

My Pretty Pony

by DAr

ACT 1

“Are you sure this is a good idea?”

Natalia smiled at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, the hand holding Olivia’s favorite shade of lipstick hanging motionless in front of her mouth. “For the hundredth time... yes.”

She heard the older woman sigh from the other room. “I still think we should have thrown a party here.”

“Olivia,” The brunette rolled her eyes and went back to applying her make-up. “We can’t claim every holiday! We celebrated Thanksgiving *and* Christmas here...”

“Ahhh, technically we never had Thanksgiving, since someone had to go and give birth in the middle of dinner.”

“It wasn’t the middle! It was the beginning!” Natalia leaned against the sink, turning her head towards the door as her voice dropped dangerously low. “Are you complaining?”

“No.” Olivia’s voice was soft, almost shy as she ran her hand down the outside of the door. “In fact, I think it’s rather fitting that on that particular day... you gave me something I’ll be thankful for the rest of my life...”

The younger woman felt her heart flip lazily in her chest and closed her eyes, amazed yet again at the sweet and gentle soul hidden beneath her lover’s sarcastic exterior.

“It also makes it a lot easier to remember her birthday.”

Natalia snorted. “Nice.”

“Practical.”

“Yeah, because practical is your middle name!”

“It is!” Olivia tapped the door one last time with her nails before sitting down on the end of the bed to pull on her boots. They were new; black ankle boots with three inch heels that turned her calves and backside into a spectacle that Natalia had labeled a near-religious experience.

Considering the source, Olivia thought it was quite a compliment.

Standing she turned from side to side, checking out the rest of her outfit in the mirror. The skirt was charcoal gray. Tight to the point of almost being obscene, it clung to her hips and thighs all the way down to her knees. Tucked into it was a white tuxedo shirt, complete with silver button covers and cufflinks. She pulled a matching charcoal vest over the top of that, smiling as it molded to her body like a second skin when she fastened it across her chest.

With a chuckle, she reached for the last part of the outfit, a crimson bow tie. Picking it up, she stared at it for several long seconds; running her fingertips over the silky material. It was soft and smooth and she could imagine a dozen or so better ways to put it to use than wrapping it around her neck. Unbidden, the image of her girlfriend with her hands bound to the bedposts popped into her head.

Swallowing, she sat down heavily. “Jesus... get a grip, Olivia.” She whispered. “You went without sex for...what? More than a year before Natalia? God, it hasn’t even been that long...” She closed her eyes, whimpering softly. “Thirty-six days, fifteen hours and...” She glanced at the clock next to the bed. “...twelve minutes...” With a tiny, anguished cry she toppled over, burying her face in Natalia’s pillow and inhaling deeply.

“Who are you talking to?” The brunette called from the bathroom.

“No one.” Olivia sighed, pulling herself to her feet and walking back to the mirror. She slid the tie around her neck, knotting it quickly into a bow. Leaning her head to the side she studied her reflection, pursing her lips as she did so. Finally, with a small leer, she reached up and pulled the tie loose, letting it dangle from beneath her collar like a playboy just stumbling home after a night on the town. She backed up a few feet and checked the overall effect of her outfit, smoothing her hand over layers of chestnut hair that were slicked back away from her face but left to hang long in the back. Her makeup was done sparingly, except for her eyes. There, the combination of charcoal eye shadow, black liner and long, thick lashes made her green eyes stand out even more clearly, glowing like a cat’s in the moonlight.

“Perfect.” She purred, a wicked smile turning up the corners of her mouth.

“Mmmm, I agree.”

Before she could react, her eyes were covered by Natalia’s soft, sweet smelling fingers.

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t want you to peek.”

“Are we going to stay like this all night?” Olivia smirked, moving her hips to rub her backside seductively against the younger woman’s groin. “Because if we are, I want to request something slow and dirty when we dance...”

“Just... be quiet and do what you’re told.”

“Ooo.” One eyebrow shot up. “I am yours to command.” Her heart caught when she felt Natalia’s lips against her ear, the warmth of her breath sending chills up and down the older woman’s spine.

“I already knew that.” She whispered.

Olivia laughed softly; more at herself than anything else. If any of her former lovers had dared to say such a thing, it would have earned them the door. But with Natalia...

With Natalia it was just the truth.

“Okay...” She leaned back slightly, licking her lips when she felt the soft swells of her lover’s chest against her back. “What now?”

“Now...” Natalia nuzzled her ear. “Now you’re going to close your eyes and keep them closed until I tell you to open them. Understand?” Olivia nodded and the younger woman removed her hands. “Turn around.”

She did as she was told, her hands instinctively reaching out only to be playfully slapped away. “Hey!”

“I didn’t say you could touch!” Natalia laughed.

“I can’t touch... I can’t see.” She frowned. “What can I do?” For a moment, there was no response, then her heart rate kicked into double time when Natalia moved in so close she could feel her breath against her lips.

“What can you do?” Long, delicate fingers curled around the back of her neck. “You can taste...”

A small whimper broke free from Olivia as her head was gently pulled down. Her lips parted automatically and that was all the invitation Natalia needed to slide her tongue inside before running it along the older woman’s lower lip, pulling it between her teeth for a moment before letting go.

It was too much for her to resist. In one graceful movement, Olivia caught the smaller woman up in her arms; crushing their bodies together as she spun her around and pressed her up against the mirror. When Natalia’s hands came up, she grabbed them both, tucking them behind her back as she devoured her lips hungrily, leaving them swollen and bruised as she licked and bit her way down the younger woman’s throat.

“Olivia...” Natalia’s voice was rough, breathless. “You weren’t supposed to touch...”

“Mmm...” She slid her lips down further, surprised that she had yet to encounter any kind of clothing. “At least I kept my eyes closed.”

The brunette laughed, pulling her hands free and using them to push a groaning Olivia away from her. “You can open them now.”

The older woman opened her eyes, her jaw dropping as all of the air rushed from her lungs at the sight of the woman in front of her.

Natalia was a vision in crimson and black; the blood red cocktail dress tight in all the right places, not that there were any wrong ones. It was strapless and sleeveless, cut low across her still much enhanced chest and left to flow freely along her hips. The color enhanced her natural skin tone, making her look as though she were positively glowing. Olivia followed the line of her hip down her thigh to the black leather boots that stretched from her knees to the tips of her toes. She couldn’t stop the eyebrow that arched wickedly up her forehead.

“Don’t even say it!” Natalia pointed a finger at her.

Olivia raised her hands innocently. “Say what?”

“I know what you like to call these boots!”

“Oh honey, I think that would actually apply to the whole outfit at this point.”

Natalia’s face fell slightly. “Do you... think it’s too much?”

“Are you kidding??” She slid in close, pursing her lips when their bodies once again fit together perfectly. Over the last five weeks, Natalia had quickly shed her baby weight, so quickly in fact that Olivia had dragged Rick into his office just that morning to give her a check up. She had been relieved to hear that it was just the younger woman’s naturally high metabolism kicking back in. She still wasn’t as slender as she had been before the baby, but Olivia wasn’t exactly unhappy about that. There was a lot to be said for a woman of substance. Grinning, she laid her hands on Natalia’s hips, leaning down to nuzzle the sensitive skin beneath the younger woman’s ear. “I think you’re perfect.”

“Hmmm...” Natalia hummed happily. “You keep that up and we’re never going to leave this room.”

“Would that be so bad?” Olivia mumbled, her tongue tracing the hollow at the base of her lover’s throat.

Natalia sighed and gently pushed her away. “We promised we’d be there.”

Olivia hung her head in frustration. “And why did we do that again?”

“Because,” She picked up the charm bracelet Olivia had given her for Christmas, holding her arm out so that the older woman could fasten it around her wrist. “This New Year’s Eve party means a lot to Phillip.” She rubbed Olivia’s lips gently with her thumb, trying to get her to stop pouting. “It’s the first year without Alan. Love... hate... whatever their relationship was... he has to be feeling that loss.”

Olivia sighed. “You’re right. *You’re right.*” She wrapped her arms around the smaller woman, resting their foreheads together. “I’m just kind of surprised you’re so gung-ho about this. I would have thought I’d need a crow bar to pry you away from the baby.”

Natalia picked up the ends of Olivia’s bow tie, fidgeting with them before laying them back against her shirt, her lips quirking adorably to one side. “It’s hard.” She finally admitted. “I would love to stay here and curl up under a blanket with our girls. But I think... I think we really need some adult time... away from the kids; to keep it in perspective.”

Olivia looked at her closely. “Dr. Phil?”

“Oprah.”

“Ahh...” She laughed and kissed her tenderly. “We really *do* need to get you out of the house. If you start watching Judge Judy, I’m staging an intervention.”

“Ha!” Natalia picked up the black wrap that completed her outfit, smiling when Olivia grabbed the other end. Pulling gently, she backed out of the room. “Don’t even try to pretend you’re innocent of trashy television tendencies!”

“Trashy television tendencies? Can you say that five times fast?”

“No, but I can say for a fact that I’ve seen you watching Court TV!”

Olivia blushed. “Just ‘Forensic Files’! It’s... educational!”

“Mmhmm...but do you need to explain it to Francesca? You’re going to end up giving her nightmares!” Natalia kept pulling until she reached the bottom of the stairs.

“I would think you’d be happy!” Olivia stopped three steps up, pulling back firmly. “It *is* a cop show!”

“When I asked you to help me bring her up with positive examples of her father’s profession, that wasn’t exactly what I had in mind!”

“I could show her Reno 911!” Olivia smirked. “Probably be more accurate...”

Natalia’s eyes narrowed. With a mock frown, she tugged. Hard.

Olivia stumbled down the last few steps and into her girlfriend’s arms. “Hey!”

The brunette grinned, wrapping her arms around the other woman tightly. “Lose your balance?” She glanced down. “Must be the boots.”

“You love these boots.”

Natalia leaned forward until her lips grazed Olivia’s with every word she spoke. “No... I love your *ass* in those boots.” She slid her hands dangerously low on Olivia’s back. “The fact that they’re cute is just a bonus.”

The older woman shook her head, her eyes darkening. “You’re getting quite a mouth on you.”

“The important thing...” Natalia kissed her neck, breathing deeply as she nuzzled her way up to a perfect ear. “Is what my mouth can do on *you*...”

Olivia shivered. She took Natalia’s face in her hands and kissed her, tenderly at first and then with growing enthusiasm.

“Oh my god! Are they always like that?”

The two women broke apart quickly to find Jane and a wildly giggling Emma watching them from the couch.

“Yeeees!” The little girl sang happily. “Mommy and Natalia sittin’ in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!”

“Okay, bean.” Olivia ran a finger around the edge of her lips, smirking when she saw the burst of color in Natalia’s cheeks. “I was just... checking her lipstick.”

Emma rolled her eyes.

“She definitely gets that from you.” Natalia whispered.

The older woman smiled proudly. “Okay, here are the ground rules! No soda past ten o’clock, no candy past eleven. No scary movies, no long distance phone calls and no wild tea parties with your dollies. You can stay up to see the ball drop but I want you in bed by twelve-thirty. Agreed?”

“Agreed...” The little girl said sullenly. “But I still don’t know why I can’t go with you!” Her lower lip extended in a spectacular pout.

“And she gets *that* from you!” Olivia whispered in Natalia’s ear on the way to the couch; making the brunette laugh. “It’s not that we don’t want you with us, Jellybean.” She sat down next to her daughter, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “But there won’t be any other kids there. It’s all grown-ups and you know how boring we can be. Plus, Jane needs you to help take care of your little sister, don’t you Jane?”

“I do.” The babysitter nodded.

Emma sighed. “Okay...” She stretched the word out over several seconds.

“Be good?” She waited until the little girl nodded, then kissed her on the forehead. She watched with a small smile as Natalia did the same.

Waving goodbye, they stepped out onto the porch. The air was crisp and clean, the world white with a dusting of new snow that had recently fallen over the old. Olivia pulled the black cashmere wrap tight around the younger woman’s shoulders before tilting her head back to finish their interrupted kiss.

A few moments later they heard the crunching of tires in the driveway and looked up to see Phillip’s personal driver Jacob pulling up to the house in a long black limousine.

Olivia glanced at her watch. "Eight O'clock. Right on time."

"It was really sweet of Phillip to send a car."

"Yeah, it was." She took Natalia's hand and led her to the limo, smiling at Jacob when he jumped out into the cold to open the door. "Hiya, Jake. He got you out all night?"

"Six runs." The young man nodded; an amiable smile on his face. "Mr. Spaulding said he didn't want anyone to even think about having to drive home. You're my first stop, though." He winked. "You're special."

Olivia inclined her head towards her date. "She's special. I'm just a lucky fool."

Jake smirked. "Yeah, he said that too."

Natalia laughed at Olivia's look of mock outrage, dragging her into the back seat and sighing happily when the heat from the vents hit her full force.

"Cheeky bastard." The older woman grumbled good-naturedly.

"Mmm..." Natalia snuggled into her side. "You know, you never did tell me how you got Jane to babysit tonight. Whatever it was must have been major, for her to give up New Year's Eve."

Olivia played idly with the hair falling across her lover's forehead. She wandered if the errant lock was a desired effect or just an escapee from the perfect chignon Natalia had pulled her gorgeous mane into. She brushed her fingers through it happily before trailing them down one smooth cheek, her heart flipping over when a perfect dimple appeared beneath her touch. "Let's just say that she doesn't have to worry about next month's rent..."

Natalia's eyes widened. "Olivia!"

"Hey, to have you all to myself, looking like that?" She kissed her gently. "I'd have paid her college tuition next year."

"Oh..." The younger woman's face melted into a lovesick grin. "That is so sweet! But you know... it *is* a party... we won't exactly be alone."

"You forget... it's a big house..." Olivia winked. "A *really, really* big house."

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Mayor Doris Wolfe was nervous.

It was not a feeling she liked, nor was it one she was used to experiencing; especially not while sitting in her car, dressed to the nines, outside her kinda-sorta girlfriend's house.

To be honest, this was not where she was supposed to be. Nor was it where she expected to end up.

But here she was, and here she had been for the last quarter of an hour, trying to decide whether or not to do something about it.

With a long sigh, she looked at her watch. It was five minutes to eight. In five minutes she was supposed to be making her grand entrance at the social event of the year, the Spaulding New Year's Eve Bash. She had been amazed to even be invited. Mayor or not, the Spauldings were a family more accustomed to owning politicians than courting them and, truth be told, her invite probably had a lot more to do with who she knew than who she was.

But either way, it was an opportunity to rub elbows with Springfield's elite and drum up support for her next Mayoral campaign.

So why, knowing all of that, was she sitting outside of Anna Li's house contemplating social suicide?

"Because you're insane!" She growled at herself, reaching for the keys and starting the car. She let it idle for a minute, gunning the accelerator like it was somehow connected to her common sense, before sighing and killing the engine yet again.

Wrapping her scarf tightly around her neck, she pushed open the door of the car, her teeth beginning to chatter at the first lungful of freezing winter air. Slamming the door shut behind her, she hurried up the path towards the front door, heels slipping on the new ice as she muttered quietly to herself. "I *must* be insane. That's all there is to it. I'm insane. I have lost my freakin' mind. Do they even allow crazy people to run for office?" She stopped on the front step, tucking her hands under her arms and staring at the bell. "What the hell am I doing?"

"That's a damn good question."

She spun around quickly, losing her balance on the icy step. A moment later she was caught up in warm arms, her chest and face pressed against the soft leather of a brown bomber jacket.

“Are you okay?” Anna Li looked down at her, eyebrows knitted together in concern.

“I’m fine!” Doris stood up straight, trying to adjust her black overcoat, which had fallen open in the scuffle. “I’m... just perfect!”

“Wow!” Anna whistled in appreciation, reaching out to part the coat wider, taking in the Mayor’s appearance with appreciative eyes. “You can say that again!”

Doris was dressed in a black Dolce and Gabbana cocktail dress. It was gathered tight around her waist and cut low across the chest in a diamond-shaped pattern. The neckline was a fitted choker that left her shoulders bare until it met up with the half sleeves that circled around the older woman’s upper arms. Anna felt her eyes widen as they slid down the decadent dress to a hem that was far from modest, landing a full two inches above her knees. The outfit was finished off in style by a pair of two inch heels that made the Mayor’s calves look like they were carved from stone and a messy, upswept bun that softened the whole image with stray locks of hair framing her face.

“Wow.”

Doris blushed, pleased. “You said that already.”

“Yeah, well...” She raised her eyebrows. “It bears repeating. Where the hell are you going looking like that?”

“New Year’s Eve at the Spaulding mansion.”

“Ahhh...” The detective held up the white plastic bag she was carrying. “Kung Pao chicken and hot and sour soup.” She shrugged, a self-deprecating smile on her face. “I’m a girl who knows how to party.”

“Well... I...” Doris fiddled with one of her diamond earrings. “I was sort of hoping that you were...”

Anna blinked. “Were what?”

“A girl who likes a good party.”

The detective stared at her. “You better come inside.” She unlocked the door and shuffled the freezing woman into the foyer. “I think the cold has gone to your head.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

"It means you can't possibly be asking me what I think you're asking me."

"What do you think I'm asking you?"

Anna sighed, rubbing her temples with her fingers. "It kind of sounds like your asking me to go to this party with you."

"Oh, good!" Doris nodded. "Because that's what I'm asking you."

Anna stared at her speculatively for several long moments until Doris finally frowned. "What?!?"

"I'm waiting for the punch line."

"This isn't a joke!" She sighed. "I... I've wanted to ask you for a while now but... I kept talking myself out of it."

"And for good reason!"

"Really?" Doris sat down heavily on the bench in the entryway. "You think there's a good reason? Because all of the ones I keep coming up with make me feel like a coward."

"Doris," Anna sat down beside her and took her hand. "It isn't cowardice to protect the things you've worked for, the things that matter to you. It's rational... and understandable."

"Rational." The Mayor repeated. "Anna, I've been hiding my whole life; first from myself and then from the rest of the world. For the longest time I hid from my own daughter! To such an extent that she doesn't even know who I really am. All that time... all those opportunities... gone. Wasted. And now she's on the other side of the country. I can't get those years with my daughter back and I can't undo all of the lies I've told. But I can start living my life differently *now*. I can stand up and be proud of who I am instead of hiding all the time!" She laced their fingers together. "What's the point of being Mayor if I only got here by pretending to be something I'm not? What's so rational about that?"

"Doris... sweetheart..." Anna ran a hand through her jet black hair. "If you do this... if we do this... Then that's it, it's done. You can't un-ring that bell."

"I know."

"Do you?" Anna looked at her closely, surprised and more than a little turned on by the determination plainly evident in the woman before her. She blinked as she breathed in

deeply. “Wow... you’re really serious? You’re willing to risk everything... to come out... with me?”

“Yes I am.” Doris cupped her chin, pulling her forward to kiss her firmly. “Now, the real question is...” She looked her lover over from head to toe. The woman looked damn good in jeans and leather, but she wouldn’t exactly blend. With a smirk, she reached out and pulled the ball cap off her head. “Do you have a couple of mice and a magic pumpkin somewhere? Because I’m no fairy godmother and you’re a tad underdressed.”

Anna’s lips curved into a crooked grin. “Oh baby, you’d be surprised how well I can clean up. Give me twenty minutes.”

Doris stopped her when she started towards the bedroom, pulling her back and down onto her lap. Never breaking eye contact, she began to unbutton Anna’s shirt. “I could always come help...”

The detective laughed. It was full and deep and sent a wave of tingles down the older woman’s spine. She slapped Doris’ hands away and climbed off. “Not if you want to get to the party sometime tonight. You just sit there and be a good girl.”

Doris grinned; her gaze following Anna until she disappeared into the bedroom. Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes, breathing in evenly as she let her mind wander.

“Doris?”

The Mayor blinked rapidly as she sat up. “Oh my god... did I actually fall asleep?” She rubbed at her eyes carefully, trying not to smudge her makeup.

“Well, you were pretty stressed out. So what do you think? Will I pass for the social elite?”

Doris looked up, her breath stopping as her eyes widened in unabashed appreciation.

Anna was wearing a short, pale green shift. Iridescent, the fabric shimmered as it slid smoothly across her body. It twisted with her as she spun in a slow circle, providing the older woman with a complete 360 degree view. The dress was held up by two thin strips of fabric that hugged her slender shoulders before widening to create an almost drape like affect down her back. While modestly cut in the front, the back plunged so low that Doris swore she could almost see the dimple at the base of her spine.

And as for her hair...

“Dear god!” Doris reached up tentatively, her fingers gently nudging the thick mass of wild black spikes that jutted out in all different directions. She was amazed to find them incredibly soft and made a mental note to figure out how the Asian woman had managed to pull that off. “You’re... magnificent!” She whispered finally.

Anna smiled, the faintest hint of a blush tinting her cheeks. “Thanks.” She sat down next to her and pulled on a pair of brown, fuzzy UGGs.

“Uhm...” Doris bit her bottom lip. “Really?”

The detective rolled her eyes, holding up a pair of black, strappy sandals in her other hand. “Frostbite beats fashion every time. I’ll change when we get there.”

“Ahh...” Doris smiled when Anna stood and held out a hand. Taking it, she allowed herself to be pulled up, kissing her lover tenderly before turning to study their image in the hallway mirror.

“So...” The Asian woman brushed the hair away from her eyes. “What would your new image consultant say about this?”

“Honestly?” Doris tucked her arm into Anna’s. “I don’t think he’d say much of anything. His head would just implode.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“No.” She admitted. “But I think it time I stopped doing what’s right for everyone else... and started doing what’s right for me.”

Anna nodded. “Okay then... let’s go destroy your political career.”

“Sweet talker!” Doris smiled, hugging their hips together as they headed for the door.

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ACT 2

Natalia sighed happily, burrowing deep into Olivia’s arms as she watched the snow fall outside of the limousine. The flakes were small and fluffy looking, but they were falling so quickly that it was hard to make out any of the landmarks they were passing. She smiled in amazement when she realized that she still knew exactly where they were, even without seeing the signs or recognizing the buildings, she knew.

After all the years of trying to create a life, of trying to make her world work the way she thought it was supposed to; after all the years of trying to find a place where she and Rafe *truly* belonged...

She had finally found everything she needed... and all she'd had to do was lose everything she ever thought she wanted.

This was her home.

This place... this town.

This woman.

That realization filled her with a tenderness so overwhelming she could not contain it. Closing her eyes, she cried softly.

"Hey..." She felt Olivia's fingers run over her hair before trailing down her back. "Hey, hey, hey..." The words were whispered, soothing. "What's wrong sweetheart?"

"Nothing's wrong." Natalia's voice was small and she sniffled as the look of concerned adoration on her lover's face almost sent her into a fresh round of tears. "Absolutely nothing."

"Then what's with the water works?"

"I just..." She bit down on her bottom lip, breathing in deeply as she tried to control her emotions. "It's just that every time I think I've reached the limit..." She shook her head, a tiny smile offsetting the tears. "...that I couldn't possibly feel anything more for you that I already do..." She closed her eyes as she traced her lover's mouth gently with her fingertips. "You'll say something, or you'll do something and it just hits me again... sometimes so hard that it's like a physical blow and I have to wonder if it's a sin because I shouldn't love you more than I love... God..." Her voice trailed off to a whisper. "But I do."

Olivia kissed her softly on the forehead, not trusting herself to speak.

"And Rafe..." The younger woman's voice caught. "I never thought that there would ever be *anything* I would refuse to do for my son." She looked up, amazed to see the shine of tears in the other woman's eyes as well. "But Olivia... if he had... if he had forced me to choose..." She swallowed. "I'd still be here..."

Olivia pressed her lips together tightly, angling her head back to keep the tears from falling. The questions were there... the same ones that had haunted her since she had lost

Natalia all those months ago; the same questions, the same doubts. But this was a brand new year. A new chance and she could either hang on to the past; let it damage her, let it damage *them*... or...

"I believe you."

Natalia look up at her, hope shining in her eyes. "You do?"

A shiver ran down Olivia's spine. "I do."

They both went completely still, caught in the moment as those two words hung in the air between them. Everything they had been through, everything they had together, and all of the love they shared seemed to come together in a moment of perfect clarity.

But it was a clarity that neither of them was quite ready to deal with.

Olivia's gentle laughter finally broke the moment. "You're going to have me looking like a raccoon." She carefully wiped at the tears clinging to her lower lashes.

Natalia quirked one eyebrow, "With that eye shadow you picked I thought that was the look you were going for."

The older woman blinked. "Wha...?" She saw the edge of Natalia's lips quiver and pulled away, leaning back against the seat and crossing her arms as she pouted. "You said you liked it."

"Oh, I do.... I do." The brunette said seriously. "I'm just afraid of the affect you might have on the rest of Springfield's female population." She sighed. "I certainly wasn't expecting what you did to me..."

Olivia half-snorted, "Oh, you're saying that this..." She waved her hand back and forth between them. "This is all *my* fault? That I'm the one...?"

"Yup!" Natalia crossed her legs, looking prim and proper as she rested her hands together in her lap. "You made me gay."

"*What?*" She tried for outraged and ended up sounding strangled as she choked on her laughter. "You did nothing? You had no part in this?"

"Nope, I'm innocent."

“Soooo, this is all me...? You never had any naughty thoughts? No lust in your heart for me? Not ever?”

Natalia blinked innocently. “Of course not! I’m a good Catholic girl!”

Olivia pursed her lips. Turning slightly, she slid back until she was tucked into the corner of the limo’s bench seat, far enough away that she lost all contact with the other woman. With a small smile, she brought her hand up to her chest, slowly popping the buttons on her vest until it hung open.

“Uhm...” Natalia swallowed. “What are you doing?”

“Is it hot in here?” She began to do the same with the buttons on her shirt, closing her eyes as she slid her hand inside to rub lightly across the tops of her breasts. Her fingers dipped dangerously low, disappearing to the first knuckle beneath the black lace of her bra. “Or is it just me?”

When there was no answer, Olivia licked her lips... slowly. She felt the seat dip and smiled as warm breath ghosted across her cheeks. Opening her eyes, she stared up into Natalia’s beautiful face, shifting slightly to accommodate the smaller woman as she lowered her body down on top of her. “Mmmm.” She sighed happily as Natalia’s full weight pressed into her. “God, you feel good.” She laughed lightly, pulling her head back as the younger woman tried to capture her lips in a kiss. “Oh no... no naughty thoughts at all...”

“Shut up.” Natalia took her face between both hands, holding it still as she pressed down with her hips. Her eyes closed at Olivia’s groan of pleasure. “Just shut up and kiss me.”

“Gladly.” She slid one hand up Natalia’s back, slipping her fingers into the tight knots of hair at the nape of her neck. Not for the first time, she wished that Natalia had worn her hair down. The idea of tangling her fingers in it, using it to pull the younger woman more firmly against her, was more than appealing. In fact, the images it evoked were downright toe-curling. She settled for sliding her other hand down and across Natalia backside, cupping one firm cheek as she met her lips halfway.

The kiss was tender at first; lips touching gently, grazing against each other in the same teasing dance that always led to trouble. And trouble quickly followed as Olivia parted her lips, welcoming Natalia’s tongue inside and playing against it with her own. The textures were like velvet, the taste of her lover intoxicating, and she couldn’t stop the small whimpers that were coming from the back of her throat.

She had expected passion; she had seen that much in the dark, wide pupils of Natalia’s eyes. But she hadn’t expected the fire that came along with it; or the hands that wandered

possessively down her body, fingers lingering atop her nipples before running across her ribs and down her hips. She felt the other woman shift, rolling her body slightly to the side, and then her head fell back into the soft leather seat as firm fingers wandered up the inside of her thigh, dragging her skirt up with them.

There was a whirring sound and Olivia opened her eyes briefly, fighting the urge to laugh as she saw the privacy shield going up between them and Jake.

Good old Jake. She thought to herself. *I need to send him a bottle of...* “Fuck!” Natalia’s fingers had reached their destination and began playing over the silk between her legs. The touch was gentle, light, almost to the point of being maddening. But the intent was there and when the pressure began to increase, Olivia rolled her head to the side, breathing heavily as teeth bit firmly into the skin of her neck. The bite was followed by Natalia’s lips and she whimpered as they formed a seal over the tender spot. The pain was exquisite... and so completely worth the scarves she’d have to wear for the next few days. “Oh yeah... Just a... a good... Catholic girl...”

Natalia’s laughter was low and deep. “Forgive me, Father,” She whispered. “For I have sinned...”

Then her mouth was on Olivia’s again and it all felt so incredibly good that she wanted to cry... she wanted to laugh... she wanted to write bad poetry and sing sappy love songs. It was astounding. Sex had always been good, but with Natalia...

With Natalia it was an epiphany.

She knew they should stop... she wanted to say ‘not like this’. After waiting so long she didn’t want this to happen in the backseat of a limo, but it felt so right to have Natalia’s hands on her, to be kissing her... to be loved by her.

For them to love *each other*.

“Wait... wait...” With a sigh she wrapped her fingers around Natalia’s, holding them still. “Sweetheart...”

Natalia growled, pressing down harder as she tried to pull her hand free and continue what she was doing.

“Honey...” Olivia whispered, delighted by the desire burning in her lover’s eyes. “We have to stop.”

“Why?” The younger woman pulled back slightly, frowning, and Olivia had to bite down on her lip to keep from laughing.

The same lines creased Francesca’s forehead when the little girl was angry or frustrated. In fact, it was the same exact pout.

Dear God... I’m in trouble!! She knew she’d never win an argument again.

“Because...” She traced one pouty lip with a fingertip. “Because we agreed to wait until we could be together...”

“We are together.” Natalia lowered her head again, kissing her softly before trailing her lips down her chin.

Olivia groaned. “God, you’re making this hard.”

She tugged at her hand again. “Then just let me.”

The older woman laughed, pulling the captured hand up to kiss her fingertips. “Not here and not like this. Not until I can touch you too.”

Natalia looked down at her, a strange expression on her face. “Olivia... I need to tell you something.”

There was something in the tone of her voice that caught the older woman’s attention immediately. “What?”

Before she could answer, Olivia’s cell phone began to ring. With a sigh, Natalia pulled herself up, letting her lover grab the phone from her purse on the floor.

“Olivia Spencer.” She growled. “And this better be important.”

Phillip’s laughter could be heard on the other end. “I was just wondering if you were actually going to come inside or if you were planning to circle the driveway a few more times and call it a night.”

“What?” Olivia squeaked in surprise. She tried to look out the window, sighing when she realized they were all steamed up. She brushed at the film with her hand, hanging her head in embarrassment as the front of the Spaulding mansion came into view. Phillip was on the porch waving at them, a huge grin splitting his face as they drove past. “Jake!” She knocked on the privacy divider, trying not to blush even harder when the driver’s smirk came into view. “How long have we been here?”

“About ten minutes.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” She demanded.

“I didn’t think you guys would want to be disturbed.” He glanced down at her unbuttoned shirt before winking at her. “I know I wouldn’t.”

Olivia laughed grudgingly. “Just... stop on the next pass!” She waved for him to raise the privacy shield again before smiling sheepishly at Natalia. “Sorry, what were you saying?”

Natalia started to speak, then shook her head when the car pulled to a stop. “It can wait.”

“Are you sure?”

The brunette watched Olivia button her shirt and vest, a wistful expression on her face. “At this point, I think it’s going to have to.”

“Alright,” She smoothed her hair into place before wrapping her hand around the back of Natalia’s neck and pulling her into a brief but passionate kiss. “Until then...”

The door opened and Phillip ducked down, sticking his head inside. “Hey there! Glad you could make it.” He held out his hand and helped each of them from the car before waving them up the steps. “I like that shade of lipstick.” He bumped Olivia playfully with his shoulder as they walked. “But I think it goes better with Natalia’s outfit...”

~~*~*

Doris stopped the car ten feet from the front of the Spaulding mansion, holding up a hand to stall the valet that glanced their way. She laughed when she saw Olivia smack Phillip on the back of the head as he led them into the house.

Anna looked over at her curiously. “Second thoughts?”

“Not exactly.” Doris smiled self-deprecatingly. “I just realized I never even bothered to ask how you felt about this.” She took her hand, squeezing it gently. “If I’m going to try to be a better person, then it means caring about your feelings at least as much as my own.” She turned in her seat to study the younger woman carefully. “This means coming out for you too. That could make it harder for you to do your job.”

Anna shrugged. “I’m a cop but... I’m also a lesbian. I’ve never tried to keep those things separate. I’ve just never advertised it either. I mind my own business and if someone ever asks a question I give them a healthy dose of the truth. They usually run for cover, and

that's fine by me." She looked down at their joined hands, tracing one of Doris' nails with a fingertip. "I guess I just never considered my sexuality a political issue. But then, I'm not elected so I can see how it would be different for you. It just isn't a concern I share." She smiled warmly. "I am happy that you thought to ask me, though."

"The old me wouldn't have." She turned and stared out the window.

Anna could feel the other woman closing herself off and reached out, cupping her chin in her hand and using it to bring her head back around. "Part of starting over is forgiving yourself for the past, Doris. We've all made mistakes, done things we're not proud of, hidden parts of ourselves..."

A shadow passed over her face but it was there and gone so quickly that Doris barely had time to register it, let alone ask about it.

Anna shook her head slightly, refocusing. "The point is that you want to change. So let all that go..." She slid her fingers up the Mayor's arm, laughing when Doris' eyebrows went skyward. "...and come dance with me."

"Dance?" The other woman squeaked. "Who said anything about dancing?"

Anna trailed her fingers down Doris' jaw line before dropping them to her chest. She tucked them into the opening in her dress and used it to pull the older woman forward until they were nose to nose. "You promised me a party. A party means dancing. Ergo, you promised me a dance."

Doris laughed. "With that kind of logic maybe you *should* try for a political career."

"Ya think?" She moved in closer. "Isn't that like inviting competition?"

"A little competition can be... invigorating..." She stopped breathing when Anna kissed her softly. "And voters love cops."

"Do they?" She kissed her way up to Doris' ear, nuzzling it with her nose. "What about you?"

She felt the older woman go stiff in her arms and pulled back slowly, blinking at the look of wide-eyed panic on the Mayor's face. "Doris?" She patted her lightly on the cheek when she didn't respond. "Doris... it's ok." She smiled. "I'm not expecting any kind of declaration here. I was just playing with you." She sighed in relief when the color returned to the other woman's face. "Thank god! I thought I gave you a heart attack!"

“Pretty close.” Doris took a deep breath.

“Listen,” Anna caressed her face with her fingertips. “Whatever this is... whatever we have... I’m not in any hurry to slap a label on it.” She kissed her, lightly at first, then more deeply, finishing with a nibble on her bottom lip as she pulled away. “I am enjoying you, Doris Wolfe. And that’s more than I can say for my last few relationships. So how about we just relax and see where we end up... deal?” She held out her hand.

Doris laughed, relieved. She took the other woman’s hand, shaking it before turning it over and placing an open-mouthed kiss in the center of her palm.

“Oh...” Anna shivered, feeling the older woman’s kiss from the top of her head to the tips of her toes; with a few lingering stops at specific points in between. “You keep doing that and I know exactly where we’re going to end up.” She pulled her hand away. “And I really wanna see what kind of dancer you are, Madame Mayor. So behave; and let the anxious little man park your car.”

Doris smirked, pulling up the last ten feet and jumping out before the disgruntled car jockey could even touch the door. She walked around to the passenger side and opened Anna’s door, holding her hand out gallantly.

“My... what a gentleman you are.”

“Who would have thought it?” Doris smirked as she watched Anna change her shoes, then pulled the younger woman gently from the car and looped their arms together.

“Ready?” She felt the older woman tremble slightly and leaned into her, sharing her body heat.

“As I’ll ever be.”

“Then lead the way.”

Doris knew what she was doing; knew she was giving her one last out. If she turned and got back in the car, Anna would do the same. They would go home and make love and nothing would ever be said about her failed attempt at joining the human race.

She thought about Olivia and Natalia. She thought about what they had, the family they shared and the future that was stretched out before them and she knew.

To do that would lead her right back to her old life.

And that just wasn't good enough anymore.

God help her.

She dropped her arm, smiling at the shock on Anna's face when she took her hand instead, leading her up the steps and into the party.

~~*~*

"Wow..."

Olivia glanced over at Natalia as they entered the house, smiling at the look of delight on her lover's face. "You lived here once dear." She smirked. "It can't be that much of a surprise."

Natalia made a face at her and bumped her with an elbow. "I'm not talking about the house. That's as decadent as it always was. I'm talking about the decorations."

Olivia glanced around, thinking that Natalia definitely had a point. The entire house had been decked out in silver and gold, all of it shimmering in the bright light of the overhead chandeliers. Down one hallway she could see the dining room, where the table had been removed, replaced by parquet; with a live band set up at one end. There were already several couples twirling around the make-shift dance floor to big band music and Olivia smiled when she saw Jonathan spin Reva until it looked like the woman might lose her balance.

Down another hall, what was once Alan's conference room had been turned into a large buffet, with several attendants running back and forth from the kitchen, exchanging empty pans for full ones and replacing them in their matching chaffing dishes. She wasn't sure what they were serving, but whatever it was, it smelled incredible.

And knowing Phillip... it would be.

All around the buffet, tables had been set up. From large, ten-seaters to small, intimate two-place settings, there was a size available to fit anyone's needs. Many of them were already occupied with people laughing and eating or just talking quietly while they sipped their drinks. One thing about them all was the same though. Large or small, each table sported an incredible centerpiece made up of perfect silver and white roses arranged with large sprigs of acacia and baby's breath around a glistening ice sculpture.

Natalia smiled as her eyes jumped from table to table and she clapped her hands in delight at all the different designs. From fairies to butterflies to doves taking flight, each sculpture was intricately designed and incredibly rendered.

“Impressive.” Olivia shot Phillip a playful smile. “Until they end up as puddles in a couple of hours.”

Phillip glanced at his watch. “Three hours and twenty-one minutes to be exact.”

She blinked. “You have it timed?”

“Let’s just say...” He stroked the head of a nearby fawn. “You might want to be close by around midnight.”

“You want us to watch *ice melt*... on New Year’s Eve?” She laughed. “Somehow I was expecting something a little more exciting.”

“Oh, there will be several events to choose from.” Phillip smiled mysteriously.

“Silver?” Natalia suddenly spoke, interrupting their conversation. “Where did you find silver roses?”

Olivia snorted. “Look closer.”

Natalia did as she was told, her eyes widening. “They’re painted!”

“Airbrushed.” Phillip grinned. “Each one done individually... by hand.”

She glanced around the room. “There must be... five hundred of them!”

“Six hundred, actually. Two dozen for each table.”

“You really went all out didn’t you?” Olivia gave him a smile of grudging respect.

“What, with this?” Phillip winked. “You ain’t seen nuthin’ yet.” He crooked a finger at them, beckoning them to follow.

Exchanging smiles, the two women joined hands and trailed behind him. The hallway banners glittered, reflecting the light from thousands of chasing lights strung up to direct people towards the many different rooms, each with a different theme. From 70’s disco to 90’s rave, there was a DJ and décor scheme to match anyone’s mood.

But the main living room... now *that* was truly inspired.

The floor was littered with thousands of tiny pieces of silver confetti, creating the effect of walking on water. The walls were covered with ribbons and drapes and showers of gold and silver streamers hung down from the ceiling, suspended from iridescent balloons that swayed gently with the moving air, making the whole room seem alive with light and energy.

The center of the room was taken up by a huge champagne fountain. Made up six sterling silver plates, all with tiny silver spigots, the sweetened red punch ran in rivulets from plate to plate before raining down into chilled serving bowls.

Olivia inclined her head towards the punch. "And what about those of us that prefer something... a little less fruity?"

Phillip bit his lip, holding back his laughter when her green eyes narrowed in warning. "Uhm..." He cleared his throat. "Then there's always the *other* champagne tower."

He looked behind her pointedly and Olivia turned; her jaw dropping as she took in the tall, brushed silver structure pushed up against the wall. To most people it would have looked like an over-sized game of Jenga. But she knew exactly what it was.

"You have got to be kidding me." She walked over to it quickly, tugging on one of the twelve doors to reveal the small, bottle shaped inner chamber. Lying there, perfectly chilled, was a magnum of 2000 Louis Roederer "Cristal" Brut Rosé. "Oh..." She closed her eyes, a small smile of appreciation playing on her lips as she shivered in anticipation. "Where on earth did you get a Vertical Limit? There were only fifteen of them made! And if I remember correctly, they didn't make them for Roederer."

"I had this one modified slightly... to hold *your* favorite champagne." At her confused look he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and hugged her. "Merry Christmas, Olivia! It'll be dropped off next week."

"I'm..." She shook her head, looking between Phillip and Natalia. "I'm speechless."

"Well... then it was money well spent." He laughed when she elbowed him in the ribs. "But wait, there's more."

"More?" Natalia looked a little embarrassed by the display of wealth. "Isn't all of this enough?"

Phillip held up a hand. "This one..." He gestured towards the main balcony. "This one, I think you'll like, Natalia."

The balcony was dark when they stepped outside, but several carefully spaced heaters kept the air warm while the heating mats built into the structure itself kept the floor free of snow and ice. The view from the balcony was spectacular and Olivia could see the Spaulding grounds sprawling out in all directions. She watched Natalia's face light up as she pointed out the six large firework launchers lined up along the back wall.

"Only six?" She joked.

"Oh, that's just part of it." He pulled a small remote out of his pocket and tapped a button, causing a bright red glow to appear above them.

Natalia looked up and laughed in delight. Suspended on what she had thought was a flag pole, a multifaceted crystal ball winked at them as it slowly revolved, changing colors with each revolution. It looked strangely familiar. "Is that..." Her eyes widened.

"Yes." Phillip's smile was huge. "A one-sixth scale version of the Time's Square New Year's Eve Ball, complete with four hundred and forty five Waterford Crystals and fifty-four hundred Philips Luxeon LEDs. It's an exact replica." He shrugged. "Except... in size." He pointed a warning finger at Olivia, who was chuckling under her breath. "At 11:59 tonight the ball will begin its descent and when it hits the bottom... There will be a display that this town will remember for years to come." His smile was gentle. "I know it's more New York than Chicago but... I figured it might give you a little taste of the big city."

"You..." Natalia stuttered in surprise. "You... you did this... for me?"

He took her shoulders in his hands, leaning down slightly to look into her eyes. "I did this for my family. You are Emma's mother. That makes you my family."

Tears welled up in the brunette's eyes as she wrapped her arms around the tall man, hugging him tightly.

"Uh..." He patted her back carefully, looking over her shoulder at Olivia. "Does this mean she likes it?"

"Oh, she likes it." She looked at him gratefully, letting the playful battle of wills between them fade for just a moment. Then she smirked. "Hey, what does this red switch do?" She hovered her foot over the wide, flat button at the lying at the bottom of the ball's path.

"No!" He laughed nervously, stretching a hand out towards her. "C'mon! You wouldn't..."

“To see the look on you face?” One eyebrow arched wickedly. “I just might.”

“Olivia.”

Natalia’s voice was soft, but the meaning was clear. Slowly, she lowered her foot, coming back to stand beside her lover. She hung her head slightly as she chewed her bottom lip.

“I’m a little thirsty.” Natalia kissed her on the cheek. “Could you get me a drink, sweetheart? Please?”

Olivia nodded, throwing a rueful grin in Phillip’s direction before heading towards the bar.

“I don’t believe it.” He stared after his ex-wife, astonished laughter bubbling up inside of him. “I *never* thought I would see the day that Olivia Spencer ended up on a leash!”

“Trust me, Phillip.” Natalia watched her partner all the way to the bar, enjoying the gentle sway of her hips and the way her outfit accentuated some of her best assets. “If Olivia *is* on a leash... it’s only because she chooses to be there.”

“That says a lot about you.”

“Considering I’m just as bad about her... I think it says a lot about both of us.”

Phillip nodded, watching in silence when Olivia returned and handed Natalia a glass of champagne. Their fingers touched as the glass passed between them, causing them both to breathe in quickly as their eyes met. The connection was visceral, almost physical and Olivia could not stop herself from leaning forward to capture Natalia’s lips with her own.

“Okay!” Phillip clapped his hands together, shaking them slightly for emphasis. “On that note, I think it’s time I saw to my other guests.” He shook his head when they paid no attention to him. “Uhm... the coat room... it’s in the den... when you... you know... get too warm...” He laughed. “Yeah... okay.” Without waiting for a response, he headed back inside.

“Finally,” Olivia mumbled against her lover’s lips as she wrapped her arms around her. “I thought he’d never leave.”

“Be nice.”

“You like it when I’m naughty.”

Natalia felt a bolt of desire run through her, leaving her quivering in its wake. “Considering where we are...” She whispered. “I think it’s safer if I deny that.”

The older woman smiled, kissing her on the forehead before releasing her. "Nice enough?"

"For now." Natalia took a long drink of her champagne. "How about we get rid of your coat and go find something slow to dance to?"

Olivia's tongue played across her upper lip. "Oh... I think I like that idea."

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"Hello?" Olivia tapped the bell on Phillip's desk, which had been set up as a makeshift coat check table. "Anyone here?" She poked her head around the screen that was blocking the rest of the den from view, whistling softly at the rows of fur and leather already hanging from rolling garment racks. "It looks like anyone who's anyone in the next four counties is here tonight." She picked up the sleeve of a chinchilla coat, holding it with two fingers before dropping it in distaste. "Fur is murder." She mumbled.

"Technically so is leather." Natalia stood on tip toe to peek at her over the top of the rack.

"Yeah, but..." The older woman shrugged. "That crime doesn't seem quite so horrible when it comes with snow peas and a nice merlot."

Natalia rolled her eyes.

"Where is the attendant?"

"Relax." The brunette came up behind her, wrapping her arms around her midsection and placing a soft kiss on the back of her neck. "They're probably on a break. Besides..." She slid her hands up and under the taller woman's lapels, brushing lightly across her breasts as she peeled away the long, black overcoat. "I'm used to hanging up your clothes."

Olivia groaned. She quickly turned in Natalia's arms, pulling their bodies firmly together. She dropped her head, breathing into her ear as she whispered, "What about taking them off...?"

"That too..." Natalia swallowed, her eyes closing automatically as Olivia's hips pressed into her. She turned her head up to meet the older woman's lips, losing herself in the kiss until all she could hear was the sound of her own heart beating wildly in her chest. The want... the *need* to be loved by this woman hit her hard; an overwhelming wave of desire that left her senses reeling and her self control in tatters. Suddenly, it didn't matter where they were, or why they were there...

All that mattered was that Olivia never stopped touching her.

Which meant...

"I need..." She whimpered when the older woman's teeth bit into her neck. "I need to tell you something."

"Mmm..." Olivia kissed her way to the tops of Natalia's breasts, nuzzling them lovingly with her nose while her hands slid dangerously low on her hips. "Tell me what?"

"Wow!" Anna laughed before she could stop herself, quickly bringing her hand up to cover her mouth when Olivia and Natalia looked their way.

"I concur." Doris raised one eyebrow wickedly. "I'd say that making out in the coat room was a bit cliché, but I doubt it ever looked this good. Please, by all means... continue."

Olivia growled deep in her throat as the two women untangled themselves. "Your timing... sucks, as usual Wolfe."

"Oh, I'd say it was just about perfect." She looked back and forth between them. "No? Well... then could you at least hang our coats?"

The older woman pushed passed the still smiling Mayor, grabbing one of the paper tags from the desk. She slapped it into her hand. "Hang it yourself. You're a woman of the people, right?"

They stared at each other for several moments... and then burst into laughter.

"Bad timing or not, I'm glad you could make it." Olivia squeezed Doris' hand warmly.

"Like I could pass up the social event of the year." She shook her head slightly, turning to Anna with an apologetic look. "You know Detective Li."

"Yes." Olivia forced a smile. "It's... nice to see you again. And you know my..." She blinked, biting back the first word that came to mind. "My... partner... Natalia."

"Of course." Anna smiled as they all fell silent.

"Well!" Natalia broke up the uncomfortable moment. "Shall we?"

"You're still wearing your wrap." Doris pointed out.

"Oh..." Natalia adjusted the black cashmere carefully, covering the small red mark she could feel throbbing on the left side of her neck. "I'm a little... cold."

“Funny,” The Mayor smirked. “You look kind of flushed to me.”

“Ha... yeah, well...” She shrugged. “I think I could use another drink.”

“Oh, me, too.” Olivia took her by the hand, more than a little surprised when Doris did the same with Anna.

“Lead the way.” The detective smiled charmingly at her date.

The entry way was packed with newly arrived guests and Olivia realized they had been lucky that it was Doris and Anna that had stumbled across them in the coat room.

Then again, she laughed softly to herself, it's not like we really have anything else to hide.

The fact that they were a couple had been hot gossip for about a week; the same length of time it took people to realize that they weren't ashamed of it.

It was funny how uninteresting the truth really was.

Now Doris and her new squeeze...

She followed them quietly through the main room, watching the way heads turned in their direction. She could feel each stare as though it was trained on her and shook her head sadly.

“What's wrong?” Natalia asked softly.

“I just think she picked an interesting time to come out.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look around.” Olivia cast her glance around the room. “Half the people here donated money to fund her last Mayoral campaign. I don't think this is what they were expecting to buy.”

Natalia frowned. “You sound like you don't approve.”

“It isn't that...” She pulled the brunette to the side. “I just...” She watched as Anna whispered something in Doris' ear, making the older woman laugh. “I just hope she isn't doing this for *her*.”

“Anna?” Natalia looked over her shoulder at the two women. “Why? I think they look lovely together.”

“There’s just...” Olivia cursed softly, unable to put her finger on what she was trying to convey. She settled for the obvious. “There’s just something about her I don’t trust.”

“Ahh...” Natalia smiled knowingly.

“What?” She pulled the other woman closer. “What?”

“Mama Bear is protective.”

Olivia rolled her eyes. “Doris Wolfe is not my cub.” She raised her voice slightly to be heard over the music.

“Maybe not; but she *is* your friend.”

“I don’t have very many of those.” Olivia nodded slowly, cupping the side of Natalia’s face with one hand. “And you finally made me realize just how much they’re worth.” She plucked a glass of champagne from the tray of a passing waiter, turning to hide the emotion in her eyes. “I don’t want to see her get hurt.” She took a quick drink. “Unless I can film it...”

It was so classically Olivia; hiding her soft side behind sarcasm and cynicism; that Natalia felt her heart swell to almost painful levels. For the hundredth time that day she sent up a little prayer, thanking God for leading her to this incredible woman... and for giving her the strength to come back to the one place she knew she truly belonged. She was connected to Olivia in every way imaginable.

One of which she was missing very, *very* much.

“I’m ready.” She blurted out.

The older woman smiled at her. “Ready for what, sweetheart?” She upended her glass, draining the contents just as the band finished its set.

“Ready for sex!”

Those three words rang out over the lull in party conversation, sending Olivia into a coughing fit as she choked on her champagne and turning Natalia’s cheeks a deep shade of red.

At the bar, Doris just shook her head in amusement.

“Wait...” Anna blinked in confusion. “They’ve never had sex?”

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ACT 3

Olivia covered her mouth with her hand, coughing quietly as she tried not to die from embarrassment. She was used to finding the humor in most things, even when the laughter was turned in her direction. But Natalia... she didn’t like it when people laughed at Natalia.

Taking the brunette gently by the elbow, she led her over to the bar, accepting the napkin Doris handed her with a grateful nod.

“Okaaaay.” She dabbed at her lips, drying them off while trying not to smear her lipstick. “Let’s try that again. What?”

Natalia looked nervously at the trio of women.

“Doris,” Anna took her lover’s hand. “I think I heard the first few notes of “I Will Survive” in the 70’s room. I love Gloria Gaynor. Wanna come be my dancing queen?”

“That’s ABBA.” Doris answered absently, watching her two friends with keen interest.

Anna rolled her eyes. “Come on, Mayor Wolfe. I think Olivia and Natalia need some alone time.”

“What? Why?” Doris looked truly baffled. “I want to watch!”

“Oh my god!” She laughed. “You’re about as subtle as an anvil.” She dragged the protesting women away.

Olivia shook her head before focusing on Natalia, surprised to find her lover’s forehead creased with a frown. She reached out and gently smoothed the lines away with her thumb before trailing her fingers down the smaller woman’s cheek.

Natalia leaned into her hand, closing her eyes and exhaling slowly as the familiar touch both calmed and unsettled her. “I’m sorry.” She whispered.

“For what?”

"I... I didn't mean to... blurt it out like that."

Olivia smiled, glancing up as she drew Natalia into her arms, holding her gently. "I've gotten used to it." The other woman's soft laughter was her reward. She felt her relax in her arms and began to sway to the slow song the band was playing. "Listen..." She took a deep breath when Natalia laid her head against her shoulder, closing her eyes as her hands wandered aimlessly up and down the smaller woman's back. "I know you want to make me happy. But you can't rush this, sweetheart. I miss us...being together..." She swallowed as a hundred different images of their lovemaking flashed through her mind. "God...I miss it... But it isn't worth the risk. The last thing I would ever want to do is hurt you."

Natalia pulled back, looking up at her shyly through thick black lashes. "I know." She whispered. "But that's what I'm trying to tell you." She leaned her forehead against Olivia's chin, sighing happily when she felt the older woman's lips brush tenderly across her skin. "Do you remember this morning, at my appointment? Dr. Rick was in the middle of going over my test results when Francesca decided she had to have her wubby?"

Olivia laughed. "How could I forget?"

Their little girl's 'wubby' was an incredibly soft pink baby blanket that had been a gift from her sister Ava. She had slept with it every night since she had been born and demanded, quite loudly, that it be brought with them anywhere they went. That morning it had been left in the car and as soon as Francesca had woken up, she had been very vocal in her displeasure of that fact. Olivia had taken her to retrieve it and missed the last fifteen minutes of Natalia's appointment.

"Well..." Natalia chewed on her bottom lip. "While you were gone... Rick told me that it was okay for me to have sex again."

Olivia blinked. "Can we do that again in slow motion?"

"Rick... he told me that I've healed a lot more quickly than anyone expected and... as long as we don't get *too* crazy..." She blushed a lovely shade of red. "That it would be okay if we..." She waved her hand in between their bodies. "You know..."

The older woman couldn't help snickering. "I think the whole room knows, sweetheart." She grew serious again. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I knew if I said anything we'd never leave the house." She sighed. "And tonight was important to me."

Olivia looked around the room. It was beautiful, but it was also filled with people she barely knew. Aside from a few close friends, they were mostly business contacts and strangers. “Why?”

“Because... we’re always being defined by something...” She closed her eyes and leaned into Olivia, falling into the rhythm of the music. “Your past, my religion, our children...” She swallowed heavily. “Just once... I wanted everyone to see *us*... for what we really are.”

The older woman felt tears stinging her eyes and looked up at the ceiling, tucking Natalia’s head under her chin as she tried to use gravity to keep them from falling. “What are we?” She whispered.

“Don’t you know?”

“Yes.” She laughed gently. “But I really need to hear you say it.”

“We’re a couple. Partners, lovers... Girlfriends...” A silly smile blossomed on Natalia’s lips as she raised her hand, playing idly with one of Olivia’s buttons. “Just two people who fell in love despite everything that got in our way. Everyone keeps looking for a reason...” She glanced around the room, her smile fading slightly. “But the only *reason* is that you and I... we were meant to be together.”

“And you thought coming here tonight would show people that?” The older woman leaned her head down, rubbing their cheeks together softly. “Is it working?”

“You tell me.”

Olivia looked around, unsurprised to find most of the attention in the room focused on them. What did surprise her though, was how many smiles were directed their way. There were still a few cold stares, and the odd look of confusion here and there, but by and large the attention was warm... and approving.

“Damn!” She looked down into Natalia’s smiling face. “You’re pretty smart.”

“That’s why you love me.”

“Is that why?”

“Yup.” The younger woman smirked. “Someone has to do the thinking.”

“Ohhhh!” Olivia twirled her carefully as the music switched to a light Latin beat, stepping back until their fingertips were barely touching and then pulling her back firmly into her arms. “I think I may be rubbing off on you a little too much.”

“Actually,” Natalia tucked her thigh between Olivia’s legs as the older woman dipped her, pressing into her firmly when she pulled her back up. “I don’t think you’ve been doing that *enough*.”

Olivia closed her eyes, her heart beating double time when Natalia stayed close, their hips grinding together in a way that was just north of obscene. “You’re asking for trouble...” She sang softly.

The brunette slid her hand up Olivia’s side, skirting the edge of one breast with her fingertips as she leaned in to whisper, “Oh, I’d say I’m *begging* for it...”

Olivia pulled back as though she had been burned, taking long, ragged breaths as she studied her lover intently. After a moment, she smirked. “Be careful what you wish for.”

Grabbing Natalia by the hand, she pulled her across the room towards the stairs.

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“Where are they going?” Anna looked up from the table in time to see Olivia and Natalia heading up the stairs. They had gotten as far as the buffet before Doris gently suggested they wait on the dancing.

“Who knows,” The other woman shrugged. She was staring into the rabbit-shaped ice sculpture on their table, trying to make out what was frozen inside of it. “They’re probably sneaking off somewhere romantic.”

Anna raised her eyebrows at the older woman’s tone. “Does that bother you?”

“No.” Doris sighed. She picked up her knife and began to poke at the side of the bunny. “It’s just that... it used to bother *them*, you know? Olivia was scared of what it all meant... Natalia was terrified of what people might think. Now... it’s like they don’t even care.”

Anna reached out and took the knife away from her, brushing the ice chips off the table as she tossed the older woman a sardonic look. “Should they?”

“They just...they make it look so easy!”

"I know I haven't been in town very long but, from everything I've heard, their relationship was anything but easy." She picked up a shrimp and popped it into her mouth, humming in pleasure at the flavor. "In fact, unless half of the rumors I've heard are pure hyperbole, I'd say it's a miracle they're together at all."

"What have you heard?"

"Well..." Anna pursed her lips. "That Olivia tried to steal Natalia's husband?"

"That one's true." Doris snatched one of the sushi rolls off the younger woman's plate.

"What else?"

"Did Natalia really almost kill her by locking her in a bathroom?"

"Yes," Doris munched on the food happily. Good sushi was so hard to find! "But, in Natalia's defense, there were extenuating circumstances."

"Death by bathroom..." Anna scratched her head. "I don't even know how I would write that up." She shook her head, looking at the other woman skeptically. "Did Natalia *really* give Olivia her husband?"

"Mmmhmm." Doris nodded.

"And then when he died, she gave Olivia his *heart?!?*"

"Yup, all true." Doris took a sip of her wine. "But, it does even out. Eventually Olivia gave up her dream job so that Natalia could have her dream house."

"Even though they hated each other?"

She nodded as she crunched into a breadstick.

"Oh yeah..." Anna rolled her eyes. "Easy!"

Doris sighed. "Love... hate.... They're both sides of the same coin. I guess it just depends what side that coin happens to land on."

There was something so wistful in the older woman's voice that Anna reached out and took her hand. She thought for a minute that Doris might shake it off, pull away, but after a moment, she wrapped their fingers together, holding on tightly.

"Did you lose the toss?" Anna asked softly.

Doris stared at her for a moment. "I don't know what you mean."

"You and Olivia... seem close—"

"Olivia..." Doris cut her off. Stopping short, she lowered her voice before continuing. "Olivia was a pain in my ass that... somehow... became dear to my heart. I'm glad she's happy."

Anna nodded slowly, feeling a retreat from this particular topic was in order. "Then why are you upset?"

"Because I..." She pulled her hand away, clasping them together in her lap as she looked around. "Because I want the same things and I can't seem to figure out how to get them."

"Isn't that what tonight's all about?"

"It is." She laughed bitterly. "I'm just... not doing it very well."

"Actually," Anna slid her chair closer. Picking up the Mayor's arm, she draped it around her shoulders, snuggling in close to her side. "I think you're doing just fine."

Doris stared down at the younger woman, mesmerized by the black pools of her eyes. She glanced at her mouth and that was her undoing. Slowly, without even realizing she was doing it, she lowered her head until she could almost taste the champagne on Anna's full, red lips.

"Doris?"

The Mayor sat up quickly, pulling her arm back to her side as she looked around to see who had called her name. She paled when she saw Blake standing next to their table. "Oh... Hi!"

"Hi." Blake looked from Doris to the pretty young Asian woman sitting by her side. She knew who Anna Li was; she had seen her at the station when she brought lunch to Frank, but she had never met her.

And for the life of her she couldn't imagine why she would be at the Spaulding's New Year's Eve party... with Doris Wolfe no less.

When the Mayor made no move to introduce them the redhead smiled and held out her hand. "Hi, I'm Blake Marler."

“Anna Li.” The young woman shook her hand firmly. “I’ve seen you around the station. Aren’t you dating...” Her eyes widened slightly. “Chief Cooper.”

The man in question walked up behind Blake, placing a hand possessively in the small of her back. “Detective Li, I wasn’t aware you had been invited to the party.”

“She’s here as my guest.” Doris finally spoke up, her back stiffening slightly.

“I see.” Frank looked back and forth between the two women. “That’s... interesting.”

“Not really,” Doris stood, holding out her hand to help Anna from her chair. “I’d think you’d be used to it by now.” Frank’s cheeks reddened slightly, but the Mayor held up a hand before he could speak. “Truce?” She smiled good-naturedly. “At least for the party?”

Blake took him by the arm, squeezing gently. Frank looked at her for a moment and then smiled, but it never reached his eyes. “Agreed.”

She eyed him slowly, starting at the ground up. When she reached his head, Doris pursed her lips. “You look very... dashing in your dress blues, Frank. But isn’t it customary to remove your hat in the presence of a lady?”

He opened his mouth to say something but stopped abruptly when Doris looked pointedly at Blake. Flushing, he pulled the cap from his head and tucked it under his arm. He bowed slightly to his date. “My apologies.”

Blake nodded. “It’s okay Frank.”

“Would you excuse me for a moment?” His smile faded quickly. “I’d like a word with Detective Li.”

“Of course.”

Doris glanced at Anna, raising her eyebrows, but the Asian woman just shook her head. She squeezed her hand quickly before letting it go. “I’ll be right back.”

When Frank had pulled her out of earshot, Doris turned her attention back to Blake, taking in the other woman’s outfit slowly.

It was a calf-length emerald green cocktail dress that wrapped tightly around her midsection, accentuating her ample chest without being obvious. The neckline was square cut, with tight, off-the-shoulder sleeves that hugged her arms the way the skirt hugged her thighs, making her look svelte and sleek, all while bringing out the fiery red highlights in

her hair. Black three-inch stiletto's finished the outfit off with style and Doris couldn't help whistling under her breath.

"Stop." Blake laid a hand on her arm, flushing a deep red as her smile gave away her gratitude.

"I'm sorry." Doris pulled the hand from her arm, holding it out to the side to get a better view. "But I have to say... you look incredible tonight."

The redhead tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, asking shyly, "Do you really think so?"

"Hasn't Frank told you that?"

"Oh, well..." Blake frowned slightly. "He's been... busy. There are a lot of people here who have monopolized his time." She shook her head when Doris looked at her sadly. "No, it's fine. Really. Besides... they say compliments from women are more sincere."

"They are." The Mayor smiled, slowly dropping her arm but not letting go. "They really are. And since your date has failed on so many levels this evening," She laughed when Blake rolled her eyes. "Allow me to also say, that you are very much a lady." Without thinking, she brought the hand she was holding up to her lips, kissing Blake's knuckles gently.

The other woman's soft intake of breath was all it took to bring her back to reality and Doris let go quickly, bringing a hand up to cover her mouth. "I'm... I'm so sorry." She stammered. "I don't know why I did that..."

Blake just stared at her with wide eyes as she rubbed her hands together slowly. "It's okay." She finally whispered, a watery smile making its way onto her lips. "It's... uhm..." The smile brightened. "It was... nice."

Doris could only stare, her mouth slightly open as she realized that, for one of the few times in her life, she had absolutely no idea what to say.

Across the room, Frank had pulled Anna into the corner, standing between her and the two women they had just left at the table.

The detective sighed, wondering if the man had any innate cop abilities whatsoever. A first-year rookie knew not to turn his back on a room, no matter what the situation. "What did you need, Chief?"

Frank leaned in close, lowering his voice. "Look, I know about your..." He waffled his hand in the air between them. "...persuasion, and that's fine. It's none of my business what you do

in your private life. But what I don't understand is what you are doing *here*, with *her*." He held up his hand when she tried to respond. "I get that you have aspirations, Li, I really do, but that... piranha... is going to end up doing you more harm than good. I have known Doris Wolfe a long time and I can say from experience that the woman is poison. So do yourself a favor and drop her, before the damage is irreparable."

Anna stared at him, completely astounded that the man had the nerve to even have this conversation with her. Taking a deep breath, she tried to hold on to her temper. "First of all, you're right; my private life is none of your business. And since tonight definitely qualifies as *my private life* I am going to respectfully tell you to butt the hell out. Secondly...uh..." She glanced over his shoulder, stumbling slightly on her words when she saw Doris kiss Blake's hand. "You..." She shook her head, refocusing. "You might want to worry a little less about my date and a little more about yours. Who the hell wears their hat inside anyway?"

Anna walked away without waiting for a response. When she reached the table, she smiled sweetly at Blake before taking Doris by the hand. "I want to dance." She said firmly.

"Oh...uh... okay." Doris nodded, allowing herself to be led away. "Bye."

Blake raised her hand, staring at it strangely as she waved. "Bye."

"Everything all right?" Frank slid his arm around her waist and kissed her on the cheek.

"What?" She asked absently.

"Is everything okay?" He looked at her closely, his forehead furrowing in confusion.

"Oh! Yeah," She frowned slightly, watching the two women until they disappeared into the sea of bodies dancing in the next room. "Why wouldn't it be?"

~~*~*

"So..." Anna pulled Doris all the way through the 'disco' room, not stopping until they were in the farthest corner from the door. "You want to tell me what that was all about, Casanova?"

Doris blinked innocently. "What?"

She rolled her eyes, trying not to smile. "I saw you! What, did you trip and your lips just happened to land on her hand? C'mon, Wolfe! You can't need the votes *that* badly!"

“Honestly?”

Anna nodded.

“I have no idea *what* the hell that was.” Doris sighed. “I’m all over the place tonight. I feel like I’m splitting in two and the wrong half keeps grabbing the reins.” She stroked the younger woman’s cheek gently. “I’m sorry.”

“No...” Anna leaned into her touch. “Don’t be sorry. It’s not like you made out with her or anything. You’re under a lot of pressure. I can see how that might make you a little crazy...” Her voice trailed off as her eyes narrowed. “Or maybe... maybe you were just trying to get a rise out of Cooper!”

Doris raised one eyebrow, making Anna laugh.

“Okay, but here’s the deal.” The Asian woman pointed a finger at her. “For the rest of the night, those lips are mine. Beyond that, we can always renegotiate.”

The Mayor smiled. “Deal.” She took both of Anna’s hands in hers, moving closer as “How Deep Is Your Love” played softly in the background.

They began to dance and a part of her was relieved that the conversation had ended so quickly; that Anna had been so willing to accept such a simple explanation.

But another part of her still wondered...

What the hell just happened?

~~*~*

“Ow!”

“What’s the matter?” Natalia asked anxiously.

“I ran into something with my knee.” Olivia grumbled. “Why the hell does Phillip have all the lights off up here?”

“Maybe because he wants his guests to stay on the first floor?” The brunette snickered.

“Shush you.” She found a door and pushed it open, her lips quirking into a silly smile as she glanced around blindly, “Oh my god...” She slid her hand along the wall, trying to find the light switch. “How is it possible that I can still get lost in this place?”

“Well... it *is* obscenely huge.” Natalia said quietly.

“Why are you whispering?”

“Because I know where we are.”

Olivia’s fingers finally located the small pad on the wall and she ran her thumb across it, blinking as the lights flashed on from recessed fixtures overhead. She grinned when she recognized the tall stacks lining the walls from floor to ceiling; her eyes lingering on the long, deeply burnished oak ladder that clung to a thin brass rail above the shelves.

“The Library.” She breathed in deeply, closing her eyes as the scent of dry paper and old ink filled her nostrils. “Mmmm. Gotta love that smell!”

“I do.”

Olivia turned to look at her lover, one eyebrow raised. “Why are you still whispering?”

“Because...” She waved a hand around the room. “We’re in the library.”

The older woman blinked. “We’re in *a* library. Not *the* library.”

Natalia shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. It’s not the room.” She leaned in closer, lowering her voice even more. “It’s the books.”

Olivia pressed her lips together firmly. She looked around. “I don’t think they’re going to complain.”

The brunette rolled her eyes. “Stop it!” She slapped her lightly on the arm. “Books are sacred.”

“All of them? I kind of thought you just felt that way about one particular book.”

“You’re just... you...” She sighed. “You’re going to make me crazy about this aren’t you?”

“It’s not quite midnight,” The older woman smirked. “No reason to break with tradition just yet.”

Natalia walked around the room, gently trailing her fingers across the books as she passed by. “I always loved to read.” She pulled one of her favorites off the shelf, a huge smile on her face. “Little Women.”

“How did I know that you’d love that one?”

She stuck her tongue out at the older woman, making her laugh. “When I was young, my Daddy always brought me home a new book every payday.” She touched the spine of the novel lovingly. “Little Women was the last one he ever gave me.” She slid it back into its spot on the shelf. “Anyway, after I got pregnant I couldn’t afford them anymore, so I used to reward myself with a library book once a week instead. No matter how tired I was, I would read a little bit of it each night, at first just to myself, and then out loud to Rafe after he was born.”

Olivia watched the dimples appear in Natalia cheeks when she smiled and couldn’t stay away. Coming up behind her, she wrapped her hands around the smaller woman’s biceps, pulling her back tightly against her chest. Natalia hummed happily, rolling her head to the side as Olivia’s lips traveled from her ear down to her neck.

“We had... traditions...” She swallowed when Olivia’s teeth grazed across her pulse point. “I’d read...The Gift of the Magi every... every Christmas... *oh...*” She bit down on her lip, her breathing ragged as Olivia’s nails scratched lightly up her arms, running under the black wrap to trail down into the deep V of her cleavage. “And... uhm... Where the... Where the Red Fern Grows... every summer.” Her back arched when the older woman’s hands briefly cupped her breasts before splaying out across her stomach, palms gliding firmly over crimson silk as they headed downward. “In the fall, it was...it...” Olivia’s hands slid onto her thighs, her fingers curling slowly, dragging Natalia’s dress up her legs as she pressed herself against the brunette’s backside. “*Oh my god...*”

“I don’t know that one.” Olivia snickered.

“Don’t... don’t make fun.” Natalia began to move her hips in small circles, caught up in the exquisite torture of her lover grinding into her. “Some of my best memories... are of books.”

Olivia closed her eyes, nuzzling into Natalia’s ear as she whispered, “Some of my best fantasies are too.”

Natalia turned her head to stare up at her. “Fantasies?”

“Oh yeah...”

“What...” She swallowed heavily when Olivia’s fingers finally touched bare skin. “What kind of fantasies?”

Olivia froze and Natalia could feel her heart pounding hard against her back. “Are you serious?”

“Tell me.” She reached up, running her index finger across Olivia’s mouth. Her eyes fluttered shut when she felt the other woman’s tongue brush across it.

“I’d rather show you...”

The whisper was accompanied by a full body press, making Natalia groan loudly. Unable to speak, she merely nodded, leaning forward to rest her head against one of the shelves when the presence at her back suddenly disappeared. She heard the heavy ‘click’ of a dead bolt being turned, followed by several desk drawers opening and closing and then a quiet ‘Yes!’ that sounded strangely triumphant.

“What are you doing?” She asked nervously.

“Turn around.”

She turned slowly, her bottom lip held firmly between her teeth, to find Olivia with her hands behind her back and a strange little smile on her face.

“Oh, that’s perfect.” The older woman breathed. Leaning forward, she kissed her, biting down on her lip hard enough to make it sting before pulling away. “You have to promise to do what I say... otherwise this won’t work.”

“What are we doing?” Natalia asked breathlessly, a dark flush already working its way up her cheeks.

“No.” Olivia shook her head. “Promise me.”

The brunette hesitated.

“Do you trust me?”

Natalia’s eyes held the only answer she needed. “I promise.”

“Okay,” She pulled one hand out from behind her back. “Put these on.”

The younger woman’s jaw dropped slightly when she was handed a small pair of glasses. “What?”

“Put them on.”

“But... they’re not... mine...”

“They’re just reading glasses.” Olivia assured her. “They won’t hurt your eyes.”

“Oh...okay.” Laughing softly, she slid them on. “How’s this?”

“Hmmm...wait.” She took hold of the frames, gently pulling them forward until they rested further down her nose. “Perfect.” She kicked off her boots and then pulled her other hand out from behind her back, handing Natalia a book.

The brunette took it slowly, biting down on the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing. “Moby Dick?”

“The title doesn’t matter!”

“Okay, okay I’m sorry.” She tried to look serious. “What do you want me to do?”

One eyebrow arched wickedly. “Tell me it’s overdue.”

Natalia’s eyes widened. “I beg your pardon?”

Instantly, Olivia went from smiling seductress to naïve young girl. “I’m returning my library book... ma’am.” She hung her head slightly, the corner of her mouth twitching as she looked up at her with big green eyes.

“I... I don’t know what to do...” She shrugged helplessly.

Olivia moved closer. She kept her hands down at her sides, pressing in with her body until Natalia was forced backwards. “All those years... all those books...” She smiled when the younger woman backed up into the ladder, reaching out to grab the rails on either side of her, holding her in place. “There has to be one librarian out there somewhere... just one... that made you think naughty thoughts...”

“All the...” Natalia’s breath caught when the older woman’s hands moved from the ladder to her hips, her fingers squeezing firmly. “They were all... women.”

“So?” Olivia laughed softly at her lover’s surprised expression. “You can’t tell me you never had a girl crush.” She leaned in, rubbing their cheeks together before breathing into her ear, “Come on, Natalia. One sweet, pretty little thing... the kind you’d stay late for, shelve books for...do anything for.” Her thumbs began to move in small circles, inching their way towards the nipples that were hardening beneath her dress. “The kind that might make you keep a book out a day or two longer than you were supposed to... just to get her attention?”



Natalia gasped when Olivia's hands finally reached their destination. Moving with slow intent, the older woman ran her fingers back and forth across the pebbled flesh.

"Your book..." Natalia closed her eyes, swallowing hard.

"What about it?"

"It's... overdue."

Olivia smiled. She pressed in closer, dragging the brunette's skirt up as she used one foot to slide her legs apart. Natalia groaned and tried to kiss her but she pulled her head away. "And?"

"And... there's... *oh*..." She dropped her head back against the ladder when Olivia placed her foot on the first rung, using the leverage to press her thigh firmly into the ache between her legs. "There's... a fine..."

The other woman blinked innocently. "But I don't have any money..."

Her eyes flew open when Natalia's fingers tangled fiercely in her hair, pulling her head back so that the younger woman could stare down at her. "Then I guess you're just going to have to work it off." She growled.

She brought her lips down hard, stealing Olivia's breath with the force of her kiss as her free hand worked at the buttons on her vest. When it was loose, she slipped her hand inside, her fingers closing over a swollen nipple hard enough to make the older woman gasp.

That sharp burst of pleasure mixed in with the slight, stinging pain was enough to jolt Olivia out of her shock. She pulled Natalia forward roughly, her heart skipping a beat at the younger woman's delighted laughter. With a small moan she slid her fingers into soft, dark hair, tugging it free from the carefully designed chignon to let it flow over her hands and down across the smaller woman's back.

"I love you." She whispered, not giving the other woman a chance to respond before claiming her lips in a soul-searing kiss. Closing her eyes, she lost herself in the feel of Natalia's mouth, of the tongue brushing firmly against her own. In the back of her mind, her memory ran through a thousand different images, each of them depicting a moment in time when the two of them could have kissed, when they *should* have kissed... and didn't. That desire resurfaced now, maddening in its intensity and so overwhelming that she didn't pull away to breathe until small spots danced before her eyes.

Panting for breath, Natalia pulled at the front of Olivia's tuxedo shirt, unable to get it open because of the silver button covers holding it in place. She whimpered in frustration and Olivia crossed her arms over her chest, pulling the whole thing up and over her head.

"Oh..." The brunette looked at her lover through heavily lidded eyes, taking in the soft swells of her breasts, her hardened nipples protruding clearly from beneath black silk and lace. She cupped them both in her hands, squeezing them firmly, reveling in the feel of the sharp points jabbing into her palms.

Olivia closed her eyes tightly, licking her lips as a sharp spike of desire traveled from her breasts down to the juncture between her legs, causing the ache that had been there for weeks to escalate to an almost unbearable level. "Natalia..." The word came out strangled, her throat closed by desire, but it was all that her lover needed to hear.

She felt nimble fingers work the clasp at the back of her skirt, felt the zipper being released before the fabric was pushed down and off her hips. And then Natalia's palm was

on her stomach, her fingers sliding down beneath the black silk of her panties to coat themselves in the liquid heat between her thighs.

"Oh god..." Olivia cried out sharply, her hips rocking wildly when Natalia's fingers sought out and found the hard ridge of flesh at the top of her cleft; playing across it in long, languid strokes that made her back arch and her toes curl.

"God, you are so beautiful..." She heard Natalia whisper, but before she could answer, the younger woman's mouth was on her breast, her lips and teeth suckling against her nipple and she could no longer speak... it was all she could do to breathe.

Olivia held on tightly, her nails scrambling under the black cashmere wrap to scratch across smooth skin and soft flesh. She tried to think, tried to speak, but the feel of Natalia's hands on her was overwhelming, the pleasure so intense that she could already feel her orgasm growing quickly.

Then Natalia's hand slid around her back; she felt it brace against her spine and had just enough time to take a single breath before her lover buried three fingers deep inside of her.

"Oh fuck!" She curled her hand around the back of Natalia's head pulling her closer while her other hand clawed at her back. She felt the fingers inside of her begin to thrust, slowly at first, then faster; felt the tips of them curve in and she began to shudder, her head falling back as wave after wave of ecstasy crashed through her. When the final wave hit, it took all the strength from her knees, sending her tumbling forward into Natalia's arms, her body trembling and weak from the strength of her release.

"I've got you." The younger woman stroked her hair gently, her lips placing small kisses along Olivia's cheek and forehead as she held her tightly. "I've got you."

"Yes, you do." She laughed softly; burying her face in Natalia's neck as she pulled the cashmere wrap from around her shoulders. She waited until her heart beat normally and then tested her legs by walking over to Phillip's desk, laying the wrap across it before turning around to stare into Natalia's eyes.

The desire in that gaze was so intense that Natalia felt her nipples tighten from across the room. She had a hard time breathing as Olivia walked towards her; a goddess with green eyes and wild hair, full of wicked intent.

Olivia recognized the wide-eyed look and smiled. It was the same as the first time she had kissed her and she knew now just as she had known then, that this woman; this infuriating, frustrating... wonderful woman... was the light and love of her life.

She stopped an inch away from Natalia, the sweet smile on her face at odds with the wicked gleam in her eyes. "Turn around." She said softly.

Natalia didn't hesitate and she was rewarded by Olivia pressing herself tightly against her back as she slowly took each of her arms and raised it over her head, using her own hands to wrap Natalia's fingers around one of the upper rungs of the rolling ladder.

"We don't want to damage this lovely dress."

Natalia eyes half-closed when Olivia freed the clasp on the back of her gown; slowly inching the zipper down until the dress was a puddle on the floor around her ankles. The older woman lifted her leather-clad feet one at a time, pulling the dress free to toss it over Phillip's high-backed chair.

The dress had a built in bustier, which meant she hadn't been wearing a bra and Natalia began to drop her arms, wanting to cross them over her chest.

"No."

She froze at that one word.

"Put them back where they were."

She did as she was told; breathing in sharply when she felt Olivia's hardened nipples press into the sensitive skin beneath her shoulder blades. The older woman gripped her hips firmly, pulling them back until they were tucked snugly against her groin, leaving her bent forward slightly as she gripped the ladder.

"Now keep them there."

Olivia's voice was low, gravelly, almost like it was when she woke up in the morning and Natalia felt her thigh muscles clench in response. Making love with Olivia first thing in the morning was one of her very favorite things to do; that voice being one of the major reasons.

"Do you know how beautiful you are?" Olivia asked softly, her hands gliding up to cup Natalia's breasts. "How perfect you are..." She groaned as the brunette's nipples hardened even more. "How fucking good you feel?" She pressed into her backside, unable to stop her hand from sliding down the younger woman's stomach and onto her thigh.

Natalia's entire body trembled. It had been so long... She felt Olivia's teeth close on her shoulder and cried out softly, "Please... Olivia... please don't make me wait...*touch me...*" She

whimpered when strong fingers slid between her thighs, stroking through the wet heat to find the small nub of flesh that seemed to be connected to every nerve-ending in her body. "Yes...."

Olivia's jaws clamped shut, biting off a groan that felt like it had been pulled from the very depths of her soul. All the weeks, all the days, all the hours and minutes of waiting for this moment culminated in a need so huge that it was indefinable, indescribable... uncontrollable. It felt as though some part of her had been hollow, empty; like a vessel waiting for Natalia to fill her and make her whole again. With something akin to shock she realized that it wasn't just the sex she had missed.

It was the connection. The raw, visceral link they created whenever they made love. All consuming, it went beyond the physical, creating an orgy of emotions and sensations that never failed to set her on fire from the inside out.

And she was burning *now*, the heat threatening to make her lose all control.

Olivia took a deep breath and slowed the movement of her fingers, keeping a gentle rhythm that nearly drove Natalia to distraction. It felt incredibly good, but more than anything, she needed Olivia to make her scream; to take her hard and fast, muttering vulgar words in her ear while she did it.

And there was only one way she knew of to get her lover to do that.

"I want you to fuck me, Olivia..." She whispered. "*Please...*"

She felt the woman behind her tremble, felt her fight to control herself and knew the exact moment when that fight was over.

Olivia slammed into her from behind, her hand squeezing one breast firmly as she increased the tempo of her fingers. "What did you say?"

"I said..." Natalia gasped softly, pushing back hard with her hips, grinding her backside into the other woman. "*Fuck me.*"

It was all she needed to say.

Olivia never went inside, which was what Natalia really wanted, but she increased the speed of her fingers until it no longer mattered.

Natalia half-laughed, half-cried as her head slammed back onto Olivia's shoulder, her back arching so severely that she had to let go of the ladder. She was vaguely aware of teeth

biting into her neck, of lips that suckled against her so hard that she knew they would leave *another* mark.

But none of that mattered either.

All that mattered were the colors that blossomed behind her closed eyes, the liquid joy that sang through her veins and the woman that was responsible for all of it. Crying out loudly, she let herself go, feeling the edges of her vision darken as her orgasm ripped through her.

When she came to her senses she was sitting on something incredibly soft; something warm that felt like silk against her skin. She looked over her shoulder, a happy smile curling her lips when loving green eyes blinked back at her.

Somehow, Olivia had managed to get them both into Phillip's chair, with her sitting in it and Natalia curled up on her lap.

She sighed happily, snuggling into her lover as best she could with bones that felt like jelly. She noted absently that her legs felt strange and glanced down, choking on her laughter. "I'm still wearing my boots."

Olivia shrugged; the movement sending little shock-waves sensation down her body. "Seems fitting... considering..."

"Don't!" Natalia stopped her with a kiss, laughing sympathetically when Olivia whimpered in pain.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" The older woman asked.

"That we can never go this long without making love again?"

"That, too," Olivia nodded. "But actually... I was thinking it's a good thing this chair is made of leather."

~~*~*

ACT 4

Doris frowned.

She had lost the plot. She didn't know when it had happened or how it happened, but she had definitely lost the plot.

She stared into the bathroom mirror, the cold water she had just splashed on her face falling back into the basin in small rivulets. She had hoped that it would cool her skin, lessen the flush that had traveled up her neck to pink her cheeks and ears, but all she had really succeeded in doing was wasting the hour she had spent putting on her make-up before the party.

There was a small pyramid of rolled hand towels next to the sink and she picked one up with a sigh, wondering what the hell was wrong with her. The night had been going so beautifully... right up until...

She closed her eyes, leaning heavily on the counter as she accepted the fact that there was only one way to describe what had happened.

Doris Wolfe, Mayor of Springfield, long time lesbian and political badass... had freaked.

Plain and simple

Hanging her head, Doris closed her eyes, fighting the urge to yell obscenities at the jerk in the mirror. She knew that it wouldn't help; it might make her feel better, but it certainly wouldn't help. She had broken the cardinal rule of politics.

Don't run... *ever*.

Even if you're doing the most idiotic thing on the planet, you smile and wave like you're at a baseball game eating hot dogs and crapping apple pie.

Act guilty and the public *will* convict you. Maybe only in the court of public opinion but in her world, it was the only court that mattered.

Doris leaned up against the wall; softly banging her head on it like she thought it might knock some sense into her.

She had spent the last two hours dancing with Anna, jumping from room to room as they chased the slow grinds from the '60's up through the '80's. The younger woman had tried to drag her into the Rave room but Doris had declined, laughing at the pouty little faces her date was making to try and change her mind.

It struck her then, at that moment... that she was happy. That she was doing exactly what she wanted to be doing and the world wasn't crashing down around her ears.

Enchanted, she had looped her hand around the back of Anna's neck and pulled her close, cupping one cheek as she ran her thumb across those full, gorgeous lips.

Anna had closed her eyes, tilting her face up and it was an invitation that Doris could not refuse. She leaned forward, not stopping until she could almost taste the other woman's breath on her tongue. And that was when it happened.

All of the music stopped.

Doris had looked up to see every head in the Rave room turned in their direction. For a moment, she was completely frozen.

Then she let go of Anna so fast that the younger woman had actually stumbled backwards, losing her balance and ending up on her ass.

That was when Doris had bolted; mumbling some lame-ass apology under her breath as she took off.

The bathroom was the first private place she had come across and she had ducked inside quickly, locking the door behind her.

Now, twenty minutes later, she felt like a fool.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" She asked her reflection

She had hurt Anna.

And worse... when she had dropped the Asian woman like she had the plague, just for a moment there had been a look of utter disappointment on her face. It was there and gone so quickly that most people would have missed it.

But Doris had spent her whole life watching for that look and to her it was as plain as the egg on her face.

"Fuck." She whispered

There was a soft knock on the door and Doris felt her heart jump into her throat. Part of her hoped like hell that it was Anna, coming to tell her that everything was alright.

But another part of her knew... she just wasn't that lucky.

"Doris?" A soft voice called through the door. "I know you're in there."

The Mayor blinked, confusion slowing her recognition. "Blake?"

“Yeah. C’mon, let me in.”

She hesitated for a moment. There was no other way out of the bathroom and if she knew Blake, the woman would not give up. With a loud sigh, she walked over to the door, unlocking it and opening it just wide enough to allow the other woman to slip through before slamming it shut again.

Once it was closed, she leaned her head against it for so long that Blake finally came up behind her, ducking her head down to smile at her gently. “Hi.”

Doris banged her head softly against the door. “Hi.”

“Stop it.” The redhead slid her hand between her forehead and the door, frowning when Doris didn’t listen. “Hey, come on, stop it.” She took her by the shoulders and turned her around, looking suddenly at a loss for words when the Mayor’s attention was focused directly at her. “Uhm... that was quite a sprint you did.” Blake smiled, pulling her hands away and crossing her arms over her chest. “You’re in pretty good shape for a politician.”

“Oh god...,” Doris groaned, covering her face with her hands. “I’m such an ass.”

“I think the jury’s still out on that, sweetie.” She patted her awkwardly on the back. “But... you should know... that no one was looking at you and Anna.”

Doris snorted. “Thanks, Blake but... I saw it with my own eyes.”

“No... What you saw was everyone’s attention turned towards the door.” She smiled sympathetically. “They were looking at the monitors, Doris. There’s one sitting right inside each room. The music stopped because Phillip was on them, doing his forty-five minute’s till midnight speech. He’s pretty excited about his fireworks display...” Her voice trailed off when she saw the look of absolute shock on Doris’ face. “Didn’t you see them when you were dancing?” Her lips quirked oddly. “No... I guess you wouldn’t have. You’re attention was... definitely elsewhere.”

The Mayor closed her eyes tightly, her hands balling into fists. “I made a complete ass of myself... for nothing?”

Blake patted her on the arm. “I wouldn’t worry about it. A politician making an ass of themselves is like bees making honey... it’s expected.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“Sorry. I’m just trying to make you laugh.”

"I know." Doris sighed. "And I appreciate it, I really do, but..." She shook her head sadly. "I really screwed up."

"You mean with Anna?" She waited for Doris to nod. Pursing her lips, Blake went to the sink, wetting a hand towel with warm water and bringing it back. "I'm not so sure about that..." She began to dab at the Mayor's face, gently removing the traces of eye liner and mascara from her cheeks.

Doris' eyes widened in surprised but she let her continue. "You didn't see her face when... when I..."

"Dropped her?" The redhead pulled back to look at her for a moment. "Actually I did see her face. And more importantly, I saw her face *after* you left." She traded the wet towel for a dry one, gently patting the moisture from the other woman's skin. "I think more than anything she was surprised... and confused."

"Confused?"

"Well, yeah!" She tossed the towel into the basket under the sink and pulled a compact out of her clutch. Opening it, she began to apply fresh powder to Doris' cheeks. "I can't say as I blame the poor girl. You spend two hours dancing with her like she's your own personal stripper pole and then you freak over something as simple as a..." She swallowed. "...as a kiss."

Doris leaned her head to one side, her voice soft. "I thought you said no one was watching."

Blake snapped the compact shut, reaching into her bag for a tube of mascara. Focusing on the other woman's eyes, she cleared her throat. "I'm pretty sure if you just explain to her what happened, she'll understand. You panicked." She screwed the mascara shut and picked up a tube of lipstick. "It happens to the best of us."

Doris grabbed her hand, gently pulling the make-up from her fingers. "I'll... I'll do that..." She walked over to the mirror, applying the lipstick carefully while watching Blake's reflection. The redhead was looking at the floor, her fingers playing idly with the small diamond dangling from her necklace. She started to say something to her and then shook her head. "I don't even know where she is."

"She's out by the pool." Blake stepped closer, looking directly into Doris' eyes. For a moment, she just stared. She had always thought they were blue... but up close... there were definitely specks of green in them...

"Blake?"

“Hmm?”

“I asked how you knew that.”

“Oh...” She shook her head, brushing at the hair that fell into her eyes. “I saw her grab a glass of champagne and head outside. The heaters only extend as far as the patio around the pool.” Blake shrugged. “She looks too smart to get herself frozen.”

Doris bit down on her bottom lip as she stared at the door.

“Go on...” Blake said quietly. “What do you have to lose?”

“You’re right.” She smiled. “Thank you.” Without thinking, she pulled the redhead into her arms, hugging her tightly.

After a moment, Blake wrapped her arms around Doris too, silently returning the embrace.

It was just a friendly hug, a gesture of thanks and comfort, but it went on far longer than either of them really intended.

It was Doris that finally pulled away, clearing her throat as she rubbed the back of her neck with one hand, her cheeks flushing a lovely shade of red. “Well...” She smiled shyly. “Thanks.”

Blake nodded slowly, a grin finally settling on her lips. “Go get her, slugger.”

The Mayor laughed as she pulled open the door. “Next time?” She stopped and pointed at Blake playfully. “Next time you’re on *my* team.”

The redhead laughed and waved her off, the grin on her face turning wistful as she watched Doris disappear out the door.

~~*~*

“Okay... now *that* is a lie!”

Natalia’s laughter echoed off the bookshelves, the delightful sound bringing a happy smile to Olivia’s lips. She tightened her arms, pulling the younger woman more tightly against her as she shook her head in mock outrage. “I never lie...”

The brunette turned her head, looking at the woman behind her as she rolled her eyes sarcastically.

“...anymore.” Olivia finished with a small kiss to her lover’s cheek.

They were still in the exact same place they had been for the last two hours; sitting snuggled tightly together in Phillip’s high backed office chair. Even though the chair was more than wide enough for them to lounge side by side, Natalia had chosen to sit in the V of Olivia’s legs, her back pressed warmly against the older woman’s chest and her head resting on her shoulder as she talked quietly about the events that had led them to where they were. Desire and need still hung thickly in the air between them but they had agreed to wait until they got home to deal with it... now that the hard edge had finally been buffed away.

Natalia shivered and Olivia pulled the black cashmere wrap more tightly around their bodies, spreading it out, turning it into a makeshift blanket. “I’m glad you hung on to this thing. It’s *freezing* in here!”

“Mmmhmm.” Natalia poked her playfully in the thigh. “Don’t change the subject. That has to be a lie.”

“No, it’s true.” The older woman smiled. “I felt... connected to you somehow... from the first time we met.”

“But...you were *so* horrible to me!” She accused.

“I didn’t say I liked feeling that way!” She ducked when Natalia swatted her playfully on the arm. “And besides, it was *you* that hated *me*.”

Natalia became serious. “I didn’t hate you. I could never hate you.” She rubbed her forehead. “I wanted to... oh, I *really* wanted to!” She shrugged. “But I couldn’t.” She picked up one of Olivia’s hands, tracing her knuckles with a fingertip. “You made me *so* crazy... I tried to stay away.... I really did. But every time I turned around I was outside your door. I told myself it was for Emma, or for Gus, but the truth is... you fascinated me.”

“I fascinated you?”

“Yes.” The younger woman blushed. “You were beautiful... strong... powerful...” She swallowed. “And so very, very broken.” She pursed her lips, looking down. “You could be so cruel... in one breath... and then I would see you with Emma and the love you had for her... it would just... *shine* through your eyes.” She shrugged. “I knew that deep down... you were a good person. You just needed a reason to see it.”

Olivia breathed in deeply, bringing her hand up to gently stroke Natalia's cheek. "You are the best reason I could have ever hoped for." She whispered; her voice breaking. "You are my heart... and I would die without you."

"Don't say that." Natalia snuggled deeper into her arms. "Don't ever say that."

"That's how I feel."

"Yeah, well... you're gonna live forever, if I have anything to say about it."

"I'd settle for sixty years with you."

Natalia closed her eyes, smiling at the sweetness of the comment.

"Of course, either one is a big improvement over you trying to kill me."

The brunette made a sound of shocked outrage, grabbing Olivia's knee and squeezing the ticklish spot. "I did not try to kill you!"

"You could have fooled me!" Olivia laughed, trying to pry the younger woman's fingers loose.

"I was just trying to keep you from ruining my wedding!" She giggled when Olivia's fingers skittered down her ribcage, letting go to slap the attacking hands away. When the older woman didn't stop, she leaned up and kissed her.

It was the only incentive Olivia needed to behave. The kiss was long and slow, sweet with just a hint of the desire they were holding in check. Natalia moaned as she nibbled on her bottom lip, causing the older woman to sigh when she pulled away. "What is it with us and weddings?"

"I dunno..." Natalia shrugged, one finger tracing around Olivia's mouth. "Maybe... maybe everything kept going wrong... because we kept trying to marry the wrong people."

Olivia took her hand gently, holding it still so that she could place a kiss in the center of her palm. "Maybe..." She whispered.

Natalia closed her eyes as slight tremors ran through her body. When they stopped, she turned around, supporting her weight on her knee's as she straddled Olivia's lap. Wrapping her arms around the older woman's head, she pulled her in close, burying her face between her breasts as she hugged her, hard.

Olivia licked her lips when she caught Natalia's scent. It was clean and heady; rich like grass after a rainstorm. She felt her mouth begin to water and slid to the edge of the chair, dragging Natalia forward until the heat between her thighs was pressed up against her belly and her legs were wrapped tightly around her back. She tangled her fingers in dark silk, using it to draw Natalia's head down so that she could capture her lips in a kiss.

It was long, slow and deep. The kind of kiss that involves the whole body as much as the lips and tongue and when they finally parted, there was a warm slickness low on Olivia's stomach that made her growl and lean in for more.

But Natalia turned her head, offering her neck instead and whimpering when her lover bit down on it, hard. "I thought..." She groaned quietly when Olivia's hands slid down to cup her ass. "I thought you wanted to wait... until we got home."

"Okay," Olivia snickered softly. "Maybe *that* was a lie...just a little white one." She began to kiss her way down Natalia's body, pressing the younger woman backwards as her lips trailed down between her breasts to nuzzle happily against her stomach.

They both froze when there was a firm knock on the library door, followed by someone trying the knob.

"Olivia? Natalia?"

The older woman held a finger up to her lips, wincing slightly as she mouthed the word, "Phillip."

"I know someone is in there." The humor in her ex-husbands voice was unmistakable. "I know this because it takes opposable thumbs to lock a door and I don't think any of my first editions qualify..." There was a pause. "Okay..." She could almost hear him rolling his eyes. "Well, if anyone in there should happen to see my ex-wife and her baby mama, could you tell them that the ball drops in twenty-seven minutes and... 13 seconds and that I would very much like them to be in attendance for that event. Oh and, you might also let them know that the bedroom two doors down has a full bathroom suite."

They could hear his laughter fade away down the stairs and Olivia shook her head. "I'm not sure if the new, improved Phillip is worth his sense of humor."

Natalia slid away reluctantly, immediately missing the warmth of Olivia's arms. "I guess... we really should behave..."

"Whose idea was it to come here tonight?" The older woman grumbled under her breath.

Natalia smiled innocently. "Yours."

"Mine?" Olivia's eyes widened. "That's a lie!"

The younger woman climbed to her feet, picking up Olivia's still-buttoned shirt and tossing it at her.

"Just a little white one." She smiled.

~~*~*

Doris stopped at the patio door, her heart jumping slightly in her chest when she saw Anna standing at the edge of the pool. The snow had finally stopped falling and the sky had cleared, leaving nothing but a black expanse heavy with a blanket of stars and a perfectly full moon that bathed the younger woman in pale blue light.

Doris looked up in surprise. For a moment she could only stare in wonder. It was so clear that she could see the outline of every mountain, every crater; the orb hanging so low that she felt like she could reach out and grab it, pluck it from the sky and offer it to Anna like a ripe piece of fruit.

"Blue moon..." She whispered in awe. "Once... in a blue moon..."

Taking a deep breath she headed across the patio, goose bumps breaking out along her arms as she moved from the glow of one heater to the next. When she was halfway there she saw Anna's head turn slightly to the side, saw her back stiffen and slowed to a stop a few feet away.

"Hi." She said softly.

There was no response.

"Anna?" Doris tried again. "Please let me explain."

"What is there to explain?" The younger woman didn't sound upset. She sounded tired, and in so many ways, that was worse.

"I..." She sighed, bringing her hand up to rub her forehead. "I just..."

"You left me there." Anna turned around slowly. She looked at Doris with sad, red-rimmed eyes. "You dropped me on the floor... and you left me there!"

“I am so sorry-“

The detective held up a hand, cutting her off. “There are a lot of things I can forgive, Doris. The fact that you’re scared, that you’ve spent your whole life in the closet, that you’re a politician...” She made a face. “That you’re a republican. But shame...” She tunneled her fingers through her hair. “I can’t *be* with someone that’s ashamed to be with *me*. I can’t be your dirty little secret... your occasional play date. I can’t... and I won’t.”

“I don’t want you to be.”

Anna shook her head. “I don’t think you know *what* you want.” She shrugged. “And I don’t know that I can wait around for you to figure it out.”

Doris closed the distance between them, bringing both of her hands up to cup the other woman’s face. “Anna...” She stroked her cheeks gently with her thumbs. “What happened in there... it didn’t have anything to do with you.” She saw the disbelief on the other woman’s face and rushed to continue. “The way we danced together...” She laughed softly. “I’ve never even danced in public like that with a *man*.” She blushed. “I don’t think there was any doubt in anyone’s mind just who and what we are to each other.”

The Asian woman looked thoughtful for a moment. “Then... why?”

“Because I’m a dancing daisy.”

Anna blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“Do you remember... a couple of years ago? There was this craze for those little potted daisy plants? The ones that danced whenever you played music around them?”

She tried not to laugh. “A couple of years ago? Doris, I was in my twenties when those things came out.”

“Okay, so... maybe I’m a little off on my timeline...”

“A little?” Anna snorted.

“Can we... stay on point here?”

The other woman held up her hand. “Sorry! Please... continue. Tell me how you’re a ...” She bit her lip. “...a dancing daisy.”

“Well... now the analogy seems silly.”

“Now it seems silly?”

Doris threw her hands up. “Look, the point is that those things danced whenever they heard music. They didn’t have a choice; it’s what they were programmed to do.” She stopped to breathe. “I... have spent my whole life that way. You shine a spotlight at me and I start dancing. I perform. I play a part. And up until now, that part has always been about who I *appear* to be.” She looked down at the ground. “No one has ever cared who I *really* am.”

Anna couldn’t stop herself. She stepped closer and wrapped her arms around the shivering woman. “I care.” She whispered.

“I know, and that means the world to me.” She sniffled quietly. “Anna, when I looked up and saw everyone watching us... I heard that music start to play in my head, only I didn’t want to dance anymore. I was standing there, caught between who I used to be and who I want to become and...” She shook her head. “I just... went into overload.” She leaned back, staring directly into Anna’s eyes. “But I swear... It didn’t have anything to do with you.”

Anna heard voices and looked up, nervously releasing Doris as she saw people begin to file out onto the upper balconies. “I think...” She frowned when the New Year’s Eve Ball suddenly winked on, rotating slowly on its axis as it shimmered in every color of the rainbow. “I think maybe we should finish this somewhere else.”

Doris looked over her shoulder. She felt panic fill her chest and throat at the number of people looking down at them. Trying to calm herself, she turned away to stare at the moon.

Blue light rained down on her face, filling her with a strange sort of peace and suddenly she knew one thing with absolute certainty.

Some moments you only get one shot at... because they only come around once in a lifetime.

“No. No, here is just fine.” She glanced down at her watch. “Three minutes till midnight. Got any last minute resolutions?”

Anna smiled when the older woman slid her hands down to her waist, pulling her in close. “No...” She leaned her head to the side, studying the Mayor closely. “How about you?”

“Just one.” Doris slid an arm around the smaller woman’s back. “But for that, you’re going to have to wait two minutes and fifty-one seconds.”

~~*~*

Olivia led Natalia towards the main balcony, smiling when the waiters on either side of the door moved into the crowd, creating a path for them that led right up to the base of the countdown display.

Phillip was waiting for them, a huge smile on his face. "So glad you could make it."

"Yeah, well," Olivia smirked. "We heard somewhere that you were looking for us."

"You heard that, did you?"

"Or maybe I read it..." She shrugged. "I can't remember."

Her ex-husband leaned in close. "I hope you at least remembered to wipe down my chair."

Olivia's eyes were huge. "How did...?"

"It's the only possible piece of furniture in the room." He smiled.

"That's not true." Natalia blurted, turning bright red as she slapped a hand over her mouth.

"She's right." Olivia hugged her lover close, amusement shining in her eyes. "There's also that rolling ladder."

"Stop!" Phillip held up his hands. "I have to use that thing every day!"

"Oh and the desk," She continued.

"Gah!" He covered his hands with his ears just as the large digital clock at the bottom of the ball's path lit up and the crystal sphere began its descent.

"We never used the desk!" Natalia whispered.

Olivia smiled. "Only because we were interrupted." She gripped her lover's hips possessively. "I had big plans for you and that desk."

The younger woman pressed her lips together, her dimples flashing as she blushed shyly. "You have an office too you know."

Olivia's jaw dropped, but before she could respond, Natalia was pointing down towards the patio.

“Hey... isn’t that Doris and Anna?”

She looked over the railing, her eyebrows crawling up her forehead when she saw the Mayor below with Anna Li wrapped up in her arms. “I’ll be damned... She’s really serious.”

The people around them began to chant, pulling her attention back to the woman at her side.

10....9....8....

She wrapped her arms around Natalia, pulling her so close that the people watching were hard pressed to tell where one of them left off and the other began.

7....6....5....

Together they watched the multi-colored crystal ball slowly slide downwards.

4....3....2....

Turning her head, Olivia briefly captured Natalia’s lips with her own. “I’m going to love you forever.”

1....

The ball reached the bottom, its weight pressing down on the flat red, plate built into the base of the platform.

There was a moment of absolute silence and in that stillness, Natalia pulled her head down to whisper, “You promise?”

The night shattered into a sea of colors as all six firework launchers went off; lighting up the sky with blossoms of every shape and size. Along the sides of the Spaulding property, lasers and projectors played across screens that had hung hidden between the trees. They created a kaleidoscope of landscapes that seemed to grow out of thin air only to burst into vibrant colors before crumbling to dust; only to be reborn a moment later by yet another phoenix rising in its place. Beneath it all, the vibrant strands of *Around the Bend* pulsed, supplying a steady beat and an energetic musical score that had everyone on the balcony dancing happily in place as the world exploded around them.

Everyone... except Olivia and Natalia. The two women stood perfectly still by, caught up in their own private moment as a brand new decade stretched out before them.

Olivia raised her hands, gently cupping the younger woman's face. "I do."

~~*~*

Down below, Anna raised her head as the first fireworks went off, following their trails across the night sky to watch them explode against the inky blackness.

Doris watched Anna's face change, watched the lines around her mouth and eyes soften with delight and felt herself melt right along with them. Not stopping to give herself time to think, she twisted her fingers into the other woman's dress, using it to tug her forward until their hips were locked together. Lowering her head, she kissed the startled woman fiercely.

"Oomph!" Anna squeaked in surprise, freezing for a moment as her brain tried to catch up with what was happening.

Then she kissed Doris back, her whole body straining towards the older woman as she wrapped her arms tightly around her neck. It wasn't sweet and it wasn't soft. It was lips and tongues and teeth and want, wrapped up with hands wandering into dangerous areas and small whimpers that slid into bone shaking moans.

All around them, the night was loud with celebration, but none of it mattered. Not the fireworks overhead or the people who glanced their way briefly before continuing on with their own merrymaking.

All that existed for them was each other... and that kiss.

The sky had gone dark by the time they broke apart; the lighter trails of grey ash and smoke that crossed over the blackness the only proof that it had ever been on fire at all.

But the music played on and when someone in the group above began to clap, the rest of the party followed suit. Whether it was for their display or the one overhead, Doris would never know, but she did see Olivia smiling down at her before she disappeared into the crowd.

"That was..." Anna shook her head, laughing softly. "That was one hell of a kiss."

Doris placed a cold hand against her own cheek, trying to cool the heat of her skin. "Uhm... yeah."

The younger woman slid into her arms, resting her chin on Doris' shoulder. "Do you court all of your voters this way?"

“Only the special ones.”

“Are there... any other perks?”

“Come home with me.” Doris whispered, her hands sliding low on Anna’s back. “And I’ll lay out my entire strategy for you.”

Anna felt a spark of heat follow the older woman’s hands down her spine, making her purr deep in her throat. “Deal.”

The older woman kissed her, sweetly this time, then took her by the hand and led her around the pool.

“Oh but...” Anna’s lips quirked into a smile as she trailed behind her. “You should really incorporate that whole ‘dancing daisy’ thing into your next campaign speech. “Cuz yeah... that was classic... really.”

~~*~*

Natalia opened the front door of the farmhouse, trying to quiet her laughter as she wiggled away from Olivia’s curious fingers. “Shhh.” She admonished. “It’s late!”

“Why are you telling me to shush?” Olivia snarked. “You’re the one making all the noise.”

“Only because someone can’t keep their hands to themselves.”

“Oh, now you *want* me to keep my hands to myself? In the limo you said I couldn’t touch you enough.” She moved in close, breathing heavily into Natalia’s ear. “You said you needed it more than air.”

The younger woman shivered. “I do... I need it more than anything...” She swallowed and stepped away, balling her hands into fists as she tried to even out her breathing. “And there will be time for that... even if it takes all night and damn...” She flushed. “I really ho... hope it does. But right now... we need check on the girls and send Jane home.”

Olivia wasn’t sure if Natalia’s flush was caused by her swearing... or by the desire she was obviously fighting to keep from giving in to, but she knew which one she was hoping for.

She also knew that if she pushed just a little bit harder... she could have had Natalia on the kitchen table with her dress hiked up to her waist and her legs wrapped around her shoulders.

She froze for a moment; the visual that came along with that thought making her stomach clench and her palms ache. Then she closed her eyes, forcing it out of her head. As appealing as the image was... she'd rather try that particular scenario when the interruption factor was a little lower.

"Where did *you* go?" Natalia smirked.

"Oh, somewhere really, *really* nice..." She glanced at the kitchen table and then took the younger woman by the arms, turning her until she faced the entryway. With a soft push on her backside, she started her moving again. "You want to get out of this room. Trust me."

Natalia laughed, but did as she was told, stopping short when she stepped into the living room, the laughter dying in her throat. "Oh my..."

Olivia pulled up short behind her, covering her mouth with her hand to hide her amusement.

The living room looked like a war zone... if that war was being fought with licorice whips and bazooka bubble gum.

There were candy wrappers in various colors and sizes littering the floor and empty soda cans covering nearly every flat surface. An overturned bowl of popcorn blanketed one end of the couch like snow from a freak indoor storm, while a dozen little M&M cairns made the table look like a scene out of Pet Semetary.

And the other end of the couch... well... it was laid out with the casualties of war.

"So much for needing to be quiet." Olivia snorted, walking over to check on Emma, who was dressed in her ballerina outfit and fast asleep, her head and shoulders hanging halfway off the cushion. A sticky, half-eaten Sour Punch Straw was still clutched in her little fist and she had to pry her fingers open to pull it free.

Next to her, Jane snored loudly, her head hung back over the arm of the sofa with Francesca curled up in a ball on her chest. She glanced at Natalia. "At least she has her tucked towards the back so if she rolls, there's no place to go."

The younger woman just frowned at her.

Olivia winced. Turning around, she gently picked up their baby girl, cuddling her in her arms before leaning down to shake the babysitter's shoulder. "Jane?" When there was no response she shook her a little harder. "Jane!"

“Wha?” The young woman sat up quickly, looking around in a panic until she saw the baby in Olivia’s arms. “Oh... you’ve got her... okay.” She rubbed at her eyes. “What time is it?”

“It’s a little after one.” Natalia looked pointedly around the room. “What happened here?”

Jane snorted. “Like mother, like daughter.”

Olivia’s eyes narrowed.

“I mean...” She jumped to her feet. “Emma missed you... a lot and... I tried to keep her entertained but... she kind of... just did what she wanted.” She gestured wildly with her hands. “I figured as long as it wasn’t dangerous what’s the harm right?”

Natalia sighed. She picked up an empty Reese’s wrapper. “How much sugar did she eat?”

“Uh... a lot... especially if you consider the cookies... and the... uhm... six pack of soda...” She looked down at her feet. “And the ice cream.”

“No wonder she’s passed out! She’s in a sugar coma!” Olivia laughed, biting her lip when Natalia glared at her. “Look, Jane... why don’t you go ahead and get out of here? We’ll settle up at work on Monday ok?”

The young woman took one look at Natalia’s face and nodded eagerly. Scooping up her coat, she headed for the door. “Happy new year.”

“This is going to take forever to clean up.” Natalia grumbled after she was gone.

“Yeah well, we’ll worry about it in the morning.” Olivia nodded at Emma. “You want to grab the sugar plum fairy and we’ll take them both upstairs?”

The brunette finally smiled. She picked Emma up, holding her tenderly as they climbed the stairs. When they reached the little girl’s room, she laid her down on the bed, taking off her tutu and ballet slippers before pulling the covers up to her chin. She watched Emma sleep for a few moments then leaned down, brushing the hair off her forehead before kissing her goodnight. She felt her heart swell with happiness, just as it did every night when she tucked her little girl into bed, knowing she would get to do it the next night and the one after that. She would do it for as long as Emma let her.

And she hoped that would be a good long while.

“Sweetheart?” Olivia looked at her knowingly. “She’ll still be here in the morning. And probably grumpy as hell from the sugar crash.” She leaned down and kissed Emma on the forehead too. “Let’s see if you’re still as starry-eyed then.”

Natalia smiled. “I will be.”

The older woman laughed. She led the way to the baby’s room, stopping long enough for Natalia to nuzzle her daughter’s head before lowering Francesca into her crib. “She’s wet.”

“Oh, okay...” Natalia started to move but Olivia grabbed her by the hand, pulling her back to kiss her gently.

“I’ll take care of it.” She smiled at the younger woman’s shocked look. “I’ve changed her diaper before!”

“Maybe, but... I don’t think you’ve ever actually volunteered for it.”

“Yeah well...” Olivia went to the changing table, pulling out a fresh diaper, a bottle of powder and some wipes. “It’s a new year, right? That means I get to be a whole new me.”

Natalia came up behind her, circling her arms around her waist. “I was pretty fond of the old you.”

She closed her eyes, leaning back into the body behind her. “Does that mean I never have to deal with diapers again?”

“Let’s not get crazy.” Natalia patted her on the butt. “A *little* change is good.”

Olivia snickered. “Why don’t you go get ready for bed?” She kissed Natalia on the nose. “I’ll be right in.”

She watched as the older woman picked up their daughter, humming a lullaby under her breath. “I think I’ll start with a shower.”

Olivia made faces at the little girl, who was smiling up at her.

Natalia pursed her lips as she walked backwards to the door. “Which means I’ll be in the bathroom...”

“MMhmmm.” She laid the baby on the table, bending down to blow a soft raspberry on her tummy.

“...and I’ll be naked...and wet.”

She laughed. “Don’t you dare start without me!”

The younger woman blew her a kiss and headed for their bedroom.

Olivia smiled down at her daughter. “Hey you...” She whispered when she was done changing her. “I wanted to talk to you alone for a minute.”

Francesca looked up at her expectantly.

“We both love you so, so much, little girl.” She picked the baby up, rocking her slowly. “But sometimes your mommies need... to have a play date of their own; just a little time for us to be alone together and show each other how we feel.” She made a silly face. “That’s something that we really need tonight.” She laid Francesca back down in her crib. “Now, I know how much you love to interrupt whatever we’re doing, but I need you to just... take the night off, okay?”

The baby gurgled at her happily.

“I’m not above begging.”

Francesca laughed.

“Okay... well then, how about a bribe?” She pulled the little girl’s blanket up, tucking it in, making her look like a burrito. “You give me one night with your mommy and I will...buy you a pony. When you’re old enough to ride it of course. Deal?”

Slowly, the little girl’s eyes closed; her tiny chest rising and falling evenly as she drifted off to sleep.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

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Natalia groaned happily as she turned her face up into the warm spray of the shower. The water felt incredibly good, almost decadent, against her over-sensitive skin and for a couple of minutes she just stood there, letting it rain down on her.

Her entire body had felt like the exposed end of a live wire ever since the library and all night long she had been fighting like hell to keep from acting on it. Now, safe at home, she let her self-restraint go; closing her eyes and purring softly as her nipples hardened under the heavy pulse of the showerhead.

"I thought I told you not to start without me." Olivia said softly, molding herself to Natalia's back as she stepped in behind her.

The younger woman laughed breathlessly. "You were taking too long..."

Olivia picked up the soap, lathering her hands generously before sliding them onto the other woman's belly. She rubbed upwards in small, slow circles, loving the feel of smooth skin and soft flesh under her hands. Touching Natalia was always a revelation. One she knew she would never tire of.

"You looked beautiful tonight." She breathed, her hands slipping up to cup the younger woman's breasts. "It was all I could do to keep myself from taking you right there... on the dance floor..." She caught the younger woman's nipples between her fingers, rolling them firmly with soap slickened fingers. "Or the balcony..." She pressed into her with her hips.

Natalia leaned forward, bracing herself against the wall as Olivia ground into her from behind. "What about..." She swallowed hard when the other woman gently nudged her legs apart. "What about the shower?"

"The shower? The shower I think we can do."

~~*~*

Olivia sucked on her earlobe as she brought one hand down, slipping it into the heat between her thighs with a groan that Natalia felt all the way to her bones. "Jesus...you are so incredible." She moved her fingers slowly, reverently; reveling in the small sounds Natalia was making in the back of her throat. She loved to touch her this way, to explore every inch of her; but right now... right now she really needed something else.

Pulling her arm back, Olivia slid her hand around the outside of her hip, caressing her backside firmly as she whispered, "Natalia?"

"Yes." The brunette nodded quickly. "Oh god, Olivia... please... yes..."

The older woman used one knee to push Natalia's legs further apart then leaned down, biting her firmly at the base of her neck as she slid two fingers into her from behind.

“Oh!” Natalia cried out, reaching behind her to tangle her fingers into Olivia’s hair. “Yes... oh, god, baby, yes...”

Olivia tried to move carefully at first, but the younger woman growled at her, tugging sharply on her hair as she pushed back, hard. From that point on she couldn’t speak, couldn’t think... all she could do was focus on the warm velvet wrapped around her fingers and the soft flesh cupped in her other hand. She thrust into Natalia wildly, curving her fingers to reach the spot that would make her lover come apart in her arms.

She wasn’t disappointed.

Natalia’s back arched, her entire body beginning to shake as the fingers of her free hand scrabbled madly at the tile wall, trying to find anything to hold onto. She settled for grabbing onto Olivia’s hand, squeezing it tightly around her own breast as her hips pumped frantically against the woman behind her.

“Come for me...” Olivia begged softly. “I need to hear it, feel it... God, sweetheart please... come for me.”

And Natalia did, her entire body going rigid as a huge wave of pleasure rode through her, making her toes curl and her lips tremble. She cried out once, twice... and then she fell back into Olivia’s arms, crying softly as the older woman gently lowered her to the floor.

“Did I hurt you?” Olivia asked anxiously.

“No...” Natalia laughed, closing her eyes and she rested her head weakly against the wall. “No, you most definitely did not hurt me.”

Sighing in relief, Olivia sat down beside her, pulling her into her arms. “I love you.”

The younger woman kissed her tenderly. “I love you, too.”

They sat quietly for a few minutes, listening to each other breathe.

“I’m getting a little cold.” Olivia finally acknowledged. “Are you up to moving this into the bedroom?”

“*Oh yeah.*” Natalia stood up, holding out a hand to help the other woman up. “I think there’s enough warm water left to finish our showers.”

“No.” Olivia jumped out quickly, pulling Natalia after her. “I don’t want you to wash anything away.”

“Why not?” The brunette looked at her curiously.

“Because I’m hungry...”

Natalia laughed as Olivia led her out of the bathroom. “Wait! We haven’t even dried off!”

“What does it matter?” She tossed Natalia facedown onto the bed, climbing in on top of her. “The sheets are just going to end up soaked anyway...”



~~*~*

“Jesus...” Natalia fell back against the pillows, trying to catch her breath as the remnants of her last two orgasms slowly dissipated.

“Blasphemer.” Olivia tucked her hands behind her head, smiling happily.

“No, not really.” The younger woman covered her eyes with one hand, licking her lips to try and moisten them. “That was actually a prayer.” She glanced at Olivia when the older woman chuckled. “You don’t have to look so smug about it.”

“I don’t?”

Natalia considered the question for a moment. “You’re right. Go ahead and look smug.” She shook her head. “But you are so *not* buying her a pony.”

Olivia’s eyes flew open wide. She opened her mouth to ask how the hell she knew about her promise and then closed it with a grin when she spied the baby monitor sitting on the bedside table.

“Are you saying that wasn’t worth a pony?”

Natalia laughed weakly. “Are you kidding?” She swallowed; her mouth dry. “But who would take care of it? You barely go near the cows!”

“I didn’t earn the cows...” She trailed her fingers down Natalia’s ribs, splaying her hand out flat across the smooth expanse of her belly.

The brunette lifted her head slightly, watching as Olivia’s hand slid lower. “You trying for a whole herd?”

“Well, we’d need one for Emma, too...” She leaned down, pulling Natalia’s earlobe into her mouth with her tongue. “Can’t have the bean getting jealous...” She bit down lightly. “And Ava should have one... for when she comes to visit...”

“Oh...” Natalia’s eyes slammed shut as long, deft fingers gently stroked through the wetness between her legs. “What about...” She licked her lips. “What about me? I always wanted to learn how to ride.”

“Really?” Olivia chuckled low in her throat, raising the hair along the back of Natalia’s neck. In one smooth move, she rolled them both over, fitting the younger woman’s sex against the firm muscles of her right thigh. “That’s what you have me for...”

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Epilogue

Olivia blinked slowly as she woke up, letting her eyes gradually adjust to the bright rays of sunshine streaming in through the bedroom window. She turned her head from side to side, sighing happily when the bones popped with a satisfying snap.

Looking over at the other side of the bed, her eyebrows knitted together in confusion.

She was alone.

“Natalia?” Climbing out of bed, she grabbed her robe and wrapped it around her body, marveling at how good the silk felt against her skin. “Natalia?”

She wandered down the hall, looking in on Emma to find the little girl sleeping peacefully before heading to Francesca’s room where she found Natalia, sliding the changing table to one side to stare at the wall thoughtfully.

Olivia walked up behind her, sliding her hands possessively down her hips and onto her thighs. The fact that she was allowed to do that now still made her a little bit crazy. “What are you doing?”

“Mmmm...” Natalia wiggled slightly, pushing back further into her arms, rubbing against her until Olivia half-moaned. “Making a space.”

“For what?” Eyes closed, the older woman was barely following the conversation as she rocked gently against Natalia’s backside.

“That...” The brunette swallowed, the feel of her lover moving against her making her more than a little breathless. “That Vertical... thingamabob.”

Olivia froze, blinking quickly to clear away the lust-induced fog. “My Vertical Limit?”

“*Our* Vertical Limit.” Natalia smiled, turning her head to kiss the tip of Olivia’s chin. “I think it’ll fit perfectly right here.”

“But...” She glanced over at the crib, her heart melting slightly at the sight of their daughter sleeping peacefully. “Why would we put it in the baby’s room?”

“Are you kidding?” The brunette turned in her arms, resting her chin in the center of Olivia’s cleavage as she looked up at her with big, doe eyes. “All those little refrigerated sections? They’re perfect for baby bottles.”

Olivia’s eyes went wide. “What?”

“Oh yeah! And we can put the bottle warmer right on top!”

“But... but...”

“No buts.” Natalia traced her lips with a fingertip. “It was very generous of Phillip and we’re not going to turn him down, but there is no reason you need to keep that much

champagne in the house. You can have the last two compartments. And..." She kissed her, taking the sting out of her words. "If it's up here and Francesca is sleeping... you'll really think twice about how much you need it before trying to sneak past the human intruder alert."

Olivia's lower lip swelled into a pout.

"Hey..." Natalia bit that lip, tugging on it gently. "You may feel as strong as an ox and act as stubborn as one..." Her smile was a little forced. "But it's barely been a year since the last episode with your heart. You have a family now, Olivia.... Four kids and a..." She swallowed. "Me... who need you around."

Tears rolled down Olivia's cheeks as she pulled Natalia close. "I'm fine."

"I know." Natalia's voice was very small. "And I am going to do whatever I have to do to make sure you stay that way."

The older woman nodded, coughing slightly to hide her sniffles. "How about some breakfast then?" She kissed the top of Natalia's head. "And considering it's a new year, I think my bacon ration should reset..."

Natalia laughed. "Jeez, you and your bacon." She wiped at her eyes. "Two pieces, that's my best offer."

"I'll take it!"

"Bring your daughter." Natalia headed for the door. "It's time for her bottle. But I think we should let Emma sleep in. Let all that sugar wear off as much as possible."

Olivia watched her until she was out of sight then went to the crib. She scooped the little girl up carefully, the dopey grin on her face only getting bigger when the baby gurgled at her happily.

"Hey there, Franciegirl. You ready for some food? You sure earned it, yes you did!" She tickled the child's belly, laughing along with her. "You were really good for your mommies last night... and you know what?" Olivia craned her neck to make sure the hallway was empty and then reached out, flipping off the baby monitor with her thumb before whispering, "You are so getting that pony!"

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An hour later, Emma Spencer stumbled down the stairs, following the sounds of voices to find her two mommies in the kitchen, her baby sister playing quietly in a playpen nearby. For a moment, she felt lost; like she didn't belong there.

After all, they hadn't even woken her up for breakfast. She was about to sneak back upstairs when she heard her mother talking to Natalia.

"Do you think she's slept enough? I miss my Jellybean... I really want her to watch the Parade with us."

"I do, too." She could tell that Natalia was smiling. Her other mommy had the most expressive voice in the whole wide world, which is why she never understood how anyone had ever thought she was in love with Uncle Frank. All anyone had to do was hear her talk to mommy and they would know who she really loved.

Duh...

Smiling, feeling better, she bounced into the kitchen.

"Jellybean!" Olivia grabbed her little girl, wrapping her up in her arms. "There you are! I was about to come up and get you! I missed you!"

"I missed you, too, Mommy." She looked at Natalia. "I missed both of you." She picked up a piece of toast. "Did you bring me anything?"

"As a matter of fact..." Natalia pulled a small black package out of her pocket, handing it to the little girl. "We did."

"What is it?"

"We don't know!" Olivia raised her eyebrows. "It was inside of a bunny rabbit!"

Emma's eyes got huge.

"Olivia!" The brunette smacked her lightly with a spatula. "The bunny was made of ice, sweetheart. Your Daddy had them on all the dinner tables."

"Cool!" Emma ripped into the plastic wrapping, holding up her prize when she was done.

"Is that..." Natalia stepped closer, looking at it curiously.

“It’s a fortune cookie.” The little girl smiled. Cracking it open, she pulled out a bracelet and a rolled up piece of paper.”

Olivia took the bracelet, whistling softly at the heft of it in her hand. It was made up of two delicate chains attached on either side of a long slender, band.

Engraved across the band were three words:

‘Peace, Love, & Happiness.’

“Platinum.” She shook her head. “You can’t do anything small, can you, Phillip? What does the fortune say, Bean?”

The little girl unrolled it eagerly. “It says ‘May your future shine as brightly as the love in your heart.’”

Olivia handed the bracelet back to her daughter, grabbing her hand and pulling her out of her chair for a hug and a kiss. “So, did you see the ball drop?”

Emma frowned. “I fell asleep too early.”

“Oh, baby I’m sorry.” Natalia came over and hugged the little girl too. “I know you wanted to stay up and look into the New Year.”

The little girl shrugged. “I don’t have to do that anymore.”

“What? Why not?” She glanced at Olivia, wondering if there were still some issues left unresolved with their daughter.

“Because!” Emma smiled brightly. “I’m back home... with both my mommies *and* my little sister.” She touched the quarter hanging from a thin chain around her neck. “And my big brother... he loves me, no matter where he is.” She sat back down, picking up a fork to spear several of the heart-shaped pancakes that Natalia had set on the table. “I already know this year is going to be great!”

Olivia smiled. “You’re right, baby.” She reached out and grabbed Natalia’s hand, pulling the younger woman into her lap. “We have everything we need to make it great...sitting right here with us.”

The End

