

What Dreams May Come

by geekgrrllurking

ACT 1

Her dream was always the same, when it came.

It was a typically gorgeous summer day in the park, except everything was far from typical. Above her eleven crows flew in slow motion, the beating of their wings sounding loud in her ears, their shrill cawing sending shivers down her spine. Around her the breeze moved through the trees before dipping down to stir up little whirling dervishes of dust. In the distance a woman's familiar voice cried out.

"Olivia..."

She froze, recognizing her mother's haunting tones. It was not disapproving, or angry, but as she remembered hearing it as a young child being called in for supper. Beckoning her. She spun quickly, hoping to catch a glimpse of her one last time, only to find nothing but row upon row of chairs, all festively decorated.

That's right, she remembered now, it was Rick and Mindy's wedding day. Her hands moved over the red silk of her dress, smoothing the material over her curves. She needed to warn somebody about something, but she couldn't quite remember what. Her heart raced, thudding against her ribs like a wild bird trapped in a cage, desperate to escape. Somewhere the pop-pop-pop of gunfire sounded and a baby cried. She turned again, fear gripping her. She knew that baby's cry anywhere.

"Emma?"

She couldn't move. She was stuck as if drowning neck deep in quicksand, sinking deeper every second. Suddenly Edmund Winslow stood before her, a huge grin plastered across his face as he offered her a drink from a bottle of Johnny Walker. She simply shook her head.

"Come on and play, Olivia! The next song is a good one!" Edmund smiled taking a quick gulp of whiskey before he tossed the bottle over his shoulder. Stepping away from her, he twisted the guitar game controller around from his back, repositioning it as he stepped backwards and to

the side, revealing Jeffrey O'Neill and Frank Cooper already playing Rock Band together on a small stage.

Jeffrey stood, stepping out from the game drum set to stand beside Edmund. He slid an arm around Edmund's trim waist and tugged him closer, smiling softly before dropping a lingering kiss to his mouth.

Finally she could move again, so she turned and ran.

"Wait...come back!" Jeffrey's voice floated behind her on the wind, dark and menacing. "You can't fall asleep, you little bitch; the fun is just about to start. And I'm not nearly done with you yet..."

Her stomach churned at the sound of his echoing laughter and she could almost feel his thick fingers clawing at her body, the sour taste of punch and bile rising in her mouth. She ran faster, trying to escape him, to escape the past.

Up ahead on a small rise she spotted the gazebo, where a woman in a white wedding gown paced back and forth. Big white fluffy flakes of snow drifted lazily down from the sky as she slowed down to catch her breath. She tugged the lapels of her long winter jacket a little higher to block out the icy wind whipping around her and made her way to the building.

She cautiously made her way up the steps and into the gazebo, her breathing starting to calm finally. She paused, smiling widely as she recognized the woman waiting there for her.

"Natalia?" Relief flooded through her and her heart started to beat faster again. Her lover turned to face her.

"I'm so sorry..." Natalia's eyes were large and dark, sadness creeping in. She came closer, needing to fix whatever was wrong, pulling her into a tight hug.

"There is nothing to be sorry for, honey." She whispered into the thick dark hair, breathing in the sweet clean scent of cinnamon and something all Natalia. "God, I love you so much."

"Don't you know? I-I don't want to be with him," Natalia murmured against her shoulder starting to cry. She pulled back, their eyes meeting, locking. "I don't love him, I love you!"

Her heart swelled at the words, and for a moment she got lost in Natalia's eyes, falling into their depths and finding peace. She never wanted to leave. They stared at each other for a long moment, before the pop-pop-pop of gunfire in the distance intruded again.

"Mamma!" Francesca screamed somewhere far away, and she turned to look but couldn't see anything but more fluffy flakes falling slowly to the ground.

Suddenly Natalia grew light in her arms and she looked quickly back, only to find she was holding a wedding dress in her arms. She turned around and around in circles, but her lover was nowhere to be found.

Her heart breaking, she stood in the heat of the courtyard of the religious retreat and screamed up to the bright summer sky.

“NATAAAAAAALIA!!!”

Olivia Spencer sat bolt upright in bed, inhaling sharply as she jerked awake, heart hammering in her chest as a sadly familiar wave of grief and loss overwhelmed her. Twisting, blindly she reached out, clutching at the blankets, needing to reassure herself that Natalia was still in bed beside her.

“Natalia...” Olivia whispered into the night, sighing with relief upon finding warm familiar curves beside her. She glanced over to see if she had woken her lover, smiling as she merely snuggled into her blankets a little closer. Stroking a hand through her hair with a weary sigh, Olivia started to calm down as she realized where she was, safe at home in her bed.

Another nightmare. She should be used to it by now. Olivia shook her head and carefully slipped out of bed, knowing that sleep was going to elude her for awhile. She tiptoed out into the hallway, needing to make sure everyone was still safe and sound. Cracking open the nursery door, her mind settled even more at the sight of wee Francesca fast asleep, her tiny legs exposed as she snuggled her wubby closer, tucking the soft pink blanket tightly under her chin.

“Like mother, like daughter.” Olivia fully entered the room, smiling softly before she tugged the blanket back down to cover Sweet Pea’s small body. Leaning over to press a soft kiss to the girl’s dark hair, she breathed deep, the clean scent of baby powder and shampoo settling her rattled nerves. With one last rub to her baby girl’s belly, she made her way back out to the hallway, quietly pulling the door almost closed.

Shuffling down the hallway a little further Olivia pushed Emma’s bedroom door open a little wider so she could peek inside. Cornelius, Emma’s old battered teddy stood guard faithfully watching the girl sleep from his post on the bookshelf. It had been almost a year now since Alan’s death and so much had happened since then. There had been so much for the girl to deal with, forcing her to grow up so quickly. Kids seemed to grow up so quickly in Springfield; before she knew it Emma would be driving, leaving home and starting her own family.

Olivia shivered at the thought, her heart growing heavy. Everyone leaves eventually. She sighed and tried to shake off the thought, most likely an unwanted residue of her nightmare. She glanced back at the well loved bear, remembering how Emma's teddy had helped her then.

"Somehow I don't think good old Cornelius is gonna cut it anymore..." Olivia whispered to herself. A low woof came from Emma's bed, and a white fuzzy head popped up from under the thin blanket to stare at her.

"Shadow," Olivia hissed afraid that the dog would wake her daughter. "Quiet."

Tilting her head, the dog quickly hopped to her feet and clumsily stomped all over Emma as she made her way to the edge of the bed, landing on the wide wood planks with a clatter of nails. Olivia winced but sighed with relief as Emma just grunted and shifted, not waking at all. Shadow padded over and sat on Olivia's slipper, staring up hopefully at the woman.

Shaking her head, Olivia backed out of Emma's room, Shadow following close on her heels.

"I suppose you want a treat of some sort, doncha?" Olivia smiled at the tail wag she received with the word 'treat' as they headed down the hallway to the stairs and made their way down to the living room, towards the kitchen.

Flicking the light on, Olivia blinked and made her way over to the cupboard, quickly pulling out the bag of rawhide chew sticks the pup loved to gnaw on for hours on end.

"You tell anyone about this and I'll feed you to the felines, fuzz ball." Olivia tossed the chew stick up and grinned as the dog popped up and snatched it out of the air. Dropping to the floor, Shadow immediately started to chomp on her treat.

"Time for momma's treat." Smiling softly, Olivia turned to pull a highball tumbler from the cupboard, putting it down on the kitchen counter before reaching up to the top shelf, finding a bottle of whiskey they kept there for guests. Pulling the bottle down, Olivia opened the fridge and grabbed some ice cubes from the tray and dropped them into the glass with a clink. Twisting the cap off, Olivia tipped the bottle and paused, staring into the familiar amber depths of the alcohol.

It would be so easy, to just pour and drink the nightmare away, to drink it all away. Olivia could almost feel the burn of whiskey on her tongue, the liquid fire slipping down her throat, landing in her guts with a warm splash of heat. It wouldn't take long before she'd be comfortably numb to it all, to be able to slip back into mindless sleep...

Olivia closed her eyes and flashed back to last February in San Cristobel, Natalia's face in shadows, disappointment in her eyes, whispering into the night. *"I thought we talked about this. That you could come to me, instead of turning to a bottle..."*

"What the hell are you doing, Spencer?" Olivia dropped the bottle back to the counter top. She had said that she would do things differently this time, but it was so easy to slip back into bad old habits. She glanced down as Shadow snorted, suddenly chewing at an itch on her hind leg before looking up at her, slowly wagging her tail, unconditional love and trust reflected back at her.

Olivia sighed and grabbed the cap, twisting it back on tight before reaching and putting it back up on the shelf, quietly closing the cupboard behind it. Grabbing the tumbler she tossed the ice into the sink and opened the fridge, pouring cold milk into the glass instead. She slipped the ceramic lid off the cookie jar and snagged three home baked chocolate chip cookies.



Biting into the chewy goodness, Olivia sighed and headed for the back door. Quickly slipping on a light jacket to keep warm in the cool fall evening, she unlocked the door and made her way out onto the porch, Shadow dashing out past her to go do her business on the lawn. She leaned against the post and watched as Shadow inspected the telescope Josh had brought over a few weeks ago, still set up in the yard, sniffing at the tripod legs.

Glancing up at the star filled sky, Olivia munched quietly and took a sip of milk feeling her nerves settle and calm warmth surround her. She sank down to sit on the top step and sighed. The last time she'd sat on this exact same spot was when Natalia had left her, her heart broken into as many pieces as there were stars in the sky.

What a difference a year made.

Her little family lay asleep upstairs, warm and safe. A farmhouse full of love, something she never thought she'd want and yet now she couldn't imagine her life without it and she would do anything to keep it from slipping through her fingers. Anything.

Olivia smiled and dipped her cookie into the milk before taking another bite. Shadow ran up and snuffled along her slippers before sticking her head into her lap. Olivia ran her fingers into the warm fur and massaged the dog's ears slowly. Movement overhead caught her eye and Olivia looked up in time to see a shooting star trail brightly across the sky.

"I wish..." Olivia closed her eyes, thinking hard for a moment. She had everything she wanted right there under her roof. There was only one thing left that she could possibly wish for. She opened her eyes and stared up into the heavens, releasing her wish to the stars, the universe, or to whoever was up there listening.

"Please don't let me fuck this up."

A warm September sun shone brightly on the citizens of Springfield, as many of its denizens rushed in and out of Company, the cheery restaurant busy with its usual morning crowd dropping in for takeout orders and the breakfast crowd. Blake Marler and Marina Cooper hustled behind the counter taking orders and filling them as fast as possible, while Buzz clattered and bellowed from the kitchen.

Olivia grinned as she wandered into the mayhem, covering a yawn with her hand as she nodded a greeting to a swamped Blake before she scanned the room and found exactly who she was looking for lurking in one of the corner booths.

"Well, you look like shit." Doris Wolfe looked up and smiled as she easily recognized who was sliding into the booth across from her.

"I love you too, Wolfe." Olivia smirked back and looked up gratefully as Marina dropped a mug of coffee in front of her and a menu and disappeared again just as quickly.

"Jesus, what does the woman dip herself into to turn that particular shade of orange?" Doris shook her head as Olivia just about spit back out her first gulp of coffee.

"Warn a girl before you do that, would you?" Olivia coughed a little, as Doris just chuckled evilly.

"So, was your hot girlfriend keeping you up late again?" Doris couldn't resist the opportunity to tease the woman about her sex life. The mighty Olivia Spencer brought to her knees willingly by the virtuous Natalia Rivera seemed like one of those lesbian romances Blake was publishing these days. Besides it was fun to push Olivia's buttons every now and then.

"If you must know," Olivia glared, stirring some sugar into her coffee, avoiding Doris' amused gaze. "I was up late working on a proposal last night."

"Riiight." Doris smirked, before taking a sip of her own cooling coffee. "I like my version better."

"I think I like your version better, too..." Olivia grinned and raised an eyebrow, before she whipped open the menu and began looking over her breakfast options.

Doris snorted and shook her head, taking a gulp of her coffee. She watched Olivia over the rim of her cup, taking in the weary droop to her shoulders and dark circles around the eyes. Makeup helped cover it, but the woman was certainly tired, and she somehow doubted it had anything to do with her job. In fact Doris had noticed some of those same features on herself over the last few weeks, often after a particularly rough night reliving Edmund's rampage in her own dreams.

Doris' eyes narrowed as she realized that maybe Olivia wasn't working on a proposal last night after all. She let the silence between them stretch out, not sure if she should bring it up or how to even broach the topic. Maybe talking about her most recent nightmares was the way to approach it. Doris sighed and put her cup back down on the table top and took the bull by the horns.

"Actually, speaking of lack of sleep," Doris began carefully. "I'm still having nightmares about the whole Winslow thing." She watched her friend closely, looking for any signs that she had hit a nerve and should duck for cover. Olivia however simply looked up, saying nothing as the mayor continued on. Doris looked down at her hands, relieved in a way to talk about what had been haunting her too.

"It's like it's on repeat or something. I keep seeing Blake tackling me, shoving me down out of the way only to end up shot and bleeding out all over me." She shivered at the memory, the haunting image of Blake's dead eyes staring up at her immediately flashing into her mind. Doris forced herself back to the here and now, as Olivia dropped her menu to the table top, eyes filled with concern.

"God, Doris." Olivia murmured sympathetically, reaching out across the table top to squeeze her friend's arm in sympathy. Doris just shrugged a little and sighed, grabbing her spoon to stir her coffee a little more.

Olivia swallowed hard. She had survived this long; she didn't see the point in whining about it to some therapist, or saddling her friends with her worries. Still, Doris had opened up to her. Olivia struggled a moment longer, trying to figure out best how to respond.

“Hey, you know what? You’re not alone. We’ve all been having nightmares at our house, but the family therapy seems to be helping. Felicia has been great with Emma. And Natalia has been chatting off and on with Sister Anne.” Olivia smiled softly as her friend looked up at her.

Doris nodded, silently noting that there was no one Olivia seemed to be talking to. She opened her mouth to say as much when two muffins appeared in front of them.

“Compliments of Blake.” Marina grinned as she also quickly topped up each mug. “Sorry for the wait ladies, I’ll be back.” She whisked away again, not stopping long enough to take their order. The interruption, however, had effectively broken the moment, and then Olivia’s BlackBerry buzzed. Apologizing, she quickly read through the text message and typed a terse response; Doris sighed and decided to let it drop. For now.

“Sorry, minor emergency at the Beacon. I’ll have to tear a strip off an employee a little later, nothing major.” Olivia apologized again for the text and put the phone back down on the tabletop, just in case they called back. She took a big sip of her coffee and sighed happily as the warmth trickled down into her stomach.

“You know, I’ve heard that they put crack in the coffee.” Doris leaned forward conspiratorially, pulling the top of her blueberry muffin off.

“Well, Blake would know.” Olivia began peeling the paper muffin cup from the bottom of hers. “Did she spill that tidbit to you during some pillow talk?” Olivia teased, more than happy to turn the spotlight onto Doris’ love life and away from things that kept her up at night.

“Shut up. You know good and well that we’re just friends.” Doris bristled a little, the subject of Blake a sensitive one. They both glanced over to where Blake was busily working away.

“Riiiiight.” Olivia simply arched an eyebrow as Blake waved at Doris from behind the counter. “Is that ‘friends with benefits’, you old wolf?”

Doris couldn’t help herself as she smiled back at the redhead. It still caught her by surprise that the woman seemed to genuinely like her. She didn’t have that many friends and didn’t want to screw that up by being Blake’s experiment. No, it was for the best really, to keep her at arm’s length. She glanced back and found appraising green eyes watching her thoughtfully.

“Listen, no offense, but it’s been my experience that straight girls just end up breaking your heart. Once they’ve gotten their curiosity, and other urges, satisfied, they leave you for the

next handsome face that comes down the road.” Doris’ voice turned bitter and she tried to ignore the quiet lull in the conversation as Olivia digested her little statement.

“Is that what you really think? I’ve never heard it put like that before.” Olivia stared at her friend. Obviously there was a story there and it didn’t sound like it had a happy ending. Then again if you’d asked her opinion on that last summer she would have wholeheartedly agreed. A straight girl did break her heart for a while, too. She frowned a little at the memory.

“Yeah well, you’re a little new to the wonderful world of being...you know.” Doris’ vaguely waved her hand, letting her friend draw her own conclusions.

“Happy?” Olivia smirked.

“Ok, that works.” Doris chuckled. Glancing up she noticed a familiar face dashing into the place. “Speaking of exes...” She nodded towards the counter.

Olivia turned to see a frazzled looking Bill Lewis leaning against the wooden counter, chatting to Blake. She realized his baby should be arriving any day now. She felt an old familiar warm spot blossom for the man. He had been so good with Emma, she knew he would make a great dad. She was genuinely happy for him.

“Could I get an extra large coffee and a medium decaf herbal tea?” Bill glanced at his watch, obviously in a hurry. He glanced around and their eyes locked, saw her, smiling warmly and waving at her.

“You do have a thing for dimples, don’t you...?” Doris leaned forward a little. Olivia looked back at the mayor and simply rolled her eyes.

“That was a long time ago, and besides, Natalia’s dimples are much cuter.” Olivia glanced down into her coffee mug and swirled the contents thoughtfully. “Actually, our anniversary is coming up this weekend.”

“God, it was September when you moved back to the farmhouse, wasn’t it?” Doris shook her head, amazed at how time flies when life is good. “So, what do you have planned? Anything special?”

Olivia just smiled and took a bite of muffin.

Natalia Rivera pulled open the oak door and listened to the happy tones of the electronic chime sound as she stepped into the Beacon's new daycare facilities. The old conference room had converted nicely into a warm inviting space and Lewis Construction had done an excellent job, finishing on time and under budget.

The wiggling bundle in her arms didn't even seem to notice, as Francesca seemed content to tug on her mother's hair to try to get her attention. Pulling the little fingers away, Natalia gave them a quick kiss before stepping deeper into the room.

"Hey!" Leyla Rivera came in from a small back office, a huge smile erupting as she recognized her visitors. "You're in early."

"You're one to talk. Olivia and I didn't even hear your car leave this morning." Natalia bounced her daughter ever so slightly to keep her distracted. Turning at the sound of Leyla's familiar voice, Francesca's eyes widened and she reached out with both arms.

"Tee-yah." Francesca wiggled in Natalia's arms, trying to get closer to her aunt.

"Hey, little one, come to Tia Leyla." Leyla laughed and scooped the baby out of her sister's arms, tickling her little belly until she giggled and squirmed, and then dropped a squeaky kiss on the flushed pudgy cheek.

Natalia's heart filled with joy at the sounds coming from both her daughter and sister. A year ago she never would have dreamed that her family would have been in contact with each other, let alone grown close again to Leyla. She sent a silent prayer of thanks skyward and grinned back at her sister.

"I just wanted to get in here and get things going. But I guess I didn't need to rush, as no one's bothered to come in yet." Leyla tried not to let the disappointment or worry show in her voice, but Natalia heard it anyway.

"It's going to take some time for word of mouth to build." Natalia smiled softly, running her fingers over her daughter's head and then shifting to tuck a stray lock of Leyla's hair behind an ear. "Have a little faith..."

The happy tones chimed again as the door opened slowly, and two familiar figures entered the room. Both women looked at each other and smiled. It was the daycare's first official customer.

"Hi there, can we come in?" Jonathan stood in the doorway, his daughter in his arms.

“Absolutely!” Leyla smiled, pleased to see the handsome man again. She watched as the small dark haired girl slid down his lean form to land solidly on the floor. “Hi, Sarah. Have you come to stay with me today?” They all smiled at her shy nod.

“I’d like to sign Sarah up for daycare.” Jonathan ran a hand through his messy dark hair, pleased when his daughter’s natural curiosity finally kicked in and the girl made her way towards the small pile of toys to one side. “Since Lizzie is ready to pop and I’m busy with the new school project with Lewis Construction, my baby girl needs somewhere to go for the day. And who better than Auntie O’s new Beacon daycare facilities.” Jonathan grinned widely.

“Sounds good to me!” Leyla smiled warmly up into the dark eyes, swaying ever so slightly with Francesca.

Natalia stood quietly to one side, as Leyla started to get the paper work going, chatting and teasing Jonathan. By the time he had a pen out and was filling out some of the necessary forms the daycare door chimed again as a hotel guest with a toddler wandered into the room, looking around curiously. Leyla smiled warmly and went to greet the newcomers.

Natalia met Leyla’s happy gaze and nodded. Things were going to work out here, just fine.

It had been relatively quiet at police headquarters since the Winslow fiasco. There were the usual petty thefts and traffic violations and even one case of a flasher down on Main Street. Not wanting to dwell on the man’s short comings, Detective Anna Li had been able to wrap that one up pretty quickly. And although she should be grateful for the peace, somehow it simply felt more like she was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“What’s a five letter word for idiot?” Remy Boudreau called out from his desk, before chomping noisily into an apple. The man loved to do crosswords at lunch. He looked up as the Chief came into the squad room, scanning it briefly as the rest of the cops in the room quickly tried to look busy.

“Oh, it would be too easy...” Anna muttered to herself, sitting up a little straighter in her chair as Frank Cooper made his way towards her desk. “Try ‘dunce’, Remy.”

Remy scribbled it in and nodded. It fit perfectly. His cell phone rang, and seeing Cyrus Foley’s name on the call display he quickly answered it. He kept a discreet eye on what was happening in the room though, not wanting to miss a thing.

“Anna, I’ve got a new assignment for you.” Frank smiled warmly.

“Yes?” Anna said cautiously. She was immediately suspicious of the Chief’s intentions. Frank was acting all chipper, bouncing on the balls of his feet and grinning at her like that. He was up to something.

“Since Officer Wendell left on maternity leave last week, we’re going to need a new officer to serve at Springfield Elementary until she returns.” Frank glanced over at Remy and grinned before turning and heading back out the way he had come. He tossed a final parting shot over his shoulder. “It should be an easy gig for you, Li.”

“*Diu!*” Anna swore and closed her eyes. Sure she liked kids and all, in small doses, but a whole school under her watch. She was being punished, she was sure of it. Remy had a hand over his mouth as he eavesdropped, trying to keep his laughter under wraps from their boss. “Shut up Boudreau. They’re kids, how much trouble can those ankle biters get into anyway?”

“Oh, I almost forgot.” Frank waved a junior officer into the room, his arms full of files. “Just drop those files on Li’s desk for me, will yah Johnson? Thanks.”

The young man quickly deposited the folders and beat a hasty retreat. Detective Li’s temper was becoming legendary around the squad. Remy’s laughter finally erupted though as Frank disappeared from sight. Even Anna’s glare didn’t stop him.

“Sorry, man. I’ll fill you in later...” Remy chuckled into his cell. “See you tonight.”

Anna sighed and flipped through the files on the top of the heap, her mind spinning. How long before the average woman comes back from maternity leave anyway? Wendell was a warrior; she’d pop that kid out and be back in the saddle in six weeks. Anna bit her lip, okay maybe eight weeks? She glanced up to find Remy still grinning at her plight. It seemed like the perfect time to torment her partner a little, just for sport.

“So how is your boyfriend?” Anna smirked, sliding the file back onto the top of her pile. “Big date tonight, lover boy?”

“Shut up.” Remy leaned back, still chuckling and tossed his apple core into his garbage can. “Cyrus says hi by the way. He was dropping Mel off at the new firm.”

“New law firm?” Anna looked up. She vaguely recalled hearing about Doris getting involved in a new venture. Not that she was stalking her ex, but she had been following things a little in the paper since the shooting.

It had irked Anna that Doris had been raked over the coals by the Springfield Journal, with some of the locals calling for her head, muttering about the blatant disregard for the safety

of the citizens. As if Doris could have stopped that mad man. Hell, the woman had been a target the day of the shooting spree. If Blake hadn't acted so quickly...

Anna shuddered slightly and turned her attention back to her partner. She didn't even want to think about how worse things could have turned out if Jeffrey hadn't taken Winslow down.

"Is that the one Mel and Doris are getting started?" She asked. "They just announced that not too long ago. That happened fast."

"Yeah. The timing was good, Mel's old lease is up at the end of this month and so she packed up her offices and moved. The new place is pretty swank too." Remy nodded. "Beth Spaulding is one of the partners too, her husband offered up this nice old Victorian mansion down on Old River Road that Spaulding Enterprises owns."

Anna whistled. The mansions down there were spectacular historic buildings; the very bricks and mortar and obsessive attention to architectural detail screamed old Springfield money at its finest. Over the years, several of the old mansions had been turned into apartments and rental properties for the not-as-wealthy anymore children of old Springfield money. And a few others had been turned into offices for accountants, doctors and other professionals at every corner practically. It would be a perfect location for a high end law firm.

"Well, send my best wishes to your sister." Anna stood up and pulled her blazer up off the back of her chair, shrugging it on. "I'm gonna log some down time, I said I'd swing by and visit Jeffrey, drop him off at Cedars for an appointment he has today. It'll do him good; he's going stir crazy in that apartment of his."

"I'm sure your juvenile delinquents in training will be here waiting for you when you get back." Remy smirked at his superior officer. Anna gave him a glare for good measure before heading out of the squad. His chuckles followed her out the door.

ACT 2

The sign for the new offices of Wolfe, Boudreau and Spaulding, Attorneys at Law, stood tastefully at the edge of a well-manicured lawn. A pathway meandered up through the lawn, past a garden overflowing with bright blooms and ending at a short stairway that headed up to a wrap-around porch on an old Victorian mansion. Beth Spaulding stood on

the porch, her cell phone pressed to her ear, trying to hear what her husband was saying on the other end.

“Phillip, is that Peyton screaming at the top of her lungs?” Beth asked worriedly. She knew that she should have stayed home with her baby when the girl had woken with a headache and upset tummy. Phillip had happily volunteered to stay at home so she could go get herself set up at the new office. He refused to let her miss her first day on the job.

“She’s fine, sweetheart,” Phillip’s soothing voice came back to her over the phone. “I just wanted to wish you good luck on your first day one more time.” Beth could hear his quiet pride coming through loud and clear. She smiled and leaned against the porch post, watching a jogger run past.

“I love you,” Beth murmured softly.

“I love you too.” Phillip’s smile colored the tone of his voice and she smiled wider. “Now go rack up those billable hours. Someone around here has to pay the bills.”

Beth laughed as they hung up and she slid her phone into her purse. Bending over, she picked up her box of personal office belongings and headed in. Seeing her name on the brass plate to the side of the door made her smile again. Finally, after so much effort, she had achieved her dream.

She had thought long and hard about what name she would use professionally. In the end Beth realized that she was just old fashioned and romantic enough at heart to want to take Phillip’s name as her own, personally and professionally. And as Doris had been quick to point out, after she had informed her partners of her decision, the Spaulding name wielded a certain power to it which could come in handy for the firm. Beth was going to have to keep an eye on that wily Wolfe.

Maneuvering herself carefully, Beth managed to turn the door handle before pushing the big door open with an elbow. Making her way inside, she looked up and took in the wide staircase that wound its way upstairs to where the partners each had an office. She knew there was also enough space upstairs for a small library and current file room and a fully outfitted private washroom.

The main floor of the mansion had been converted into a reception area, with a waiting lounge in what had once been the living room. A huge brick fireplace dominated the room and there were several very comfortable leather couches and club chairs for clients to wait in. Wide plank floors glistened, the warmth of the wood complimented the tasteful neutral colors on the walls and the thick crown molding along the edge of the ceiling.

Past the reception area was a small board room, which had once been a dining room. Behind that there was another spacious bathroom and then the kitchen, which was brightly outfitted with state of the art appliances, contrasting nicely with the exposed brick walls. There was a large harvest style table with plenty of chairs for staff to sit and eat their lunches.

Out the back door of the kitchen was a continuation of the wrap-around porch, with stairs down into a spacious back yard. A very comfortable patio set beckoned, with a barbecue tucked away over by a small utility shed.

The basement of the mansion held the vast majority of the files and office supplies for the firm. There was a bedroom with an adjoining bathroom and shower, for those nights spent burning the midnight oil a little too long on a case. And for a little rest and relaxation, or as Doris had justified it, for in-house client entertaining, there was a small pool table and a pub style bar set up with a flat screen television along one wall. Once Mel had gotten her head around spending money on this type of thing for the firm, she had insisted on a nice wine collection behind the bar. Doris had simply smiled, relishing her victory at swaying her two partners to her way of thinking.

“Do you need a hand with that, Mrs. Spaulding?” Their receptionist asked from her desk in the waiting room, nodding at the box in Beth’s hands.

“No, Jenny. I’ve got it covered.” Beth shook her head and smiled, heading up the stairs to her office. A new chapter of her life was beginning and she couldn’t wait to get started.

A gray sedan turned at the streetlight and pulled up outside the Quickie Mart. A woman opened the passenger door and stood, looking both ways down the sidewalk before dashing into the convenience store, while the driver sat in the car idling.

Wrapping the light scarf tighter around her head, the woman quickly went over to the coffee counter and poured two cups, mixing in sugar and cream liberally. Popping the plastic lids on, she looked around the quiet store and headed for the check out.

Paying the teenager at the register quickly, she slid her sunglasses back on and hurried to the door. She bumped into another woman entering the store.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” Anna Li said, catching one of the paper cups before it tipped out of the woman’s hands. “Are you okay?”

"I'm good. Thanks." The mystery woman smiled, nervously tucking stray blonde strands back under her scarf before dashing out the door, making a bee line straight for the waiting sedan.

Anna watched the car take off down the street, sensing something a little off. She shrugged, shaking the feeling off and headed inside. It had taken no time to drop Jeffrey off at the hospital and now she still had time to grab a quick sandwich before heading down to the park for some much needed stress release.

Frank made his way down into the depths of the crime lab, hidden deep in the basement of police headquarters. It was part of his routine now, to pop down and check in with Eleni. It was often the highlight of his day.

Making his way down the busy hallway, he nodded to various officers and old friends before finding himself outside of her office. Tapping lightly on the door, he waited for his ex-wife's permission to come in.

"Please tell me that's one of Buzz's famous cappuccinos." Eleni Andros smiled, looking over from her computer terminal.

"Still pretty warm, but you might want to pop it into the microwave," Frank wandered in and dropped the paper cup on her desk top. "Pop sends his best."

Eleni smiled wider and flipped back the plastic lid, breathing in the aroma. Too impatient to reheat the beverage, she took a quick sip and moaned appreciatively.

Frank swallowed hard at the sexy sound, and the memories they evoked, and turned to sit down.

"So, what are your plans for the weekend, Frank?" Eleni glanced over at the fidgeting man.

"Oh, well. I've got my little Sweet Pea with me." Frank's face lit up as he started to talk about Francesca. "Otherwise, I'm just hanging around."

"Sounds heavenly." Eleni grinned back at him. She remembered spending lazy weekends with Frank, playing with Marina in the backyard, cooking dinner for the family, snuggling together at night watching television; a part of her longed for those simpler days, when they had been a happy family. Before she'd gone and screwed it all up.

"You know, you're a lucky man, Frank Cooper." Eleni sighed, not wanting to look too closely at her past. She couldn't change it now anyway; all she could do is work on the future.

"I guess." Frank laughed self consciously, ducking his head and rubbing at his neck. Most days he didn't feel all that lucky and he tried not to dwell on how badly his love life had been the last few years. He looked back up, his eyes locking with his ex-wife's. God, she was beautiful like this, strong, powerful and self assured. "So, what are you going to be up to?"

Eleni grimaced and turned back to her monitor, the desktop image of Marina, Shayne, and little Henry almost tormenting her, something she wanted to be a part of desperately and yet tantalizingly just out of reach. She had no one to blame but herself, part of the fall out of screwing it all up.

"I was hoping to see Henry this weekend, but Marina won't even take my calls." Eleni ran a hand through her thick waves of curls in frustration.

Frank frowned. Their daughter was so stubborn sometimes, but then she got that naturally from her mother. Still it was heartbreaking that Eleni couldn't see her own grandchild.

"What if I called her to see if she would let me babysit Henry Friday night?" Frank snapped his fingers and leaned forward, pleased with his plan. "I'm sure she'd jump at the chance for some alone time with Shayne. Come over for dinner and we could look after the kids together."

Eleni stared at Frank's earnest face and hesitated. It sounded...really good actually. She just didn't know if it was wise to have Frank in the middle of her feud with Marina. Still he had offered, and he should know how pig-headed their daughter could be.

"Okay." Eleni said; her decision made. The happy look on Frank's face made her smile wide in response.

"Okay!" Frank stood, suddenly needing to move. He needed to get the ball rolling on all this, get it all organized. "This will be great. Let me call Marina and I'll let you know what's going on."

"Sounds like a plan." Eleni took a sip of her cappuccino and watched as Frank excitedly headed out of her office, waving at her as he disappeared out of the door. She chuckled to herself. Frank was awfully cute when he got like this.

Eleni spun her chair back to start analyzing the computer data on her latest tests and tried not to dwell on the familiar little flip-flops her stomach was making.

It had been a pleasant surprise when Phillip and Peyton had swung by the school to pick Emma up and take her for a picnic lunch in the park. She had been having such a bad day, and the picnic sounded like the perfect escape. Emma giggled as Peyton dragged her dad to the sandbox, forcing him to make a sandcastle with her. She could almost ignore the big security guard watching them all from the park tree line. Almost.

"I'm just going to go down to see the ducks, okay, Daddy?" Emma asked. With a nod of his head, she made her way towards the large park pond. She kicked some stones on the pathway as she went, her mind turning back to her class that morning. It wasn't right; her new teacher this year was stupid. She wished she had Miss Jennings again.

"It's not fair," Emma growled under her breath, bending to pick up a small flat rock at the edge of the pond. She had finished her project, but had left it at home by accident. Natalia had even helped her color the title page. The teacher had said that it was too bad, but Emma would have to learn that you can't just miss deadlines and sent her back to her seat with a note for her mom, that she had failed the assignment. She had wanted to roll up into a ball and cry, but crying was for babies. So she had just not said a word and stewed about it all morning not even talking to her friends. She had been going to hang out by the teeter-totters and eat her lunch alone until she had seen her father by her locker after the class bell rang.

"I could just hit something." Emma threw a stone across the water, watching the rock skim and bounce across the surface. A duck quacked and suddenly flew up, startling her. Emma covered her mouth in dismay.

"Oh, my gosh!" she cried out. "I'm sorry little duck!"

Emma hung her head. Great, now she almost hurt a duck too. This day was just going from bad to worse. She looked over at her father, happily playing with Peyton, who was squealing and running around him before being scooped up into a big bear hug. She wished she was little again, when things were easier. It was all so confusing now.

Across the pond, movement caught Emma's eye. She squinted and realized that it wasn't someone running along the path or anything. It was a woman, making weird movements with her body. Emma giggled as she recognized the lady. It was the police officer who was friends with her moms.

Emma watched the smooth movements of the police woman, the way they flowed into each other, hands posed perfectly. She looked so elegant, like she was doing a slow motion

dance in a way. She tried to copy some of the movements, twisting at the waist and pretending to hack away at someone with her hands.

“Hi-yah!” Emma’s hands chopped the air frantically and then she spun and kicked waist high. It made her feel a little better, to move around and hit into the air. Giggling to herself, she turned to head back to her father, kicking and spinning the whole way.

Anna slowly moved in the warm park sunshine, smiling to herself as she saw a little girl across the way copying some of her moves. It looked a little like Olivia Spencer’s daughter, but the girl had turned and was bouncing back towards the children’s play area.

Shaking her head to clear it again, Anna took a cleansing breath and settled back into her routine. She stretched her arm out into a single whip and then shifted her weight and stepped up, raising her hands before morphing into spreading her arms wide. Just as her arms reached their correct position was when she noticed she had company.

“What are you doing, Mayor Wolfe?” Anna held her final pose and turned her head towards the redhead.

“Watching you.” Doris leaned forward, her hands resting on the back of a park bench, admiring the view. She had to admit the woman moved with grace. Her mind flashed back to other graceful movements she’d had the pleasure of experiencing at the hands of the talented detective.

Anna bit her lip and dropped her stance, sweeping low with her foot and positioning her arms just so. She didn’t want to say anything to screw this up, silence seemed to be the safest option.

“I see you’re as deadly as ever. I could be killed very, very slowly. Oooh... I’m scared.” Doris teased as Anna just shook her head and grinned. “Seriously, what is this, slow-mo kung fu or jujitsu or something?”

Anna let out a slow breath and spun to her right, her left foot placed carefully on the soft grass, as she shifted her weight forward and moved her arms precisely.

“Taoist tai chi.” Anna inhaled and twisted to her right, taking another slow step and swirling her arms along behind her. “Master Moy called it moving meditation. It centers me, frees my mind to think while my body moves of its own accord. You should try it; work out some of those kinks.”

"Maybe I like my kinks." Doris sassed raising an eyebrow saucily before flicking her lighter to light up a cigarette. Sinking down onto the seat of the bench, she inhaled deeply and shook her head. "Besides, there's way too much to learn. I'll just watch your smooth moves instead."

Doris exhaled a long trail of smoke and admired the trim form of her ex-lover. She knew that their time spent together between the sheets had not been one of their problems. In fact that had been one thing that had given her pause. Her mind shifted to Blake for a moment, wondering idly what it would be like with her. She blinked slowly, recognizing that a part of her was afraid that Blake would up and leave her once she'd gotten this little experiment out of her system. It had happened to her before, with devastating results.

Anna meanwhile slowed her steady movements even more as her mind raced. Was Doris actually flirting with her?

"I was cutting through the park on my way to a city council meeting and I saw you. Thought I'd stop by and say hello." Doris closed her eyes for a moment and took another drag of her smoke. It was good to see Anna again. A part of her questioned off and on whether she had been too hasty where the other woman was concerned. If she was honest, there were still some feelings lingering for Anna. Before she considered moving on, maybe they should talk about it.

Or fuck each other senseless.

Doris' eyes snapped open at that last random thought. Where had that come from? She watched as Anna bent and twisted, revealing a tantalizing glimpse of cleavage from her black tank top. Oh, that could have something to do with the suddenly randy thoughts.

"Well, I'm glad you did." Anna continued to shift and flow, trying not to get her hopes up. She concentrated on her movements instead of how she was feeling. It was safer that way.

Doris sat and puffed on her cigarette in silence. Just what the hell did the new and improved Doris Wolfe want anyway? There were days she missed the 'want-take-have and just cover your ass' mentality she had lived by for so long. To be honest, she just didn't know what she wanted anymore. Damn this whole new leaf and morals thing, it was messing with her head way too much.

Tossing her cigarette butt to the ground, Doris twisted her foot and crushed it out. Talking to Anna might be a good idea though; she knew it was high time to figure out her own feelings between her ex-lover and her potential new one in Blake. It was a good place to start anyway.

“Um...I was wondering if you would be interested in having dinner with me?” Doris finally choked out.

Anna stopped mid-movement and straightened, not quite believing her ears.

Doris cleared her throat self-consciously and looked down at the grass.

“I miss talking with you.” The redhead moistened her lower lip with her tongue. This was so damn hard. After a beat she was relieved to hear the detective’s voice.

“I miss that too, Doris.” Anna smiled. “Sure. I’d love to go out.”

Doris smiled back and nodded as she stood. This was good. They could work out some of their old issues and she could see how she felt. See where things headed. Maybe check out a basketball game or something together. The Springfield High School basketball team would be playing again soon. Even if they just ended up as friends, she could always do with more friends in her life.

“Let me make some arrangements. I’ll call you later, okay?” Doris said, feeling a lot lighter all of a sudden.

Anna gave her a lopsided grin and nodded, a little stunned at the turn of events.

“Good. Well, say, look at the time, I should probably get going. It’s hard work wasting all that taxpayer money.” Doris stood and started to back away. Turning she headed back down the pathway, towards the street. She looked back over her shoulder, with a cute little wave goodbye before turning back and striding back towards city hall.

Anna stood for a moment watching the woman go, the sway of her hips distracting her pleasantly. She shook her head and sighed.

“Okay, what the hell just happened?”

“Happy Anniversary, Lillian. A little early.” Olivia stood at the nurse’s station on B wing of Cedars Hospital. She had spent enough of her own time on the wing to be on the first name basis with most of the staff here.

“Thank you, Olivia.” Lillian flushed a little and smiled up at her. “What brings you here? Are you visiting someone?”

“Oh, I’m here to see Rick. Check out how the old ticker is doing.” Olivia glanced down at her feet. It wasn’t a lie exactly. She did have an appointment with him in about half an hour, two floors up from here. She refused to look at the pamphlets for therapists tucked haphazardly into her purse. Maybe this had been a bad idea after all, researching therapists. She could just keep going to the family sessions with Emma and Natalia. Sure, Natalia had been seeing Felicia a few times on the side as well, but the shooting had been so traumatic it made perfect sense. The nightmares would die down eventually, just like they always did before...

Lillian smiled warmly and nodded, not even blinking at the explanation. She reached out and squeezed Olivia’s arm, breaking her out of her thoughts.

“I guess it’s your anniversary, too. You and Natalia moved back in together not long before the wedding, right?”

“Yeah,” Olivia smiled, touched that Lillian even remembered. “It’ll be a year on Saturday.”

“Oh honey, that’s wonderful. Are you doing anything special?” Lillian grinned at the slightly flustered woman. Luckily, Olivia was saved by the bell, as Lillian’s pager went off. “Sorry. They need me to cover in emergency.” Lillian apologized and headed for the stairs in a rush. “Give my best to Natalia!”

“Okay, thanks!” Olivia stood and waved at the departing nurse as she disappeared into the stairwell. Shaking her head, she turned to go find the elevators herself, headed for Rick’s office and ran right into a quickly moving body.

“Oh, God! I’m sorry are you all right,” Olivia grabbed wide shoulders to catch her balance, strong arms holding her tight and looked up into familiar blue eyes and deep dimples. “Bill?”

Bill Lewis stepped back and smiled wider. Olivia looked good in a black pencil skirt and a flowing green blouse, matching the color of her eyes attractively.

“Hey there! How are you?” Bill looked up, their eyes locking. Olivia smiled and took a step back, moving out of his arms.

“I’m good. How are Lizzie and the baby? She must be due any day now.” Olivia was happy for her ex-husband. After seeing Bill with Emma and now with little Sarah, she knew he was going to be a great father.

“Actually she’s a little overdue.” Bill checked his watch suddenly realizing the time. “And she’s in seeing the doctor now. That’s where I was just headed.”

“Relax, Bill. Trust me, you’re gonna do just fine.” Olivia nodded at the somewhat frazzled father-to-be. She wondered briefly just how much sleep he was getting.

“Thanks, I should go though.” Bill smiled, flashing his dimples at her before dashing past her towards the office he was needed in. “Good to see you.”

“You too.” Olivia shook her head as he disappeared down the hall. She headed to the bank of elevators and hit the call button, thinking that despite all the pain they had gone through, things had turned out exactly as they were meant to be.

She wouldn’t want it any other way.

Natalia checked her watch and hurried into Cedars. She was sure she was going to miss Olivia’s appointment with Rick, having stopped to clean up the reservation mess this morning. Olivia was going to kill someone if she hadn’t stepped in and rearranged everything. There was nothing like a free dinner at the Chef’s table to help smooth ruffled feathers.

Taking the stairs up instead of waiting for the elevator, Natalia passed a quickly descending Lillian who waved at her while muttering something about the emergency room. Finally reaching the sixth floor where the professional offices were located, she made her way down the hallway to the third door on the left. Hurrying into the room, Natalia looked up just in time to keep from tripping over Jeffrey O’Neill’s out stretched leg.

“Jeffrey!” Natalia pulled up short as the wounded man shifted trying to protect himself. “Oh my gosh, I’m sorry.” She swallowed hard and moved carefully around him, realizing it would be rude to not sit beside him in the small waiting room.

“Hey, Natalia!” Jeffrey smiled back at her. “What brings you to Cedars? Everything okay?”

“I’m fine.” Natalia tugged off her light jacket and settled down beside him. “It’s just Olivia’s regular heart check up and I wanted to be here for her. With all the drama around the...” Natalia waved her hands vaguely, both of them knowing the topic she was trying to avoid discussing. “You know. And with Billy’s heart attack, well, I kind of insisted Olivia come in just to be sure.”

“That makes perfect sense.” Jeffrey smiled softly. It was completely understandable and touching that the little spitfire sitting beside him was still in ‘protect-her-family’ mode. “Rick’s running behind, like usual. He wanted to check my leg to see how it’s progressing.”

Natalia nodded and looked down at her hands for a moment. Despite her personal feelings of anger towards the man, she really needed to address the shooting and their roles in how it all played out. She had been talking with their family therapist about how upset she was with the man for past injuries mixing up with her gratitude over the shooting. She sighed knowing that Felicia Boudreau would be happy to hear of this progress, she was sure, but right now it was not the time and place that she really wanted to do it. God rarely presented opportunities when you wanted them though, it seemed.

"I feel I should thank you for everything you did." Natalia looked up at the man who had saved her and her family from certain tragedy. "And I do appreciate that, Jeffrey. More than you'll ever know."

"I'd be lying if I said it was just my job." Jeffrey shifted self-consciously. It had felt damn good when he had learned Winslow had been taken down with his shot. He only wished that he had finished it once and for all. Still it was a victory for the good guys, even if there was still dangling loose ends with Anna's father lingering in the background. "It was personal. I'm just glad you didn't have to deal with the consequences of the shooting."

Down at the far end of the hallway, the elevator dinged and Olivia stepped out, digging for her cell phone in her purse. Fumbling with the bag, she dropped it to the floor right outside the doorway to the waiting room. Kneeling to retrieve it, she paused as she heard her name mentioned inside by a very familiar voice.

"Olivia has been a rock, Jeffrey. I don't know what I'd do without her sometimes. We've been dealing with a lot, trying to keep our family safe, first with Jane's death and now the whole shootout thing with Edmund. I'm glad that there wasn't the additional weight of Edmund's shooting on my soul as well." Natalia said sincerely. She would have been tormented by killing Edmund, but she had no doubt that she wouldn't have done anything differently.

Olivia stood and leaned against the wall, listening to her lover speak. She knew it would have ripped Natalia apart to have had to deal with shooting a man, possibly killing him. She would always be thankful to Jeffrey for saving Natalia, in more ways than one. She moved to enter the small room but paused again as her partner went on.

"I don't want to seem ungrateful, Jeffrey," Natalia continued. "And I know you mean well, but I want you to stay away from our family and from Olivia in particular. I realize Ava is your daughter and that you have a wonderful relationship with her. And I know Olivia has somehow been able to forgive you for everything in the past, or at least look past it."

Jeffrey grew very still, not expecting this turn in the conversation. He turned to face her dark eyes, glittering now with barely controlled fury.

“But I’m not Olivia,” Natalia ground out, her voice low and intense. “I cannot get past what you did to her, how you hurt her.”

Jeffrey’s eyes widened. He flushed with embarrassment and a little anger at being called out after all this time but he wisely held his tongue and waited.

Natalia ran her hand through her long dark hair and tried to organize her thoughts, to calm the churning of her stomach. She took a deep breath, trying to release some of the anger bubbling inside.

“Listen, all I wanted to say was that I know what happened. Not the warm and fuzzy, we were just crazy kids who drank too much and things got out of hand line, okay.” Natalia leaned forward to make her point. “You hurt her, Jeffrey. You took that beautiful spirited little girl that was Olivia Spencer and you damaged her forever.”

Natalia closed her eyes, the pain and anger flowing through her. Felicia had suggested it might be something she had needed to address, to work through. Confronting Jeffrey hadn’t been quite what the doctor had meant maybe, but this was working for her. She slowly opened her eyes and pinned the man with an unyielding stare.

“And while I’ve prayed for the strength to forgive you for it,” Natalia’s eyes grew dark with the conflicted emotions playing just beneath the surface and her voice dropped to a dangerous growl. “I just can’t do it. I will never forgive you for raping Olivia, and you can be sure I will never forget it.”

Jeffrey said nothing, simply taking in everything the angry woman beside him said. He deserved every word and he knew it. Anna had warned him that it had come out when she had revealed where she knew him and Olivia from. And as hard as it was to hear the words falling from Natalia’s lips, it was almost a relief that someone was calling him on it.

Outside the doorway, Olivia swallowed down the pain and shook her head, wiping at a tear slowly trickling down her cheek. She couldn’t believe her ears. No one had ever protected her like this, fought for her like this. It was almost overwhelming really.

“I only have to look as far as your faked death to see the pain you can still inflict, all in the name of the greater good. Well, screw that. All your good intentions aside, I will protect my family from you. And that includes Ava now too, by the way. Make no mistake; Olivia will never be hurt by you again. I’ll see to it personally.” Natalia felt as if the world had suddenly righted itself again. She stared at the man a moment longer to make sure her message had sunk in. “Have I made myself clear?”

“Crystal.” Jeffrey said tersely. Not only was he tormented by destroying his marriage to Reva by his own actions, here was another friendship with a good woman effectively ruined because of his past indiscretions.

“Mr. O’Neill,” the receptionist called from her desk. “Dr. Bauer can see you now.”

Natalia watched as Jeffrey simply nodded and stood, awkwardly making his way over to the office door. Tapping lightly, the nurse opened the door for him and they entered Rick’s office.

Natalia glanced around the busy waiting room, at the surreptitious looks shot her way, wondering just who had heard what. She didn’t care though; it felt good to finally get it off her chest. She jumped a little as someone suddenly dropped down into the seat Jeffrey had just vacated.

“Oh!” Natalia blinked at a very emotional Olivia staring back at her, her green eyes filled with unshed tears. “How long have – “

Natalia lips were quickly captured, tenderly at first, once, twice and then long fingers slid into her hair as Olivia pressed against her lips, deepening the kiss. Pulling apart slowly, Natalia opened her eyes, oblivious to anyone else sitting in the busy waiting room who might be watching.

“Shh, don’t cry.” Natalia murmured softly. Reaching out, she wiped away a slowly falling tear with her thumb before gently cupping her lover’s flushed cheek. Olivia turned her head slightly, pressing a soft kiss to Natalia’s palm, their eyes locking again before she finally found her words.

“You’re still my freakin’ superhero...” Olivia offered a watery smile.

“No, baby.” Natalia whispered as they both leaned forward slightly, foreheads touching affectionately in that old familiar way. “I’m just the woman who loves you...”

ACT 3

It didn’t take long for word of mouth to start to spread the news of the new Beacon daycare facilities. The first few days of business had seemed to just fly by for all concerned, with both staff members and outside clients thrilled with the new service offered at the hotel.

Ava Peralta hesitated outside the door of the busy little area. At their morning meeting, Olivia had encouraged her to drop in and check it out, her mother apparently quite pleased with how everything was going. And to be honest she was a little curious to see how Leyla had taken the business plan they had worked on together and turned it into reality.

Still Ava was a little reluctant to go in. If she was honest with herself, it was seeing all the sturdy little children, running and playing around that was giving her pause. It was at times like that when she would realize that her son would be two if he had lived.

Running a hand through her hair, Ava paced a little in the hallway. She had struggled through the hardest part of her post partum depression in the treatment center Jeffrey had sent her to in Chicago. And moving to San Francisco had helped her heal, but she still didn't like to talk about Max, the gaping hole in her heart was sometimes too much to bear. Remy at least had Christina and little CK to fill that hole deep inside. Who did she have?

Sighing at the dark turn her thoughts had taken, Ava tugged at the door and plastered a smile on her face as the annoyingly happy tones of the chime rang out and several small children looked up from their toys. One of the part-time daycare employees grinned up at her before turning back to keep an eye on the smallest ones at her feet. Looking around the room, she found Leyla sitting behind a small desk, busily entering something into her laptop.

Ava stepped deeper into the room, her attention diverted as she noticed two young boys playing with a truck, making vroom sounds and beeping when the truck would back up. Sudden tears pricked, but she couldn't turn away from the happy laughter of the boys as they played.

Leyla looked up from her work, noticing the familiar form standing transfixed in the middle of the room. She frowned at the wistful look on Ava's face, growing concerned as she saw the other woman fighting off tears. Something seemed very wrong, but she was reluctant to say anything.

To be honest, she was never quite sure where they stood with each other these days. Sometimes she and Ava fought like cats and dogs and other times it felt like they could be good friends, given half a chance. Part of her still didn't quite trust Ava though, waiting for the other shoe to drop as it were.

"Hey there, stranger!" Leyla called out warmly in greeting, drawing Ava from the cheerful playing going on before her. Despite their rocky friendship, she was genuinely glad to see the other woman. Their relationship had been relatively friendly since Ava had taken a look over her business plan, even having suggested some good pointers before she presented

the whole thing to Olivia. She watched as the other woman carefully made her way around several discarded toys lying on the floor and came to stand beside the desk.

“Congratulations! It looks great in here.” Ava sat down on the edge of the long desk, pleased as Leyla accepted the compliment.

“Thanks, but I had a lot of help along the way from many people, including you.” Leyla grinned back. “We started off a little slow but everything seems to be falling into place.” She noticed Ava seem to drift off again, as a boy scampered past them. Leyla blinked slowly, realizing something was definitely not right, wondering if maybe she should mention something to Natalia or Olivia about it.

“That’s great.” Ava murmured distracted. A sweet child’s laugh rang out to her left, and she suddenly found it hard to breath, her chest constricting almost painfully. This was becoming too difficult for her. Ava knew she needed to head out before it all overwhelmed her. She stood suddenly. “I should go though. I just wanted to check out how nicely Mom got your new venture set up for you.

“It’s not like it was handed to me, you know.” Leyla frowned, not liking the tone of that comment. She shook her head confused. The woman ran hot and cold. What was wrong with her anyway? She watched as the willowy brunette rolled her eyes and started heading for the door.

“Right. Like this would have happened any other way.” Ava snipped at the confused woman, taking the opportunity to fall back on familiar ground, needing the anger or something to help her to escape the room as the laughter of little boys playing swirled around her.

“Hey, I worked hard to get this up and running.” Leyla grumped back. She had been worried about Ava, but if she wanted to be all prickly like this then she could give as good as she got.

“And Natalia whispering in my mother’s ear on your behalf had nothing to do with it.” Ava’s gaze narrowed, warming up to the brewing disagreement. She smiled in triumph as Leyla’s eyebrows descended and her lips formed a tight line, like she was fairly biting her tongue off. A blaze of anger sparked in Ava stomach and it was good to feel something, anything, again.

“Y’know what? Let’s just not do this, okay?” Leyla stood now too, trying hard to keep her anger under check. It was one thing to taunt her, push her buttons, but to drag Natalia into this was just not cool.

“Fine.” Ava checked her watch and headed to the door. “I should be going anyway.” A yellow Nerf ball launched from across the room and suddenly beamed her in the head, bouncing up and away from her as she passed by the group of boys playing. She stiffened as she heard Leyla stifle a laugh behind her, and tugged the door open, the chimes sounding oddly flat and annoying now.

The day was just going from bad to worse...

Anna pulled her car into the parking lot of Springfield Elementary and quickly found a spot. Stepping slowly out of her car, she slid her sunglasses down onto her nose and zipped her jacket up against the brisk fall breeze. Feeling naked without her service revolver which she had stored in the trunk for safe keeping while at the school, she sighed and locked her car with the key fob, before turning to face the two story brick building.

“Ready or not, here I come.” Anna smirked and headed in.

Once inside, she headed down the long hallway, kids scrambling all around her, on their way outside for recess if the ringing bell was any indication. Finally finding the main office, Anna pushed the door open and walked up to the counter.

“Can I help you, dear?” An older pudgy woman looked up and smiled at her before making her way out from behind her desk and to the counter.

The name on her desk plate said Mrs. Kilbride and Anna was surprised that the woman was shorter than she was. Anna removed her sunglasses and returned the warm smile.

“I’m looking for Principal Smith.” Anna asked as the other woman checked an open appointment book on the counter.

“You must be Detective Li?” Mrs. Kilbride smiled again as Anna just nodded. “Principal Smith just stepped out for a few minutes.” She mimed puffing a cigarette, and shook her head disapprovingly.

“Ah, I see. A three inch break. Not a problem, I’ll just wait until he’s back.” Anna glanced at the chairs lining one side of the office, two boys glaring at each other as they waited there. “Is there a washroom nearby?”

“Oh, sure. Head out this door and then at the end of the hallway turn left. Then right at the library, around the corner and it’s just there on your left. You can’t miss it.” The woman beamed.

“Ok,” Anna frowned, a little unsure.

“I can take you there. I’m going right past.” A young woman’s warm voice sounded behind her. Anna turned to find an attractive teacher standing there. She blinked in surprise a moment before finding her voice.

“Oh, thanks.” Anna smiled, subtly admiring the woman’s soft curves. Why didn’t she have cute teachers like this back in the day? She stretched out her hand. “Detective Anna Li, I’m the new officer for the school.”

“Calliope Jennings. Nice to meet you, Detective.” Ms. Jennings smiled warmly back, shaking the offered hand as a delicate flush colored her cheeks.

“Please, call me Anna.” She moved a little closer, charmed by the younger woman.

“Fine, only if you call me Callie then.” The teacher wrapped her arms around her textbook, hugging it close as she pushed the office door open with her hip, nodding for the detective to follow. Anna stepped out into the hallway, feeling like a fish going against the current as children flowed in and around her.

“You get used to it.” Callie laughed and tilted her head, indicating the direction to head and they waded their way down the hallway.

“What grade do you teach?” Anna asked, distracted by the gentle sway of the woman’s hips in front of her. They turned left at the junction and kept going down the next hallway.

“Grade four. I love working here and the kids are generally good, y’know?” Callie glanced back, just as Anna looked up, their eyes meeting.

“That’s nice to hear.” Anna grinned, barely noticing the library as they passed. She did notice the sudden shouting coming from the doorway to the library though.

“Oh, that’s not good...” Callie murmured and dashed towards the open doorway.

Anna followed, recognizing Olivia’s daughter and another girl in a terse argument as they got closer. Callie had suddenly turned into the big bad Ms. Jennings as she reprimanded the girls, and Anna had to stop the grin as naughty thoughts suddenly came to mind.

“Emma, Sarah, stop that this instant. You both know better than that.” Callie’s voice rose just high enough to be heard over the argument, silencing both girls immediately. Sarah tugged a book out of Emma’s hand and grinned triumphantly as Emma glared back at her. Ms. Jennings held out her hand for the book, taking it from a reluctant Sarah.

“Thank you.” Callie glanced down at the book, fully expecting to see Justin Bieber’s floppy-haired face staring back at her. “Karate for Dummies?”

“She started it.” Sarah glanced back at Emma who was now staring at her feet, before looking down at her own toes too. Anna stepped forward, taking the book from Callie’s hand. She glanced over at Emma, realizing that she had been watching her work out in the park the other day and had obviously made an impression with the girl.

“I don’t care who started it. This book is going back into the library right now and there will be no more fighting, do you understand?” Callie glanced back and forth at the two girls.

“Yes, Ms. Jennings,” they said in unison.

“Ok, let’s go.” Callie shook her head at Anna. She didn’t know what had gotten into the girls. They had been such good friends when they used to be in her class. Anna handed the book back to her and smiled.

“Would you mind if Emma showed me the way to the girl’s washroom, Cal...I mean...Ms. Jennings?” Anna tilted her head at the subdued girl. She glanced at Emma, startled at how much she reminded her of Olivia, so stubborn and determined to do things her own way. It took her back to when they had been kids on San Cristobel, a lifetime ago now. “We could talk about fighting maybe?”

Callie hesitated, but she trusted the detective knew what she was doing, so she nodded. She turned to return the book with Sarah into the library.

“It was nice to meet you.” Anna waved a little at the departing teacher. “I hope we run into each other again sometime.”

“Me, too, Detective.” Callie smiled back at her one final time before herding the other girl into the library.

Oh, yes. This assignment was definitely looking up. Anna grinned to herself before turning back to the quiet girl beside her. They stood alone together for a moment before the girl started to walk down the hallway in a huff. Anna followed closely behind.

“You aren’t gonna tell my mom, are you?” Emma finally asked.

“Nope, I don’t get enough hazard pay for that, but maybe you should. What do you think?” Anna asked as they made their way through the maze of hallways. Emma just shrugged a shoulder and sighed. Anna stifled a grin. Oh, she was going to be a handful some day. Apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, does it?

Anna assessed the situation though. Emma just needed a little focus, self-discipline and some order in her life. She almost felt sorry for Olivia and Natalia and what was going to be coming their way before too long.

“I saw you in the park the other day, doing karate or something.” Emma looked up earnestly at the other woman. She flattened her hand and did a slicing chop through the air. “It looked really cool. That’s why I wanted that book. So I could learn to do that too, but Sarah was being a copy cat and stole it from me before I could sign it out.” Emma pouted slightly as they stopped walking.

Anna looked up to find they were at the washrooms. She would be hard pressed to find her way back to the main office now. She glanced back at the girl, who seemed to be weighing something over in her mind.

“Would you teach me?” Emma blurted out, her eyes shining with curiosity and genuine interest. “I’d be good, I promise.”

“Um, well...” Anna hesitated. She wasn’t sure how Olivia or Natalia would feel about her teaching Emma any sort of martial art, even something as benign as tai chi. Still it would be a good way for the girl to settle down, learn some control and vent some of her frustration. Anna sighed. “Tell you what. I’ll ask your moms, but no promises. Okay?”

Emma’s huge smile said it all.

Anna shook her head. Apparently, she was a total sucker for both generations of Spencer women.

The afternoon sun threw long shadows across the park pathways as Jeffrey made his way to the gazebo. It was a beautiful spot to people watch, with the flower beds all around. He sank down on one of the benches and waited.

Ava’s text had said she would be able to meet with him, and he wasn’t looking forward to this conversation at all. Anna had seemed understanding the other day as he discussed his new orders from the government agency he worked for once again. She would still keep a sharp eye out here for him and keep him in the loop.

Jeffrey looked up as he saw his daughter making her way across the park lawns towards him. She was so elegant and beautiful, it made his heart ache. Natalia’s strong words the

other day had only been one more reason to leave for awhile. To let things settle down here a bit.

“Dad.” Ava smiled as she stepped up into the gazebo, kissing her father on the cheek before sliding down onto the bench beside him.

“Hey, sweetheart.” Jeffrey glanced down at their clasped hands. “Thanks for meeting me.”

“I’ve always got time for you, you know that.” Ava grinned back.

“I’ve got a few people I need to talk to.” Jeffrey looked back up and met his daughter’s eye, not wanting. “I’ve decided that I’m going to leave town for awhile.”

Ava frowned at her father.

“But you’ve only been back a few months. What about your family?”

“I promise that you, and Colin, will know where I am,” Jeffrey said, cutting her off. “You will always know where to find me sweetheart.” He said a little softer, his eyes gentling. “It’s too hard, Ava. It breaks my heart to watch Reva build a life with Josh, seeing my son being raised by another man. I just need to get my head back together, and then I’ll come back.”

Ava nodded. She could understand that. She turned and wrapped her arms around her father, not happy with the situation at all, but resigned to accept it.

“And Natalia has made it clear that she doesn’t want me near Olivia.” Jeffrey pulled away slightly, but kept an arm around his daughter’s shoulder as she continued. Natalia’s words still stung, even though he knew why she felt the need to talk to him about it. Who could blame her? She was only drawing the line in the sand and telling him not to cross it. A part of him respected her immensely for having the balls to do it too. Jeffrey could see what Olivia saw in the little spitfire. He glanced up to see Ava’s eyebrows descend.

“What did she say to you, Dad?” Ava asked quietly, her anger barely controlled. That interfering woman continued to wrap everyone around her little finger, manipulating her mother to do just about anything. It just wasn’t right.

“It was nothing that I didn’t deserve, okay. So stand down.” Jeffrey smiled sadly at his daughter, softly cupping her cheek. “It’s for the best right now that I go, but I need you to be strong and to keep an eye on our little family for me. Check in with your brother, Colin, too and make sure he doesn’t forget me.”

Ava glanced down at her feet, but nodded. It felt like everyone she loved was leaving her or was being taken from her grasp and she didn't like it. She felt herself pulled into a hug, snuggling into her father's strong arms.

"I love you, baby." Jeffrey murmured into his daughter's dark hair. "Promise me you'll try to stay safe."

Ava just nodded against his shoulder, breathing in the familiar scent of his cologne and memorizing the sound of his voice, before he disappeared from her life once again.

Olivia sat behind her desk at the Beacon, pouring over the month end projections. Even with the added expenditure of the new daycare facilities, September was shaping up to be quite the profitable month. There had been some concern that Edmund's shooting rampage would scare away tourists and visitors to the area. Apparently, having a local lunatic shoot up the town and have it plastered all over the television news good for business. Who knew?

She looked up as her office door quietly opened to find Natalia standing there. It was so incredibly good to have her lover back at work, even on a part-time basis. Something in the way the woman looked at her just seemed to calm her down. Olivia was sure the staff was thrilled, too, if the happy faces around the hallways and staff meetings were any indication.

"Hey there, gorgeous. Got a minute?" Natalia asked, smiling from the doorway.

"For you, I've got a lifetime." Olivia tossed down her pen and grinned, putting her hands behind her head and leaning back into her leather chair and spinning slightly from side-to-side. "Too sappy?"

"Oh, not at all. Sappy definitely works." Natalia grinned wider and came into the office, watching as Olivia stared at her, seemingly distracted by the sway of her hips as she walked closer. Shaking herself a little to draw attention from the lure of her lover, Natalia willed herself to switch back into business mode as she glanced down at her BlackBerry, checking her schedule for the upcoming week.

"Oh, I've asked Keira to pencil in a meeting next with Greg. He has a proposal for us to look at. Apparently it has something to do with a Halloween extravaganza in support of a local community resource center." Natalia scrolled down looking at the email she'd gotten from him already about it.

“Well, of course it would be an extravaganza if Greg is involved,” Olivia teased, as she came out from behind her desk to see what Natalia’s email from the man said. She leaned over her lover’s shoulder, nuzzling along her cheek as she read over some of the preliminary details. “Hmm, it’s for the local LGBT community.”

“We should really support that, don’t you think?” Natalia asked breathlessly, as her lover’s hands started to wander over her body.

“Definitely.” Olivia said as she nipped at a tender earlobe, then dropping a soft kiss to Natalia’s cheek. Hearing a knock at the door and a discreet cough, Olivia moved slightly as Keira popped her head inside the office.

“Ms Spencer, there’s a Detective Li here to see you, if you’re available?”

“Please, send Anna in.” Olivia and Natalia exchanged worried glances as they waited. Surely they would have heard if there was news about Edmund or any of his fanatical followers or goons.

Anna soon entered the office, smiling warmly as Keira ushered her in and shut the door behind her. She quickly turned her attention to the concerned women in the room.

“Thank you for seeing me on such short notice,” Anna started as they all sat down.

“Is it Edmund?” Natalia asked anxiously. She may not have shot the man but a part of her, deep down was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with how much she actually wanted to. It was something she definitely needed to explore with Felicia.

Anna’s eyes widened and she realized that, of course, the two women would automatically think this had something to do with that crazy bastard.

“No, no. Nothing to do with that at all. Sorry I should have been clearer when I spoke to your assistant about why I was here to see you.” Anna tried to reassure them; however, they only looked more confused. “There has been no change with the Winslow case. This visit actually has to do with your daughter.”

“What did Ava do?” Olivia asked, immediately jumping to conclusions. She knew her daughter had been moody lately but to do something that attracted the attention of the police was not good at all.

“Whoa, I’m not here about Ava. It’s Emma.” Anna smiled as she tried to explain. “She saw me doing tai chi in the park the other day and now she’s asked me to show her how to do some martial arts. I told her that I’d ask the two of you about it first and then we’d see.”

Natalia and Olivia's eyes narrowed and then they looked at each other. It would almost be funny if Anna wasn't the one who was on the hot seat with the two of them.

"Martial arts?" Olivia asked. "She's still just a baby." She looked up at Natalia as her lover took her hand and squeezed sympathetically.

"Well, actually, Felicia had said that Emma might benefit from some form of regular physical program." Natalia said softly.

"Ok, joining the volleyball team at school is a little different than learning how to fling some guy over your shoulder and slam him into the ground." Olivia's eyes turned a darker shade of green, anger starting to take hold as she stood to start pacing. "She's only a little girl."

Anna sighed and tried again. She knew this wasn't going to be easy. Damn that cute kid.

"It's not like that. I just want to show her the basic moves for Taoist Tai Chi. It's a gentle form of movement, with a certain set pattern of moves that are repeated in various forms. Seniors all over the place do this for exercise. It's very good for your health and flexibility."

"Ok, so let her take up ballet or gymnastics." Olivia waved her arms, starting to get upset. Natalia stood and made her way over to her lover. Olivia shook her head as her lover approached. "I don't need her learning how to hurt people, Natalia."

"Querida, listen. I more than anyone know that hurting someone else is not the answer. If I had actually shot and killed Edmund, I would have struggled with that for the rest of my life. But if I had never done anything to protect myself and my family, and something horrible had happened, I don't think I could ever live with that." Natalia glanced down, their fingers tangling together, both of them needing the connection with the other. "Emma needs structure in her life, to feel like she's in some kind of control. I think the self-discipline of a martial art would be perfect, build her confidence."

Olivia sighed and shook her head. Natalia smiled softly knowing the battle was almost done.

"And she asked me to teach her." Anna added from her chair. "Emma is a bright girl, but she's struggling. She can see her boundaries and know she's starting to push at them. Pushing you, testing you, too, I bet. This would be a good way for her work through stuff."

Olivia turned to Natalia realizing what they were saying was the truth, but she didn't want her baby to grow up too fast. Olivia had suffered consequences that she was still dealing with now because she had rushed to grow up. But then, if she had the opportunity to learn

discipline and honor instead of trying to find meaning in the next party or next cute guy things might have ended up differently.

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Olivia sighed again. Natalia wrapped her arms around her lover from behind, recognizing that she had given in to the idea. Kissing her partner's neck tenderly, she held tight for a moment and they both looked back to the waiting detective.

"Ok, Anna. When did you want to start working with Emma?" Olivia finally said.

Anna blinked a moment and grinned. This looked like the beginning of a beautiful new friendship with her and the Spencer-Rivera household.

By the time five o'clock rolled around Olivia was ready for a cocktail, or ten. After a quick call to Natalia to remind her partner that she was meeting up with Doris after work and to see if there was anything she needed to pick up, making the necessary stop at the Mini Mart for some extra diapers and fighting idiot drivers on the congested streets of Springfield, she was more than ready to try to relax. She didn't even have a chance to knock on the Mayor's front door as it suddenly swung open, the redhead greeting her with martini in hand.

"You look like you could use this Spencer." Doris grinned and handed it over, ushering the tired looking woman into her home.

"You have no idea." Olivia chuckled and took a sip of the expertly mixed drink before coming in to settle on the couch in the living room. Apparently Doris had picked up a few things from dating a bartender. A plate of cheese, crackers and fruit sat on the low coffee table and she started to feel herself relax as she popped a strawberry into her mouth.

Olivia looked up as Doris came into the living room and dropped down into the easy chair beside the couch. She was casually dressed in jeans and a white cotton shirt, with a hunter green t-shirt peeking out underneath. Olivia thought she looked good like this, comfortable and at ease, instead of constantly running around and stressed with her job. Politics was not for the timid that was for sure, but with all the extra drama lately it was starting to take a bit of a toll on Doris. She was glad the woman had decided to switch back into private practice once her term was up. Even just getting the new firm set up had seemed to breathe new life into her friend and for that Olivia was glad.

"I was over at the new offices today, getting things unpacked," Doris sighed and leaned back taking a sip of her own red wine. "Even though I'm not really doing anything until my term is up, I still want to be involved in the set up and organization."

"I drove past the other day, the place looks fantastic from the front," Olivia said, spreading a little brie on a cracker and biting into it.

"Thanks. I love the old Victorians myself. And Phillip is giving us a good deal on the rent too." Doris grinned. "I knew Beth was going to be an asset."

Olivia chuckled and the conversation quickly turned to the mundane things of life, troubles at work and funny things the kids had done. By the time Doris stood to refill their drinks, Olivia was fending off questions about what she was going to do for their big one year anniversary.

"Come on, spill it. Moving in with 'the love of your life' was a big deal," Doris paused in her mixing to make little air quotes. She couldn't resist the teasing. Olivia and Natalia were disgustingly cute together, almost annoyingly so, but she couldn't begrudge them their happiness. Doris leaned to the left as a balled up napkin just missed hitting her on the head. "You must have something planned."

"Nothing I'm going to share with you." Olivia chuckled, holding firm. She grew thoughtful for a moment though. "You know, I think we will probably always celebrate that day. It really was the start of our lives together. Even after we get married, it will always hold a special place in my heart."

"So... hot, sweaty, monkey sex is what you're saying then? Gotcha." Doris smirked as she tossed some extra olives into the martini glass, pleased as Olivia broke out laughing. She carefully made her way back to the couch, handing the martini over before sinking down onto the couch beside her friend.

"You know I don't kiss and tell." Olivia said, biting into one of the olives she had snagged from her drink.

"I've noticed, and it's most annoying." Doris said, cutting her off. She took a sip of her wine and glanced over at the other woman, deciding now was as good a time as any to broach the topic that had been nagging at her all day. "Listen, I was thinking..."

"Well, there was your first mistake, Wolfe." Olivia teased, pleased with the roll of eyes her comment caused.

“Remember we were talking about nightmares and stuff lately, right? Are you still having them?” Doris asked, cutting to the chase. Olivia’s sudden inhalation and stiffening of shoulders was all the answer she really needed.

“I thought as much.” Doris said softly and started to dig into the back pocket of her jeans, pulling out a battered business card. “I found this when I was going through some of my things today. I know you’re seeing Felicia Boudreau with the family, but sometimes it’s easier talking to someone you don’t know. To someone who understands what it’s like to be on the gay side of things herself. So here.”

Doris handed the card to Olivia, who hesitated slightly before taking it. Doris smiled, pleased that she had gotten that far with the stubborn woman. She leaned forward to slice off some cheese for herself.

“Dr. Tremain is someone I met in Chicago a few years ago. Brooke is...” Doris couldn’t really find the right words, her hands waving the knife in front of her as she struggled. “Well, she’s pretty great actually. She really helped me figure some stuff out, is very easy to talk to and she is definitely gay friendly,” Doris smiled slyly, flashing back to very pleasant memories. “Not that you’ll be dabbling, but she’s pretty hot in the sack too.” Doris waggled her eyebrows at Olivia before grinning and taking another sip of her wine.

“Okay, too much info.” Olivia grimaced. She bit her lower lip in thought a moment though. It was sweet of Doris, who was simply trying to be a good friend.

To be honest, Olivia had always thought whining to some shrink about your problems was for weak people, and she was always more than capable of handling her own affairs. However, after seeing Felicia with the family, and all the drama that had swirled around her over the years, she was starting to see how it could help.

The night terrors and issues surrounding her rape had never really been dealt with, the damage that followed in its wake haunting her to this day. Her mother’s sudden death, coming to grips with being a lesbian, the urges to kill Frank Cooper on a regular basis, dealing with Emma’s new anger problems, they were all weighing on her mind. In fact, Olivia hadn’t even mentioned to Felicia how useless and devastated she had felt when Natalia jumped into harm’s way with Edmund; it was all becoming too much for her to handle. And alcohol was definitely not the answer. She smiled wryly, taking another sip of her martini.

Still, would it really help her? That was the million dollar question.

“Thanks, Doris.” Olivia said as she tucked the card into her purse at her feet. “I’ll think about it, okay?”

“That’s all I ask.” Doris watched her friend over the rim of her wine glass and smiled, please she could possibly help her out. She knew first hand how hard it was dealing with some of life’s curveballs. Speaking of life’s curveballs, she had one of her own to worry about. “So, enough about you, Spencer. Guess who’s got a date tomorrow night!”

“Really?” Olivia perked up at the sudden change of topic. She swirled her martini in the glass before snagging another olive and popping it into her mouth. “Anyone I know?”

“Yes, actually,” Doris fidgeted for a moment. “I saw Anna in the park the other day, so I asked her on a date.”

Olivia nearly choked on her olive.

“You what?” She finally sputtered.

“I thought you might have a point, about everyone needing a second chance.” Doris grinned back.

“Since when do you listen to me?” Olivia asked. “And what about Blake?”

“Well...” Doris looked away. She didn’t want to get hurt anymore than she wanted to hurt Blake. “She’s a friend. A good friend and I don’t really want to screw that up.”

Olivia sighed. She could understand that, it was part of the reason she had been worried about starting things with Natalia.

“Well, I may not have a lot of experience with dating women, but I do know both Anna and Blake are good women and the neither of them deserve to be toyed with. You need to figure out what you want.” Olivia warned. Gay or straight, it wasn’t right to lead anyone on while you dallied with another. That road just leads to unnecessary drama and pain.

“I know, I know,” Doris leaned back and sighed. “Why is this so damn hard?”

“Because nothing good in life is ever easy, my friend.” Olivia sipped her drink, feeling the truth of her own words. Her own ups and downs with Natalia had proved that. She glanced over at the other woman, and reached out, squeezing her arm in concern. “Just think about what you’re doing, okay? Not that you heard it from me, but I don’t want you hurt either.”

“Thanks.” Doris smiled, touched by the gesture. She cleared her throat, the emotions their talk had stirred up surprising her a little. “So you thought you could squeak out of giving me details on what you’re gonna do for your anniversary. Think again my friend...”

Olivia just shook her head, accepting the topic change and took another drink of her martini.

It had been a long week of moving and getting things situated so by the time Friday afternoon rolled around, everyone at Wolfe, Boudreau and Spaulding was looking forward to the weekend. Mel and Doris headed into the kitchen to grab another cup of coffee before hitting the storage boxes in their offices upstairs again. Beth paused a moment as she noticed movement outside.

“We can walk up the wheelchair access ramp if you like, sweetie.” Bill Lewis cringed as he realized that was probably not the right thing to say to his very pregnant wife. The warm sun shining overhead was no match for the cold stare suddenly leveled at him.

“The stairs are fine.” Lizzie growled and started up the first step. Bill took her arm for support as they slowly made their way up onto the porch surrounding the new law firm offices. They both looked up as the front door opened and Beth stepped out, obviously thrilled to see them.

“As stubborn as your father, I see.” Beth teased, as she wrapped her arms around her daughter and gave her a hug. “I thought you were supposed to be taking it easy at home?”

“I know, but I wanted to see your new office, Mom.” Lizzie squeezed back. “Besides I’d get nothing done if I sat around just waiting for this baby to come.” She shifted back to Bill’s side, rubbing her large belly softly. She was more than ready to give birth, but the baby had its own schedule apparently. They followed Beth back into the house, nodding to the receptionist as they made their way into the waiting lounge.

“We saw the doctor on Monday, and he said they will induce labor next week if nothing happens soon.” Bill helped Lizzie down onto one of the leather club chairs. They both looked up as Doris and Mel came out from the staff kitchen, steaming mugs in hand.

“Hi there!” Mel came over smiling at the new arrivals, Doris following not far behind.

“The offices look great; I love the renovations you had done.” Bill said hugging Mel warmly and nodding at Doris. “The location is good too.”

“I know, we’ve had several people just drop by who live in the neighborhood, saw our sign and—” Mel stopped suddenly as a loud moan was suddenly heard.

“Oh, God!” Lizzie groaned again, suddenly feeling an intense wave of pain rush through her body. Everyone froze and all eyes turned to her panicked looking face. She smiled and tried to breathe through the pain. “Be careful what you wish for, huh?”

“Call 911, Jenny.” Beth called out to the receptionist as she knelt down to take her daughter’s hand.

“Already on it, Mrs. Spaulding.” Jenny turned her attention to the phone and started giving details to the person on the other end of the line.

“Here we go, honey.” Bill knelt down on the other side of Lizzie and took her hand. “I’m right here, by your side all the way.” He smiled at her and then started to grimace as another contraction hit and his hand was just about squeezed off.

“That’s it, just try to breath.” Beth tried to soothe, worried for her daughter but knowing this was how this worked. She watched as Lizzie’s eyes bulged and then glanced down, where a wet stain was suddenly growing on her maternity pants.

“Jenny, tell them her water’s just broken.” Mel called out to the woman who was still on the phone with the 911 operator.

“Will do.” Jenny said, relaying the message quickly to the operator.

“Thank God it’s one of the leather chairs,” Doris mumbled, looking unrepentant as Mel glared at her. “What?”

“Ambulance is on its way.” Jenny said from her desk, and in the distance they could just hear a siren approaching.

“Hang on, baby.” Lizzie whispered, rubbing her belly.

“We better start calling the family, let them know the newest little Lewis Spaulding is on the way.” Beth beamed at her daughter. “I’ll talk to your father and we’ll meet you and Bill at Cedars. Just keep breathing, honey.”

Suddenly the ambulance was there, with Jenny waving the two paramedics into the building, wheeling in a gurney with them.

“Your ride’s here,” Bill kissed Lizzie’s head as one of the ambulance attendants came to help her up and over to the bed. They were quickly whisked out of the house, Beth grinning as she grabbed her purse and followed her daughter and son-in-law out.

"I'll let you know how it goes." Beth waved and was gone. Silence suddenly descended on the women standing there, the excitement all over.

"Wolfe, Boudreau and Spaulding, tending to all your family needs since 2010. We get them coming and going, apparently." Doris said, as Mel smiled and shook her head and Jenny started chuckling away at her desk. "Come on, girls. We have to think about advertising for the firm y'know."

The mayor suddenly grew serious as another thought occurred to her.

"Do we need to check our insurance policy for this?"

Eleni dashed up the short walkway to Frank's apartment building. She had seen him earlier in the morning to confirm that the evening was still a go. She had even gone shopping for several essential items for making her famous *moussaka*. It had been one of Frank's favorites when they had been together and seemed like it had been forever since Eleni had made it.

There were days like today when Eleni missed her catering business, the planning of the meals, choosing the fresh ingredients, preparing it all to perfection. What she didn't miss was the bitchy clients and the sporadic work. And when she had finally sat down and thought about what else she could do with her life, Eleni's mind had almost immediately turned to Frank and how satisfying his job was for him. Helping people was always a good thing. She liked the routine of her job, the attention to details, following a set procedure for testing things, but it was still the fact that she was helping people, speaking for the victims or the dead in some cases, that she treasured the most. And she really had Frank to thank for it all, indirectly.

That thought brought a big smile to her face, as Eleni arrived at the door and hit the buzzer, patiently waiting with groceries in hand. She heard footsteps and then the door opened, with Frank standing there with his adorable little daughter, sleepy and sucking on her thumb.

"Hey, you made good time." Frank leaned forward and kissed his ex-wife on the cheek. Francesca reached out and tugged on her curly hair before she was able to pull away. Frank chuckled and took his daughter's hand, blowing kisses on the palm before heading turning back inside. "Come on in. Henry is down for a little nap and I'm hoping to get Francesca to join him soon."

Eleni sighed softly, easily flashing back to how good a father Frank had been with Marina, tucking her in as they read stories to her. She smiled wistfully to herself before following him inside, quietly closing the door behind them. It was going to be like old times tonight.

Surprisingly, after all this time, that was actually just fine by her.

Doris knew Friday nights downtown on Main Street were always busy with so many good places to eat and hang out. The Rivoli had come highly recommended by Natalia, even though the savvy brunette had managed to lure one of their chefs to work at the Beacon. The Italian restaurant was small and intimate, and if the amount of couples dining together were any indication, it was a popular Friday night date destination.

Nervously the Mayor fiddled with the cutlery on the table, wondering if she had time for a quick cigarette. No such luck, as she looked up to see Anna entering the busy restaurant before pausing by the front desk. The friendly hostess smiled warmly before escorting her into the dim dining room. Doris let out a long breath, trying to relax a little.

“Your table is right this way, Ms. Li.” The woman paused at a table by the window. Anna raised an eyebrow as Doris Wolfe smiled and stood.

“Anna,” Doris leaned forward and placed a chaste kiss to the petite woman’s cheek, hesitating just a moment longer than was necessary. She always liked Anna’s perfume; one of her favorite memories was of waking up to the scent on her pillowcases. Doris shook her head to come back to the here and now, and sat back down.

“A window seat?” Anna asked before slipping into her chair. Doris had always been so concerned about who saw them out together. It had taken her weeks to talk her out of wearing that silly hat of hers. Apparently times had changed for the Mayor. “That’s new.”

Doris took a sip of her ice water and smiled over the rim at her date.

“I’m just full of surprises, my dear.”

It was quiet at Company for a change, as Natalia dashed in to order some take out. Buzz burgers and a movie with the girls snuggled on the couch sounded like heaven. Francesca had been moody all afternoon, and it never failed to irk her that the minute the girl saw her father she would be as good as gold. Olivia thought he must slip something into her food, and Natalia was starting to believe it too.

Natalia sank down onto one of the stools by the counter, smiling as she saw Blake pop out from the kitchen.

“Hey, you’re working late today.” Natalia said taking note of Blake scowl. She immediately sensed that something was up with the other woman. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Blake grumbled, wiping at the fastidiously clean wood countertop with a damp cloth. She glanced up as a customer waved at her for some help. “Damn needy customers.” She mumbled under her breath.

Natalia bit her lower lip. The redhead was going to rub the varnish completely off at this rate, whatever was bothering her was definitely not nothing. Sighing she pulled out her BlackBerry, found Olivia’s cell number and started typing a text message as Blake went to refill the man’s coffee cup.

There’s leftover tuna casserole in fridge. Start the movie without me. Blake needs some TLC and a friendly ear. Love you xoxo. - NRivera 6:23pm

Hitting send, Natalia slid the phone back into her purse and smiled up at her disheartened friend.

“Listen, something came up and my plans unexpectedly changed. Did you want to grab a bite with me and we can catch up?” Natalia smiled, the look on Blake’s face making up for missing a little snuggle time on the couch.

“You know what? I’d really like that.” Blake said, tossing her cloth into the bar sink and headed towards the kitchen. “Let me just tell Buzz I’m done for the day and I’ll put in an order for some food.”

“It’s a date.” Natalia pulled her jacket off and headed for the corner booth. She could just make out Blake grumbling softly to herself as she went.

“At least somebody wants to date me...”

Eleni had never really heard the whole sordid affair of how Frank and Natalia’s relationship had ended. She had always just assumed that things hadn’t worked out between the two, Natalia’s confusion about her own sexuality probably having a lot to do with that, and that they had just decided to part ways and raise Francesca separately.

Eleni was a little shocked to find out just how strange a situation it had actually been. She had forgotten what life was like in sleepy little Springfield.

“So, let me get this straight. No pun intended.” She smirked at Frank who merely grimaced back as he chopped green peppers beside her. “Olivia coached you on how to woo Natalia?”

“Yeah. It was working too.” Frank admitted sheepishly.

“Really? Huh.” Eleni blinked as she tried to process the latest twist in the tale. “And you didn’t think that was a little...weird?”

Frank smiled weakly and shrugged.

“There you are.” Phillip made his way down the long hallway, finding Beth on the third floor of Cedars Hospital, in the maternity wing. “How are they?”

“Oh Phillip, everything is fine. The baby is beautiful, so perfect.” Beth gushed, as she pulled her husband closer for a hug. “We’re grandparents. Again.”

“You’re too beautiful to be a grandmother.” Phillip kissed her softly as she just smiled up at him.

“Jeezuz, do we need to get a hose on you two or what?” Billy Lewis’ familiar drawl pulled them out of their kiss. The big man looked good, considering his recent heart attack as he and his wife made their way towards the room from the bank of elevators.

“Shut it, Billy.” Vanessa whacked him on the arm as they approached. Her cell phone chimed and she quickly pulled it out to power down. She paused as she recognized the overseas phone number. Quickly she opened the message.

The eagle has landed.

Vanessa smiled, joy flaring in her chest. All her babies would soon be together. Glancing at Beth and realizing they really needed to have a talk soon, but that could wait for now. She had a grandson that she wanted to meet. Vanessa powered down her phone and slid it into her purse and came up beside Billy.

“Can we go in yet?” She asked excitedly.

Beth nodded and pushed open the door to the private room. Everyone quietly entered, to find Bill and Lizzie sitting there, exhausted but thrilled at the arrival of their son.

Vanessa made her way to give Bill a big hug and kiss as Phillip and Billy shuffled closer to Lizzie and the baby.

Lizzie looked up at all of her family surrounding her, and reached out to grab Bill's hand. She glanced down at one of the most gorgeous men she'd ever seen, her own son.

"Say hello to Alan William Lewis."

The little bundle in her arms barely moved, tiny fingers curled into the soft material.

"That's a big name to live up to little man." Billy said, reaching out to pull the blanket down a little. The baby scrunched his face and yawned at his grandfather. Billy chuckled, delighted. The kid already had the old Lewis charm.

Phillip moved down to slip an arm around Beth, as they both watched Lizzie and Billy play with the baby. Beth snuggled closer, squeezing him tight as she noticed tears starting to well in his eyes.

"Alan's here in spirit." She whispered to him. "I know it."

Phillip just nodded, wiping at his eyes, missing his father more than he thought possible at that moment. He kissed Beth's hair and sighed, so glad he was alive to see this day.

Lizzie handed the baby to Bill, the child looking even smaller in his father's arms. Bill turned to his mother, smiling as tears sprang to her eyes.

"The next generation of Lewis men," Vanessa whispered to her son, before taking the baby into her arms. "Springfield will never be the same."

"And then Clarissa put this great spin on the ball and it curved perfectly. The kid has a great arm, I just need to work with her a bit more. It's so cute." Doris smiled softly, before glancing out the window watching a young family wander by, two little children arguing with each other as they passed. "You know, Blake does such a good job with that little girl all by herself..."

The brunette just nodded, and spun the ice around in her rum and coke. Anna felt like a third wheel on her own date. Things had definitely changed with Doris; she was much

calmer, content even, which was wonderful for the woman. Unfortunately, Anna knew that she was not the one responsible for it.

Anna smiled sadly, the truth sinking in that this was not going to work between them anymore. She surreptitiously checked her watch before looking for their server, hoping their meal would arrive soon.

"I know we're just friends, but I had hoped..." Blake sighed, dipping a fry into a blob of ketchup on her plate.

"Maybe you should just give her a little time to figure out what she wants." Natalia tried, cringing at how lame that sounded even as Blake rolled her eyes in response.

"I'm not getting any younger, you know." Blake complained. She glanced down at her coffee cup and sighed, finally saying what was really at the heart of this all. "I just want something close to what I had with Ross, to what you have with Olivia. And Doris really makes me happy and sometimes I can see a glimmer of what could be. I guess I just want the chance to see if it could work between us. Is that so much to ask?"

"Oh, honey." Natalia reached out to squeeze her friend's hand, Blake's sad eyes pulling at her heart strings. "That's not too much to ask for at all."

"Natalia took how long to say yes?" Eleni frowned as the oven dinged from the kitchen. Putting her glass of wine down on the end table, she stood to go find the oven mitts and pull out the moussaka. "Didn't that raise any warning bells?"

"Well..." Frank looked a little uncomfortable. "I thought it had to do with Gus."

Eleni nodded, she could see how that could explain it, if you were looking for a way to deny what was really going on right in front of your nose. Poor, sweet Frank. He really was clueless sometimes.

Lovable, but clueless...

"Get your head in the game, Wolfe." Doris stood in the small bathroom at the restaurant washing her hands, staring at herself in the mirror. Talking non-stop about Blake was not

helpful; no wonder Anna looked bored out of her mind. Meanwhile, there was her naughty side that wanted to come out to play, to torment the petite woman by slowly taking the good detective's clothes off her sexy little body.

A lecherous grin spread across her reflections' face as Doris met her own stare. Jesus, how long has it been anyway?

Doris almost didn't notice the door open, but she saw in the mirror as Anna stepped cautiously into the room. Their eyes met in the reflection and held, the old familiar chemistry sparkling between them...

"How can I possibly compete with that?" Blake whined. "Have you seen the Detective in her leather jacket, looking all tough and growly? Hell, even Reva Shayne would want to sleep with her."

Natalia smiled a moment at the mental image. Anna Li was pretty hot, with her dark sunglasses and those well fitting jeans she had on the other day...

"Natalia?" Blake waved her hand in front of her eyes, snapping Natalia back to the here and now.

"Sorry," Natalia paused a moment longer with the picture in her mind and then wiped her grin off her face. "You have a lot to offer too though Blake. You're an attractive, smart, funny woman."

"Doris just doesn't want me." Blake sighed.

Natalia didn't have an answer for that one. So she did the only thing she could think of, she pulled out the big guns.

"I think we need something chocolate right about now..."

"And it took Natalia how long to realize she was pregnant?" Eleni bit into the moussaka pleased with the texture and taste. It was perfect. Henry even seemed to like his bite-sized pieces. She leaned over and helped him with his spoon.

“Well, you know, I didn’t really ask too many questions.” Frank tried to squirm out of it a little, getting a little flustered with the topic. “I’m never very good with the monthly feminine problem.”

Eleni closed her eyes, shaking her head and trying hard not to laugh. “Oh, Frank...”

Doris turned slowly, taking the few steps to bring her face-to-face with her ex-lover. Her hands somehow found their way to Anna’s shoulders, curving and molding to them as she gently pushed the petite woman against the bathroom door.

They stared at each other a moment longer letting the tension build. This had always worked between them. The sweet seductive pull of attraction pulsed between them as the heat rose, both women needing a release, somewhere, somehow.

Doris moved again, shifting her weight and sliding her thigh between Anna’s legs, pressing tight against her center. She felt Anna tremor against her and leaned closer, full lips waiting to be claimed.

Trapped between the door and Doris’s curves, Anna couldn’t have been more confused, or happier. Maybe all was not lost after all.

“Doris,” Anna moaned softly, letting herself go finally, her hands running up Doris’ back, her hot breath tickling the redhead’s ear as she rolled her hips.

Doris suddenly stopped. This wasn’t what she wanted. She didn’t want a grope in the bathroom, a quick roll in the hay to satisfy that old familiar itch. Fun sure, but not what she really wanted anymore.

“I can’t do this.” Doris murmured sadly. Her eyes met the dark eyes before hers and she slowly leaned in for a chaste kiss before stepping back. “I’m so sorry.”

Anna sighed and watched as the bathroom door quietly closed behind her ex, as Doris made a hasty exit. She let a long slow breath out and raked a hand through her long dark hair.

“I’m getting too old for this shit.”

"I'm getting too old for this shit." Blake sighed and looked down at her hands, fidgeting slightly with her napkin, the decadent chocolate cake long gone from her plate.

"Stop it, you are not. It will happen for you, I have faith." Natalia said finishing up her coffee. "Whether it's Doris or someone else, you will find that someone special when the time is right."

"Do you think?" Blake said hopefully.

"I know." Natalia smiled and stretched out to squeeze Blake's hand.

Eleni poured herself a glass of merlot and sank down on the couch beside Frank, both kids passed out in the nursery. It had been a good meal and good company. She had missed her easy friendship with Frank, and working with him now was good for them. It felt like they were rebuilding something important.

This mess with Natalia had really put him through the wringer though. She couldn't believe the mayor had even been involved.

"Doris Wolfe really told you to man up?" She took a long drink as Frank sighed, sadly nodding his head.

Whatever happened to the strong dynamic man she married. Eleni knew he was still there hidden inside this floppy haired man. Maybe he just needed a little help remembering who that man was.

And maybe she was just the woman to do it.

"Brrr!! A girl could freeze her botox off out here." Blake grumbled, wrapping her jacket tighter to her throat to keep the chill out as the two women stepped out of Company together. Fall was definitely here, with winter nipping at its heels.

"Don't ever change, Blake." Natalia snorted and hugged the redhead

Blake hugged her back, holding on a little tighter.

"Thanks for ditching your girlfriend for me tonight." Blake chuckled as Natalia's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Yes, you're busted, but thanks for being a good friend."

“Anytime.” Natalia smiled softly.

From across the street, Doris stood silently in the shadows, watching the cheery display. Blake and Natalia wandered along, laughing and then hugging again before each hopped into their respective cars. As the cars pulled off Doris turned away, continuing to walk down the quiet street.

She had a lot to think about...

The time had come and Jeffrey knew it. He stood on the doorstep of Cross Creek, his hand raised ready to knock as the door opened unexpectedly. Reva Shayne stood there with her car keys in hand, obviously on her way out.

“Jeffrey,” Reva exhaled his name, confused and startled to see him. “What are you doing here so late?”

“I’m sorry, Reva, I should have called first, I guess.” Jeffrey looked down at his boots and shuffled a bit. There was no good way to do this as he glanced back up at her, gathering his thoughts. “I just wanted to come see Colin and talk to you for a moment. I figure you should hear this from me.”

“Well, Jonathan is inside with Sarah watching Colin and I was just going to go to Cedars to meet up with Josh. Lizzie and Bill had their baby, a perfect little boy.” Reva smiled happily, flashing back to the birth of her own child not all that long ago. “What’s going on?”

Jeffrey nodded. Jonathan already knew of his plans, but had asked him not to say anything. The young man wasn’t happy about it any more than Ava had been, but he understood.

“I’m leaving Springfield, Reva.”

Reva frowned, not expecting her ex-husband to so abruptly leave town. However, she didn’t think he would have ever abandoned her and their family before either.

“When?” She asked finally. “Why?”

“Tomorrow morning, I catch my flight. I’m headed to D.C.” Jeffrey looked down and shifted his weight to his other foot. “The agency has a new assignment for me. I’ll be desk bound for awhile until my leg is healed completely, profiling various serial killers. With all my experience with Edmund, they want to pick my brain, I guess.”

An awkward silence fell. Slowly Reva nodded, accepting the man's answer at face value, but secretly suspecting there was more to it.

"Go see your son," She finally spoke. "We'll be here waiting for you, when you can finally come home." She could just make out Jeffrey's eyes starting to well with tears, as Reva pulled him close for a hug.

"Be safe." Reva whispered into his shoulder.

"You too," Jeffrey murmured into her hair, soaking up the warmth and vitality of the woman he still loved. Reva pulled away and headed for her car. And all Jeffrey could do was stand there and watch her go.

"Good bye," Jeffrey murmured sadly into the night, before stepping into the small house he used to call home and closing the door behind him.

ACT 4

Saturday morning arrived bright and early, with Olivia detouring to drop Emma at the park for her first tai chi lesson, and letting Leyla out at the Beacon before heading to the downtown core. A few streets west of Main Street was an area that was lovingly referred to by many as 'the Village'. It was the gay area of town, such as it was which wasn't really very much.

There were a few restaurants, a dance bar, several coffee shops and new little community center. After all this was Springfield not New York. Olivia had sheepishly admitted to Doris that she had no idea that there was a gay district in town before. The mayor had simply rolled her eyes at her and poured more wine.

Olivia checked the business card in her hand and knew she had the right spot. An old three story building had been converted into a community center as the sign outside the building proudly proclaimed. It looked like it still had some work to be done on it though, and there was a banner with a countdown for funds for a new roof hanging from the front. Parked to one side was an old VW bus from the 1960's painted purple with the community center name hand painted across the side right above a bright rainbow flag.

Straightening her shoulders, Olivia headed into the building, passed by two very feminine looking men, who were admiring her low-heeled boots just peeking out from her straight-legged jeans, if she had heard their whispers right. Smiling to herself at the little

confidence boost that gave her, Olivia made her way to the small reception area, where a bald man with many piercings and tattoos sat.

“Um...can you tell me where I can find Dr. Tremain, please?” She asked hesitantly.

“Brooke’s in room 312, on the third floor. The elevator is out of order at the moment, but the main staircase is just over there.” The big guy smiled and pointed to the right.

Olivia nodded and made her way to the stairs, passing a small room with a fireplace where several teenagers were hanging out on the comfortable yet thread bare furniture. The kids were laughing and joking and that was the important thing she realized as Olivia started up the old wood staircase.

There was a small gymnasium on the second floor, Olivia noticed as she passed an open door on her way up. By the time she hit the third floor she was beginning to think she needed to hit the gym more often again. Pulling open the door, she made her way out into a small maze of hallways, but saw a tasteful sign indicating where rooms 310 to 315 were.

Turning the corner Olivia saw an older woman talking with a girl who was obviously distressed. The woman was average height with short blonde spiky hair and dark-rimmed glasses. She noticed that the woman was casually dressed but in designer clothes, so she fit in with those around her yet obviously had money if you knew what you were looking at.

“I want you to think about that this week and I’ll see you next Saturday, okay?” The older woman ducked her head, making sure she had eye contact and a nod before she sent the girl on her way.

Olivia moved closer, watching as the troubled girl headed towards the stairwell and disappeared through the door. Turning back her eyes met bright blue, caring eyes, watching her just as closely.

“I’m Dr. Brooke Tremain.” The doctor extended her hand, smiling as Olivia shook it. “You must be my ten o’clock appointment?”

“Olivia Spencer.” Olivia let out a breath, not aware that she had been holding it. The doctor nodded and watched her carefully.

“Come on in.” Brooke’s eyes narrowed and she smiled softly leading the obviously nervous woman into the office. “Excuse the mess; I’m only here on Saturday’s. The center is still pretty new and I know the gay community isn’t very big here in Springfield but the timing

was really good for me. My normal practice is out of Chicago, but I've wanted to get out of the rat race there, you know? So, this is a first step to expanding my practice."

Olivia hesitated in the doorway. Was she really ready for this? She had faced some demons on her own and with Natalia at her side, but there was only so much that even she could handle on her own. The doctor seemed nice enough too.

"Talk or don't talk, it's up to you." Brooke shrugged and dropped down into one of the worn club chairs in the office, subtly observing her potential new client. "Let me guess, you're a late bloomer, fresh out of the closet and have so much baggage you need a bellhop."

Olivia's smirk said it all. She took another step closer, her hand resting on the door knob as she tried to take that final step. This was going to be very different than the family therapy she was still doing with the kids. This was years and years of her own drama and crap that she needed to work through. And she honestly didn't know if she could do it.

"Come on, Spencer." Brooke ran a hand through her short hair and waited, curious if the obviously skittish woman would stay or not. "Satisfaction guaranteed or your mania back."

Olivia rolled her eyes and snorted. She looked the doctor in the eyes and saw genuine compassion looking back at her. She felt herself physically relax. Maybe this was going to work out okay after all.

"What do I have to lose, right?" Decision made, Olivia stepped all the way into the office and quietly shut the door behind her.

Anna stood in the shadow of the gazebo in the park watching as her young pupil carefully placed her foot at a forty five degree angle from the other one, and shifted her weight slowly, before looking up to see if she'd done it right. Anna nodded, warmed by the huge grin that came over Emma's face.

"That's it. Now turn to the right and extend your arm like I showed you." Anna started to circle the girl, glancing down to see that the white dog, Shadow, was still safely tied to the closest gazebo post. Apparently the dog still couldn't make any sense of what the girl was doing, as her head was at a tilt watching every move closely. Anna chuckled softly and continued watching Emma's technique. So far so good.

"I read on the Internet that you can do tai chi with staffs and swords..." Emma said excitedly, her arm drooping slightly.

Anna tapped her on the elbow, to get her back into the right position and sighed. Of course the bright child had researched the different forms out there.

“Well, that’s true.” She weighed her words carefully. “But every journey begins with a single step and that is where we are now. Let’s get the basics down first and then who knows where this will lead you.” Anna stroked a hand through Emma’s soft hair pleased that the answer seemed to satisfy her.

Anna stepped back as Emma moved into the next move, the concentration on the girl’s face making her smile. Ms. Jennings had been right, she was a good student. That made another question pop up into her mind and Anna tapped her chin for a moment before deciding it was time to think about starting a new journey herself.

“Say Emma, do you know if Ms. Jennings has a boyfriend...”

Leyla dashed out of the daycare center and made her way to the main office, wanting to make photocopies of the registration list for accounting. Several staff members were going to have the daycare fee deducted directly from their paychecks and she needed to get this info submitted to human resources as soon as possible.

Coming around the corner quickly, Leyla looked up just in time to avoid slamming into Ava, her papers unfortunately flying everywhere as they slipped out of her hands.

“Whoa, slow down there.” Ava reached out to stop the shorter woman from falling, gathering her close for a moment. “Are you okay?”

“Sorry!” Leyla said a little flustered, moving away abruptly before bending down to start gathering her forms. She never knew if she was coming or going with Ava. “I’m good, thanks.”

“You’re in on the weekend, I’m surprised.” Ava noted, as she knelt down to help pick up the documents. Leyla tried really hard not to bristle at the tone in the other woman’s voice. “Your sister is so good at organizing everyone else’s lives; I would have thought she could have swung weekends off for you too.”

Leyla froze, anger racing through her at that unkind remark. It was one thing to pick at her personally, that’s fine if it was deserved. Leyla was a grown woman who could look after her own battles, but no one messes with her family, not even if it was Olivia’s daughter.

“What the hell does that mean?” Leyla finally spit out.

“What? It’s the truth,” Ava stood up, handing the papers she had gathered over, well aware she was pushing buttons in the younger woman, but didn’t care. It just felt good to finally say what was on her mind. “Natalia can’t leave well enough alone. As if my father hasn’t been through enough with that madman Winslow, saving her life and getting shot himself, she has to go poke at him. It was the straw that broke the camel’s back and now he’s gone.”

Leyla straightened and glared at the other woman. Sure Ava was upset that her father was leaving town, but that didn’t mean she had the right to go around spewing stuff about Natalia, especially stuff that wasn’t necessarily true.

“You know what; Jeffrey is a grown man and can fight his own battles. If he can’t take the heat then he should get the hell out of the kitchen.” Leyla growled. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have some work to do. Unlike you, my mommy isn’t going to subsidize my living.”

Leyla pushed past the tall brunette and made her way into the copier room.

“Bitch.” Ava snarled, and turned storming down the hallway and disappearing around the corner in a huff.

“*Putta!*” Leyla muttered under her breath, slamming the copier lid down and jabbing the green button to start the machine. She hung her head and muttered more curses as the photocopier jammed, and started beeping loudly at her.

The annual fall garage sale held at the Catholic Church had gone well and Natalia had left Father Ray happily counting the day’s proceeds with the sales committee treasurer. After running around like a crazy woman all day, she was ready to spend a nice evening doing whatever with Olivia.

Natalia had no idea what Olivia had planned for their anniversary, despite her best efforts to get it out of her. Olivia had hinted they were going somewhere special for dinner but that was all she could pry out of her. Her lover had pushed her out the door that morning, sending her on her way to the sale for the day, telling her to trust her and that she would take care of everything.

So, Natalia had done just that and enjoyed a wonderful day.

Frank was looking after Francesca all weekend and Phillip had picked up Emma and Shadow from the park after the tai chi lesson with Anna. And Leyla had even offered to stay at the Beacon over the weekend, claiming she wanted to be on site in case there were

any issues with the daycare on its first weekend of operation. Her sister was so sweet, but Natalia knew full well Leyla had just wanted to give them some alone time.

Turning into their driveway, Natalia smiled at the warm light coming from inside the farmhouse. Everything still seemed to be standing so all was right with the world. Parking beside Olivia's car, Natalia hopped out and grabbed the one or two items she had picked up at the sale from the backseat and quickly made her way inside.

"Oh my God, what smells so good?" Natalia asked, coming into the warm kitchen and dropping her bags by the door. Olivia sat at the table, flipping through a magazine, as everything boiled and bubbled away around her.

"Chicken cacciatore. I hope you're hungry." She looked up in time to catch a quick kiss from her partner. "Hmm, your lips are chilly."

Natalia grinned and slipped around behind her lover, nuzzling along her hair.

"I can think of a few ways to warm up." Natalia murmured against soft skin.

"I bet you can." Olivia smirked, enjoying the feel of Natalia's cool hands on her shoulders. They both jumped at the sudden knock on the back door.

"I swear if that's Frank..." Natalia grumped, having suffered more than enough interruptions from her former fiancé. The man had uncanny timing really.



Olivia chuckled at her partner's words and leaned into her touch. A part of her to this day worried that someone would come through the kitchen door uninvited, even though she personally locked the doors herself now. In this case though she knew who was there and so Olivia stood, shaking her head.

"Oh no, I'm expecting a delivery." Olivia wandered over to the door and opened it, talking briefly with the delivery guy before slipping him a tip and taking the item from his hands. Natalia had just enough time to pull off her jacket and put it up on one of the hooks by the back door. She turned, curious to see what had arrived.

“It’s for you.” Olivia smiled softly before giving a hand-tied bouquet of blood red gerbera daisies and baby’s breath to her lover. A single white rose sat in the middle of the bouquet, marking the one year anniversary.

“Olivia, they’re beautiful.” Natalia gasped, thrilled. “Thank you. Gerbera daisies are my favorite.”

“I know.” Olivia leaned over and placed a soft kiss on her lover’s lips. “I love you so much. Happy anniversary, sweetheart.” Their lips lingered, tasting each other slowly and without rush. They both knew they had all night which only added to the sweetness.

“Happy anniversary.” Natalia moved away to go find a vase to put the flowers into. “I thought you said you were taking us somewhere special for dinner.”

“I couldn’t think of anywhere more special than right here, in our home, with you.” Olivia smiled shyly at her lover. It was the truth and she didn’t care how sappy it was, it was how she felt. She looked up and met Natalia’s eyes with an intense stare. “A year ago I didn’t think we could ever have this future together. I thought all was lost but you persevered and now here we are, a family; alone, together. It’s just you and me and our little family against the world.”

Natalia nearly melted on the spot. She came closer tangling her fingers with Olivia’s, drawing her attention.

“It seems like I’ve spent most of my life struggling, working constantly and never having a moment to just live, always needing the next paycheck, the next job or just trying to find a safe place to raise Rafe that I could call home.” Natalia glanced down for a moment, lost in difficult memories of the past. She sighed and looked up meeting Olivia’s loving gaze. “And now it seems I’ve found it. Finally. Here with you, in our little farmhouse of love. But it’s not the brick or mortar that makes it a home; it’s you, and me and the kids. Together we are a family and it all began a year ago, when we took that first step to live together to make this house a home. Our very own slice of heaven on Earth.”

Leaning forward their lips met in a slow loving kiss, each needing to feel the bond with the other. They moved into a much needed hug, the emotions and love surrounding them.

They spent the rest of the evening just talking and laughing and spending time connecting with each other. Natalia set the table and talked about the garage sale. Olivia poured the wine and discussed the new LGBT community center and how much she liked the new therapist. Plating their food, Olivia brought their dinner to the table mentioning that she had made another appointment for next week. Natalia smiled, reaching out to take her lover’s hand, thanking God for all their blessings before they started to eat.

It was just a normal evening spent at home, a home that they had built together, each found in the heart of the other. And it was perfect.

The movie had ended long ago, and the flames in the fireplace were getting low, but Natalia was loath to move out from under the blanket and her comfortable spot wrapped in Olivia's arms. She hummed softly to herself as Olivia began to nibble her earlobe, a telling ache growing more insistent, low in her belly. It was a need that would only be satisfied by her lover's sure touch.

"You know, I still can't believe we've made it this far," Olivia murmured against warm skin, luxuriating in the closeness. She nuzzled along Natalia's shoulder, finally voicing her thoughts, "I'm so afraid I'm going to screw this all up somehow." She felt Natalia turn in her arms to gently kiss her in reassurance before pulling away, her eyes sparking with emotion.

"I won't let you go that easy, you're stuck with me I'm afraid. I can't get enough of your kisses, missy." Natalia leaned closer, staring deeply into the green eyes before her. Her eyes fluttered shut and she waited, anticipating the touch of her lover's lips. Instead she felt a gentle pressure and realized that Olivia had pressed her forehead to her own. She smiled softly at the familiar touch and show of affection. She ran her fingers up into the honey blonde hair and lifted her face.

That was then, this was now.

"I want you." Natalia said, certain and clear, no doubt in her intentions or desire.

Olivia grinned, loving this side of her partner, the strong confident woman that constantly amazed her.

"You have me." Olivia dipped her head, once again capturing the full lips before her.

"Anyway you want me, sexy."

Natalia blushed slightly, unsure how to broach something that she had been thinking about a lot lately. Olivia noticed how silent she had become, nuzzled along the soft cheek to find a tender patch of skin behind her ear to nip playfully at.

"Hey, what's going on in the gorgeous mind of yours?" Olivia whispered softly, a little worried she'd said something wrong. "I didn't mean to..."

"No, *querida*, you didn't. I-I..." Natalia closed her eyes and bit the bullet. "It's just. Well...I've been having thoughts, um...fantasies really."

“Go on...” Olivia’s voice dropped an octave and she smirked, raising an eyebrow. This was getting good. Natalia flushed slightly but offered a lopsided grin and a naughty flash of dimples.

“Working with you more again at the Beacon, I-I’ve been thinking about...” Natalia squirmed a little, but continued. “Um...well about making love with you, in all sorts of different places.”

“Really?” Olivia’s eyebrows just about shot off her forehead as she stared down at the sexy brunette, her own fantasies flashing through her head at her lover’s words. She swallowed hard, needing to know more. “Like where?”

“Oh, well. I don’t know.” Natalia chewed on her bottom lip a little. “I guess I’ve been replaying that time at New Year’s Eve in Phillip’s library over and over in my mind. And when you got back from your little Mexico escapade, I so wanted to throw you across the desk in your office and have my way with you.”

Natalia closed her eyes, vividly remembering other fantasies now that she’d opened the floodgates. Twisting a little under the blanket, she slid her body against Olivia, wanting the contact and the reveling in the sexual tension between them. Natalia dipped her head and started to nibble and nuzzle the tip of her cold nose along the collar of Olivia’s shirt, licking at the hot skin and delectable neck.

“Then there’s the gazebo in the park,” Natalia dropped a kiss to her jugular, pleased to find it beating strong. A thrill rushed through her as Olivia moaned softly, watching as the green eyes fluttered shut. She slowly kissed a warm path to the nearest earlobe whispering hotly into the delicate swirls she found. “Or even taking you, in the bathroom at Company.”

“I’m living with a nymphomaniac.” Olivia smirked, finding herself turned on even more. “I may actually have to go to church to thank God for this development.”

“Hey!” Natalia frowned, pulling away slightly not liking the direction of that witty remark.

“Sorry, baby. I didn’t mean anything. I was just teasing.” Olivia wrapped her arms tighter around her lover pulling Natalia into a slow, deep kiss, chasing away any lingering offense. “I would love to do anything you want to try.”

“Well Blake actually suggested...” Natalia began, only to be cut off by her shocked lover.

“Blake!” Olivia covered her eyes with the palm of her hand. “You spoke to Blake about this? Oh, God...”

“Quiet you, Blake had some good advice about this.” Natalia nipped playfully at Olivia’s earlobe.

“I’m sure she did.” Olivia suddenly wondered just how much Blake mentioned about their little escapade in the local lingerie stores toy department. Now there had been an adventure she should have taken with Natalia.

“Anyway,” Natalia blushed ever so slightly but pushed on. “I’ve been looking around online.”

“You have?” Olivia blinked; a little thrill ran along her spine and settled in her nether regions at the thought. “Of course you have. Google is your friend.”

“Yes, it is.” Natalia smiled seductively, glancing back at her lover. “A very, very good friend in this situation.” Natalia blushed a little bit more at her own boldness. “I-I just don’t want you to get the wrong idea. I love what we do with each other, making love with you is amazing but I think maybe we could explore?”

“I would love to explore.” Olivia grinned wolfishly, thoroughly enjoying the idea. Toy shopping with her lover was a much better idea than with Blake.

“And I was thinking maybe we could even find something extra special for our honeymoon?” Natalia waggled her eyebrows and grinned mischievously before dipping her head down and snuggling into Olivia’s neck.

“Really?” Olivia blinked, getting into the idea now that they were talking about it. It could be fun, a lot of fun actually. “I love the way your mind thinks.” Olivia dipped her head and captured her lover’s tender lips.

“All this talk is making me...” Natalia murmured against Olivia’s mouth as she rolled her hips, getting her point across.

“Me too.” Olivia shifted and they both finally stood, the blanket dropping to their feet as they threaded their fingers together.

Olivia brought Natalia’s hand up to her lips, gently kissing the soft skin on the back of her hand. Their eyes met, locked and held. Olivia tugged ever so slightly, pulling Natalia along with her towards the staircase, finally leading the way upstairs to the landing.

“I remember kissing you good night, right here.” Olivia murmured as they stood in the hallway outside of the nursery, remembering the long nights spent dreaming of just this when it had been her bedroom. She watched entranced as Natalia’s eyes grew dark with desire and she leaned forward and pressed their lips together.

“Yes, you were like a very polite prom date,” Natalia sucked on Olivia’s lower lip a moment, pulling it slightly before nipping and kissing her way along the strong jaw. “And all I wanted was for you to come into my bed and ravish me.”

Olivia groaned into the demanding kiss that followed, as Natalia started pulling her further down the hallway, towards their bedroom.

“And now here we are a year later, and you’re still standing out here like a very proper prom date.” Natalia teased. She watched Olivia’s eyes turn a darker shade of green as she dipped her head closer still.

“Oh, honey,” Olivia growled against hot flesh, tugging Natalia’s blouse out of her jeans, needing to feel more of her lover’s skin against her own. “You should know by now that I am anything but proper.”

“And I thank God for that, every single day.” Natalia smirked naughtily as she turned the doorknob to their bedroom and lead her lover inside, impatiently reaching out to tug the hem of Olivia’s brown shirt up. “Now I think I have a present to unwrap.”

Olivia laughed softly and kicked the door closed behind them. It was time for the real celebration to begin.

It had been one of the best anniversaries Olivia could remember. Natalia always seemed to be able to surprise and amaze her. It was going to take a lifetime of loving to figure the woman out, and she was more than ready for the challenge.

Sleep continued to elude her, despite their energetic love making and certainly not because of any nightmare images clawing and dancing across Olivia’s troubled mind for a change. Far from that, in fact. Natalia was asleep, completely spent after their last round of lovemaking, and sprawled across her in all her naked glory. So Olivia happily indulged in her favorite pastime, Natalia watching.

She desperately wanted to wake the sleeping beauty up with kisses and tender caresses. To once more ravish her lover’s sweet body, and to have that ache satisfied deep inside that only Natalia knew how to take care of, but at the same time she knew her lover needed her sleep. Olivia watched as her partner’s lips parted ever so slightly and she sighed, like a soft moan, just a little, her heart doing small somersaults at the sound.

God Spencer, how did you ever get so lucky?

Slowly Olivia ran her fingers through the soft dark hair, tucking stray tendrils behind her ear. She watched entranced as Natalia turned to her in her sleep, as if knowing even in

slumber where she was. A soft smile ghosted across full lips and Olivia desperately wanted to kiss the tempting mouth.

“What are you waiting for, *querida*?” Natalia whispered, her voice rough and gravelly with sleep, as her eyes slowly blinked open. Olivia loved her like this, sleepy and oh so sexy. It always did things to her, her body simply reacting to the unspoken promises, clenching and yearning for her touch.

Olivia slowly ran the pad of her thumb across her lover’s full lips. Natalia sucked it in, her tongue swirling around it seductively, the languid heat beckoning. She released it with a moist pop, as she sat up and rolled slightly towards her lover, wide awake now and ready to play.

“Hmm, looks like somebody is having a tough time falling asleep?” Natalia snuggled close, her voice tickling in Olivia’s ear, followed by butterfly kisses along her temple before crossing a flushed cheek to hover tantalizingly over her lips, her breath warm against my skin. All Olivia could do was slowly nod and wait for her, rewarded with a lopsided grin and a flash of dimples, before her mouth was claimed.

“As someone wise once said to me, screw time and space...” Olivia eventually gasped, panting for much needed air.

“Screw something all right.” Natalia nipped at a tender earlobe as Olivia’s eyebrows rose in mock shock.

“Miss Rivera. Such language...” Olivia couldn’t stop the giggle that bubbled up from inside.

“You love it.” Natalia giggled, “Now come here, Trouble.”

Olivia shook her head and smirked before she was slowly rolled Natalia to her back, handily pinning the brunette to the mattress with the length of her body.

“I’m afraid that I’m not quite done with you just yet...” Olivia teased, moving meticulously, mapping gentle curves and hollows before carefully crawling across her lover’s body, leaving a trail of butterfly kisses in her wake, enjoying the goosebumps that followed behind in waves. Natalia’s moan of pleasure urged her on, until she finally pressed fully against her, one strong leg sliding between her legs, her thigh pressed tight against her partner’s core.

Natalia gasped and tried to catch her breath as hot lips trailed across her jaw line, only to find her lips captured again. Olivia dipped her head once, twice, three times, each time lingering longer, tasting her partner’s sweet lips, ending the last one with her tongue

asking for entrance, before sinking into a slow penetrating kiss. Strong hands tickled across the brunette's stomach, blunt nails dragged across twitching abs, exploring as much skin as possible.

"You are so damn beautiful...and all mine." Olivia growled possessively against her lover's lips. Her steady hand trailed down the well-toned stomach, coming to tangle into the damp curls below. Moaning desperately, Natalia thrust forward, bucking and needing more contact, wantonly parting her thighs wider, a silent plea for much needed attention.

Olivia moaned into Natalia's mouth, tongues meeting and tangling, dancing together. Grinding beneath her, Natalia writhed against the sure touch, silently encouraging her as a wayward hand leisurely trailed down tempting curves, tickling through the dark, soaked curls.

"Please, Olivia," Natalia arched her back off the bed in an effort to get closer, her voice rasping hoarsely in the quiet night air. "Fuck me."

Olivia chuckled and gladly did as she was told.

Natalia gasped as she was suddenly filled, Olivia taking her, fast and hard, angling and thrusting deep, claiming her as her own. Natalia barely recognized the needy moans coming from her mouth, lips still hotly pressed against Olivia's.

She could feel Olivia's smirk as she bucked against her, wanting more, needing to increase their tempo. Natalia growled as her lover ignored her, taking her sweet time to build the pressure, taking her higher, dancing on the razor sharp edge and then suddenly slowing the pace. Her eyes snapped open and Natalia groaned with frustration.

Helplessly Natalia watched Olivia's mouth descend again, demanding, deep kisses and then she was lost again, suddenly distracted by a thumb slowly circling her stiff clit. With a slightly desperate whimper she broke the kiss, Olivia turning to nuzzle along her flushed cheek as she squirmed, needing a release.

"Oh, I know." Olivia whispered, unrepentant. She dipped her head to once more tease Natalia's lips with gentle kisses. Deciding to take pity on her lover, Olivia picked up their pace, moving her hand faster. "Just let go, I've got you now."

Olivia's low, husky voice echoed in her ear, as Natalia's emotions began to overwhelm her, the rush of pleasure building to a fine point, until finally she felt her body shatter into a million pieces and she cried out into the night, only to finally land, safe in Olivia's arms...

When she could move again, Natalia's body finally relaxed and she was unable to stop the contented sigh. Sated and exhausted, she panted into Olivia's honey blonde hair, her breath starting to even out again. She moaned softly as Olivia shifted, feeling the loss of her partner's intimate touch keenly. Sliding to her side, Natalia pulled her into a tight embrace, arms and leg tangling lazily together.

Finally feeling her energy returning, Natalia began to stroke along Olivia's body, enjoying the sensation of just touching the flushed skin. Dragging her fingers along Olivia's naked hip, Natalia dipped lower, finding her way to where she was most needed, groaning as her partner started to spread her legs for her.

"Oh, baby. Is this what you need, hmmm?" Natalia smiled against Olivia's cheek, relishing the whimper her touch was causing, her fingers teasing along the length of her partner and then withdrawing.

"Mmmm, you are so wet for me..." Stretching out over Olivia, she kissed her lover thoroughly, easily distracting her before sinking deep, taking and filling her.

"Oh, God..." Olivia gasped.

Natalia simply smiled, Olivia's body bucking against her as she suddenly started making her way down the long delectable body, dropping kisses as she went. The short hair tickled her nose as Natalia's tongue dipped into the heat of her lover.

Olivia felt the world narrow to just the two of them, the give and take between them growing slick and fast until she felt Natalia's insistent mouth sucking and flicking firmly along her clit. Crying out, her world exploded.

"Shh, now rest," Natalia quietly murmured against Olivia's body, riding out the tremors crashing through her lover.

Olivia draped an arm over her eyes and tried to calm down. Before long she glanced down over the swell of her naked belly at the adorably tousled dark head resting there catching her breath. She could feel puffs of hot breath tickling against her slick flushed skin, triggering tiny aftershocks. A deliciously lazy moan vibrated against her lower body and she felt soft lips making a trail back up to her navel.

"Somebody's still a little twitchy..." An amused voice floated up, as Natalia trailed her moist tongue, teasing the salty hollows of her lover's abs, the hips below moving and lifting of their own accord. "Haven't I worn you out yet?"

“God, Natalia. You’re trying to kill me.” Olivia gasped, thrusting up against her lover, craving her deeper intimate touch once again.

Dark chocolate eyes looked up and held her lover’s gaze. Crawling up the woman’s body like an exotic jungle cat ready to pounce on its prey, Natalia paused here and there, twisting a very erect nipple and licking along puckered scar tissue from the transplant, finally nuzzling a sensitive earlobe, nipping, and then sucking the sting away.

“Hmm...but what a way to go, don’t you think?” She breathed hotly into Olivia’s ear, slowly lowering her weight onto the writhing body below. Capturing the sweet mouth beneath her, Natalia trailed her hand down through soaked curls and claimed her lover once more.

Filling and thrusting deep into the wet heat, Natalia was rewarded with a startled gasp followed by needy moans against her lips. Her lover bucked against her, trying to increase the tempo, but she simply ignored her, taking her time bringing her back to the peak, then slowing it down again, much to Olivia’s frustration.

A slightly desperate whimper finally escaped from her partner’s oh-so-tempting mouth. Smiling at the familiar sound, Natalia took pity and picked up the pace, moving ever faster, thumb circling her clit, bringing her lover once again to the edge.

“Wait for it, not until I tell you.” Natalia whispered, dipping to tease Olivia’s full lips. Her groan of frustration made her smile even wider and she slowed her strokes ever so slightly. “I know, baby...just a little longer. Let me see those gorgeous eyes, hmm...”

Natalia smiled as her lover growled and forced her eyes open. Glancing down she thrilled at the fire blazing in Olivia’s intense green eyes, knowing she was near.

“Now.” Natalia demanded, filling her lover quickly, taking her by surprise. “Come for me now, *querida*.”

It was all Olivia needed to hear, as she suddenly crashed and tumbled over the edge once more. Her body finally relaxing, Olivia moaned, sated and exhausted, into Natalia’s soft hair, her breath starting to even out.

Rolling to her side, Natalia brought her tired lover into a tight embrace. She ran a hand through sweat damp hair, pulling tendrils away from Olivia’s eyes. Dropping slow lazy kisses, she watched Olivia struggle to stay awake, as she nuzzled closer, dropping a tender kiss on her temple and running a soothing hand through sweat damp hair.

The first rays of dawn fell into the master bedroom, gentle light illuminating the white cotton sheet just barely covering them.

"I love watching the sun come up with you," Olivia murmured sleepily.

"Me too." Natalia smiled softly, the light from the window slowly growing brighter. Dawn was one of her favorite times of the day, and to spend it wrapped up in Olivia's embrace was heaven on Earth.

"Happy anniversary, baby." Olivia said quietly.

"The first of many to come, my love." Natalia whispered back, tears threatening to fall. This really was a dream come true, something a little over a year ago she thought she had screwed up forever. You just never know what dreams may come. For this perfect moment in time, she sent up a small prayer of thanks.

Lazing together, they quietly listened to the world beginning to wake up. Small birds began to chirp just outside the window, their happy morning sounds heralding the new day.

"So do you think you might be able to get some sleep now?" Natalia murmured eventually, tender kisses pressed against sweat damp skin, a cocky grin covering her sweet lips. Olivia's deep chuckle and a raised eyebrow was her only answer.

"Come here." Olivia husked, not happy until Natalia was wrapped tight against her. She sighed, at ease again.

"Better?" Natalia's lips moved against the soft skin of her lover's shoulder, smiling softly as Olivia yawned slightly.

"Much." Olivia pressed her nose into the soft dark hair, breathing in deeply, her mind slowing and starting to drift. "Remind me to send Blake some flowers tomorrow..."

Natalia snorted and squeezed her lover tighter as Olivia simply chuckled softly and then yawned.

"Go to sleep. I'm not going anywhere, love. I promise..." Natalia stroked her fingers lightly across her partner's forehead and then up into her thick honey blonde hair, memorizing every line and feature for the umpteenth time. She watched contentedly as Olivia fell

asleep in her arms, slipping into sweet dreams, before drifting off herself, each woman surrounded by peace, love and joy.

Outside in the distance, a crow cried out.

The End