emma and Natalia. "You're on your own. Stakes are too high in this game for me."

Olivia rolled her eyes at Doris and turned to the stove to get to work when a knock interrupted her. Olivia motioned for Natalia to stay seated. She opened the door to her ex-husband, who was already looking over her shoulder for Emma.

"Daddy!" Emma jumped up and ran and leapt into his arms.

"Hey, pumpkin!"

"Daddy, that was so Halloween!"

"Oh, forgive me. Hey, turkey! Gobble, gobble, gobble." He tickled her belly, making her giggle and squirm out of his arms.

"And you're early!" She poked at him.

"Well, I couldn't sleep. I was too excited about seeing you."

She smiled and grabbed his hand. "Come on, let's go!"

"Hold up, Bean!" Olivia called. "You still need to have some breakfast before you leave. Why don't you two go hang out for a bit? This won't take long."

Emma suddenly bounced excitedly. "Oh, I know. Come see my room. I rearr...rear...I changed things around a little."

In a flash they were gone out of the kitchen and up the stairs. Natalia watched them go, then turned back to a very focused-looking Olivia, who was cracking eggs into a bowl. Then she noticed how the other woman managed to crack and open an egg one-handed - like a pro. The image was complete with a whisk held comfortably in her free hand and a dishtowel tossed effortlessly over her shoulder. Natalia eyed the complete package before her, and with a shuddering breath understood why Olivia found her to be so sexy when she was in the kitchen.

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He followed Emma - actually it was more like he was dragged - up the stairs. He paused at an open door and Emma slowed down with him.

"That's the baby's new room. They had to leave the door open because Natalia made Mommy put up a new wallpaper thingy up top last weekend." Phillip looked and saw the old-fashioned Winnie the Pooh border around the room.

"It's a really cute room. Looks like they've been working hard on it." He stepped in further to get a better look and Emma stood in the doorway.

"Yeah, they never stop working on it. If Mom's not working in here at night, she's on her computer trying to find some new gift for Fran...Frances." Phillip smiled at his daughter's attempt to say the difficult name. "I have a hard time saying it. It's a hard name."

"That's okay. Maybe you could just call her Fran or Frannie or give her a nickname especially from you." Phillip didn't miss the sad look on Emma's face and his parental instincts told him something was going on with his daughter. Maybe with a little time, he could figure out how to help her.

When Emma didn't say anything, he pulled her down the hall to her own room. On her bed, he saw something familiar and went over to sit down. When he turned back to her, he held up Cornelius, her teddy bear from when she was younger.

"You know, Em, when you were just a baby, your mom went searching everywhere for this teddy bear. She went to every single store in Springfield, determined to find you the perfect bear. And a lot of stores had teddy bears, but it wasn't the perfect bear. I didn't think she was ever going to find the right one, but she finally did and now you have Cornelius forever."

"She went through all of that to get me Cornelius," she said, her small voice disbelieving.

"Yep! It sounds to me like she's doing the same thing for Francesca by trying to make everything perfect for her."

Emma looked down and nodded her head. Phillip saw an opening in the small gesture. "I have an idea. How about you and I go on a special shopping trip this weekend? We can look for a super special gift for your little sister, something that only you can give her. What do you say?"

"Can we get ice cream?"

"Of course!"

“Okay.”

By the time they got back downstairs, breakfast was done. Olivia had made enough for everyone, so they all sat down around the table and dug in. Natalia took a bite and looked up at Olivia, shocked.

Olivia asked around a mouthful of toast, “What?”

“Oh my God, you faker! You can cook!”

Olivia shrugged. “A little. Told you I could help you with fixing dinner today.”

Natalia just shook her head at Olivia. “You never cease to amaze me.”

Doris broke the moment. “Okay, this love fest is getting a little thick in here. Break it up you two or go get a room.”

Natalia blushed while Olivia smirked.

Phillip cleared his throat and looked at Emma. “I think that’s our cue, kiddo. You ready?”

Emma barely took a moment to hug her moms and Doris before slipping on her coat and racing to the car. Phillip hung back for a moment. “Hey, Olivia, do you mind if I take Emma shopping this weekend?”

“Shopping?” She looked at her ex like he needed a trip back to Ravenwood.

He laughed. “Yeah, she’d like to get the baby a gift. I thought I’d help her out. If it’s okay with you two.”

Olivia looked at Natalia, who simply shrugged. “Okay, sure.”

“Great!”

Olivia stopped him on his way out the door. “Oh, and since I have to pick up Sam and Ava at the airport, I can stop by to get Emma on my way instead of you coming all the way back out here.”

“That’s perfect, Liv. See you then. Bye ladies!”

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The farmhouse was starting to come alive with the smells of Thanksgiving. The smooth richness of garlic mashed potatoes and the sinful sweetness of a sweet potato casserole, with almost as much brown sugar and nuts on top as sweet potatoes below, permeated every inch of the house. Then, the first batch of chocolate chip cookies was baking in the oven settling a warm-scented blanket over everyone. Natalia sat drinking some decaf tea while the other two women sipped coffee.

“Sam and Ava said they’d take care of the turkey when they get here, and we have to save some kind of dessert for Emma to help with. She loves to do that.” Olivia ran off the list of what had been accomplished and what still needed to be done.

“Cheesecake.” Natalia spoke from her chair.

“What?” Olivia looked at her.

“That’s what we’re making and what we can save for Emma to help with...cheesecake. Gooney, warm, homemade cheesecake with a crumbly graham cracker crust and fruit toppings. Mmmmm.”

Olivia lost her train of thought watching her girlfriend get more and more thrilled by the idea of cheesecake, so much so that she was totally derailed when Natalia closed her eyes and hummed.

Doris snapped her fingers in front of Olivia. “Earth to Olivia.”

“Huh? Oh.” They looked at each other knowingly while Natalia remained oblivious.

“Oh no!” A sudden gasp and Natalia grabbing her belly had Olivia at her side in a split second.

“Honey, are you okay? Is it the baby?”

Natalia looked up at her like she was crazy. “What? No! We need butter for the cheesecake. I only bought one package.”

Olivia flopped her head onto Natalia’s shoulder. “Please don’t do that to me again, okay? Rented ticker here.” She straightened back up and looked down at Natalia. “Do we absolutely have to have a cheesecake?”

“Yes.” Natalia’s tone brooked no argument, so Olivia threw up her hands.

“Alrighty then! Allow me to go get more butter.” She slipped on her coat and gloves, but before she could get out the door, Natalia beckoned her back.

“Don’t you dare walk out that door without giving me a kiss.”

Olivia walked back over and braced her hands on the back of Natalia’s chair, on either side of her shoulders, leaning in close. “Wouldn’t dream of it, dear.” The kiss lingered, slow and deep, until a throat being cleared behind them broke the mood.

They turned to see Doris looking slightly flustered. “Um, hello...you’re not alone here. The single lesbian would really like to be forewarned if she’s getting a free show so she can appreciate it more.”

Olivia drew back from Natalia. “In your dreams, Wolfe, and technically, you’re not single.”

“Getting laid does not constitute a relationship, as you well know.”

“Touché. And just where is your new flame?”

Doris flopped down in the chair next to Natalia. “She couldn’t make it. Work or something. We do have a date though, for Monday.”

“Work on Thanksgiving?” Natalia honed right in on the heart of the issue.

“On that note, I think I’ll leave the mushy girl talk to my better half.” Olivia leaned over and kissed Natalia quickly. “Love you. Be back in a bit.”

No sooner had the words fallen from Olivia’s mouth and she opened the door, when Reva stumbled through the open door and into her arms. Barely catching her in time, Olivia managed to get her back on her feet.

“Whoa, watch the hands there, Olivia. Your girl might get jealous. Hey there, Natalia.” Reva waved a gloved hand at the brunette.

“Hey Reva, come on in.”

Reva slipped off her coat and gloves, handing them blindly to Olivia muttering behind her.

“Can I take your coat, Reva? Sure...no problem. Glad I could help.”

Reva walked over to Doris, reaching out her hand. “Mayor Wolfe, fancy seeing you here.”

Doris took the offered hand, giving it a firm shake. “Friend of the family, and here it’s just Doris.”

“Doris it is.” Reva said. “I think drinks are in order.”

Reva was the same everywhere she went, sizing up every female within a twenty-mile radius for potential threat, but now Olivia had learned how to take the other woman. Of course, no longer fishing in the same pond had helped her get Reva off her trail.

Olivia saw Jonathan coming up the walk with Sarah and Colin in tow. She slipped off her coat, sighed, and offered a smile to her nephew.

Olivia held her arms open to Jonathan. “Do I get a hug?”

He slipped easily into the hug. “Of course, Auntie O.”

A tug on Olivia’s arm drew both of their attention down to Sarah. “Is Emma home?”

“Not at the moment, honey. She went to spend a little time with her dad. She’ll be back later.” The shy little girl looked disappointed, but then turned up her big eyes again. “Can I play the Wii?”

Olivia tousled her curly locks before she ran off. “Of course.”

Jonathan moved to go with her, but Olivia stopped him. “Nuh uh.”

“What? I was going to go help her get set up.”

She smiled at him sweetly, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “I don’t think so. I’ll go help her get started. You, my dear nephew, will sit right here at this table and chop onions and peppers for the stuffing.”

Natalia leaned across the table as best she could. “I’d just do what she says for now, but when she’s gone...party!”

Olivia leveled her death glare on the snickering room. “Don’t even get any ideas. If my darling, and very pregnant, girlfriend gets up on her feet while I’m gone, I’m taking each of you down. Doris, Graham...nuff said. Reva, I already have a place to hide your body and it’s been a long time coming. Jon, honey, snip, snip to that hair, and baby,” she leaned over to kiss Natalia on the head, “you have to live the rest of your days with me. Think about it. That’s all I’m sayin’.”

After a few moments in the living room with Sarah, Olivia re-entered the kitchen and slipped on her coat and gloves again.

Seeing that Doris had poured her and Reva a glass of wine, Olivia reached over and took one along with a hearty swallow. On an air of stunned silence, Olivia grabbed her coat and bolted from the house.

Reva looked at Natalia who was smirking at the closed door, and asked, "How do you live with that?"

Natalia sighed, "Happily."

Doris made a gagging sound.

"Tell me about it!" Reva smirked at the mayor as they clinked glasses.

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The Springfield mini-mart was a bustling place for mid-morning on Thanksgiving. Olivia had to nudge her way past several people to get to the butter. She made sure to grab two packages, just in case, and then made a sprint for the liquor aisle, picking up two more bottles of wine for emergencies. After all, it was a holiday, and she had thought it wise to feed Natalia's need for family and togetherness by inviting two of the biggest alpha females in Springfield - next to her anyway - to her house.

"Smart move, Spencer." On that thought, she decided to backtrack to get a bottle of tequila too. "Much better."

With all of the items in the car, she began to make the long drive back out to the farmhouse. Her house...no, their house. She still had to get used to that. At one time, she had so readily accepted the farmhouse as her home, but then she spent weeks telling herself that she'd never go back. It was taking some effort to stop thinking negatively and accept the reality that she and Emma really were home...finally.

Turning off the main road from town, Olivia started down the road that ran past the farmhouse and into the next town. When she was about a mile from home, she slowed, seeing a dark sedan on the side of the road. She drove past slowly and tried to peer into the vehicle, but it appeared to be empty. She pushed the strange feeling away, assuming the driver was probably lost or had run out of gas.

When she got home and came inside, Doris greeted her with a hearty, "Thank God!"

"Um, okay."

The mayor shrugged on her coat, double-checking the pockets for something, before heading out the front door.

Olivia turned to the group in the kitchen. "Is she okay?"

"I think she needed a nicotine break, and I need a potty break or we're going to be swimming in it in here." Natalia said and attempted to stand. Olivia reached out a hand to help her up.

It's okay, honey, I got it. Just thank God for guest bathrooms!"

Olivia laughed and looked back at Reva and Jonathan. "Did she...?"

Reva held up a hand. "She was perfectly behaved."

"You're just saying that because you value your life." Olivia smiled.

"Pretty much."

"Thought so." Olivia held up the bottle of tequila. "Whatcha say?"

"Now this is my kind of party!"

They quickly pulled down shot glasses from the top shelf, filled them, and downed one each before Natalia came back. Olivia hid the bottle back in the corner and snickered at Reva.

Natalia rounded the corner to see the two women giggling like schoolgirls. "What are you two up to?"

"Nothing," they answered simultaneously.

"Uh huh."

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The bitter wind of fall had picked up outside, and for the billionth time Doris wondered why she kept up this habit if she was always freezing her ass off trying to appease it. A long pull on the cigarette reminded her of why, and she let out a deep sigh of pleasure. She leaned her head back against the porch post and continued to periodically take a draw from her cigarette. The crunch of gravel made her open her eyes. Slowly, a black car made its way along the road. It seemed to slow more as it came even with the house, and she blinked her eyes hard to focus on who was inside, but the windows were darker than normal. She could only tell that the driver seemed to have fine features like a woman and long straight hair.

“What the...?”

The door behind her opened, and Olivia stepped out with two glasses of wine. She handed one to Doris. “Thought you might want one.”

Doris thanked her absently and took the glass. Olivia tracked to where she was looking and recognized the car. “I think that’s the same car I saw a little while ago on the side of the road. I didn’t see the driver though. Guess they’re just lost.”

The car sped up suddenly. Olivia turned to go back inside, and Doris watched the dust fly up on the road as the car disappeared in the distance.

Doris shook her head. “No, you’re just imagining things and being suspicious, Wolfe. Just let it go.”

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When Doris came back in, Olivia had settled down on the couch next to Natalia while everyone watched Jonathan and Sarah playing Mario Kart.

Doris slipped into an overstuffed chair, took a sip of her wine and leaned back. “Now this is perfect.”

Natalia curled around Olivia, cradling her tea and humming in contentment. “Yes it is.”

Olivia kissed the top of her head. “It’ll be even better when Sam, Ava and Emma are here.”

Natalia nodded silently against her shoulder.

The momentary break in the holiday labors didn’t last though. A knock at the door had Olivia sitting up and looking at Natalia. “I wonder who that could be. I told Phillip I’d pick up Emma. Hope everything’s okay.” She unfurled herself from her partner’s grasp and walked to the door.

She opened it to find a sheepish Buzz grinning at her, while a happy Lillian held tight to his hand, and beyond her Frank shuffled his feet and looked to Blake at his side with Clarissa hanging back a little behind her mother.

“Buzz?”

“Is the invitation to dinner still open?”

Natalia poked her head out from behind Olivia, answering for her. "Of course! Why don't you all come in?"

Buzz handed over a bag. "Our new stove decided to go on the fritz, but I made a couple of different types of salad to try and contribute."

Natalia took the bag and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, but you didn't have to do that."

He shrugged. "I wanted to."

They shared a friendly smile and Lillian leaned forward to hug her, reaching down to touch Natalia's belly. "How is she, dear?"

"Unusually quiet."

Lillian leveled her best mom look on Natalia. "I hope you're staying off your feet and taking care of yourself."

Natalia smirked at Olivia, who was putting away the new guests' coats. Olivia smiled back at her, obviously having heard Lillian's comment. "As if I have a choice."

Lillian patted her hand lovingly. "Good. That's good."

The new arrivals moved into the living room, and Buzz looked confused at seeing Reva sitting on the far end of the couch with Colin in her lap. "What are you doing here?"

"Um, I was invited."

He brushed off the comment. "That's not what I meant. I thought you were at your house for Thanksgiving."

"Last minute plans. Um, where's Shayne, Marina, and Henry?"

"Probably at Cross Creek looking for you."

Reva's shoulders sagged and she sighed. "No."

"Fraid so." Buzz took the spot on the couch next to her. "Maybe you should call them to let them know you're here."

Reva made eye contact with Olivia who was leaning against the wall. With a small nod of her head, Olivia answered her. "Call 'em, Reva. I'll go get the folding chairs out of the barn."

Olivia headed to the back door and pulled on her coat as Natalia followed.

Jonathan turned to the retreating pair, putting down the steering wheel of the game and followed them into the kitchen. "Let me do that, Auntie O. You need to go get Sam, Ava, and Emma."

She let out a breath she hadn't realized she had been holding. "Thank you."

"No problem." He flashed a brilliant white smile at her and jogged to the barn for the chairs.

Olivia started to take off her coat, thinking she didn't have to leave after all, but Natalia tugged the open edges back together and slipped a button through a buttonhole. She looked at Natalia curiously. "What's up, honey?"

"You still have somewhere to go."

"Yeah, but I still have about thirty minutes before I have to leave for the airport."

Natalia hung her head and ran her hands over the lapels of Olivia's jacket, skirting dangerously close to her breasts. "That's not what I meant."

Olivia got a panicked look in her eye and glanced down at Natalia's belly.

"No, not that, Olivia. We need food. Lots and lots of food. We're going to have far more people here than we have food for."

Olivia stood up a little more confidently, running a finger along Natalia's jaw, letting it slip into a dimple as the woman smiled up at her. Olivia kissed her gently. "I'll take care of it. I have to go get Emma anyway and pick up Sam and Ava. I'll just get some more stuff from the mini-mart while I'm out. Will you be okay?"

Natalia nodded.

~~*~*

The foyer of the Spaulding mansion was strangely quiet. Olivia had let herself in, assuming that Hilda would be busy with Phillip and Beth's special dinner. She walked further into the spacious and well-appointed home and back to the library where Phillip spent most of his free time when at home. Before she could turn the corner and announce her presence, she overheard Phillip and Beth talking.

"I can do it. It's not like I've never cooked before, you know."

"That's not the point. You weren't supposed to cook today. It was supposed to be a special day for us." Olivia could hear the exasperation in Phillip's voice. "That's it, Hilda's fired."

Olivia peeked her head around the door. "You're sounding like the old me, Phillip. I was hoping I didn't transfer my bad characteristics to someone else. Guess you're just a lost cause!"

Phillip laughed at Olivia. "Actually, she got called away for a 'family emergency.'" He lifted his hands and put the comment in quotes, then turned back to Beth. "And she wants to do the cooking now."

"And the problem is?" Olivia didn't get it.

Beth tilted her head at Phillip's ex-wife and her occasional personal nemesis. She raised her hand and gestured at the other woman. "Exactly. Thank you, Olivia."

"You're welcome."

"Yeah, well, I'd prefer not to let Beth loose in the kitchen because I like the house standing." He fought a smile as he looked sideways at the blonde woman next to him.

Beth glared up at the smiling man and elbowed him in the ribs. "Keep it up."

Olivia rubbed at the bridge of her nose, muttering under her breath. "I must be a glutton for punishment."

"What?" Beth looked at her again.

"The invitation for dinner is still open."

As if it had been timed perfectly, Emma came bounding down the stairs. "Yeah, Daddy, come on! Please?"

He looked at Beth, questioningly, and she nodded her approval. "Well, I can't say no to that."

"Funny, that's exactly what Natalia says." Emma bounded over to her mother. Olivia smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "We have to make a pit stop at the mini-mart though. We're gonna need a lot more food."

Phillip looked at his watch. "You better hurry. They're closing early today."

Olivia glanced at her watch, anxiously. "And I still have to get Sam and Ava from the airport. Ah ha! I have an idea!"

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The farmhouse was becoming noisier by the moment. With every fumble, pass, or interception, cheers, boos, or hisses were heard in quick succession. The kitchen had become too congested for Doris' comfort so she grabbed another glass of red wine and decided to brave the testosterone-laden living room. She found Blake sitting in a rocking chair looking blankly at the television. On the couch sat Frank, Buzz, Shayne, and Jonathan, clinking beer bottles and crudely harassing each other over who had the better football team. Sarah was smart enough to scurry off to Emma's room to play with her dolls, while Lillian, Reva, and Natalia swapped mommy stories in the kitchen. Marina had conveniently, but not surprisingly, decided to take Henry for a walk down to the pond. That left Doris to fend for herself. She looked at her watch and grumbled when she realized that it would be at least another thirty minutes before Olivia got back.

Blake glanced at the woman propped on the edge of the couch, then eyed the mayor's countenance thoughtfully. "I thought you liked sports, Doris."

"I like to play, not watch, unless it's live, especially not oversized men in tight pants tackling and sweating all over each other." She visibly shuddered at the thought. "So gay!"

Blake laughed. "Do you watch any sports?"

"Oh sure. Women's college softball and sometimes basketball."

"And that's not gay?"

Doris opened her mouth, a witty retort at the ready, when her phone rang. She slipped it out of her jeans pocket and flipped it open. "Um, hi?"

"Doris, I need your help," Olivia said.

"Hello to you too, Olivia." Doris answered Blake's questioning look with her comment, making Blake smile.

"Tell Natalia that Phillip and Beth are on their way with Emma. They had a small crisis too, so they're joining us for dinner."

Doris looked around at the shrinking space in the house. "Olivia, someone may have to sit on the porch to make this work."

"I know, but we'll have to make do. Natalia wanted a big Thanksgiving dinner and she's sure getting it!"

"Okay, I'll tell her."

"Um, that's not all."

Doris hung her head. "Lay it on me, Spencer."

"I need you to go get the groceries for Natalia. I have to be at the airport to get Sam and Ava in ten minutes and time's getting short here. It's already after noon and that turkey has to get in the oven soon. The quicker I can get them to the house, the faster that bird will get done."

Doris rolled her eyes. "That's the big help you needed? Olivia, I think I'd pay you to let me get out of this house right about now. I'll gladly go."

"Thank you! I owe you."

Doris smiled into the phone. "I'll have a list of appropriate gifts when I get back."

Olivia laughed. "I'm sure you will."

"So, what should I get?"

Olivia rattled off the supplies Natalia needed, and Doris made a mental list. When the other woman finished, she ended the call and stood to slide the phone back in her pocket. She reached behind the chair Blake was in and picked up the woman's purse, handing it to her. "Come on."

Blake jumped at her purse suddenly landing in her lap. "What? Where?"

"Time to raid the mini-mart." Blake scrambled from the chair at the chance to get out of the house, telling a distracted Frank that she'd be back in a little while. He never tore his eyes away from the television set as he reached up to give her a quick kiss.

Doris noticed the exchange and shook her head as Blake joined her in the hallway to the kitchen.

"What?"

“Frank? Really, Blake?”

The redhead squinted her eyes at Doris. “He’s a good guy.”

Doris snorted a little and wanted to say something sarcastic, but instead she decided to let it go. After all, what did she care if Blake liked Frank? To each their own, she thought. Besides, looking at her own track record, who was she to judge when it came to dating?

Doris led the way into the kitchen letting Natalia know that Phillip and Beth were on their way with Emma and that they would be joining them for dinner too. At Natalia’s panicked expression, Doris laughed. “Don’t worry. Blake and I are going to get what you need to take care of dinner. Olivia’s probably on her way right now with Sam and Ava.”

Natalia glared at Doris for worrying her then breathed a sigh of relief as she waved at them leaving. The raucous noises from the other room actually put a smile on her face. This was what she had always wanted - all the trimmings for a great family holiday and a house full of family and friends, sharing the holiday together. She regretted that Rafe wasn’t there to be a part of it, but she rubbed her belly knowing that the life she always wanted for her son would be a reality for her daughter. They were going to have it all. The joy that suffused her made her giddy, and she smiled.

“Now that’s the look of a happy woman there.” Lillian smiled at her observation of the young woman.

Natalia looked at Lillian sincerely with a huge smile. “I am. I’m the happiest I’ve ever been, Lillian.”

Lillian looked over at Reva, who was leaning against the counter nursing a martini. “I think we can both say that we’ve never seen Olivia so happy either, right Reva?”

Reva nodded and added, “I can say I never expected this for her. The being happy, that is. Falling for a woman doesn’t really surprise me, but the being happy...now that’s a shocker.”

Lillian nodded in agreement. “You’re good for her, Natalia.”

Natalia smiled. “We’re good for each other. We always have been.” She looked at the picture on the side table from New Year’s Eve last year and her thoughts drifted as she searched for the words. “She believed in me. She saw more in me than I thought I was capable of, and she pushed me, drove me crazy, and frustrated me. When I didn’t think I was capable of being more, she challenged me. I am who I am because of her.”

Lillian reached across the table and squeezed Natalia’s hand. “I’m sure she’d say the same thing of you.”

The intense moment was broken by a loud cheer from the living room and the kitchen door swinging open. Emma rushed in with Phillip and Beth close behind.

“Hey, Emma! Did you have fun?”

“Yep, but I’m really, really hungry because Hilda wasn’t there and Daddy wouldn’t let Beth go in the kitchen to cook. When will dinner be ready?” She looked at the table as if searching for a bite to eat.

“Well, honey, your mom has to get back with Sam and Ava so they can put the turkey in the oven and then Aunt Doris and Aunt Blake have to get back with the stuff we need to make our cheesecake, so it’s going to be a while. I’ll tell you what, Sarah’s playing in your room. Why don’t you go up and wash your hands, and I’ll bring up a sandwich for the two of you?”

“Okay!” Emma ran out of the kitchen and waved hi to everyone watching the game as she raced up the stairs.

Phillip and Natalia shared a smile as they watched Emma leave. He turned to Beth and gave her a pitiful look when he heard another cheer from the living room. “Oh fine. Go...go watch the game.” He smiled like a kid at Christmas and went into the other room.

Beth gestured to the refrigerator. “Natalia, you want me to get some sandwich stuff out.”

Natalia sighed. “Yes, please.”

“Hey, Natalia, can you bring me a beer?” Natalia started to stand up and was promptly pushed back down by Reva.

“Oh no, he didn’t,” the blonde growled. “Frank, get your lazy butt up and get your own beer!”

When he slunk his way into the kitchen, four sets of female eyes pinned him down. Reva was itching to say something cruel about Natalia being someone else’s wife, but dropped it when she felt the woman in question reach out to squeeze her forearm. She suddenly had a sense of why Olivia had fallen for the brunette. In the short time she had been around Natalia recently, she noticed her own rough edges softening in the younger woman’s presence. She couldn’t put her finger on what magic or power this woman held, but she could now understand how Olivia had changed so much over the past year.

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Blake raced up to the door of the mini-mart just as the red and white sign was being flipped from “open” to “closed.” She banged on the door, pleading for admittance, but the clerk pointed to her watch and the temporary sign with their holiday hours on it. The clerk mouthed “sorry” and turned to walk away.

Doris sauntered up and tapped on the window with a musical rat-a-tat-tat. The clerk turned back around and was visibly angry, but once she saw Doris, she smiled sweetly and unlocked the doors.

Blake looked at Doris suspiciously. “Do I even want to know how you know her?”

“Oh, get your mind out of the gutter, Marler. Her dad was a huge donor to my last campaign, and he had several fundraisers at his house for me.”

Blake’s cheeks reddened at being caught thinking bad thoughts of Doris. “Oh.”

When the doors opened, Doris spoke to the young woman. “Hey, Shelby. How are your parents?”

Shelby’s cheeks flamed at being addressed directly. “They’re good, Mayor Wolfe. And you?”

“Very good. We just need to get a few things we forgot for dinner. We won’t be but a moment.”

Shelby looked over Doris’ shoulder at the redhead behind her, a flash of jealousy passing over her youthful features. Doris saw the look and instantly knew what Shelby thought. “It’s dinner at a friend’s house...with lots of other people there.”

The young woman looked down and excused herself. Doris turned to see Blake looking at her, smiling. “Seems you have an admirer, Mayor Wolfe.”

Doris brushed past Blake to get a bag of sugar. “A jealous admirer too. Seems she thought you and I were together.” The look of surprise on Blake’s face quickly made her explain, “It was the dinner comment, I’m sure. It sounded like we were having dinner together and not with a big group. Nothing to worry about.”

“I’m not worried.” Blake smiled at Doris and kept walking down the aisle.

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When Doris and Blake returned with ingredients for the cheesecake, the house was warm from wall-to-wall people and an oven full of baking turkey and stuffing. They handed the

bags off to Olivia and Natalia and headed into the living room with everyone else. Olivia called up to Emma, Sarah, and Clarissa to come help with the cheesecake.

Olivia got the freshly washed mixing bowl out and set it in front of Natalia and the young helpers on either side of her. All of the ingredients and measuring scoops were placed on the table. Olivia watched as Natalia worked her magic with the girls, who were giggling and making a horrible mess with the sugar.

She turned to the counter and poured a small bit of red wine, kissed Natalia on the top of the head, and walked out to see what was going on in the living room. The football game had been forsaken in lieu of a competitive game of Wii pool. Frank had a horrible aim and missed every pocket, while Doris routed him three games in a row.

Lillian and Blake were seated closest to Olivia, and Lillian had to speak up over the noise of the game for Blake to hear her. The proximity allowed Olivia to hear as well though.

“Maybe one day you and Frank will have your own children. He’s so good with them. Francesca’s going to be such a lucky little girl to have him as a parent.” Blake didn’t really respond to the comment except for a brief nod, and Olivia didn’t hang around to hear any more.

She went back into the kitchen for more wine and poured a heaping glass of the red liquid. She turned with a sigh to watch the graham cracker crust being pressed into the pan.

Natalia heard Olivia’s sigh and looked up. She glanced at the glass in her hand but didn’t comment. Instead, she showed the young girls how to press the edges of the crust up on the side of the pan without it falling. They were amazed by what in their minds was an impossible trick.

Ten minutes later, Natalia had all of the ingredients together for the cheesecake filling and Olivia had a fresh glass of wine. Once the batter was whipped, Natalia looked at it thoughtfully.

She glanced at Olivia, who was looking a little glassy-eyed. “I think I need more cream cheese. There may be more in the fridge. Could you check?”

Olivia spun a little too fast and grabbed the open refrigerator door for support. “Nope, don’t see any.” She closed the door and turned back to Natalia, finishing off the glass of wine in her hand. “I’ll go get you some more.”

Buzz and Doris came into the kitchen at that exact moment and Doris inquired, “Get more what? Did we not get enough of something?”

Natalia stood to stretch her legs and walked over to the trio. "Cream cheese. I think one more pack would make it the perfect consistency."

"I'll go to the mini-mart for it," Olivia said.

Natalia reached for her arm. "It's not that important, honey." She took the wine glass from Olivia's hand. "Besides, I don't think you need to be driving right now."

"I'm fine." Olivia spoke a little tersely.

Doris sensed the impending argument. "You know, the mini-mart is closed anyway. We had to beg for it to stay open when we got there."

Natalia looked up into sad green eyes. "Let's not have a repeat of the engagement party, okay? Not today."

Natalia saw the pain flicker across Olivia's face at the reminder of a difficult time for both of them and instantly regretted her words, but wasn't sure how to fix it.

Buzz had witnessed the exchange and stepped in then, trying to lighten the mood. "The mini-mart may be closed, but fortunately for you two, Company can be open at your beck and call. I'm pretty sure there's some cream cheese in a refrigerator at the back of the kitchen. Olivia, why don't you come with me? I could use the company. Get it? Company!"

Olivia leaned her forehead against Natalia's, and they had a wordless conversation just by looking into each other's eyes.

"I'm sorry." Olivia said quietly.

Natalia gave her a soft and simple kiss on the lips and then brushed the freshly kissed lips with her thumb. "It's okay."

"I love you, Natalia."

"Love you, too."

"I'm going to go with Buzz. Be back in a bit."

"I'll be here waiting." Natalia caught Buzz's eye as he followed Olivia out the door and mouthed a "thank you" to him.

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The drive to Company was quiet. Neither Buzz nor Olivia spoke, and she was grateful for the momentary silence. She loved the man, but she really didn't feel like talking at the moment. Buzz opened the door and motioned for Olivia to sit on the stool at the bar.

She watched for a few moments as Buzz moved around behind the bar. Thanks to her delayed reactions, it took her a little longer to realize he was making coffee.

"Buzz, can we just get what we came for and get back?"

"No." Buzz put a hearty amount of coffee grounds into the machine and filled it with water.

"What do you mean 'no'?"

"You're going to sit for a few minutes and have a cup of coffee with me. And you're going to talk to me."

Olivia pressed the bridge of her nose. "We need to get back. I need to help her finish the dinner prep."

"It's a cheesecake, Olivia." He threw his hands up in the air. "I'm sure it can wait a few more minutes. What's going on with you? You were fine one minute, then sullen and drinking the next."

Olivia wanted to be mad at Buzz for calling her on her attitude, but she couldn't seem to stay mad at him for long. She didn't plan to let it slip, but her exasperation and lowered inhibitions from the wine suddenly made her mouth spout off before her mind could stop her. "Why is Frank always the 'good man' or the 'good father'? I swear if I hear it one more time..."

He raised one hand and looked at her dumbfounded. "Whoa, wait a minute. That's what has you upset? Who got the girl, Olivia? You did. Who got the house? You did. Who got the family and tons of people around who love, admire, and respect both you and Natalia? You did. What do you have to complain about?"

Olivia was speechless and she just sat for a moment thinking on what he had said.

"I knew." She looked up confused at his words, and he made a hand gesture. "You know, about you and Natalia. I knew probably before the proposal."

He smiled at her ruefully. "I thought it was all you though."

"Everyone thought that, Buzz."

“Can’t blame ‘em.”

“No, I can’t.”

He smirked at her. “I really didn’t think that Natalia would feel that way about you. Not until she took off at the wedding. I knew why she ran off.”

Olivia looked at him, confused. “She told me that you weren’t exactly kind to her when I went to San Francisco.”

He smiled at her. “Frank is my son. It’s a natural instinct to defend your kid even if he’s wrong. But you two have had a long, hard road to get to this point. It hasn’t been easy. I’ve watched it all from the outside, and I know you. I know you just can’t accept that this is as close to perfection as you’ll ever find.” He looked down sadly thinking of his own lost loves. “Some of us aren’t so lucky.”

She sighed, and squeezed the bridge of her nose. “I just...it’s...overwhelming. We haven’t really had time to be alone or get away from...things. It just feels so...out of control.”

Buzz laughed. “That’s the holidays for you! And you’re so used to controlling everything. It’s hard to let go and just let the moment be.”

“It’s hard to explain, but I have this incredible need to whisk Natalia away, and be alone with her for once, just her and I.” She was quiet for a moment. “The last time the world got too much in the way, she ran off.”

He tilted his head. “Is that what this is all about? You’re afraid she could run off again?”

She looked down into her now cold coffee as Buzz continued talking. “Olivia, if you think she’d run off now, right at the moment when she not only gets the girl, but also has a home and a family that loves her, you’re crazy. Yep, I can see why any sane person would want out of that situation!”

She slapped his arm. “Smart ass!”

They were silent for a moment, smiling at each other, until Buzz broke the gaze. “Exactly why are we sitting here again?”

“You forced me to.”

“Cream cheese!” He snapped his fingers and ran to the back to get it out of the refrigerator then came back in. “Right! Well, let’s get you back to your beautiful girlfriend and all the other things you should be thankful for.”

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When Buzz and Olivia got back, Natalia quickly finished up the cheesecake and put it in the oven. As they waited for the turkey to finish cooking, everyone sat around laughing at the kids playing *Dance Dance Revolution*. Emma began to challenge every grown up in the room starting with Ava to a dance off. In quick succession, the little girl took down not only Ava, but also Sam and Jonathan.

Olivia announced proudly. "That's my girl!"

The best part though was laughing at Frank trying to keep up with Emma. Olivia was laughing so hard she almost started hyperventilating.

Natalia pulled a giggling Olivia to the kitchen where they checked the turkey between kisses before coming back to announce that dinner was ready.

The food was carefully placed and arranged on the dining room table. And since there wasn't enough room for everyone to sit at the actual table, chairs were placed in strategic places around the living room. There was mild chaos as everyone shifted and moved to make room.

Olivia and Natalia stood next to each other beside the table, laughing as Phillip and Buzz bumped into each other and shook off the close encounter with a manly "excuse me." And they became increasingly amused at Jonathan trying to balance both Sarah and Emma, each on a knee, until Emma gave up and climbed on Uncle Sam's lap.

Natalia wrapped an arm around Olivia's waist, making her warm inside and out at the contact at her side. She looked down and saw the huge dimples residing alongside shimmering tears.

"Hey, you okay?"

Natalia looked up at her. "Never been better." A tear finally did fall, and Olivia brushed it away. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For doing all of this, bringing all of these people together, and giving me my dream Thanksgiving dinner. This is exactly the way I always wanted it to be." Natalia got lost in the smoky green eyes. "I love you...so much."

“I love you, too. I’d do anything for you, anything to make you happy.” Olivia leaned down and placed a soft kiss on her lips.

“Ewwwww,” Emma called from the back of the room.

“Hey, get a room! Some of us are still single, you know.” Sam joked with his sister.

Olivia glared back at her brother. “Jealous?”

He saucily winked at Natalia, making her blush. “Maybe just a little.”

Olivia pointed at him. “Don’t even think about turning on that Spencer charm, little brother. You may be family, but I know where to hide the bodies.”

Natalia stepped forward a little, angling herself between the siblings. “Alright you two, enough of that. I think it’s time we feed the hungry natives. But first, a toast.”

Olivia watched as Natalia stepped back a little more, so as to include her in the group she was toasting to. The moment was surreal. Only a few months ago, she had stood in almost the same place and raised a glass to Natalia and Frank’s happiness. Now here she and Natalia were, a couple and a family in every sense of the word. They were still surrounded by family and friends in celebration, but this time there were no secrets. Everyone knew they were together, and it was okay. Frank was still there, but he had a friendly smile on his face, his hand gently cradling Blake’s. So much had changed in a few short months, but the look of adoration and love on Natalia’s face hadn’t. The realization took Olivia’s breath away. All of those months ago, Natalia had looked at her this same way in this same spot, and at this moment on Thanksgiving, Olivia knew exactly what she was the most thankful for. She was looking right at her.

“So,” Natalia started, “I’m not used to giving toasts. But, I think it’s appropriate to stick with the theme of the season and give thanks.”

She turned to look fully at Olivia before continuing, “The one thing I have been most thankful for in all of my life is Olivia. She has given me her love, her trust, her faith, and her future. She believed in me and tried to sacrifice everything for me, even herself. I wasn’t a very good steward of her trust, and I made some big mistakes. But I’m thankful that she saw fit to forgive me and give me another chance. You are my hope, Olivia. You are my light and my strength. I hold to what is good and your love is so good.”

Natalia fought back the tears in her eyes and turned to the room. “And I’m thankful to have all of you. The rest of our family, my little Emma, and our dear Francesca, and all of our friends who are an extension of that family. I...we love all of you and we’re blessed to share this day with you.”

There was a long pause as Olivia and Natalia simply stared at each other until Sam piped up in the back. “Awwww!”

Olivia laughed and brushed away a tear from her face. “Jeez, can we eat now? I think my stomach’s about to revolt!”

“Of course, honey, do your thing.”

With that, Olivia turned and picked up the knife and fork for the obligatory first slice of turkey. She poised the knife over the browned breast before slicing smoothly into the meat.

“Ohhhhhhh!”

The knife slipped from her grip and landed with a clang on the table. She turned to see a red-faced Natalia in obvious pain and holding her stomach.

She reached for her partner’s arm before she could sink to the floor. “Natalia?”

Frank was the first to notice the wet spot on the floor. “Um...I think Francesca has the Spencer grand entrance down pat already.”

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ACT 4

The living room was unnaturally quiet. For what seemed like an eternity, but was really only moments, the only sound was Natalia’s strained breathing as she struggled against the blinding pain of her contractions. Then it was as if everything shifted into motion and noise at once. Olivia reached for her partner’s hand and wrapped a protective arm around her waist. Frank jumped from his chair and went to Natalia’s other side. Emma ran up to them, looking scared and worried.

Ava was by Emma’s side in an instant, reassuring her that Natalia was fine but that their little sister was ready to be born. Lillian stepped away from Buzz at the back of the room and calmly walked forward. She kneeled down and peered up into Natalia’s pained eyes as she doubled-over with another contraction.

“Follow my lead, Natalia.” The older woman took a long breath in through her nose and blew it out through her mouth. She did it a couple more times until Natalia’s breathing had fallen in sync.

Olivia ran a soothing hand over Natalia's lower back and winced at the pain in her other hand, where Natalia held on tight. She watched the exchange for a moment before letting her worry kick back in.

"Is she okay?"

Lillian smiled and spoke, never taking her eyes off of Natalia. "Of course she is. She's having a baby."

Olivia swallowed hard. "Right now?"

Lillian then looked over at Olivia, her smile growing. "Hope you're ready to be a mom again."

Olivia straightened up then but never let Natalia go. "Oh boy."

Looking around the living room, Olivia finally saw the chaos that had ensued while she and Lillian were caught up in Natalia going into labor. Ava, Sam, and Jonathan were hurriedly working trying to bundle up Emma and Sarah for the inevitable ride to the hospital, and Ava was struggling the worse because Emma was so excited she wouldn't hold still. Olivia caught her oldest child's eye across the room and she could tell that Ava was telling her something, but she was too dazed to focus on it. Buzz pulled Frank away from Natalia's side, urging him to get hot water and towels, and Frank argued back telling his dad that they needed to get her to the hospital. Phillip strolled up behind Frank and clapped him on the back in congratulations, looking around, clearly amused by the madness in the Spencer-Rivera household. Shayne, Marina, and Henry were nowhere to be seen, and Reva was focused on ushering Colin, Doris, Blake, and Clarissa out the door. Beth efficiently moved back and forth from the living room to the kitchen to put away food that could spoil and turning off the cheesecake in the oven, before moving around the living room blowing out candles, preparing for a fast exit.

Olivia closed her eyes and tried to shut out the cacophony of noise, so she could focus on what they needed to do next. She chanced a glance at the clock on the mantle amazed that only about ten minutes had passed. It seemed odd when the last few minutes seemed to pass so slow.

When the noise got to be too much, she broke down and yelled into the room, "Enough!"

All motion ceased as everyone stopped to look at Olivia. She promptly dismissed them and looked down at Lillian. "Should we call an ambulance?"

Lillian looked up from the watch she had been keeping time on. "You could, but I think you'd end up needing the towels and hot water like Buzz suggested. No, her contractions are too close. We need to get her to the hospital immediately. This baby's coming fast!"

Olivia nodded at Lillian, but before she could speak, Frank stepped forward. "I could take her."

"Thank you, Frankie, but no. I think I can take her." Olivia would be damned if Good Man Frank would take her pregnant girlfriend off in his carriage like some knight in armor.

"Don't even start!" Natalia grumbled at them. "Frank, we're taking your car..."

"But..." Olivia interrupted.

"You have leather seats, sweetie, and honestly, I don't want to mess up your nice car. Frank shares responsibility in this too; I think he can deal with it."

Olivia smiled at her feisty girlfriend and looked at Frank. "You heard the lady."

Frank looked at Buzz. "I think we need those towels after all."

"And Buzz, you're driving," Natalia huffed out through the end of a contraction. "You haven't been drinking like these two have and the last thing I need or want is to be stranded on the side of the road, having a baby in the back seat of Frank's car."

Lillian stood up, looking at her husband, then at Frank. "You heard her. Let's get crackin'."

The house became a flurry of motion again as Frank came back with an armload of towels, Ava and Jonathan got the kids shuffled out of the house, and the rest piled into cars for the ride to the hospital. Lillian and Olivia squeezed into the back seat of Frank's small sedan on either side of Natalia. As Buzz took off down the driveway, Frank remembered the portable siren in the glove compartment. He reached in and placed it on the roof of the car and started it up. Buzz looked at him sideways in disgust.

"What?!" Frank yelled.

"Is that really necessary?"

"We won't have to stop at red lights now."

Buzz shook his head and turned back to the road. Frank turned to the back seat. Olivia was huddled close to Natalia, holding the other woman's hand and whispering in her ear.

Lillian held the woman's other wrist as she tracked her pulse along with the timing of her contractions.

Frank reached back to place a gentle hand on Natalia's knee. "Hey, how are you doing?"

Her eyes flew open. "I'm in pain, Frank. How do you think I'm doing? Now, turn around and buckle up. Wouldn't look good for the Police Chief to get a ticket for not wearing his seat belt."

He slumped back in his seat and buckled his seat belt for the rest of the ride. When they arrived at Cedars, Frank raced to the emergency room doors and got help. In seconds, a nurse with a wheelchair was at the side of the car where Olivia already had Natalia out of the backseat and waiting. Lillian gave the on-duty nurses all of her vital statistics and other information as they raced Natalia down the hallway to the labor and delivery wing, with Frank and Buzz trailing behind. Once they had the information they needed, Lillian came back to the entrance to let everyone else in their group know where the waiting room was located. Once the group was on their way, she headed back to help Natalia get settled in. But by the time she returned, the woman was already in a bed. Frank and Buzz stood outside the room pacing.

"Has the doctor come in yet?" Lillian asked the two men.

"He's on his way," Buzz answered.

She looked at Frank standing off to the side, appearing a little lost. She motioned to the room before asking Buzz quietly, "Isn't he going in there?"

Buzz looked down, answering quietly, "She only wanted Olivia in there with her."

"Oh." She felt for Frank, but she also knew it was Natalia's right to have whoever she wanted there. To ease Frank's pain at being kicked out, she told them, "Instead of going all the way back to the waiting room with everyone else, why don't you two have a seat over there?" She motioned to some chairs against a far wall. "That way you'll be close by when Francesca comes."

Buzz took her hand and gave her a quick kiss. "You're a good woman, Lillian."

"That's why you married me."

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Olivia stood by the bed holding onto Natalia's hand, and her other hand held a wet cloth to cool her partner's flushed face. The monitors bleeped a steady rhythm and one machine

whirled out little slips of paper charting Natalia's heart rate and contractions. Even before the hardest of the contractions hit Natalia, the little machine temporarily came to life as it spat out new data. From Olivia's vantage point, it merely looked like a fancy EKG machine with the same spiked lines indicating activity. When the contractions passed, it would slow, and the lines would roll and bounce along the paper rather than spike violently.

She looked down at the tensed features of her partner. Natalia always looked calm and serene, almost angelic, to Olivia. The only exception being when they made love and then the look on Natalia's face was indescribable. It was somewhere between fierce possession and awestruck wonder depending on her mood, and sometimes she saw both in the same night. But the look on her face now was unlike anything she'd ever seen. Even when her beautiful, warm brown eyes opened, resting from a contraction, she seemed caught in her own world. To say Natalia looked intensely focused didn't do it justice. Olivia simply had no words.

All she could do was continue to hold her hand and brush away strands of sweaty, matted hair. Natalia had said little since snapping at Frank in the car and Olivia wasn't used to the other woman being so non-vocal.

As they waited for what seemed like an eternity for the doctor, Olivia swept her free hand down Natalia's cheek, willing her to open her eyes. When the brown orbs turned to her, she smiled. "Hey."

"Hey." Natalia's voice was rough and tired.

Olivia knew the next wave of contractions was coming, so she talked to her partner while she had a chance. "What do you need? Can I do anything?"

Surprisingly, Natalia smirked at her a little before speaking. "If you happen to have any drugs for pain, slip some in my IV, okay?"

Olivia smiled at her. "Let me check my purse. I'm sure I have something in there for just such a time as this."

Natalia chuckled, "You would!"

"I thought you wanted to do this naturally."

"That was before I was painfully reminded that my body is twenty years older than it was the last time I did this. If I've passed out from the pain when the doctor comes in, tell 'em I want the drugs, like yesterday."

"You got it!"

A harder contraction slammed into Natalia then, her body going rigid and bowing. Instinctively, Natalia inhaled sharply, holding the breath, her mind laser-focused on telling her body not to push, until the wave passed. Eventually, she was able to use her breathing techniques to relax.

Olivia grimaced as the delicate hand in hers squeezed with brutal force. Olivia hissed at the pain and ended up using the same breathing techniques as Natalia to get through the pain.

Natalia looked at her apologetically once the pain had passed. "Sorry."

"S'alright, I think I have one bone left intact in there."

"Where is that damn doctor?"

Olivia was shocked at Natalia's exclamation. "Want me to go check?"

"No, don't you dare leave me."

"Wouldn't dream of it."

Moments later, the door to Natalia's room opened and a middle aged man entered the room. The two women looked at each other, confused.

Olivia was the first to speak. "Who are you? You're not her doctor, unless you're the best crossdresser I've ever met."

The doctor informed them in a slightly foreign accent that since it was a holiday and he didn't celebrate Thanksgiving, he was the only doctor on-call. His exasperated tone was clarified when he stated that he had five other women who'd gone into labor at exactly the same time. Olivia could have sworn she heard him mumble something about a full moon, but it was hard to tell for sure. She just looked at a stricken Natalia and shrugged.

"Doesn't look like we have a lot of choice."

The doctor wasted no time examining Natalia and determining that she was almost fully dilated.

"What about drugs?" Olivia hadn't forgotten Natalia's comment from earlier.

"She's too far along now for an epidural. With any luck, this baby will be here in the next hour."

Natalia's head flopped back on the pillow and a tear rolled down her cheek. "Oh God. Olivia, I can't do this. I can't. Make it stop."

Olivia looked down at her partner and started to comfort her when the doctor interrupted.

"I'll be back in ten minutes to check on her. The call button for the nurse's station is next to her head if the baby starts moving faster." The doctor then excused himself to go check on his other patients.

Olivia came back to her side and pushed the damp hair out of her face. "You can do this. You've done it before. And you know something?"

"What?" Natalia whimpered.

"You're stronger than you realize."

Natalia looked at Olivia, disbelieving her confidence in her. "Seriously, honey, think about what's happened in the last year. You took a job with me. You kicked my sorry butt in line. Fell in love. Had an almost wedding. Ran away from that before it went too far, consequences be damned. Stood up to your priest, your son, and your ex-fiancé. Fought for me. Chased me and won me back even when I pushed you away."

Olivia brushed away the tears that were now falling from her own eyes, thinking about the wonderful woman she was going to be lucky enough to spend the rest of her life with.

"You're not a quitter, Natalia. You're a fighter, and I love you so much for that. God knows, we never would have gotten to this point if it wasn't for you."

Natalia chuckled, "If you mean a surprise pregnancy, then yeah, you're right."

"You know what I mean."

"I know."

Olivia leaned over and brushed a soft kiss against Natalia's lips. It was only a momentary distraction before a new wave of contractions hit. The usual grimaces and grunts were replaced by a blood-curdling scream.

Olivia jumped back, looking at Natalia in fear. "That didn't sound good."

"Oh God...oh God," Natalia panted out before screaming again.

"Baby?"

"I think your Sweet Pea is ready to make her debut."

"Now?" Olivia gasped.

"Well, check and see."

"What?" Olivia was positively panicked.

"Olivia, just look." Natalia was losing her patience with her girlfriend.

Olivia lifted the cover up from Natalia's raised legs. "Oh God."

"What is it? Is the baby okay?"

"Head...I saw a head." Olivia voice was quiet, her eyes staring at a spot on the wall behind the bed, but Natalia heard it.

She snapped her fingers to get Olivia's attention. "Olivia, snap out of it. Go get the doctor."
"Oh yeah, right."

Out in the hallway, she searched for the nurse. Seeing no one nearby, she looked for Lillian.

Frank noticed her come out and jumped to his feet. "Is she okay?"

"Where's Lillian? We need the doctor."

Frank got his distracted ex's attention by tugging at her arm. "She went to get us some coffee. Is Natalia okay?"

"Yeah, she's fine. She's just having the baby right now. We really, really need the doctor. Can you go find him, Frankie?"

"Sure, no problem." She watched him run off down the hallway, stopping every person in scrubs that he saw, before turning to head back into the room. She didn't want to leave Natalia alone for too long.

Buzz came up behind her. "Is she really okay?"

"Yeah, she really is, all things considered." She then turned and looked Buzz in the eye. "I saw her head, Buzz. Her little head. It was," she choked up on the feeling, "it was... amazing."

They shared a moment of understanding, just looking at each other, before he squeezed her arm and urged her wordlessly to go back in the room. When she went back in, Natalia's eyes were closed, resting from the recent contractions. Olivia slid her fingers into Natalia's hand and without opening her eyes, the woman smiled.

Natalia lifted the cord next to her head. "We completely forgot about the call button."

Both of them laughed at the absurdity then looked at each other.

"You saw her head, huh?"

Olivia couldn't stop the giddy smile that crossed her face. "Yep. She has a head full of dark hair. Bet it's going to be beautiful, just like her mom's."

Their mutual smiles were erased when Natalia's body seized up again with a contraction. With perfect timing, the doctor came in with a nurse in tow and settled in to check Natalia.

"Well, Ms. Rivera, are you ready to be a mom?"

Natalia squeezed Olivia's hand, gritting the words out around the pain. "Are you?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"Okay, let's do this."

The doctor gave some instructions to the nurse, who prepped the portable crib beside the bed with cloths, a syringe, and a swaddling blanket. He then turned back to Natalia, telling her to take a deep breath on the next contraction and push as hard as she could. In a series of ten second waves, she screamed and pushed her way through several sets of contractions. By the time Natalia finished the last one, she was sure she was going to pass out. She had pushed so hard she was seeing stars.

There was no rest though, because Francesca was ready to make her great escape. Olivia moved slightly behind Natalia and wrapped an arm around her as she rose to push, bracing her body against the woman's back to ease the strain on tired muscles, allowing Natalia to focus on pushing. She squeezed her lover's delicate and thin hand in her own, whispering words of love and perseverance in her ear.

"Come on, baby. You can do this, just a little bit more. Push!"

“OH MY GOD!!!! OLIVIA!!!” Natalia cried out then took a deep breath and pushed harder than she ever remembered pushing before, and suddenly her upper body lurched forward, followed by a tiny, whimpering scream.

Natalia raised her hands to her mouth and looked at Olivia with tears running down her face. “Is that her?”

Olivia was smiling and crying too, and she didn’t care one bit. “That’s our girl.” She hugged Natalia tight and kissed her on the head. “I knew you could do it. I love you so much.”

Natalia was crying so hard her hands were shaking. Finally, Natalia raised quivering hands to Olivia’s face and kissed her tenderly, reverently on the lips. She pulled back and looked at Olivia with such a complete aura of blissfulness that it took Olivia’s breath away. For one moment, Olivia lost herself in the power of their love, not just for each other but for the baby as well.

“I love you, too,” Natalia’s hushed words were as reverent as her touch. “Is she okay? Healthy?”

They both looked at the doctor and he smiled a blinding, white smile at them. “She’s absolutely beautiful and perfectly healthy. Ten fingers. Ten toes.” The doctor looked at Olivia then, before offering her a pair of scissors. “Would you like to do the honors?”

Olivia bit her lip, but with a nudge from Natalia and a quick smile, she took the scissors in her hand and looked past the drape to get her first look at their baby. She didn’t want to stop looking at Francesca and it took the doctor clearing his throat to get her attention. After she cut the cord, the nurse briefly took the baby to wipe off and weigh and measure before coming back to the bedside where she motioned for Olivia to come closer as well. Olivia took her place on the bed next to Natalia again. Carefully, the nurse placed the baby in Natalia’s arms.

“Congratulations, Ms. Rivera and Ms. Spencer. You’re the proud parents of a beautiful baby girl.”

Natalia leaned her head back against Olivia’s shoulder and smiled up at the nurse. “How much does she weigh?”

“7 pounds 3 ounces, and she’s 20 inches long.” The nurse watched the happy couple cuddle their new baby and make silly goo-goo sounds. “Do you have a name for her?”



Olivia wiped at a tear on her cheek and nodded before answering, “Francesca Marissa Rivera.”

“That’s a beautiful name.”

The nurse went back to work with the doctor, blanketing the room in near silence as they continued to clean up. Eventually, the doctor stood and nodded his head slightly. “We’ll leave you to be with your daughter. It’s our policy not to send in visitors for at least ten minutes. Is that okay?”

“It’s perfect.” Olivia was torn between who she wanted to look at: the baby or Natalia. She settled for taking turns looking at each, and with each pass she felt her heart expand a little more. She imagined that was what the saying meant about having a heart overflowing with love. She certainly felt that way as she looked at two of the people she loved beyond her own life.

It was inevitable that the world would crash in on them and their days would no longer be their own for quite a while. So for now, they huddled together on the bed admiring the beauty and perfection of this new life.

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A few minutes later, Frank quietly entered the room. Olivia looked up from where she was softly stroking Francesca's tiny head as she held her in her arms. She mouthed a hello and tilted her head, indicating he could come closer. He moved to the side of the bed opposite of Olivia, so he could see Francesca's face.

Olivia could see him fight back tears as he bit his lower lip. After a moment, he was able to speak. "She's beautiful."

"Funny, that's the same word I'm stuck on too. Where's Buzz?"

"He went to get everyone else from the waiting room. Enjoy the quiet while you can."

Natalia looked to Olivia, then to Frank. "Would you like to hold her?"

He broke out into a huge grin. "Of course."

Olivia walked around the bed and carefully passed the baby to Frank, who cradled her gently in his arms. A tear finally fell from his eye, and Olivia turned away before he could see her brush away her own.

He rocked her in his arms and talked to her, joking about how strong she was when she grabbed his finger and squeezed.

"You are a very lucky girl, Francesca. You have so many people who love you so much, and two mommies and a daddy who will do anything for you. Anything at all." He lifted her higher and gently placed a kiss on her forehead.

"Alright, Frank, stop it or you're going to make me like you." Olivia smiled at him from her spot on the bed next to Natalia. She wrapped an arm around her partner's shoulders, holding her close.

A soft knock at the door interrupted Olivia's teasing, and Buzz poked his head in. "I don't think I can hold Emma back much longer. Can we come in now?"

Natalia laughed. "You better let my Jellybean in!"

As if beckoned, Emma came barreling past Buzz and excitedly ran to the side of the bed next to her mom. Olivia ruffled her hair. "You want to see your baby sister?"

"You bet!"

Olivia laughed, then reminded her, "Honey, you're going to have to be quiet around her, okay? We can't be too loud or we'll upset her."

"Okay, Mommy." She whispered

Frank came around the bed and knelt down with Francesca. "Say hi."

"Hi, Fra...Fra..." She looked to her mom for help.

"Francesca."

"Right." She nodded and turned back to the sleeping baby. Her little voice was full of awe as she looked at her sister. "She's tiny."

"So were you once. One day she'll be as big as you." Olivia played with her daughter's ponytail.

"Can I hold her?"

Olivia looked to Natalia, who happily nodded her head and answered for both of them, "Sure, Emma. Why don't you sit in that chair over there and Uncle Frank will help you?"

Everyone stood around watching, amused, as Frank tried to instruct Emma on how to hold the baby and keep her head still. Emma sat proudly in the chair with her sister, as everyone took turns greeting the newest member of their family. Ava came over and kissed her mom and Natalia on the cheek and offered her congratulations. Sam playfully punched Olivia on the shoulder and joked about her cleaning her shotgun when the boys came around for dates.

"Or girls," Olivia quipped back. "Hey, I'm living proof that anything is possible!"

A cell phone chimed in the room with an incoming message and everyone turned to Frank, who guiltily pulled it from his pocket. He looked at the text message and scrunched his eyebrows upon seeing a name he'd never expected to see again. He felt his heart start to race, and he took a deep breath to calm himself. Later he'd deal with it. Now definitely wasn't the time.

Blake came over to loop her arm through his. "What was that?"

“Nothing.” He tried to blow it off, but when Blake looked at him like she expected more of an explanation, he elaborated, “I forgot to cancel the dating service. Someone posted a comment on my profile, and it just surprised me. But I don’t need that anymore, now do I?”

“Nope.”

When Natalia yawned, several people got the hint and began to excuse themselves. They all came over and gave Olivia and Natalia hugs and well-wishes. Eventually, the only ones left in the room were the three parents, the baby, Emma, and Phillip.

Phillip picked up Emma. “So, Em, do you want to come spend the weekend with your old man?”

Emma was excited at first and then pouted. “But I want to be with my mommies and the baby.”

“Oh, you will. But they won’t be able to go home for at least a couple of days. The doctor’s going to want to keep them here for a little while, but we can come visit. What do you say?”

She shrugged. “Okay. As long as we can visit.”

“Okay. Well, let’s go then. Kiss everyone goodbye.” Emma leaned over in his arms and gave her mommies and Francesca kisses before waving bye.

Frank’s phone rang again, but this time when he looked at it, he smiled and handed it over to Natalia.

“I think it’s for you.”

She looked at the display and a huge smile crossed her face as she flipped the phone open. “Baby, is that you?”

“Hi, Ma. I hear I have a baby sister.”

Olivia knew immediately who was on the other end of the line just from Natalia’s reaction. She looked up at Frank in genuine gratefulness.

“Thank you,” she quietly mouthed to him.

He simply nodded and gestured with his head that he was going to step out in the hallway. Olivia snuggled up closer to Natalia on the bed. She could hear Rafe’s voice through the

phone asking about the baby, like how big she was and what she looked like. Natalia sleepily answered his questions and then there was a long pause.

There was no mistaking the sadness in his voice when he said, *"I miss you, Ma."*

Natalia swallowed hard before she could answer him. "I miss you too, baby."

"Love you."

"Love you, too. With all my heart."

"I know, Ma."

Olivia could hear the smile in Natalia's voice as she said her goodbyes to Rafe, hope springing up in both of them that their troubled son would find his way home. Natalia handed the phone to Olivia, who placed it on the side table next to her, and snuggled deeper back into the other woman's warm embrace as she cradled their child.

They didn't have to say a word. Both understood this was a new beginning for them. While it wouldn't be easy and they'd certainly have troubles like every couple and every family, they had each other.

And they had an abundance of family and friends surrounding and supporting them. It was a day of thanksgiving and neither could be more thankful than they were at that moment in each other's arms.

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To Be Continued in Episode Four...