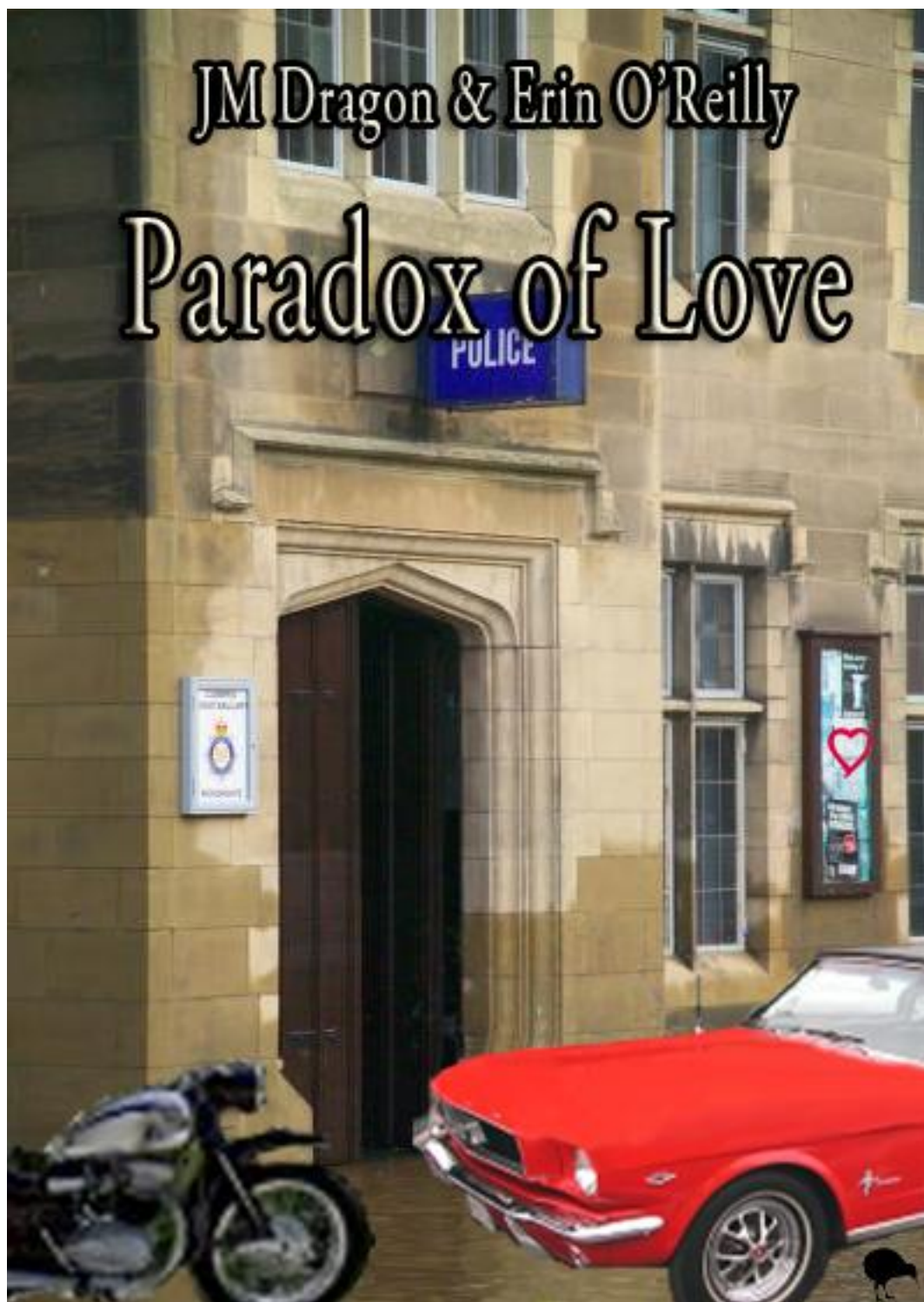


JM Dragon & Erin O'Reilly

Paradox of Love



Paradox of Love

Fourth story in the When Hell Meets Heaven Series

JM Dragon and Erin O'Reilly



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When Hell Meets Heaven Series

When Hell Meets Heaven

Fatal Hesitation

Echoes of the Past

Paradox of Love

The End Game

Wolf at the Door



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Back of the Book

Parker Davis's car limped its way into Portsmouth. It was just another city in a long line of places she'd traveled never to settle down. The major repairs and debt caused by her vehicle, forced her to stay in the city and find employment with the local police department. Olivia Santos lived for her work as a police officer, following a family tradition that she was proud of. The only thing that she would place above her police work was the love she had for her only living relative-her brother-an undercover cop.

When Parker and Olivia meet at a social function, there is an immediate attraction, which starts them on a road of passionate, unquenchable love. Their relationship binds them together in ways neither of them understand until a tragedy threatens the very fabric of their life together and their love. What happens will reflect on their future like an indelible stain forever.

Prologue

Often in life, we find something or meet someone and our worlds are never the same again. Soon our universe revolves around that which once was unknown and we do whatever it takes to make the object or person ours.

There comes a time in life that you have to let go—really let go. Allowing another inside your personal space and setting aside your differences. When that happens, it can be the most fulfilling time of your life...or, it can change you forever. You throw away what once was secure for a meteoric fall into uncertainty.

For Parker Davis such a moment occurred when she first saw Olivia Santos. So captivated by the dark beauty that all Parker ever knew about love and commitment disintegrated and love took on an entirely different meaning for her.

And so it begins...

Chapter One

The year was 1996 and a cloud of bluish smoke followed the red '67 Mustang convertible into town. When the driver finally saw a sign that read *mechanic on duty*, she nursed the vehicle up to the garage. Parker Davis opened the car door and got out. "I'm glad I made it this far," she said as she waved the smoke filled air away from her nose.

A small man with greasy hair and greasier hands walked over to her. "Looks like yer burning oil," he said.

"No shit." Parker wondered about the wisdom of not looking further for a mechanic. "Can you fix it?"

"There ain't a car made I can't fix."

"I'm not interested in other cars only mine. How much will it cost me?"

"You're lookin' at an engine overhaul." The man scratched the stubble on his face. "I'd say it'll run you about fifteen hundred give or take some."

She wanted to make sure the man knew she understood the problem so he wouldn't try to hoodwink her. "Can't you just fix the pistons?"

"Sure I can, but you won't be happy. If you're gonna fix it you're gotta fix it right."

Parker closed her eyes and mentally calculated if she could afford the repair. "Is there a place close by to stay?"

"Sure is...about a half mile down that-a-way is Sleepy Town."

The woman shook her head and looked around at the nearby structures. They didn't look too bad. "When can you have it done?"

"Well I got one car ahead of you and two waitin'..."

Parker held her hand up. "I'm not interested in spending my life in this town I just want my car fixed."

Again, the man scratched his face. "I can have it done in a week give or take a few."

"Ok, why don't you come by that motel in about a half hour and pick my car up."

"Sure will little lady...hmm since you're from out of town I need some sort of deposit."

The woman fished in her pocket and pulled out a credit card. "I'll give you a third now and the rest when it is done."

The man shook his head and turned slightly before pointing at a sign that read NO CREDIT.

"Shit, I don't need this," she muttered. "When you come to get the car I'll have the cash for you."

"Ok, just remember no cash no fix." He nodded at her. "I'll see you in half an hour give or take a few."

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Over the years since graduating, Parker never seemed to be able to settle down in one place. She was constantly looking for someone or someplace that would give her life meaning. Fortunately, her degree made finding a job easy and she knew just where to find one. She reached over and pulled the phonebook out of the drawer of the nightstand.

"Hmm, let's see, this should be a piece of cake." She laughed. "This place makes those other places I've worked look like a one horse town." She laughed again, "Because they were!"

She looked at the phonebook cover and noted the name of the town—Portsmouth. "Here goes nothing," she said to a tall blonde woman on the television. "Wish me luck."

"Portsmouth Police Department," a female voice said.

"Yes, hello, my name is Parker Davis and I am enquiring about applying for a position. Can you please tell me if you have any openings?"

"Just a second, let me transfer you."

Parker drummed her fingers on the bed as she waited for what she thought was an inordinate amount of time. Finally, she heard, "I understand you are looking for employment. We don't have any clerical openings at this time, but I can put your name on a list."

"I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear Ms..."

"Hughes, Mildred Hughes."

"Thanks, nice to meet you Mildred."

"What kind of work with the department are you looking for?"

"A patrol officer."

"You can't just apply for that position over the phone...it takes months of training and evaluations before we would even consider hiring you."

"Again, I'm sorry for not making myself understood. I have a degree in criminal justice and three years experience with two police departments."

"Still it just isn't that easy."

"What do I have to do to make that happen?"

"First and foremost is we don't hire over the phone."

Parker exaggerated her response by speaking slowly. "Ok, Mildred can you tell me if you have any openings?"

"That is not something I can discuss over the phone. As I said, it's not something we do over the phone."

"I understand that Mildred. Is there any way I can come in and talk with you about the possibility of working there? I'm sure making an appointment would be better than just showing up."

To Parker, it was clear by the tone of the woman's voice that she was irritated. The woman said, "Just one moment." The line went silent.

She needed a job. She could always work as a waitress like she did in college. She heard a click and then Mildred's voice.

"Can you come in and meet with Sgt. McGivney tomorrow morning?"

"I sure can. What time?"

"Ten o'clock...and, your name again is..."

"Parker, Parker Davis."

"Tell the desk sergeant you have the appointment, he'll give you a visitor's pass and show you where to go."

"Thank you Mildred I look forward to meeting you in person."

Silence ensued. "Goodbye," Mildred finally said.

Chapter Two

Marcus McGivney was a well muscled man with a bald head and eyes that were dark and ominous. The white shirt he wore clung to his arm as muscles, that seemed to cry for release, flexed when he motioned Parker to sit. "We don't have many people call out of the blue for a job."

"I just got to town and I figured the most direct way to find out was to call," Parker said. She confidently pulled her shoulders back and held her head high. "I assume since I got an appointment that there are positions open."

"For the right person there is."

Parker opened her briefcase, took out a folder and slid it across the desk. "In there you will find a copy of my degree, along with my GPA. You will see that I graduated cum laude and the letters of recommendation from my professors will verify that I am more than qualified for a patrol job. I also included a letter from the chief of police in Hamilton where I worked for two years."

"Why did you leave?"

"Have you ever been to Hamilton Sgt. McGivney?" When he nodded, she continued. "Well if you had, you would know why. I felt like Barney Fife would appear at any minute." Parker laughed.

The sergeant seemed to relax some as a smile crossed his face exposing his white teeth that glistened in contrast to his dark skin. "You're not a Mayberry girl."

"Not at all," she said. "I thought I'd go mad if I had to go rescue one more cat...we had one woman who installed a burglar alarm and kept setting it off at least once a week." Parker let out a genuine laugh. "Believe it or not that was a highlight."

McGivney shook his head. "Yeah, when I started out it was in a small town too." He picked up the letters of recommendation and his eyes quickly scanned the pages. "Is Dr. Chetek a short little guy with curly grey hair and a moustache?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"He was one of my professors. He was old fifteen years ago so he must have been ancient when he taught you." With a smile, he returned his eyes to the documents. "We have a class of new recruits starting next week. Would you like to join them?"

Bingo. "Yes I would."

"I'll need to verify your references and if everything checks out I will get back with you with the particulars." He opened a desk drawer and took out some papers. "You'll need to fill these out today."

"Ok."

"Do you have a number where I can reach you?"

Parker felt her cheeks get hot. "I don't have a phone...I'm staying at the Sleepy Town Motel...room twelve."

The man jotted the information on a pad of paper. "I'll call you sometime in the next few days."

"Great." Parker stood up and extended her hand. "It was great meeting you and I look forward to working here."

McGivney shook the woman's hand. "I'll be in touch."

True to his word, McGivney called her two days later. “Ms. Davis we need to set up the time for your testing. You’ll need to take various qualification tests so we can know what areas you are strong or weak in.”

“I see,” Parker said. “Exactly what does that entail?”

“Weapons, psych eval, a physical, and the obstacle course.”

Parker grinned—she could do them all with one hand tied behind her back. “Makes sense, where and when?”

“Your psych eval is tomorrow at eight. Just tell them out front you are here for psych and someone will escort you to Dr. McKinney’s office.”

Chapter Three

The next morning Parker arrived a few minutes before eight and a woman, Officer Campbell, escorted her to her psych evaluation. Once there she found herself sitting opposite Dr. McKinney, a smallish woman with horn rimmed glasses that seemed to magnify her eyes.

“First I want you to look over this questionnaire and answer each question as honestly as possible. From your answers, I will ask you a series of questions that will help me to evaluate your fitness for the job. Shall we begin?” When Parker nodded, the doctor handed her three sheets of paper.”

Forty-five minutes later, Parker handed the papers back to the woman. “Here you go,” she said. She watched as the doctor read her answers trying to gauge her reaction – she saw none.

Dr. McKinney looked across her desk at Parker and adjusted her glasses before she spoke. “Did you answer these questions truthfully or how you thought the department wanted them answered?”

Parker frowned and creased her forehead. “Excuse me? Are you questioning my honesty?” She wanted to add *bitch*, but decided that wouldn’t be prudent.

A thin smile crossed the small woman’s face. “No.”

For a long time Parker stared at the woman debating why she asked such a question. She wasn’t top of her class because she was a dummy. She answered the questions exactly as her psych teacher instructed. The question facing her now was should she protest or say nothing more—silence ensued.

Eliza McKinney tried to gauge the woman across from her. To all appearances, she was, as she appeared, supremely confident. In all her years of evaluating officers and those that wanted to join the force, Eliza never had anyone answer all the questions in the way Parker Davis did. The woman did take an inordinate amount of time to answer the questions and left no stone unturned—nothing was open ended. Eliza shook her head slightly. It seemed to her that the young woman tried to maneuver her in such a way that she had no more questions to ask. *Surprise, I do.* In an effort to affect a passionate response, she asked, “You say you are not in favor of capital punishment, yet at the same time you say you would have no problem shooting someone and killing them. How can you justify those two positions?”

Parker raised her eyebrows and slightly tilted her head in concentration. Her nimble mind assessed the question and she considered a proper answer - there was none. She desperately wanted to clear her throat, but knew the doctor would see that as a sign of deception or nervousness. “If a person is threatening me, a fellow officer, or an innocent bystander with a weapon with the intent of doing bodily harm and the only solution is to kill him, I would. As for the death penalty as a result of a trial...there are other options.”

The doctor sat with her fingers bridged with two index fingers tapping her lips as she listened and watched Parker intently. She noted that the pitch and cadence of the woman’s voice did not change and that her eyes never wavered from the scrutiny. “You would feel no emotion if you had to kill someone?” she countered.

“Of course I would, but if it is the only choice I have it is what I will do.” Parker affected a slight tremor in her voice as she said the words. It wouldn’t do to have the psychologist think of her as a psychopath with no emotions.

When Dr. McKinney heard the tremulous answer, and was glad that the woman finally answered something with emotion. “I think I have everything I need for my evaluation Ms. Davis.” She stood, rounded her desk, and extended her hand to the woman. “Take care.”

Parker nodded and said, “I will...you too.” There was no need to ask how she did—she aced it.

The doctor watched Parker’s back leave the room and close the door. “Hmm, she’s most interesting indeed.” For a long moment, she contemplated Parker trying to make a judgment as to whether she made the call or not. She sifted through her papers then picked up the woman’s answer sheets and let her eyes slide across the pages. “Qualifications...does she meet them or not.” Eliza swirled her chair around and looked out the window as her mind processed all she knew about Parker Davis. With a nod, she turned back around, picked up her phone, and dialed. When she heard the familiar voice of her long time colleague she said, “I’ve found the perfect candidate.”

Chapter Four

When Parker exited the physiologist's office, she saw the black female with the disarming smile who escorted her there waiting. "You ready to go and try your hand at shooting?"

Parker smiled and nodded. "Yep, all ready for the next challenge." Never being one to pass up the opportunity to flirt with a beautiful woman she looked at the woman by her side and said, "By the way, my first name is Parker."

"Jill," the woman said.

"Glad to meet you Jill," she said with her sweetest smile. "Have you worked for the department long?"

The officer saw the wink that followed the question, blushed, and had the distinct impression that the woman was flirting with her. "About five years. My husband and I both work here."

Inwardly Parker shook her head that the woman had a permanent relationship. She could have used a diversion while she waited to be accepted. "What division?"

"Homicide."

She let her eyes roam the woman's body. "I bet you're good at that, Jill. Poking around looking for clues as to who did it," Parker said flirtatiously. "Yep, I can see that you are very good indeed."

Jill, who secretly enjoyed the flirtations, just shook her head. "Here we are," she said pointing to a door that had a sign that said *don't forget to protect your ears*. Jill slid a card through the reader before pushing the door open. When a round man in his fifties approached them she said, "Tom Bishop, this is Parker Davis."

"Ah, yes I've been waiting for her." He looked at the tall woman next to Jill and said, "Well, come on then. I'll get you some head gear. What kind of gun would you prefer?"

"I get a choice," Parker said affecting surprise in her voice. "Wow, that's great. Golly I don't know which one to pick, what would you suggest Tom?"

Tom's face lit up. "Well you're askin' the right person." He looked Parker up and down and said, "Shake my hand."

Parker automatically shot her hand out to greet the man's hand.

"Strong grip, I like that." He shook his head as he pondered which weapon to give the woman. "I'll be right back."

Minutes later Tom reappeared with three guns. "I have a Glock 31; it is a good choice...has fifteen rounds ...about two pounds." He held up the next one. "This FN Five-seveN has low recoil and very little muzzle movement...holds up to twenty rounds." Tom smiled as he held up the last gun. "And this is my favorite sidearm the 357 Sig. This beauty with the right bullets will penetrate anything."

A slow smile crossed Parker's face when she saw the Sig. It would have been her choice too. "Let's try the Sig."

Pleased with Parker's selection, Tom handed her the gun along with protective headgear. "Use Station Five." He followed her into the cubicle and said. "This is how you stand...one foot in front the other in the back for balance." He looked at Jill. "If you're stayin' in here you need protection too." Jill nodded and fitted the ear protection over her head.

Parker dutifully followed the man's instructions.

"Good," Tom said. "You right handed or left?"

"Left."

"Ok hold the gun with your left hand and steady it with the right." He watched as the woman took the proper stance and held the weapon at shoulder height. "Aim at the circle on the target and then squeeze the trigger slowly. Then we'll check how you did."

Tom moved behind Parker and next to Jill before he pulled on his ear protection. Then he tapped Parker on the shoulder.

Parker took off the safety and held the gun in two hands just as Tom instructed. She looked at the black cut out of a person and took aim before she squeezed the trigger. Bang, bang - six shots fired out of the gun in rapid succession.

"Hey," Tom yelled. "I said one round!"

Parker let the smile leave her face before she turned around. "I'm sorry it just happened."

"If you're going to work here little lady you need to have complete control of your weapon at all times and follow directions!"

"I know...I'm sorry."

Tom, clearly annoyed, gritted his teeth and said, "Let's see how you did." He flipped a switch and the silhouette slowly moved toward them. Tom frowned. "I only see one hole." He turned an angry face at Parker. "That is exactly what I mean...you can't just fire away...you have to know where you're firing!" When it came closer, he opened his mouth, gasped and looked at Parker with wide eyes. "You got all six in the same hole? That's impossible"

Parker looked at Jill and winked. "I can't believe it!"

Perturbed, Tom pushed a button and said, "Get your butt up here." Once Parker was by his side he said, "Moving targets will come up randomly across the firing range...see how many you can hit."

With a nod, Parker readjusted the headgear and held the gun at the ready. Soon a silhouette popped up on her left and she shot. It was just like duck hunting back home for Parker. The man could keep the targets coming all day.

Once the onslaught of targets stopped, Tom began checking them for accuracy—each had a hit in the kill zone. Tom shook his head. "I've never seen anything like this." He looked at Parker. "What's your secret?"

A genuine smile crossed her face. "Duck hunting." She failed to mention that she won awards for her sharp shooting.

"Go on, get out of here. I'll send my report on you upstairs as soon as I fill it out." He watched the woman go and let out a low grow. The woman was devious and he didn't much care for her. She did however, have a good eye for accuracy.

Parker turned to Jill and said, "Where to next?"

Jill looked at her watch. "You have an appointment for a complete physical with Dr. Hill in twenty minutes. "You shouldn't have done that to Tom."

"Done what?" Parker asked innocently.

"Suckered him like that. He's a good guy and one day you'll need him and he'll remember what you did to him."

Parker waved her hand. “No he won’t...I bet he’s on the phone right now telling everyone about the woman who is a crack shot. Besides, he never asked if I knew how to fire a gun.”

Jill laughed. “Yeah, you’re probably right, but still, that wasn’t a nice thing to do to him. He really is a good guy.”

“Tell you what I’ll do...if I get this job I’ll make a point of telling him thanks for his recommendation even though I was...a ringer and hustled him.” She laughed and when the woman next to her did too, she breathed a sigh of relief. She didn’t want to piss the man him off for she might need him someday. Parker knew it was a dumb move on her part, but the man should have asked if she shot a gun before.

Chapter Five

When Parker walked into Elisabeth Hill's office, she liked what she saw. The evidence of a well toned body gave her a fluid appearance. She was lean like a runner with blue eyes that reminded Parker of pools of glacial water. There was no doubt the woman was hot.

"Please have a seat Ms. Davis. I have a few questions before I begin the exam."

Unable to stop herself, Parker winked at the doctor and said, "I like the sound of that." Then as if she realized that she said her thoughts aloud she added, "I'm sorry. I just came from a grueling hour at the practice range. I was way out of line with that comment."

Elisabeth eyed her patient. "Well I hope this won't be as grueling for you," she said with a laugh.

Parker looked at the woman again and sighed. "I can tell already that you are a step way up from Tom." When she saw the doctor smile, she relaxed. "You'll be gentle with me won't you?" she said only to shake her head. "Sorry, I did it again."

The doctor laughed. "The word incorrigible comes to mind."

The bemused look on the doctor's face told Parker all she needed to know—the doctor liked her flirting. She scratched her face and said, "Yeah, do you mind," she said already knowing what the doctor's response would be.

"No...no not at all." She shuffled the papers on her desk, brought them together, and tapped the edges. "Shall we begin?"

"By all means Doc, fire away."

After Dr. Hill gathered all the information about her patient's medical history, she stood up. "Now I'll need you to go into the exam room." She pointed to a door that was partially open. "You'll find a gown on the table. Take off all your clothes and put the gown on so it opens in the front."

Parker couldn't help the lascivious smile that crossed her face. "Sounds good to me," she said with a wiggle of her eyebrows.

The look on her patient's face made Elisabeth feel exposed and vulnerable. "When you're ready just crack open the door."

With a wink and a smile, Parker went into the exam room, removed her clothes, put on the gown, and opened the door slightly before hopping up on the exam table. The wait for the doctor added fuel to the fire that was already searing her libido. If everything worked out, the doctor would be in her bed by nightfall.

As Elisabeth routinely examined Parker's eyes, nose, and mouth, she couldn't completely squelch her body's reaction to the woman. She was certain that the woman's flirtatious ways were an indication of her interest in pursuing a relationship beyond the exam and she couldn't let that happen. She had a fiancée and she loved the man but he never quite satisfied her as women did.

She lifted her stethoscope and listened to a slow steady heartbeat before she frowned. For a moment, she wondered if she misinterpreted the woman's flirting. "When was your last pap?"

"Hmm, that would be never."

"Do you check your breasts every month?"

When the doctor looked in her direction, Parker winked. "I like to leave that to...um, others."

Elisabeth swallowed hard, pulled back the gown to expose her patient's left breast. "You really should get in the habit of doing a self exam at least once a month. While you're showering is a good time," she said as she pressed her fingers in a circular motion around Parker's breast. "Just because you're twenty-five doesn't mean you're not at risk."

For her part, Parker closed her eyes and allowed her body to react to the ministrations of the doctor. She unconsciously sighed as her nipples swelled and she became wet.

Elisabeth knew that the way her body was reacting meant she needed the woman in her bed and she couldn't let that happen. "You can sit up now," she said.

Parker's eyebrow lifted in question. "All done Doc?"

"Yes, you can get dressed then come back into my office."

"You sure you want that?"

Elisabeth felt her face flush. "I'll see you there Ms. Davis," she said over her shoulder as she hurried out of the room.

As she watched the doctor leave, Parker chuckled. *My, my I do believe I made her nervous.* Once she was dressed, she re-entered the office and found the doctor not there. Parker went to the window and looked down to the parking lot below. When she heard the door open, a crooked smile crossed her face. "Which one is yours?" she asked.

"Pardon me?"

"Which car is yours? No don't tell me let me guess." She spun around and gave the doctor a thoughtful look. "You're definitely not the sedan or SUV type and I can't see you in a hybrid. I think your vehicle is the BMW convertible."

Elisabeth's eyes widened. "Yes it is."

"That tells me that the PD job isn't full time and you probably have a practice of your own."

"Are you looking for position as a detective?" the doctor asked. "You're very good at deductions."

Parker nodded. "Am I considered a patient of yours? I should think not since the police department pays your salary and you work for them."

"You're still my patient and have the right to expect confidentiality regarding anything about your health."

"But, technically once I leave here we are no longer on a patient doctor relationship...right."

"Technically no, but I would still hold anything about you or what you tell me in the strictest of confidence."

"I've been in town five days. My car is in the shop so all I've seen of Portsmouth is what's between here and the motel." Parker moved away from the window and toward the doctor. "Will you have dinner with me tonight?"

Flustered, Elisabeth just stared at her patient while her body reacted with pleasure at the thought of going on a date with the tall woman. *Yes.* "No I don't think I can."

"Why? You're not my doctor. Are you already in a relationship?"

"I'm engaged to a wonderful man."

“So. It’s only dinner.” Parker smiled as her finger made an imaginary cross over her heart. “Promise I don’t bite...well...” she said with a wink. “I’d love the company and it’s the pits eating alone.”

Elisabeth shook her head. “Sorry I can’t.”

Parker moved so the space between them was negligible. “You sure about that?”

No. The doctor could feel her body tremble. “I just can’t.” She moved away from her patient and let out a breath. “My medical finding is that you are physically fit for the job. Of course I will need the results of your blood work but judging by your fitness that won’t be a problem.” She pulled a business card from a holder on her desk and handed it to Parker. “If you have any further questions...”

Parker blinked her acknowledgement and went toward the door certain that the doctor would be in her bed that night.

Chapter Six

As she closed the door behind her, Parker saw Jill waiting for her. "What's next?" "We need to leave the building and go out to the department's training facility. Once you've gone through the obstacle course you'll be done for the day."

Parker looked at her watch. "It's after twelve, do you want to grab a bite to eat before they check out my physical prowess?" she said with a laugh.

"You want to eat before a work out...somehow I don't think that's wise."

With a gentle pat on the woman's back, Parker headed for the door. "Come on, I'll buy after I change into my workout clothes."

An hour and a half later, the squad car Jill Campbell drove pulled up outside a fenced facility. She swiped her card in the reader and the gates opened. Jill pointed to a small building several hundred yards away. "There's where you will meet Alec Manheim."

"He's the guy in charge of the obstacle course?"

"Yes, he designed the course and is responsible for maintaining the area along with evaluating recruits."

"Hmm, so this is his baby so to speak."

Jill stopped the vehicle in front of the small building and looked at Parker with a smile. "You catch on fast." When Parker reached for the handle to open the door Jill said, "Don't try to hoodwink Alec, he's not someone you want to be on the wrong side of if you get my drift."

Parker let out a belly laugh. "Trust me Jill, there isn't a man alive that I can't charm." She got out of the car still laughing and walked toward the building then knocked on the door.

She wasn't sure what she was expecting, but Alec Manheim was nothing like she'd ever seen before. Her brother Frank was well over six four and weighed a good two thirty, but this man was bigger...a lot bigger with sculpted muscle that would make a body builder proud. She tried to hide her surprise by smiling and holding out her hand. "Parker Davis I believe you were expecting me."

"Forty-five minutes ago. Believe it or not lady I am not on your schedule." He looked past Parker and smiled at Jill. "Hey, Jill how's the old man?"

"Rick's doin' good Alec."

"How'd you get this duty? Is crime so slow that they are pulling detectives for escort service?"

Jill felt her back stiffen. "No."

"You go on back to the station Jill...I've got it from here."

"McGivney told me to stay with her."

"You just go on...I'll square things with McGivney."

Parker felt her stomach roll and soon she tasted the sandwich she had for lunch again. She felt her hackles rise as she assessed the macho man. She was certain she could out run him and chuckled under her breath. His intimidation tactics wouldn't work on her.

Jill said, "I'll radio him and see what he wants me to do." She turned around not allowing the man to reply and walked quickly to the squad car.

Cold dark eyes focused on Jill as she walked away before turning to take in Parker. "So you're the bitch that snookered Tom." He looked her up and down. "Don't you dare try any of that crap on me," he said pointing a finger at her. "You won't survive to brag about it if you do."

Parker saw red as she clenched her fists and looked the man square in the eyes. "Bring it on."

As the two eyes sparred for superiority, Jill got out of her car and approached them. Manheim was not a man anyone ever stood up to yet she saw the possible new hire doing just that. "Alec, McGivney told me to stay here until you're done." The cool measured tone of her voice had both combatants looking in her direction. "He said it wouldn't hurt if I ran the course with her." She ran a hand over her stomach and wondered again how she let Parker talk her into having a sandwich.

Manheim grunted. "You," he said pointing his finger again at Parker. "Just remember what I said."

Parker took several steps until she was in the man's personal space. "Don't you ever threaten me again or point your finger at me."

Jill gulped and watched as Alec Manheim, whose reputation as a hard nosed, do everything my way took a step backwards. "You two meet over there at the gate. Be ready to start when I get there." Then he walked back into the building and slammed the door behind him.

"Damn Parker, he's not someone you want to play around with."

Cold hard eyes met Jill's before they softened. "I don't like bullies and I really don't like being threatened." Parker winked and said, "You sure you want to do this with me. I have a feeling I'm getting the super difficult expert course."

Jill smiled and started walking toward the entrance of the course. "I can handle it just not so sure about my full stomach."

Parker patted Jill on the back. "Yes, I do believe you can." As the two stood waiting for Manheim to join them Parker drummed her fingers on her thigh. "I hope he hurries up, I might have a date tonight."

"Shh," Jill said. "Here he comes. The last thing you want is for him to know that...he'll keep you here all night."

"No he won't," Parker said confidently. "He's afraid of me."

Halfway through the grueling course Jill started to limp – she'd pulled her hamstring. "Shit," she said.

Although being timed, Parker turned back and went to the aid of the woman. "Hey, let me help you."

"No, no go on ahead. Alec is close by with his golf cart...I'll hitch a ride with him."

"Until I see you on that cart I'm not leaving you out here alone."

"But it'll mess up your time and you know he's just lookin' for an excuse."

Parker sat down in the dirt next to Jill. "Did McGivney really tell you to do the course with me?"

"Well...he said if I was worried about you I should run the course too."

Parker smiled. "I'll wait with you until he comes to help you."

Ten minutes later, Manheim drove up in his cart. "You two had enough?"

"She's pulled a hamstring."

“You get your doctor’s degree while you were out here Davis?”

Cold eyes fixed on the man as Parker stood up then helped Jill to her feet. “Lean on me,” she said as they walked toward the cart. “She needs to ride with you,” Parker said in a low ominous voice. “You got a problem with that?”

Alec scratched his head. “Come on, git your butt in here.”

Parker nodded before she took off to finish the rest of the course. The sooner she was done the sooner she could wait by the doctor’s car. A smile crossed her face as she kicked her body into high gear.



Despite the delay helping Jill, Parker still finished in the top ten percent in the time it took to complete the course. Alec Manheim begrudgingly said, “Good job,” before he dismissed her.

On the ride back to the station Parker asked, “Are you going to see the doc about your pulled muscle?”

Jill said, “No, it will be ok once I ice it and do some light stretches. I should never have attempted doing that without a proper warm up...or lunch.” She looked over at her passenger for a second. “You didn’t seem to break a sweat...what’s your secret?”

Parker laughed. “Good genes I guess.” After a few minutes of silence she asked, “What’s next?”

Jill eased the vehicle into a parking spot and turned off the ignition. “You wait. The Sergeant will receive reports from everyone and then he’ll let you know.”

Parker nodded her head. “I see. I guess this is it then.” She reached for the handle and opened the door. “It was great getting to know you Jill and thanks for watching my back with Manheim.” She gathered her belongs from the back seat then closed the door and began the walk back to the motel.

Jill opened her door and scrambled out of the patrol car. “Hey, Parker, wait up.”

A smile crossed Parker’s face before she turned around. “What is it?”

“If it matters, I think you did great today and they would be crazy not to hire you.”

“Thanks. If I do get a call back I plan on singing your praises.”

Jill fished in her bag and pulled out a business card. “Here is my number. Give me a call when you come back and we can have lunch or something.”

A genuine smile crossed Parker’s face as she took the card. “Thanks, I’ll do that.” She looked at her watch and said, “Gotta run.”

With a laugh, Jill said, “See ya.”

“Yeah, me too.” With a slight wave, Parker turned and walked away.

Chapter Seven

The first thing Parker did when she returned to Sleepy Town was go to the office. Hi Mildred,” she said to the owner. “I really like staying here, but if I’m going to live in Portsmouth permanently I need to find something else. Can you help me?”

“Did you get the job?” she asked.

“It’s in the bag,” Parker said confidently.

The woman whose hair was a soft white that set off her rosy cheeks said, “My brother has several rentals and they’re near the police station. I know that they are clean and well kept. Paul, that’s my brother, has always been a stickler for keeping his places neat and tidy.” She smiled at Parker. “Would you like me to find out if any are available?”

“Are they furnished? I don’t have any furniture and I don’t want to make that investment just yet.”

Mildred patted Parker’s hand. “Let me call and find out.”

Parker moved away from the counter to give Mildred some privacy while she talked. She sat down and kept an eye on the woman for any facial clues as to what she learned.

“You’re in luck Parker, he has two. One on the first floor and the other is on the second.” Mildred scribbled the address on a motel business card. “He wants to know if you can look at them tomorrow morning.”

Parker stood up and went back to the counter. “Sure, you don’t think he’ll rent them in the meantime do you?”

Mildred laughed. “Oh, I don’t think so he’ll be here helping me out.” She held up a finger. “Let me tell him you can come in the morning...is nine ok with you?”

Parker nodded.

A minute later Mildred came back to the counter. She found a scrap of paper and jotted something down. “Here,” she said foisting the paper toward Parker. “It’s all set up for nine. He said if you got there earlier look for him in the basement.”

“Did he say how much the rent is?” Parker quickly scanned the piece of paper that held Mildred’s brother’s address.

“No, but he did say he’d take care of you.” The older woman laughed. “He asked me if you were staying here and did you pay on time.” Mildred smiled. “I told him you were going to be a police officer and never gave me a bit of trouble.” Her face reddened slightly. “My recommendation goes a long way with Paul. He said he’d take care of you and he will.”

Parker gave the woman her best smile and held up the piece of paper. “I guess I better get going then.” With a wave, Parker left and headed straight for her room. Then her thoughts turned to how to coax the doctor into a date. She wanted the woman and she would have her.



Dr. Elisabeth Hill walked briskly out of the police station. Her eyes scanned the area and she was surprised to see Parker Davis leaning negligently against her car. “What are you doing here?”

A slow lazy smile formed around Parker's lips before it spread to her cheeks. "Waiting on you...thought you might reconsider having dinner with me tonight."

I'd love to. "I thought I made myself clear Ms. Davis. I'm not interested in having dinner with you tonight or any night."

Parker pushed off the car, moved toward the doctor blocking her entry to the vehicle. "Your eyes tell me different."

Elisabeth's eyes shifted to the ground. "You're mistaken." When she lifted her head and looked at Parker she saw desire. "I'm engaged...I can't."

"You can't or you won't?"

"Please, let me by. I have patients I must see at the hospital."

Parker nodded and stepped aside. "We can have dinner after you're done."

Elisabeth tossed her bag in the backseat, her words belying her inner thoughts. "No we can't," she said as she got in.

Parker reached in and touched the doctor's shoulder and felt a jolt go straight through her body. "Please."

The doctor sighed and leaned her head on the seat. "What part of no don't you understand?"

"Please."

Elisabeth pushed the key in the ignition and twisted causing the motor to purr. She reached for the door handle. "I really need to get to the hospital," she said looking Parker directly in the eye. "Please let me close the door."

For a moment, Parker gazed at the doctor before she winked. "Take your time Doc, but don't take too long. There are other fish out there you know. I'm in room twelve at the Sleepy Town Motel if you change your mind." She grinned. "I promise you'll never forget it," she said as she gripped the handle and gently shut the door.

Chapter Eight

Bare feet padded across the carpeted floor of room twelve. It had been five days since she had her interview with the police department and her phone hadn't rung. Parker called Sergeant McGivney and left a message three days earlier and even that didn't evoke a response. "I can't believe I didn't get the job." She paused her pacing and let her hand hover over the phone. "No, can't call him...that'd give him a hands up over me and I can't let that happen."

Added to the mix were the five phone calls she made to the doctor only to get a recording three times. Once a man answered and she said, "Pardon me I've got the wrong number." She did get to speak with Elisabeth the night before and although she turned her down again she did hear something in the doctor's voice that gave her hope.

The mechanic delivered her Mustang and true to his word, it hummed as if it were brand new. Unfortunately, the unexpected cost caused her finances to run low and she was operating on her secret stash of cash. She had signed a lease for the apartment Mildred's brother had and paid the deposit and the first month's rent. "If something doesn't happen soon I'm going to have to give the apartment up and my deposit and go back home." She smacked the wall hard with her palm. "Damn, this isn't how it should go."

Just then, she heard a knock on her door. She looked at the time on the radio's display and her brow creased. "It's six...who can that be?" She looked through the peephole and a smile crossed over her face. Things were looking up. Her hand twisted the door open and saw a smiling Elisabeth Hill.

She sat in her car outside Parker's room for ten minutes debating whether to get out or leave. When the door opened and she saw Parker, she felt her breathing stop—the woman was a vision. She gulped and said, "I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop...do you mind?"

A smile crossed Parker's face as she said, "Come on in. I was just about to go out and find something to eat." She looked back at the doctor and winked as she let her eyes rake over the woman's body.

The frank assessment of her body made Elisabeth smile. "Guess I'm just in time then...if the dinner invitation is still open."

"Excellent timing," said Parker as she moved closer to the doctor before wrapping her arms around the woman. "I've wanted to do this since I first saw you."

Elisabeth struggled to get free but when Parker's lips met hers, she melted into the delicious kiss as her arms snaked around the taller woman. When she finally pulled back, she said, "I shouldn't be here and I certainly shouldn't be kissing you."

"That's exactly why you came here isn't it." Parker grinned as her lips sought the doctor's once again wanting more as her tongue demanded entrance and the doctor gave permission. Her body was humming the tune of sexual excitement and it was reaching a crescendo. She looked in the woman's eyes and said, "I think I better put the do not disturb sign on the door." She pulled Elisabeth in again and her kisses became more urgent. "I want you."

"I can't," the doctor murmured as her lips sought out Parker's soft malleable ones. "I can't," she said into Parker's mouth. "I shouldn't."

Parker took a step back and let her eyes roam over the doctor's body seductively. "Undress for me."

"I really should go...it was a mistake coming here," the doctor said as she began unbuttoning her shirt. "This isn't right."

Hazel eyes watched approvingly. "You make me so wet I want to come right now," the husky voice said.

Although she had never stripped before, Elisabeth felt Parker's gaze and it set her free. With abandon, she twirled her underwear before flinging them at the woman. Her mind screamed for her to stop but her body would hear none of it. "I'm wet too...what are you going to do about it?"

Parker undressed quickly and moved toward the doctor. She let skin rub against skin before she picked Elisabeth up and carried her to the bed. No longer would she deny her need—she took what she wanted.

Elisabeth lay in the crook of Parker's arm and sigh. "That was incredible. I had no idea my body could react like that," she said trying to catch her breath.

"This isn't the first time you've been with a woman is it?" Parker asked.

"No."

"Does the fiancée know?"

"Roger, no he's a sweet guy."

"Does he make you feel like this?" Parker asked as she ran her fingers over the doctor's taut nipple. For Parker the coupling was a means to an end—her relief. She kissed the woman's head just as she did with everyone she had ever taken to bed.

With a slight shift, Elisabeth moved closer to Parker. "No," she said as she took Parker's hand and rested it between her legs. "I'm still wet for you."

Around midnight Parker woke up to find the doctor entangled in her arms. She slid out of the bed, went into the bathroom, and started the shower.

As she began soaping her hair, Elisabeth pulled open the curtain. "Mind if I join you?" she said. Not waiting for an answer, she stepped into the tub, wrapped her arms around Parker, and kissed her. "I want you," she moaned as she felt long fingers enter her. "Oh my god Parker."

So began their sexual love affair. Sex with no strings was their agreement. For Parker, having sex was never about love, but need. She loved the way her body felt when it achieved an orgasm and she was pleased that Elisabeth felt the same way.

"No way am I going to fall in love with you Parker," the doctor said as she opened the door. "I love Roger and we are going to be married and start a family."

"As it should be," Parker said before kissing Elisabeth's lips. She patted her backside. "You better get going or..."

Elisabeth laughed. "Save that thought for the next time," she said before she left. She checked her voice mail and saw that Roger had called. After listening to the message, she smiled as a tinge of guilt overcame her. Then she remembered what it was like to be in Parker's arms—she was aroused.

Chapter Nine

A week after Parker had interviewed for the job all those that participated in her evaluation met Marcus McGivney. "I want to thank you all for meeting me on short notice. I have read all your reports and it seems to me that there is a wide difference in opinions about Parker Davis," he said. "That's why I asked you all here...I'd like to hear first hand what your impressions are of the woman."

The first to speak was Alec Manheim. "She's a cocky bitch that needs to be brought down a peg or two."

Marcus looked over Manheim's report. "Yet she scored in the top ten percent of all recruits and officers. Sounds to me like she had every right to be cocky," he said with a shrug.

"If you don't smack her down from the get go she'll be nothing but trouble." Alec added. "Mark my words Marcus...she's nothing but trouble."

"I agree with Alec," Tom Bishop said. "She strung me along like she'd never shot a gun before and then she makes kill shots on all the targets."

Jill Campbell said, "Do you mind if I make a comment Marcus?"

"No go ahead. After all you were with her all day."

"Well, Tom never asked her if she knew about guns...he just assumed she didn't." Her eyes sought out the weapons instructor. "Isn't that right Tom?"

"Well yeah, but she just let me ramble on like an idiot. She should have stopped me."

Marcus turned his attention to the therapist. "Eliza, what was your take on Ms. Davis."

The psychiatric consultant looked up from her notes. "Sgt. Manheim is correct that she is cocky but I wouldn't go so far as to call her an egomaniac. She's very confident in her abilities and I liked that about her. Her strength lies in the area of tactics and planning. She's very analytical and thinks through a problem before she comes to an astute solution. That doesn't mean it takes her a long time to arrive at a judgment, quite the contrary. In my opinion she is exactly what we want...officers that are strong, confident and able to think quickly in any situation. From what I saw, it was in keeping with her character not to speak up and tell Tom that she did know how to shoot. She respects authority and although she might disagree, she won't voice her opinion unless asked. But, if a situation occurs, she will take action. I can't see her ever saying I told you so." She adjusted her glasses. "I think she will make an excellent officer with the potential of being a very competent leader."

"Thank you Eliza. Ok Dr. Hill other than medically what's your take?"

The doctor was glad that they were sitting around a table so no one would see how tightly she was crossing her legs. She kept her eyes on the paper in front of her until she felt she could look up and no one would see that she was fighting to stop the orgasm that was about to erupt. The night before was incredible every time Parker's name was mentioned the vision of hot bodies rubbing against each other filled her mind. She cleared her throat and said, "Um, I thought she was a very pleasant woman who was in superb physical condition." A vision of a naked Parker as she sucked on a nipple caused her to erupt slightly. She took a deep breath and tried to center her emotions. "In the nine years that I've been evaluating officers here, I can honestly say she's the perfect candidate."

“Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with us on such short notice,” Marcus said

“Certainly,” she said as she stood up. “I really need to go... I do have patients waiting.”

Marcus watched the woman leave then said, “I have everything I need and I will be offering Ms. Davis a patrol job.”

The psychiatrist said, “Not for too long Marcus. I think she has the potential to be an excellent detective.”

Chapter Ten

Parker stood in the doorway of the kitchen in her apartment and grinned. The place was awesome. In the living room, there were banks of windows on either side of an atrium door leading out to an enclosed patio. The bathroom was large with a walk-in shower that she thought would fit ten people. When she walked into the kitchen, she thought of her mother and smiled. All the appliances were new and the cupboards had everything she might need to make meals...if she ever cooked—she didn't. Her bedroom was large and airy with a huge walk-in closet.

For her, life was good. She had it all...a great job, a wonderful apartment, and a lover who was as horny as she was. Her eyes fell on the half open bedroom door. "Hey you'd better get a move on if you're going to pickup your boyfriend."

Elisabeth laughed as she came out of the room drying her hair with a towel and eyed a naked Parker. "You just can't bring yourself to say fiancée can you? I have at least an hour before his flight lands. She leaned into Parker and kissed her soundly. "Besides, I can always say there was an emergency."

"Doesn't he wonder why you have so many emergencies lately?" Parker asked as she pulled the woman close.

"Funny thing is he asked that very same question just before he left this time." Elisabeth chuckled. "I told him that it must be because my patients are getting older."

Parker undid the tie holding Elisabeth's robe together and let her hands slide over the naked body. "I think the one you're treating tonight is ancient," Parker said as she kissed a breast. "The woman is so old that it might take all night for you to find a cure." She pushed the robe off Elisabeth's shoulders and let it fall to the floor. "I think you should leave him a message that you won't be picking him up. Your patient needs special attention."

Elisabeth closed her eyes as her body reacted to Parker's touch. Yeah, I think that's a good idea. "I can't do that," she said breathing heavily.

"Sure you can," Parker said as she caressed Elisabeth's cheek. "You just pick up your cell, call and leave a message." Her fingers were sliding down the doctor's belly.

"Can't do that...my god what you do to me."

Parker deftly picked her lover up and took her to the bedroom. Their two bodies entwined and created one as they moved in unison. Just as they were about to reach a mutual orgasm Elisabeth's pager went off.

"Leave it," Parker ground out as her body hummed in pleasure.

"I can't."

Parker increased the tempo of her ministrations and Elisabeth's body, wound tight, demanded satisfaction. As her pager beeped and beeped, she felt a shattering crescendo that matched Parker's release. The insistent noise of the pager went unnoticed as the two women held each other close as the last remnants of passion subsided.

Elisabeth reached across Parker and grabbed her pager. "Damn, one of my patients was admitted to the hospital. I need to go."

Parker, lying on her back and watching her lover dress, blew out a deep breath. "You comin' back?"

"Not tonight," she said without looking at Parker.

With a shrug, Parker sat up. "He'll never compare to me you know that don't you?"

"You jealous?" she cooed.

Parker let out a snort. "No, I just want more."

Elisabeth leaned in and kissed Parker's cheek. "And you shall have more just not tonight."

"Hmm, but not before Roger," she said as she gently smacked Elisabeth's backside. "Just remember I'm the one that rocks your world."

"That you do." The doctor moved toward the door. "Later," she said as she left the bedroom then the apartment.

After she heard the door close, Parker got up, pulled back a curtain and watched as Elisabeth got into her car then she laughed. "Later indeed."

Chapter Eleven

Because Parker was the last hire, she drew Willard Donleavy as her partner. By birth, Willard was the Police Chief's nephew and was, without a doubt, the worst officer in the department. The chief's retirement banquet was the next week and Parker hoped that along with his departure Willard would go too. She had been on the job for three months and every day with the man proved to be more and more of an irritant. First thing that morning they had a call for a break in and when they found a dead body Willard returned to the squad car and threw up. "I hope they know I'm doing the work of two," Parker said to the criminalists processing the scene.

"They know," Tom Price said. "I think everyone has had him for a partner." The man laughed. "Although it seems he's stuck with you longer than most."

"Lucky me," Parker said. She was full of pent up energy and her partner was irritating her more than usual. Once the detective released her from the scene, she returned to the squad car.

"Partner's are supposed to have each other's backs Willard. That can't happen if you're sitting in the car barfing like a baby."

The sniveling man said, "I'm gonna tell my uncle what you said."

Parker snorted. "Go ahead." She picked up the mic. "This is Adam Six we are Code 7 at Fifth and Main." She pulled the cruiser into the parking lot of Frank's Pizza and got out leaving the man behind. When she heard the clunk of a car door shutting she grimaced - Willard was following her.

"Hey wait for me," the man called out.

"Willard," Parker growled. "Don't sit with me. You reek of vomit."

With a snicker Willard said, "I'm gonna tell my uncle that you aren't a good partner and won't let me eat with you."

In a flash, Parker turned around and got in the man's face. "Go ahead little man. Do you know you sound like a two year old and not a police officer? Tell your uncle and maybe I'll get lucky and get a decent partner."

To Willard, Parker loomed threateningly over him and he took a step backward. "You'll be sorry," he said.

Parker shook her head and walked away. After she got her order, she took it outside and sat at one of the tables. It wasn't long before Willard slinked toward her and before he could sit down, she glared at him. "Don't," was all she said before she heard *ten-fifty, code 1 at Twenty-Third and Main heading east*. "They're heading our way. Get in the car now Willard," she said as she ran to the car and grabbed the mic. "This is Adam Six ten-one."

That afternoon after she returned to the police station Parker approached Howard Bennett the watch commander. "Do you have a minute?" she asked.

"Sure, what's on your mind Davis," he said as his mouth curled into a smile. "Bet you think you don't need a partner any more."

Parker closed her eyes then looked straight into the man's face. "He's been with me for four months now and as hard as I've tried it just isn't working out."

"Damn," the watch commander said. "McNulty wins the pool."

Hazel eyes flared at the man. "There is a pool on how long before I came to you for a partner change?"

“Yeah, if it’s any consolation, you stuck with him longer than anyone else.”

Parker shook her head and laughed. “I hope McNulty won enough to buy me a beer.” Her eyes turned serious. “I’d like to start tomorrow without Willard as my partner.”

“You done good Davis. I’ll reassign Donleavy to desk duty.” The man’s face softened. “I’m impressed with the job you’re doing and glad to have you on my team.”

“Thank you sir,” Parker said not sure how to respond. She didn’t need him to tell her she was doing a good job, she already knew that.

“Will I see you at the Chief’s retirement Friday night?”

“Yes, I’ll be there.”

Chapter Twelve

Attendance at Chief Dunleavy's retirement banquet was mandatory for all personnel and Parker was not happy. It was the first night in over two weeks that Elisabeth had the time to be with her. "Dammit," she said when she opened the door to her apartment. What greeted her was a naked doctor with a stethoscope around her neck.

"Know anyone that needs a check-up?" Elisabeth cooed as she approached her lover. She ran her tongue along Parker's lips and licked them until the mouth opened. The kiss was just the kind Parker craved - long and deep. When she felt Parker react, she fumbled with the holster buckle until she heard the dull thud when it fell to the carpeted floor. She pushed her tongue deeper and gagged slightly as Parker sucked it in even further into her mouth. Her fingers snaked inside Parker's underwear until they found soft velvety lips. With precision, two fingers pushed upwards and with a well practiced touch, they began their assault.

"God, it's been way too long," Parker strangled out as she moved with Elisabeth fingers. All she wanted was relief, but Elisabeth was playing games by pumping her hard and then stopping just as Parker was about to come.

With a quick move, Parker pulled her mouth away. "Don't stop fucking me Beth," she said. "You know I don't like it when you play games with me."

"Sure you do. I'll start again when I feel you inside me," she purred.

Parker growled as she slid three fingers inside her lover and pumped them hard. "Is this what you want?" she said as she pushed further inside. When Elisabeth responded in kind and Parker felt the smaller explosions she knew would lead to a climax, she increased the tempo until they both erupted.

Spent, Parker pulled Elisabeth's still trembling body to her. "You never get enough do you," she said as she let out a breath. "You like the way I fuck you that's why you keep coming back for more."

"That I do, that I do. And now, I am yours for the night."

Parker groaned. "I have that damn banquet to go to tonight." She took a step back. "Want to go with me?"

Elisabeth laughed. "As your date?"

"Sure why not," Parker said as she took off the rest of her clothes.

The doctor closed her eyes and sighed. "I wish that were possible but it can't happen."

Parker shook her head and laughed. "Too much for you to handle?"

"What time do you have to be there?"

She looked at her watch and said, "I hav'ta be there in a little over two hours."

Elisabeth pooched her lips into a pout. "You sure?"

"Yeah." For a few seconds Parker contemplated the night. "Will you still be here when I get back? We can play more then."

With a playful pout Elisabeth said, "Depends on what you bring for dessert."

Parker laughed. "So its dessert you want. I think I can give you a preview if you want to join me in the shower."

Elisabeth giggled. "I like the sound of that. Lead on lover, lead on."

Chapter Thirteen

Parker stood in the doorway of the FPO and let her eyes scan the crowd. The mandatory black tie affair was not something she wanted to attend and she wished she were still in the doctor's arms. The thought of the passion they shared made her feel warm and wet.

She literally had to drag herself away from Elisabeth if she was going to be on time. Elisabeth helped Parker dress and the sight reflecting from the mirror of her naked lover made her seriously reconsider going anywhere. She smoothed her hands over the black cocktail dress she had since college. Her eyes connected with Elisabeth's through the mirror. "I really hate this kind of thing."

For her part, Elisabeth shrugged. "Then don't go stay here with me."

Now as she felt the press of the crowd against her she regretted not staying at home with her lover. She felt her skin prickle and her eyes gazed at the faces in the crowd. Her eyes fell on a tall woman with flowing black hair standing near the bar talking with a man she had met at several crime scenes. As thoughts of lust filtered through her brain, she elbowed her way toward the bar.

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From her vantage point at the bar, Olivia Santos, a tall Latina woman with long black hair dressed in black silk trousers, a white silk shirt with a small black tie around the neck eyed a woman standing at the edge of the crowd. She hadn't seen her before, which wasn't much of a surprise as she worked the graveyard shift. She considered that the woman might be someone's date and as she looked at the man next to her. "David," she said poking the man. "Who's that woman over there near Ed Layton?"

David Tourney turned and looked in the direction of Olivia's gaze. "Oh, that's Parker Davis."

"The one everyone's talking about." She liked what she saw. For a moment, the crowd thinned out and she took in the woman as a whole before the crowd regrouped. The black dress complemented the woman's broad shoulders and trim body. Her long legs were accentuated by what she guessed were three inch heels. Without the shoes, she thought the woman would be around five eight or nine. From what she could see from that distance, the woman's physical attributes were very appealing. "Do you know her David?"

"Yeah, I've met her several times. She was involved in that case last week when Citizen's Bank got robbed."

"Is she dating anyone?" Olivia looked at the woman again.

David saw where his friend was looking and laughed. "I don't think so. Why, are you interested?" He softly chucked the woman, who he considered a sister, on the arm. "I haven't heard any gossip about her from anyone. But, I've heard lots about her."

Olivia's eyes followed the woman as she walked confidently through the crowd.

She poked her friend in the ribs with her elbow. "She's coming this way, introduce me."

With a bemused look David said, "Not too subtle are we Santos."

As the woman drew closer, Olivia felt her heart speed up and her breathing stop.

Parker looked straight at David Tourney. "Hi Detective, I thought it was you."

David nodded his acknowledgement and said, "I must say you look quite beautiful tonight Ms Davis."

Parker smiled and gave the man a coquettish smile. "As opposed to other times when I look like crap," she said with a wink.

David laughed. "Nope, can't recall you ever looking that way. My friend Olivia here," he gestured toward the woman by his side, "is one of Portsmouth's finest and she's dying to meet you."

Olivia glared at him.

Parker felt her knees go weak when she looked at the smiling woman. She automatically extended her hand. "Nice to meet you Olivia," Parker said as the feeling when their hands met overwhelmed her.

Olivia took in the hazel eyes as she held onto the hand like a lifeline—the woman was even more beautiful close up. When she felt the other hand squeeze hers slightly she said, "It's nice to meet you too. I've heard a lot about you?" She reluctantly let go of the hand.

Parker creased her eyebrows. "You have?"

Olivia winked and her reward was a brilliant smile. "Yeah, it's all good. Anyone that can kick Manheim's ass is ok in my book."

Just then, the bartender asked, "What'll it be?"

"Scotch straight up and," she looked at Olivia.

"Beer would be good."

"What kind?"

"Whatever is on tap...on second thought, I'll have scotch too."

"Make that two Glenlivet's." She looked at the woman next to her and took a step closer. "If you're going to drink make sure it is the best, my dad always says."

Olivia's insides shivered when she felt the warmth of the woman's body. "I've never had that brand it'll be interesting to see if I can tell a difference."

The drinks came and Parker handed Olivia hers and made sure their fingers touched. The feeling was exquisite. She watched as the woman sipped her drink. "Do you taste the difference?"

Olivia was speechless. She had no reference for the attraction and wanton need she felt for the woman. All she could do was to move even closer and hope that she wouldn't leave. "Oh yes, I taste the difference."

"Glad to hear that," Parker said as her fingers, with a mind of their own, touched the hand resting on the bar. The jolt she felt made her close her eyes and take a deep breath. When she opened them, the gaze of Olivia Santos captured her.

All thoughts of Elisabeth disappeared as Parker found herself drawn into the dark blue eyes. Fireworks seemed to be emanating from everywhere but Parker couldn't track them as Olivia's eyes held her captive.

David was watching the entire episode and saw the sparks fly the moment Olivia and Parker's eyes met. He considered all he knew about his fiery friend and what he had gleaned from other officers about Parker Davis and shook his head—if they got together there would be fireworks twenty-four seven..

"Well I guess I'll be on my way," David said. Neither woman took notice of him or his comment.

With eyes still locked, Olivia asked, “You here with anyone?”

“No, you?”

“No. Want to get out of here for a breath of fresh air?”

“I don’t think we’ll be missed do you?”

“No.”

Just then, Scott Davidson, the chief’s adjutant said over the PA system, “The bar is closed. We all need to get to our seats now.”

Olivia released Parker’s eyes and looked as the crowd gravitated toward the tables. She shrugged. “Guess we didn’t make our getaway fast enough.”

“We can do it later,” Parker said as she grabbed Olivia’s hand. “Let’s find a table near the door.” She winked and began threading them through the crowd.

Chapter Fourteen

Once the meal was over and before the toast to Chief Donleavy, Parker asked Olivia, "Want something more to drink?"

"Sure," Olivia reached out and touched Parker's arm. "Don't take too long it's almost time for us to break out."

With a wide grin, Parker leaned in and whispered, "In that case I'll hurry."

Once Parker left the table, David sat next to his friend. "How's it going?"

Olivia watched as Parker went toward the bar. "It's looking up," she said.

A serious look crossed David's face. "Be careful will ya?"

"Who me?" Olivia said pointing to her chest and laughing. "I'm just playing...it's nothing serious."

"Yeah, sure it is," he said softly as he watched Olivia's eyes take in the woman returning from the bar.

When Parker returned to her table, she nodded at David. "Mind if I join you?" he asked.

Parker's eyes tracked to Olivia. "Here you go." She eyed David. "No."

Olivia took a taste of her drink and exhaled. "I can't wait to try that brand of scotch again. Thanks for turning me on to it."

With a slight smile and a nod, Parker said, "Glad to hear it." She moved a bit closer and added, "I hope that's not all that turns you on."

The two women exchanged glances during the next hour as the formalities of the evening droned on. With David sitting next to them making a getaway was impossible so the two women settled for touches.

As everyone rose to leave Olivia said, "Might as well wait till the crowd thins out. It'll be impossible to get out of the lot now."

The need to touch the woman next to her was overwhelming as much as it was erotic. "You work tonight?" Parker asked as she let her hand rest on Olivia's forearm.

Olivia looked at the hand resting on hers then at her watch. "Yeah." For a long moment, she stared at the woman next to her. "Wish I didn't have to. I'd rather stay here, but I guess I better get going. They tend to frown if you're late."

Parker snorted a laugh. "Yeah, I know what happened on my first day when I arrived late."

"You didn't."

"Yep, but it wasn't my fault. As a prank for the newbie, they tied all these knots in my uniform shoes and it took forever to get them out. I think the watch commander was in on it 'cause he laughed along with the others."

"Sounds like the day crew is a really funny bunch, I'm glad I'm on nights." Olivia shrugged. "I guess I'd better go."

Not wanting her time with Olivia to end, Parker said, "I'll walk out with you."

Once they were outside in the deserted parking lot standing next to Olivia's Jeep, neither knowing what to say or do. Olivia looked down and kicked a small pebble before she said, "They say it might rain tonight." Mentally she slapped her head.

Parker looked up at the sky. "Looks clear to me...weathermen, I think they throw darts for a forecast."

Olivia nodded and laughed. "I think you might be on to something there."

“I can’t believe we never ran into each other before,” Parker said fighting the urge to kiss the woman.

Blue eyes sought out hazel before Olivia said, “I keep to myself most of the time. I know a lot of the guys hang out after their shifts are done...I never saw the appeal.”

“We would have run into each other if you had, but the fates didn’t want us to until tonight.” Inwardly Parker shook her head—she sounded like a dreamer who believed in fairytales.

A smile filled Olivia’s face before she chuckled. “The fates huh, well I guess that’s as good a reason as any.”

Parker shook her head and laughed deeply. “Pretty lame isn’t it.”

“Yeah, but I like lame.” Olivia looked deeply into Parker’s eyes. “Now that I know you’ll be there, maybe I’ll stay a little longer in the mornings,” she said with a shrug. “That is if it’s ok with you.”

Parker moved closer and wrapped Olivia in her arms. “It’s more than ok with me Olivia. It will make my day.”

Olivia unresistingly melted into Parker’s arm. “It will make mine too,” she whispered.

As lips met, the kiss they shared was tentative and gentle. Parker let go of the woman before taking a big step backwards. When she looked into Olivia’s eyes, deep down she knew they mirrored hers. “I guess I’ll see you in the morning then.”

Olivia leaned in and let their lips fleetingly touch again. “Knowing my luck, some idiot will be in an accident and I won’t be able to get away until you’re already on the road,” she said with a shrug.

“I’m counting on that not happening.” With a gentleness that surprised her, Parker caressed Olivia’s cheek. “I’ll look for you,” she said.

Chapter Fifteen

The drive home gave Parker time to think about the strange way she was feeling after meeting Olivia Santos. Ever since she realized she was a sexual being, she looked to others to gratify her needs. Whether the other person was satisfied really wasn't her concern. This woman was different and she couldn't remember ever feeling that way. She smiled then hit the steering wheel. She wanted to know Olivia better. Not just in her bed but Olivia the person. *I must be sick*. She quickly felt her head—she didn't have a fever.

She parked the Mustang, walked toward her apartment, and unlocked the door. When she spied Elisabeth's keys on the table she grinned.

"Is that you Parker," Elisabeth called out.

"Yeah," Parker said as she kicked her shoes off.

"I lit some candles in the bathroom to set the mood," she whispered as she moved closer and kissed Parker's cheek. "How was the banquet? You're such a flirt I expect you found someone to occupy your time there. I could easily come up with a list of candidates from the ones I've treated in the department."

"My, my Beth are you jealous," Parker said with a laugh. "I seem to remember someone named Roger and if I'm not mistaken you've flirted many times when we've had dinner."

"Me a flirt, you've got to be kidding." Elisabeth laughed as she wrapped her arms around Parker and kissed her. "Let me get you undressed. I ran a bath for us."

"Hmm, that sounds inviting." She let her eyes wander over Elisabeth's naked body—she was hot. "I hope it's one of your special baths," she said wiggling her eyebrows.

"Oh it will be special alright. Tonight my dear, I am gong to knock your socks off." Elisabeth moved closer to her lover and said, "Turn around and I'll unzip you."

Parker let Elisabeth undress her and by the time her lover led her into the bathroom, she was close to coming. She looked at the flickering candles and thought of Olivia. It would be easy to fantasize about Olivia while having sex with Elisabeth but she didn't...she wanted the real thing.

"Hey babe, you with me or are you dreaming about some new girl?"

Parker growled and kissed Elisabeth before she said, "Now how could I think of anyone else when I have the most gorgeous doctor in the town in my bed." Her lips assaulted the doctor's body and soon their passion ignited into an all out blaze.

Long after Elisabeth fell asleep, Parker laid awake thinking about Olivia and their meeting in the morning. She yawned knowing that when the time was right she and Olivia would become lovers. Then she fell into a deep sleep.

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It was still dark when she woke, but she slipped out of the bed anyway. She made her way into the bathroom and turned on the water for the shower before getting in. The cold water hit her body and she trembled it was exactly what she needed—a cold slap in the face. After she exited the shower, she wiped the mirror off with her towel and looked at her body. On her left breast, she saw a distinct bite mark and she recalled how Elisabeth took her the night before. After the bath, her lover became voracious. It was

just how she liked it, hot, heavy, and hard. Parker looked at her neck, saw several small hickies, and growled. Elisabeth was marking her territory. She fumbled in a drawer, found a makeup stick, and rubbed it over her neck.

From her vantage point in the bed, Elisabeth watched as Parker buttoned up her shirt. "You're up early," she said. "Usually when you wake at this time you want sex but you're dressed so I guess that's not on the agenda." She pushed the sheet away exposing her naked body. "Can I persuade you to join me?" she purred.

With eyes blazing, Parker turned toward the bed as she rubbed the makeup off her neck. "Look, look at these Beth," she said pointing to her neck. "I thought we agreed from the get go that there would be no marks on the neck! And, now look at me...I'm all marked up."

"I'm sorry I couldn't help myself," Elisabeth said with a giggle. "You were just soooo good I had to eat you up."

"You couldn't help yourself? Beth you eat pussy not necks. You're a doctor for heaven's sake...you should know the difference." Parker said with a glint in her eyes. "I think it was more like you wanted to mark your territory!" Parker's eyes narrowed. "I guess I'm just going to have to punish you," she said with a scowl.

"Oooo, I like it when you take command makes me all horny and wet," Elisabeth said as she let her fingers stroke a nipple.

Parker wasted no time getting her clothes off before she crawled in next to Elisabeth. "First, we need to punish you for the bite mark on my breast."

"Oh, no not that...please Parker be gentle with me."

With a crooked smile Parker said, "You sure gentle is what you want?" before she pulled the sheets over their heads.

Chapter Sixteen

Her mind was a jumble of thoughts as she drove to work. She focused on how insatiable Beth was and had to wiggle a bit in her seat. She'd probably walk funny all day. Then her thoughts turned to Olivia Santos and the night before and knew without a doubt that she wanted to get to know her better. She considered that it might have been the lighting or the ambience that made her enamored with the woman and there was the distinct possibility that in the light of day Olivia might not hold the same appeal. She thought of Beth when she slid out of the Mustang and felt pain between her legs. Just the thought of the early morning sex made her juices flow. Then Olivia floated into her consciousness and she felt even wetter. "Wonder if she'll show? I guess I'll find out soon enough."

While she tried to concentrate on unfinished paper work, Parker kept an eye on the door for any sign of Olivia—she saw none. She got up, went into the locker room, and saw a few people she knew were on the night shift, but not Olivia. She paced the length of the room several times before she looked at her watch—the shift briefing was in ten minutes. When she looked up, she saw the brilliant smile of Olivia Santos, and all thoughts of anything else left her mind. It was at that moment she knew she had found the love of her life.

"Hi," sorry I'm late we had a 10-40 that lasted longer than I hoped it would."

Parker stared at the woman as she tried to make sense of all the different emotions swirling around in her head and body. "No problem. Well I guess the fact that I have to go in a few minutes is a problem," she said with a slight laugh.

Olivia eyed Parker and liked what she saw. "Really why," she said and batted her eyes.

Parker shrugged. "I was hoping we'd have more time." She quickly looked at the wall clock. "Listen, I really have to go."

Olivia waited as Parker advanced on her. "I'll walk with you part way," she said. She touched Parker's hand and wasn't ready for the jolt she felt. "What are you doing later...when you get off?"

"I'm having dinner with you," Parker said as she bumped hips with the other officer.

"Good answer." Olivia fished in her pocket and came up with one of her cards and scribbled her home number on the back. "This is my home number. When you get a chance give me a call and we'll set up the particulars of our date." When she saw the questioning look on Parker's face she said, "It is a date isn't it?"

Parker's face broke out into a genuine smile. "Yes, it's a date."

"Good. Give me a call ok?"

"I don't want to disturb you if you're asleep."

Olivia grinned. "You won't, I don't sleep much."



Around noon Parker pulled up to a pay phone, took out the card Olivia gave her and picked up the receiver as a vision of Olivia flashed into her head. There was no

denying that the woman would make a great partner in and out of bed. The ringing stopped and she heard a male voice say, "Hello."

"Hmm, is this Olivia Santos' house?"

"Yeah."

Parker heard, "It's for you," and smiled.

The deep sensuous voice that Parker identified as Olivia said, "Hi, you called."

"I didn't wake you did I?"

"No, I told you I sleep very little."

"Is this a good time...I mean you have company...are you busy?"

A deep laugh floated across the telephone line. "That's my brother. No, I'm not busy. If you want to know the truth, I've been waiting for your call."

Parker grinned. "I started to call you about ten times, but every time I thought I was alone the idiot riding with me today was glued to my side."

"And who is that?"

"Willard Donleavy," Parker said. "No wonder no one wants to partner with him. He's the worst excuse for a partner material I've ever known."

Olivia laughed. "Now that his uncle won't be chief much longer I doubt he will be kept around."

It was Parker's turn to laugh. "From your mouth to the new chief's ears, but, that would leave me in need of a new partner. You know anyone that might be available?"

"Hmm, maybe. I just took the test for detective so my fortunes are about to change."

Parker was unprepared for the jolt that pierced her brain. For the entire day since she last saw Olivia, she was formulating a way to get the woman to be her partner. Now, that idea seemed out of reach. "I'm happy for you Olivia...I've been thinking about doing that myself. I guess now I have a reason to."

For a moment, Olivia said nothing as she mentally calculated if being Parker's partner would be a good idea once they were both detectives. "The test wasn't that hard," she offered.

Silence ensued until Parker said, "Do you know a place outside of town called the Hideaway?"

"Yep."

"What time should I pick you up? I mean if you still want to go out." Parker held her breath.

"I've been looking forward to a date with you since I first saw you last night," she purred. "How about I pick you up? Ever ridden on the back of a Harley?"

Parker felt her shoulders relax and for some reason she giggled like a school girl. "Yeah with my brother but with you it sounds far more exciting...it'll be fun," Parker said with a catch in her throat. "My address is..."

"I already know it," Olivia said. "I'll pick you up at five. Have you ever walked the path along the river?"

"Yep, it is one of my favorite pastimes."

"Great. Maybe we can watch the boats on the river before dinner."

"I'm looking forward to it. I get off at three...maybe we can go as soon as I get home and change clothes. That will be around three thirty. We can take a walk along the river and get to know each other better." It was a stupid thing to say. "Or not."

Olivia heard the note of doubt in Parker's voice and said, "I think walking along the river with you sounds perfect."

Parker felt her cheeks heat up. "Yeah, I feel the same way." The mic on Parker's shoulder squawked. "Unfortunately, I have to go. I'll see you later then."

Her shoulder said, "All units, code 2 a 10-60 is in progress at the Portsmouth Bank, 920 Main."

Parker said, "10-4, Adam six responding." She said into her shoulder. "Sorry Olivia I gotta run."

Olivia listened as the phone went dead and jabbed a fist into the air. "It's just you and me on my Harley Parker," she said with a smile.

"You gotta date Sis?"

Chapter Seventeen

The driver pulled the Harley into a parking spot at the park near the river and lowered the kickstand. Parker loved wrapping her arms around Olivia's tapering waist.

Parker reluctantly let go and removed the helmet. "That was such a rush Olivia, thank you I loved every minute...it was way cooler than riding with my brother."

Olivia smiled; diverting the pleasure in her eyes for fear Parker would see the joy the comment brought. "Glad you liked it," she said as she tried to reign in her emotions. It was rare that she let anyone see what she felt and rarer that she let anyone inside. When she finally looked at the woman, she saw the big grin on her face and knew she was different from anyone she'd known before—that scared her.

"When I first moved here I found this place and have made it one of the spots I visit when I need solitude."

Olivia looked down the paved path along the river and frowned. "You come out here alone?"

"Yeah, why?"

Olivia said, "As desolate as this place is it wouldn't take much for a rapist or mugger to do some damage to a pretty woman who is all alone."

Parker tilted her head and creased her brow. "As cops it's our nature to never let your guard down. Have you ever gone anywhere that your eyes weren't in constant motion?"

"Yeah, yeah I get the point, but I still think it isn't a smart idea to come here alone."

Parker walked a short way before she jumped up on the rock wall, sat down and let her feet dangle over the side. "I guess you'll have to always come with me then." She winked and when she saw Olivia's face light up she too smiled.

"I like the sound of that," Olivia said as she positioned herself next to her new friend.

"Have you lived in Portsmouth long?"

"Practically all my life. My family moved here when I was six and my brother was nine." Her eyes searched Parker's she wondered how much more to say. When she saw genuine interest, she continued. "When I was sixteen my mom found out she had brain cancer and died six months later." She blew out a breath. "I never realized how strong my parent's bond was until I saw my dad deteriorate after her death." She shrugged. "He died the next year."

"That must have been hard for you."

"Yeah it was. You never know how precious something is until you lose it."

Without thinking, Parker put her arm around Olivia's shoulders and pulled her close. "What about your brother...what does he do?"

"Our dad was a police officer and we both followed in his steps. Nicky works undercover...I wish he didn't. I don't like the idea of him living in the underbelly of society. There are a lot of nasty people out there. He's assigned to a new case starting tomorrow so who knows when I'll see him again." She looked at Parker. "Tell me about you. Where are you from?"

"I'm a farm girl." Parker felt Olivia's body react and grinned. "It's true. My folks have a farm just across the state border in a little town named Kyle. I too have a brother

who is five years older than me although he acts like he's two most of the time." She laughed and jumped off the wall. "Come on, I want to show you my favorite view."

Olivia let Parker take her hand and drag her down the path until they came to a huge flat rock that seemed to hang over the river. She followed Parker's lead, scrambled to the edge of the rock, and sat down.

A long satisfied sigh emanated from Parker. "Isn't this the coolest place?" She turned to her companion and let her eyes rake over the woman. "I just love it here." Parker pointed to the distant shore. "See over there where it looks like boats are launched. Someday I want to go there and see what this side looks like."

Olivia had no point of reference for what she was feeling or what to say for that matter. She nodded her head and bit her lower lip then said, "Sounds good."

Parker heard what she thought was reluctance in Olivia's voice and boredom on her face. "I guess this was a dumb idea...I mean showing you this stupid rock." She shrugged and looked away from the woman. "Guess we'd better have dinner." When she started to get up a strong hand grasped her forearm.

"No, I like it here," Olivia said awkwardly. When she felt Parker no longer moving she added, "Tell me more about you."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I really want to know."

Parker told Olivia about growing up on a farm, her first kiss with her best friend, going to college where she had her first real relationship and her various police jobs before Portsmouth. "I guess that is about it."

Olivia was about to speak when the sky seemed to open wide with one large drop of rain that seemed to immediately lead to a deluge of water. The two women stood up and ran under a covered picnic area on the other side of the path.

"Wow where did that come from?" Parker asked as she shook her hair and shivered slightly.

"You do know don't you, that I have two rain suits back in my bike." Olivia laughed and shook her head. "A lot of good they're doing us now." She looked over, saw Parker shiver, and instantly unzipped her leather jacket. "Here, put this on."

Parker's gaze settled on the woman offering her a jacket. The black sleeveless t-shirt clung to Olivia's body leaving nothing to her imagination. "Thanks," she said lowering her eyes as the sound of a crack of lightening made her jump slightly. "That one was close. Guess we have to stay here till it's over."

Olivia looked around the enclosed area and noticed that by tucking the shelter into the side of a hill all but the front portion was rainproof. Her eyes traveled to the fire pit in the middle with wood neatly stacked to one side and she grinned. When she gazed at Parker she noticed she had her arms wrapped around her middle as she pulled the jacket close. "At least we don't need to be cold. I can start a fire."

"You can?"

"Yeah, my brother taught me how one time when we went camping."

Olivia found an old newspaper in the trash and crumpled up the pages as she threw them into the fire pit. After she carefully arranged small logs on top of the paper, she struck a match and soon a fire was going. Olivia said, "Why don't you take off those wet clothes and maybe they'll dry some."

A thrill beyond excitement filled every nook and cranny of Parker's existence. *That is exactly what I want* she thought as she cast her eyes upward. The rain pounded in what she guessed were mega drops off the metal roof. "Sounds like a real gully washer is happening," she said looking out at the concrete walkway in front of the shelter.

Olivia looked in the direction of Parker's gaze and nodded. "Guess we will be here a while." She saw Parker pull the jacket close and said, "Hey, you'll never get warm in wet clothes. If you take them off I can put them near the fire and they will be dry and warm when you put them back on."

It was hard for Parker to contain her excitement at the prospect of undressing for Olivia. She shrugged and gave the woman an apologetic smile. "I'd better not do that," she said as she continued to shiver.

Parker creased her brow and asked, "Why not?"

Parker allowed her eyes to drift to the concrete floor. "My going to the bar and meeting you last night was no accident." She lifted her head and allowed her hazel eyes to capture blue. "When I got there I scanned the area for any women who might look interesting. My gaze fell on you, the most attractive and alluring woman I'd ever seen and I had to meet you." A smile played around her lips before it filled her face. "You're all I've thought of since we parted last night. Everywhere I went, everyone I met or was with..." she said as she envisioned making love to Elisabeth. Her smile grew brighter. "Everything reminded me of you." She released Olivia's eyes and looked away. "I don't want to screw this up by..." she shrugged and looked at Olivia once again. "By letting things happen too fast." Parker decided early in the day exactly what she would say if an overture to sex occurred when she met Olivia. Now, she held her breath hoping that she hadn't gone over the top in her ramblings. She didn't want to scare her off.

For a long time the two women stood side by side near the fire pit in the quiet stillness that deep thought brings. Olivia cleared her throat. "I..." she began before she turned and gathered Parker in her arms. "I want the same thing."

Their lips met in longing and discovery. For Parker, the kiss was everything she hoped it would be and more. She pulled out of the kiss and let her finger trace Olivia's lips before running it down her cheek and slipping slowly towards the valley created by breasts. Her eyes searched Olivia's and saw a desire that probably matched her own. "Ever do it on a picnic table," Parker asked as her hand disappeared inside Olivia's tank top.

Olivia pushed the jacket off Parker's shoulders and took a step backward so the woman had full access to her breast. She closed her eyes as experienced fingers played with a nipple. "God," she said. "Do you think we'll make it that far?"

Parker released the nipple, let both her hands slip under Olivia's shirt, and started to lift it up when she heard voices. Through the pouring rain, she saw a man and woman in running attire dash for the enclosure.

"Get by the fire Gloria," the man said ignoring the two other occupants.

The woman huddled in front of the flame and smiled at Olivia and Parker. "My husband isn't usually that rude. When we smelled smoke, we hoped it was nearby. That rain is really wicked."

Olivia bent down, picked up her jacket, and readjusted it on Parker's shoulders. "Did it ever occur to you that we didn't want to share the fire?" she bit out between

clenched teeth. Her body was humming the tune of sexual overload and the couple's arrival only made it worse.

"Oh, I'm sorry..." the woman said.

"Not want to share the fire? What kind of soulless person are you?" the man countered.

Glacial blue eyes stared at the man as Olivia bent down and picked up a log and shoved it toward him. "Since you're here you can tend the fire," she said as her top lip curled into a snarl.

Parker placed a reassuring hand on Olivia's arm. "Want to make a run for it?"

The softly spoken words made Olivia's anger dissipate somewhat and she smiled warmly at Parker. "Tell you what, let me have my jacket back and I'll get the bike and drive it down here. Then we can put the rain gear on and be on our way to the Hideaway."

"Hmm that sounds like a delicious idea," Parker said as she slipped the jacket off her shoulders. "I can't wait to put my arms around you again." Her feet ate up the short distance between them and she held the jacket as Olivia slid her arms inside.

"Be right back," Olivia whispered before she took Parker in her arms and kissed her lips hard before she said, "I can't wait either." Her gaze fell on the man and woman who had their eyes glued to what was happening between them. She gave them a full smile and a wink before she turned and began her run back to the parking lot.

Chapter Eighteen

At ten o'clock, the Harley and its riders pulled up outside Parker's apartment building. The heavy rain that sporadically happened over the time they were eating dinner had finally stopped leaving a thick mist that rose up from the streets.

"Wanna come in for a coffee?"

Olivia looked at her wristwatch and sighed. "I wish I could but I have to be at work in an hour."

Although Parker knew when they left the Hideaway that she and Olivia would not spend any more time together when they reached her apartment, a feeling of disappointment welled up inside her. "Oh," she said as she gave Olivia one last squeeze before she got off the back of the Harley. "Ok then. Guess I'll see you at work sometime if we happen to run into each other."

A booted foot pushed down on the kickstand and Olivia got off and stood between Parker and the entrance to the building. The kiss was long and searing as each woman's body cried out for satisfaction. Olivia was the first to break away but that lasted only a second as her lips, with a mind of their own, captured Parker's again. As time slipped by their kisses became more urgent and their bodies, strung tightly with the hum of sexual excitement, craved more.

They broke apart when a car sped by and honked as the occupants hurled ugly epithets in their direction. Olivia rested her forehead on Parker's forehead. "I wish I didn't have to go," she whispered as she resisted the urge to kiss the woman again.

Parker said, "Me either." She wrapped her arms around Olivia and pulled her closer. "Guess we will have to put this on hold for another time."

"When's your next day off," Olivia asked as she tried to squelch her desire.

"Tomorrow," Parker whispered into the dark hair.

"Want me to come over when I get off work?"

Parker felt the tingle of the small orgasms that were erupting in rapid succession and sucked in a deep breath. "Yes," she groaned.

Once again, their lips touched but not as passionately for that would have to wait for the morning. "It's a date then."

For a long while after she could no longer see the red taillight of the Harley, Parker stood glued to the spot where Olivia had left her. Her mind was whirring with all the possibilities of what was to come. She finally turned, went into the building and placed a key into the door marked 3A. As she stepped inside, she couldn't shake the overwhelming feeling of need she felt for Olivia.

The black Town Car that was tracking the movements of the Harley and its two riders pulled to the curb and stopped under a burned out street light. Its occupant, a man with a face filled with craggy lines and dark wavy hair, took out a night vision monocular and watched as the two women stood talking outside Parker Davis's apartment building. He had been watching them ever since they arrived at the river and wasn't surprised when they embraced. When he noticed the curtain in Parker's lit apartment move slightly he smiled. "Wonder how she's gonna get out of this one," he said as the two began kissing in earnest. "One inside...one outside."

A sense of disappointment filled him when the other woman got on her motorcycle and sped away. "Damn," he growled as he lowered the optical lens. He

scrolled through the various pictures on his digital camera that he had taken of Parker over the last two months. He stopped at one that displayed the two women having an intimate dinner at the Hideaway Restaurant. As he rubbed fingers over the short stubble of his beard before he shook his head.

When his cell phone rang, he opened it and said, "Hi, Eliza."

For a few seconds he listened before he replied. "Yeah, but the Santos woman left."

His eyes watched as Parker Davis walked into the building. "I don't understand it either. It didn't take her this long to get the doctor into bed. I'm fairly certain the doctor is in her apartment." The man laughed. "I wished Santos had stayed it would have been interesting to listen to her getting around that one. It would have given us vital insight into how she handles touchy situations." He listened then added, "I'm heading back to the hotel and will be back here watching her tomorrow. I'll keep the recorder going." He closed his eyes as he recalled the explicit sounds of Parker Davis and the doctor—arousing was an understatement. "Yep, it's her day off. Ok talk with you later."

He turned the key and the car roared to life before he put it in gear and drove slowly by Parker's apartment window. The lights were off.

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"You've finally come home," Elisabeth said as she strode out of the bedroom and stood in front of her.

Parker's brow creased and her eyes bore into the doctor. "What are you doing here?" she asked in a brusque tone.

"Don't tell me you're not glad to see me." She pulled Parker's shirt over her head and squealed in delight. "No bra...I like it." Her fingers then worked on the button and zipper of Parker's jeans and with success, they fell to the floor. "And, no underwear...how delicious." When her fingers stroked the valley between Parker's legs, Elisabeth groaned. "You're all ready for me."

Parker allowed the doctor to pull her into the bedroom but grabbed her hand and stopped it when Elisabeth's fingers pressed inside. "Someone else made me wet."

"I know," cooed Elisabeth. "I saw you from the window...her loss is my gain."

"Make me come," Parker said as she let go of the hand.

Chapter Nineteen

Her alarm sounded and Parker groggily opened her eyes. She was glad that Elisabeth only stayed until midnight for she didn't want to have to explain the doctor's appearance when Olivia arrived. She scurried around changing the sheets, making coffee, and doing the dishes before she took a shower. As her hands ran over her body she imagined Olivia was standing there with her and she felt arousal begin just as it did every time she thought of the woman.

She toweled off and wondered what she should wear. If she were dressed, Olivia might think she didn't want to have sex. If she was naked, and that wasn't what Olivia wanted, she might leave. She stood naked in front of the full length mirror in the bathroom and appraised her body. When she saw the small bite mark Elisabeth left on her inner thigh she shook her head and laughed. It would be lights off for the first time. Then, if Olivia saw the bite mark, Parker could pass it off as something she did.

Parker had never wanted anyone as much as the dark haired Latina. She craved her touch so much that she began devising ways to see her all the time. Her bare bottom hit the cold chair and she jumped a bit before she settled in and started her computer. Her eyes scanned the Portsmouth Police Department web page after she logged in, until she found the qualifications for detective and the dates of the exam. "It's a piece of cake," she said when she heard a knock on the door. "Shit, I'm not even dressed." As she hurried to the door, she picked up the robe Elisabeth discarded and was tying it just as she threw the door open. "Hi, you're early."



Everything she had imagined about making love with Olivia paled in comparison to the actual event. They hugged in an embrace that screamed for skin on skin contact as they tore at the barriers that denied them. Then, when their naked bodies met, they both trembled as greedy lips sought to kiss and dominate every inch of the other. Hands caressed and kneaded willing breasts before fingers explored inner depths. Their reward was a powerful release that exploded in multiple orgasms.

They lay in an embrace as sweat beaded up on their slick bodies. Words were not necessary as the lingering touch of each body screamed for more. Just as each woman thought she could not soar higher, the need and want erupted into passion once again sending their bodies into uncharted territories.

"Wow," Parker whispered as her finger lazily traced a line down the center of Olivia's body. "I dreamed of this but reality is so much better." She rose slightly before she leaned in and kissed Olivia. "Hmm, what do you think about taking this into the shower?"

"Not yet," Olivia purred as she pulled her lover in for a deeper kiss.

A crooked grin was her answer as Parker rolled on top of the body she craved letting her thigh rest between Olivia's legs. What started out as a slow grind, ended with each woman's thighs saturated before Parker's lips made their way down her lover's body. With a slight hesitation, Parker looked up Olivia's body and into blue eyes.

"Don't stop," Olivia begged.

Parker took what was on offer. After she finished feasting, she captured the glazed passion completely obliterating any other emotion in Olivia's sensual zones. Olivia was now hers forever. Her complete domination of her lover resumed as she brought Olivia to further heights of passion.

Olivia had her eyes closed as tightly as possible as she fell through the maelstrom of excitement Parker's love making had produced. One thought fused her senses and brain—sex. She'd never been so turned on...even her brain was overloaded with thoughts of when they were going to do it again. As she opened her eyes, she saw Parker smile as her tongue dipped into her navel—she was going to like having Parker around. “Hey sexy did you mention a shower?”

Parker crawled up Olivia's body and grinned. “Do you like doing it in the shower?”

Tangling her hands in Parker's hair, Olivia grinned devilishly. “Oh I know a few games we can play in there if you're up to it...you might be tired?”

With a hearty chuckle, Parker rolled off Olivia and stood on the floor with her hand extended. “With you I am always up for anything.”

“I'll take that as a compliment.” Olivia grinned as her hand clasped Parker's in a strong but gentle hold. Feeling her feet touch the cold floor caused the heat of the sex they had indulged in dissipate somewhat.

“I like my showers hot.”

Moments later, the water cascaded down on them as Olivia felt the rush beginning again as her hands moved surely over Parker's well-toned body. Grinning, she spied the bottle of shower gel. She knew if she were inventive with her mouth in just the right places, she could cause a profusion of bubbles. “I think the shower would be hot without any running water but I need the water for what I have in mind.”

Parker arched an eyebrow as she pulled Olivia close and kissed her hard. “Please Officer, be gentle with me.”

Arching her eyebrow Olivia produced a mock serious expression, “of course Madam, we aim to serve.” Then her hands traveled over Parker's shoulders in a sensuous exploration. Dipping into the collar bone and tracing intricate patterns producing a sigh of approval from her lover. Where her hands went, her mouth continued the journey. Firm breasts molded like the fit of an Italian leather glove in Olivia's hands and as the nipples perked, she feasted on their tips for a few seconds but only a moment. If Parker was insatiable in bed she could follow suit in the shower, it was only fair. Fingers deftly tracked down the taunt belly and circled the navel as her tongue swirled around inside. Olivia could feel the tension building in Parker as her body almost hummed aloud.

With a devilish grin, she skirted the mound waiting for her and planted a quick kiss on the dark hair. Then moved dexterously to part Parker's thighs, as she did she caught the scent of her lover's juices. Almost stopping from her original task to take the precious gift on offer—she resisted, then as her fingers trailed down each thigh and her kisses matched them her eyes bulged at a mark she saw on the inner left thigh.

Parker closed her eyes as she felt the lips caressing her thighs as oblivion took over her senses. Nothing outside the confines of the bathtub mattered. Olivia was hers and that was all she needed to know.

When she saw the bite mark on Parker's thigh, she shook her head. The mark was fresh and she knew she hadn't done it. As her thoughts turned from good to bad, she

stood and glared. Her voice managed to ask equably, "Where did that come from?" Her finger pointed at the spot.

Feeling like a blow hit her body Parker opened her eyes and saw accusing blue eyes. "What do you mean?" She followed the finger pointing at her thigh. *Shit!* "I expect it is your doing," she said with a grin. "You are very oral and your bites only heightened my desire." She leaned in to kiss Olivia hoping she would accept the explanation.

Olivia took a moment to digest the answer—branding wasn't one of her specialties in fact she hated it. She knew Parker was lying to her and she debated whether to tighten the noose or let her off the hook. "I don't bite... maybe a nip but bite...not me."

She was caught in her lie but there was no way Parker was going to admit that anyone else was in her bed. "We were going at it hot and heavy," she said with a shrug. "What other explanation can there be?"

The one thing Olivia hated was someone lying to her. When that someone was a person she'd hoped would become a part of her life it was as if a stake were rammed it into her heart. The heat of her passion faded as she felt the words tripping off Parker's tongue turn the warm water to icy droplets. "I need to go. You can take it from here. I guess you must be double jointed because I sure didn't give you that mark." She opened the shower door and without even toweling herself dry, she walked back into the bedroom to collect her clothes.

"No wait," Parker pleaded as she too left the shower. "I can explain...please let me explain Olivia."

Olivia gave Parker a caustic glance as she shrugged into her shirt, "I gave you the opportunity to explain you squandered it. I don't give second chances."

Parker grabbed at Olivia's arm. "Stop, you have to listen to me...it's not what you think. I lied because I thought you would leave if you knew I..."

"I thought you and I might have made it Parker I was going to give it my best shot, you blew it. I detest people who lie to me, especially someone like...I'm going." She pulled on her pants and grabbed the rest of her gear, and headed for the door.

Parker followed the woman to the door. "Please give me another chance I promise you won't be sorry. I'll never lie to you again."

Olivia stopped in her tracks her heart pulsing at the words. It would be so easy to turn back into those arms and feel the electricity between them. Her brain decided otherwise as her lips unconsciously moved. "I'm not sorry Parker. You are one wonderful sexual partner. Say hi to your next conquest. Tell her you get an A+ approval from me. I'll see you around." She wrenched open the door and ran outside with tears of frustration and betrayal trickling down her cheeks.

Shocked, Parker stared at the door willing Olivia to turn around—she didn't. "This isn't the end of us Olivia Santos. You will be back in my bed that is certain." She padded across the floor and looked out of the window just as the Harley sped away. "You are mine and I will see to it that you come back to me."

Chapter Twenty

She sat in an overstuffed green chair with her arms wrapped around her legs and her head resting on her knees as she slowly rocked. "What the hell am I going to do?" Her mind drifted back several hours to when she and Olivia made love and she felt a tingly sensation. "Maybe I can send her flowers." When the phone rang, she jumped slightly and grabbed the phone. "Olivia."

"No lover it's not Olivia."

"Beth, what do you want?" Parker growled.

"It's your day off and I thought I'd have you for dinner."

"That's not going to happen today or ever again."

Elisabeth laughed heartily. "Oh no, don't tell me you got religion after bedding the Santos woman."

"How the hell do you know that?"

"Remember I saw you with her last night. She made you wet but it was me who made you come," Elisabeth purred. "Let me help make you forget all about her."

"Damn you Beth, no means no."

The doctor's laugh lasted long after Parker hung up the phone. With Elisabeth's words still ringing in her ears Parker picked up the phone and called Olivia-no one answered. Then she made up her mind. "Olivia is mine and I will do whatever I have to so she'll come back to me. If she won't come to me I'll go to her."

An hour later, Parker was sitting behind the wheel of a midnight blue Chevy Malibu watching Olivia's home from a block away. Around nine, she saw Olivia come out of her house dressed for work and she followed her discretely the rest of the night until it was time for her to return to her apartment and get ready for work.

It was fortunate for Parker that she didn't have a partner that day so she could drive by Olivia's house frequently. With each pass, she became more and more agitated when she didn't see Olivia's motorcycle parked in the driveway. "Where are you?" Succumbing to her irrational thoughts she stopped in front of the small house, got out and walked up to the door. She knocked then pounded before she was satisfied that no one was home. "Dammit."

The ritual went on for two weeks and once she found out what Olivia's schedule was, she was able to find time to sleep. Each time she recalled making love to the woman, she would become more determined to win her back. Twice she sent a dozen roses with a note that read 'I'm sorry. Please forgive me and give me another chance'. The result was a deafening silence that made Parker even more determined.

True to Elisabeth's predication, Parker called her several times and each resulted in an impersonal sexual encounter. She had learned her lesson and made sure the doctor understood that biting of any kind was off limits.

"If you want to have sex with me it will be on my terms Beth," she growled. "Biting is off limits."

All Elisabeth did was laugh and raise an eyebrow before she said, "Are you sure? Remember I know what you like and my bites send you into overdrive." She pulled Parker into an embrace. "I'm in your blood Parker," she purred. "You will always let me in your bed-you can't help yourself."

Parker wanted to walk away but the need for sexual contact was overwhelming. “Just know that you’re nothing more than a body to me. I will always be thinking of someone else.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Olivia kicked the bike stand into position as she dismounted the Harley. Depositing her helmet on the bench, she opened the door from the garage into the house, and entered the hall. The house had been eerily quiet in the last two weeks since her sudden departure from Parker's bed.

Her whole life had turned upside down, as she tried to equate her constant craving for the woman over her black and white attitude toward a liar. Throwing her jacket onto a clothes peg, she passed on her way to the kitchen as she summed up her present state of mind-depressed. She couldn't get Parker out of her head even though she considered her nothing but a good lay...no she was a great lay. She even conceded that the woman knew how to tweak all her buttons. Her thoughts drifted from the great sex to the unknown woman who had given Parker that bite. She considered that maybe a man was responsible but dismissed the thought. If Parker wasn't one hundred percent lesbian she'd know—or would she.

A noise from the kitchen had her mind go into cautionary mode as she crept closer to the open doorway. Her eyes widened in surprise as her depressive mood wavered and then fell completely away. Her brother Nicky was leaning against the sink with a cup of steaming liquid at his lips.

With a squeal of what, could, almost be described as childish joy escaping her lips, she dashed over giving him a bear hug. "I've missed you."

With an affectionate chuckle, her brother shook his head as he replied, "Careful Oli, or you'll make me drop this coffee all over us. Trust me it wouldn't be a high fashion statement and it's really hot."

A faint flush appeared on Olivia's cheek at the mock censure as she moved away slightly and looked him over. He looked like shit. "Sorry I wasn't expecting you so soon. Have you finished with the case?"

Nicky grinned and shook his head. "Almost, I still have the paper work to complete and a couple of other leads that will probably go nowhere. Then I'm taking a vacation-want to join me?"

"Don't tell me I look as bad as you?" She shrugged, a small smile fleetingly accompanying the words.

Nicky gave her a grave concentrated stare and then with a nod to the coffee pot he asked, "What some coffee? You'll never look this bad for you have mom's beautiful skin tones. Let me get you some coffee and you can tell me what's bothering you and before you say nothing just remember one thing..." He smiled inwardly as he recalled when Olivia was a child, plain and fat. That's when he teased her with the nickname Oli. It was his reference to one of his favorite comedians-Oliver Hardy-his sister had certainly changed.

With a heavy sigh, Olivia sat on one of the kitchen stools. "What's that?"

"I love you kid. Nothing...absolutely nothing, is going to make you unhappy if I'm around to fix it. That, Oli, is a promise I'll keep to my dying day. Here take this and tell me what's eating you." He raised a hand as his sister began to protest. "I can see it in those eyes of yours."

Olivia felt the tears she'd held since leaving Parker's apartment fall like a steady stream down her face as she sipped on the coffee. "It's nothing really I was dumb that's all."

"Dumb huh? My beautiful, dangerous and did I mention intelligent sister, could never be classified as dumb. Naïve...I grant you that but never dumb. I haven't seen you cry in ...oh since you last watched 'Fried Green Tomatoes'. Do I guess or are you going to tell me?" He placed a hand on her shoulder and squeezed it in comfort while his genial expression never changed. However, he felt the anger burning inside, as he allowed his thoughts to rage. If he found the person who did that to his sister, they'd be sorry.

Self-consciously blowing her nose on a paper napkin, Olivia related an edited version of her involvement with Parker.

"Was that the woman who called and you got real excited before I left?"

"Yeah, you won't know her, but David does." She sighed heavily. David would probably give her chapter and verse on Parker and her many attributes from a guy's point of view.

Nicky winked at the mention of his best friend and former partner. "David tends to fantasize at the moment. You know that their second child is due soon and unfortunately, Jenny's tuned him out sexually if you get my drift. Roll on the arrival of baby Tourney and then he'll lighten up. So you see Sis, you're not just the only one with romance problems."

"Yeah but mine is different...at least David would never cheat on Jenny!" She allowed the words to burst forth finally. They'd been on the tip of her tongue two weeks, virtually strangling any other conversation she had. Fortunately, being gregarious at the station wasn't part of her repertoire. Now that she actually said the words, she felt the tension ease a little.

Before he replied, Nicky pursed his lips. "She explained what was going on I take it?"

Olivia scowled. "I asked her but she lied."

Nicky let out a low whistle. "Did she outright lie big time or just try to keep the subject low-key?"

"There's a difference?" Olivia ground out wondering why her brother was taking Parker's side.

Nicky gave his sister a long look. "Hey, calm down. I'm not taking sides. If I was I'd be your right hand don't ever forget that. Look, not everyone lives in a black and white world like you." He grinned at her affronted expression before he continued. "Maybe this Parker woman lost her head for a moment. From the limited info you've supplied, I'd say you were both lost in the world of passion. It makes people do and say things they wouldn't normally. Did you ever think of that?"

Olivia closed her eyes. Nicky always made things so simple and so right. "I...I don't like people lying to me. It's part of who I am. You know that Nicky."

With an affectionate smile, he cuffed her gently under the chin and then kissed the top of her head as he stood over her. "Yeah I do, but she doesn't. If you can't get her out of your head and heart, I'd give her a second chance. Sometimes it takes that special understanding to make a great relationship. It requires even more give and take to love someone. You wouldn't want that chance to slip away would you...for the sake of a misunderstanding?"

“You think I overreacted don’t you? I might have...I...” she placed a hand over her mouth and pulled at the full lips as she considered her brother’s words. Perhaps she was hasty and, if given one, she might accept an olive branch.

“Sounds like you need some time to think. I’m going to have a drink with David and who knows by tomorrow you might be inviting her over to meet me.” He laughed at the archaic fatherly impression it created in his head.

Olivia stood up abruptly. She made a decision. She hugged her brother tightly whispering, “I love you Nicky. My life wouldn’t be worth living without you. I need some time to think. How about I catch up with you and David for supper later?”

Nicky smiled at the genuine bond they’d developed since the deaths of their parents. It hadn’t been easy, but they’d managed to find the happy medium that allowed them both to accept who they were and what they wanted in life. All his sister had to do was accept that same situation with the Parker woman. “I need a shower. I’ll catch you later Sis.” He winked as he headed for the stairs.

Olivia watched him leave and then moments later mounted the stairs for a quick shower of her own before she changed clothes. The view by the lake appealed to her thoughtful status.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The lake was soothing as Olivia thought it might be. Her conversation with Nicky had been encouraging and frank just as it always had been since they'd lost their parents. She smiled slightly as a thought flittered around. Her brother was a good man and when he stopped being undercover and settled down, he'd make a great husband and dad. The idea of her brother's children made her smile.

The breeze fluttered gently around her as she threw a couple of pebbles in the water, watching them skim across the flat surface. She needed to decide what to do about Parker. As the lights from the city drew her gaze, she became lost in a world of her own and blocked out any other sound.

Parker had followed the Harley to the parking lot by the trail near the river that she had taken Olivia to in what seemed ages ago. The fact that the woman got off her motorcycle and headed down the path gave her hope. Over the last fifteen days, the opportunity to approach Olivia never presented itself to her. She sucked in a deep breath and got out of her car. "Now, I'll make you understand."

After Parker walked about two hundred yards, she spied Olivia sitting on the giant flat rock that jutted out into the river. She smiled as her heart filled with hope.

As she neared Olivia, she felt her heart race as pheromones made her body hum. "Hey, I see we had the same idea," she said holding her breath. "Look, I know I screwed up and I want to apologize."

Olivia, caught off guard at Parker's approach, gave her a startled wide-eyed look. Then she rapidly composed herself as her heart raced. In a reedy voice, she managed to reply, "I guess." The woman had somehow snuck up on her and she found it unnerving.

With hesitation, Parker edged closer to the rock and cautiously walked toward Olivia. "You deserve an explanation and if you'll let me, I want to tell you what happened."

Nicky's words played around in Olivia's head as she guardedly replied, "Take a seat." She pointed to a spot on the flat rock. "I hate someone standing over me. It reminds me of being in school."

Parker grinned and sat close but not too close to Olivia. "When you left me after that night we were here last, I didn't know what to do with myself. You made me so aroused that nothing, not a cold shower or my vibrator, would quench my need. I went out and looked for someone to give me satisfaction. It was a stupid, childish thing to do because once we made love I knew no one would ever compare to you." She shrugged and tilted her head. "I'm sorry."

Olivia digested the explanation. It appeared to ring true and might be plausible but... "Why didn't you just tell me that instead of fabricating a story?"

Hazel eyes drifted to the river before they fixed on Olivia. "Because I didn't want to lose you," Parker cried as she wiped away a tear. "And that's exactly what happened." She hung her head and whispered, "I've never felt so connected to anyone."

"My brother tells me I should give you a second chance. Would you lie to me again if I did? I hate people that lie to me...especially people I care for." Olivia felt as if she was crossing a rickety bridge and it would either collapse or take her to a new beginning. Sometimes you just have to take that leap of faith. Nicky was right. A tender smile flickered at her lips with the thought of her brother gloating.

Blowing out a breath, Parker let relief fill her face. "I promise that I will never lie or betray you ever. If it's ok with you I'd like to try again."

Olivia turned to Parker her subconscious asking her to take it slow, but the rest of her body wanted to peel the clothes off Parker and ravish her right there. "I'd like that as well. So what happens next?" she asked as a nagging voice in her head said to be careful.

Parker let her eyes take in the body that she craved as a lascivious smile crossed her lips. "Well," she said as she scooted closer. "We could try a kiss to seal the deal." She let her lips hover close as Olivia's scent kicked her libido into overdrive.

Olivia didn't need a second request as their lips locked in a fevered passionate kiss. Once again, the feel of Parker in her arms igniting the sexual need that had been building since she'd stormed out of the woman's apartment. *God I need you*, she thought as her hands wandered over the body clasped against her. What seemed like hours later they came up for air and Olivia with a glassy expression gazed into Parker's eyes, "Your place or mine?" she said in a husky tone that was filled with undisguised lust.

"My car is closer."

Olivia grinned, as a feral look etched her eyes. "Let's go, I've always wanted to do it in the back of a car."

Parker's arousal lessened as she thought how to explain why she had a rental car. "Me too and we are in luck for unlike the mustang the car I have has a big backseat." She grabbed Olivia's hand and the two raced to the midnight blue Impala.

Peripherally, the car focused in Olivia's brain. "You got rid of the Mustang? There I was thinking we could be real close, acrobatic even." She chuckled as she opened the door and dragged Parker unresistingly inside.

"I was in such a funk over you leaving that I thought I should go for a bit more conservative," Parker said as she tore at Olivia's shirt. "Now I'm glad I rented it," as she moved to unzipping Olivia's jeans. "Not to worry, I still have the Mustang and we can try it out next."

Olivia became lost in the haze of sexual need and incoherently muttered, "You have an answer for everything," before her mouth sucked on a nipple that begged for attention through Parker's bra.

Parker grinned as she found Olivia's breast—she'd say anything to keep Olivia in her life.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Parker swung open the kitchen door and to Olivia's rapid glance, she seemed to glide into the room. Parker lazily trailed her tongue sensually over the bare shoulder the vest Olivia wore revealed.

"Mmm you smell gorgeous, you taste even better. I thought I said I'd bring you breakfast in bed. It is our anniversary, remember." Parker mumbled into her shoulder as she licked the musky skin under her tongue and then reluctantly dragged herself away to take advantage of the pot of coffee steaming on the bench.

Olivia sighed inwardly. Every day that they had off was some kind of anniversary to Parker and it was grating on her nerves. Although, it was the anniversary of living together for two years, she felt every damn one piling on her shoulders. Taking a steadying breath, she quietly replied, "I know, but I woke early and figured I could at least make coffee."

Parker grinned. "You should have woken me. I could have found better things for you to do than make coffee." She slid into the chair next to her lover and snatched a kiss lingering on the full lips that responded but not as ardently as normal. "Anything wrong?" she asked. What could be wrong? They'd been together for two years and nothing was better than being beside each other twenty-four seven.

Olivia felt the usual stirrings in her body when Parker kissed her. How could she not for the woman had the ability to send her into a sexual frenzy—she always had and probably always would. "What could be wrong? I'm just tired. We've been working nonstop for the last six months. Did I tell you that I hate serial killers?"

Parker nodded her mind flicking rapidly through the last six months. They spent more time at work on the Operation Orange case. They only slept at home but didn't always sleep. Her mind drifted to the moments of intense passion, when they had breaks in the case and Olivia was so voracious in the bedroom. When they broke the case the week before, she thought Olivia would ravish her in the car while on duty. Maybe serial killers weren't so bad after all—for her personally anyway. Her lips tugged into a smile at the provocative thought. She reached across the kitchen table, picked up Olivia's hand, and brought it to her lips before placing feather light kisses on the smooth surface of the darker skin. "I was thinking...yeah, yeah before you say it. I know dangerous." Parker laughed as she saw the raised eyebrow.

"Ok, but who's to say I would have said that?" Olivia felt that inner tension rising again and she didn't know how to handle it. If Nicky were there, he'd tell her what an idiot she was—he liked Parker and thought she was good for his sister.

Parker chuckled. "How does a week in Mexico sound. I figured we both deserved a break. In fact... wait a minute, I'll be right back." A beaming smile crossed Parker's face as stood up before shooting out of the room.

Olivia watched her streak out of the room like a child who had the keys to a candy store. With a shake of her head, she wondered, not for the first time, why she felt like she did. Parker was everything anyone could want. Her lover was beautiful, spectacular in bed, and would do anything for her. With a grave expression, she sipped at her cooling coffee. She couldn't deny that lately she wanted to be in another room, state, or continent—any place that Parker wasn't—claustrophobia Parker style came to mind. Parker

came back into the room waving an oblong envelope. “Bet you can’t guess what I have here?”

As Olivia looked at her lover, she felt her stomach hit rock bottom. *Bet I can!* “Ok, what?” she said with a resigned expression.

Flourishing the envelope one more time she placed it in front of Olivia. “Open it please.” Parker stood over her with excitement emanating from every pore.

Strong taping fingers picked up the envelope and flicked open the seal. She picked out the contents that revealed two tickets to Mexico. As she glanced at the schedule, she couldn’t hide her dismay. It was an all inclusive vacation to one of the best hotels and beaches in the country.

With a squeal, Parker turned Olivia’s face to hers. “What do you think? It’s going to be great. We can make love all night and day and fit in a tan too. Not that you need one but...” Her words dried up as she saw a bleak expression in Olivia’s eyes.

Olivia slowly and carefully pried Parker’s hands from her face and stood up. She walked over to the sink and leaned against it. “Parker we need to talk.”

“I know I was impulsive, I should have asked if you liked Mexico. It doesn’t matter...we can go somewhere else. Name it Olivia and it’s yours.”

The expectant features of Parker had Olivia wondering, how she’d become such a cruel bastard. She knew her next words would hurt her lover. “It isn’t Mexico, it isn’t any place. I need...”

Parker rolled her eyes, “I know I was impulsive O and didn’t consider that you would rather take your vacation time here and just chill? Back home they’d call you a homebody. We can do that...it works for me. Anything is ok with me as long as you’re by my side.”

“For god’s sake Parker...it’s you I want to have a vacation from not the god damn country or any place else!” Olivia felt the tension ease a little inside as she finally said the words that had been building for months.

Parker stepped back. She felt like she’d taken a slug to the chest. “I...I don’t know what you mean.”

Olivia felt the pent up frustration she’d bottled for months flood out like champagne when popping the cork. “You are at my side twenty-four seven Parker. You do everything for me...my laundry, my clothes shopping...crap you even buy my tampons. At work you even speak for me and do all the reports.”

Wounded, Parker said, “I’m better at reports than you are.”

“For god’s sake Parker you don’t even let me finish! That’s exactly the problem. I love you but living with you attached to my side like a Siamese twin is hardly what I expected. Can’t you take a vacation and go see your family and leave me alone for a week? We work together...sleep together...we do everything together. I need some space.” Olivia blurted out. Saying something about their relationship eased the tension in her shoulders.

There was silence in the room as Parker digested Olivia’s words. She couldn’t understand why Olivia wanted her to go alone and see her parents. They adored Olivia and they would be disappointed if she didn’t go with her. She couldn’t leave Olivia alone—she might find someone else.

Parker smiled. “I know you you’re ribbing me right? Look, I should have asked you first about the tickets. I know we are saving for a place of our own. She shrugged.

“Just forget I even brought it up. How about I make us breakfast then we can talk like you want.”

Olivia scowled in annoyance rather than remorse. “Ok Parker, if you’re so thick skinned that I need a sledge hammer to get through to you, I can do that too. I’ve asked you politely to take a vacation for a week and you obviously didn’t get the message. Now I’m not asking you I’m telling you. Get out of here...now! For good would be fine with me.” She turned her back on the woman she loved. Why didn’t Nicky tell her that love was a very volatile emotion?

Parker whispered, “You don’t mean that O...you can’t,” as she moved and reached out clasping Olivia’s arm like a limpet.

Olivia looked at the hand it was slightly smaller than hers was. Her strength was superior and it would be so easy to crush the hand if she chose to do so. Violence was never the answer—Nicky taught her that. “I mean every word. Go see your mom...it isn’t a request Parker...it’s the only answer.” She looked at the ashen features and added, “I hope.”

This wasn’t like their usual arguments. Normally they had a big blow up and then they made up with mad passionate love. This was different big time. It was low key and sounded more like the end to Parker. “If I go will you change the locks?” Her chuckle at her absurd comment wasn’t genuine. Besides, there was no way anything would keep her out...certainly not a key to a door—she could break in if she wanted.

Olivia, finally listening sighed. “No I’d never do that to you Parker. Can you understand I just need a little space on my own? I need to work things out in my head. What I want is what is good for me...and you. Haven’t you ever thought that being together in each other’s pockets isn’t healthy?”

“No.”

Parker’s one word declaration set Olivia’s teeth on edge. Her thoughts were dark. Everyone needed personal space—except it would seem Parker. “I’m asking you to leave now...not in a couple of days but now this minute. Pack a bag and go.”

“Olivia, we are in a committed relationship this is nonsense. If you love me, you won’t want me to go. Think about it Olivia...think?”

It was always the same. Parker tried to lull her into a false sense of security by clinging tighter. Leveling Parker the full force of a menacing gaze, she growled, “Get out Parker.” Then her emotions took control and she shouted, “Get out before I do something we’ll both regret!”

Parker felt the first stirrings of aggression from the ominous gaze. She could play the game too—she was an expert. “Ok, I’m going. Just remember who asked me to leave. You might remember that when you beg me to come back! Don’t forget Olivia, you’re not the only fish in the sea and trust me I’m a good catch. I promise you that you’ll regret this. All I’ve ever offered you was my love.” She swiped at her eyes. “All you offer are planned emotional responses. You need to take stock of what love is O or you’ll end up a lonely old woman!”

Olivia watched Parker leave the room as she felt two emotions. Mainly relief but there was a small part of her emotions that registered fear—Parker wouldn’t have any trouble finding someone else. In that moment, she hoped the separation would help.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The door to the red Mustang opened and Parker slid in behind the wheel. "This can't be happening," she whispered. Their relationship always was tempestuous but the aftermath, the making up resulted in heart pounding, mind numbing love making. This time though, the difference in Olivia's tone alerted her to the possibility of losing the only woman she ever loved. "I won't let that happen, Olivia. You're mine and just as I can't live without you, I won't let you live without me."

She jammed the key into the ignition and pulled away from the curb allowing the wheels to squeal as she sped away. At the next block, she turned and parked the car, got out and walked to the hedge where she had a clear view of Olivia's house. After an hour passed, the motorcycle and Olivia roared away in the opposite direction. Parker ran to her vehicle and after she started it, she turned the wheel made a u-turn before she guided the Mustang in the direction of the motorcycle. The red car was easy to spot so she knew she couldn't follow too closely. When Olivia's motorcycle stopped in front of a small restaurant in the seedy side of town, Parker knew why she was there—Nicky.

Parker smiled. "He will be on my side I know it." She thought back to when she first met Nicky. It was obvious that Olivia adored her brother and Parker couldn't help the feelings of jealousy that seethed just below the surface. Instead of letting her true feelings show, she devised a campaign to make the man her ally. It didn't take long before he took her side on the many occasions when arguments flared.

Still, Parker had the nagging suspicion that Olivia was leaving her. "Can't let that happen. I can't live without you Olivia." Right then she needed to find comfort and her mind flitted to Beth. "No, I don't need sexual comfort, besides Olivia has spoiled me for anyone else." Nodding her head, she pushed in the clutch, shoved the gear into first, and headed to her childhood home. It was where she always felt safe and she knew her mother would give her sound advice. As she drove, she remembered the first time she went to the farm after a blow up...



The argument was silly but for Parker it was a body blow when Olivia told her 'get out and don't come back'. When she drove down the road to the house, she saw her mother out hanging up clothes.

"What's wrong," her mother said as she engulfed her daughter in a hug.

With tears streaming down her cheeks, Parker sobbed, "Olivia doesn't love me anymore."

Ruth Davis pulled back and gave her daughter a sympathetic look. "I don't believe that baby. She looked at you with love two weeks ago; someone just doesn't fall out of love that fast. Go back and tell her you're sorry and that you love her. Don't you know that running away never solves anything?"

Parker knew the truth behind her mother's words and smiled. "I knew I could count on you for good advice Mom." She leaned in and kissed her mother's soft cheek. "Tell everyone hi for me ok. I need to go back and straighten things out."

“Mom was right then I wonder what advice she’ll give me now.” As the car ate up the miles, thoughts that revolved around her lover swirled in her head.

It was the first time Parker took Olivia to the farm that she first heard Olivia say ‘I love you’. They had been living together in Olivia’s house for six months and despite their passion, her lover never responded to I love you.

“I wonder why she said it then.”

She recalled entering the kitchen where her mother and Olivia were deep in conversation. Her mother was speaking so low that she had to move closer to hear. Neither woman seemed conscious of her presence.

Her mother patted Olivia’s hand and said, “I know how hard it is to go through life without your mother Olivia.”

She watched as her lover swiped away a tear that trickled down her cheek. “Yeah, it’s like I am lost...especially when Nicky isn’t around. It’s almost like I have no place to call home-emotionally anyway.”

Then her mother wrapped Olivia in a hug. “You will always have a home here Olivia. I know I can’t replace your mother but if you ever need one I’ll be here for you.”

That night when they made love, Olivia was a different person. Her fiery passion became tender as her gentle intimate touches sent Parker into sensual overload. Just as her passion peaked, she heard the words she longed to hear. “I love you Parker.”

After that night, everything seemed to change as Olivia took on the role of a committed partner. Parker took the detective’s exam and passed. At first, Olivia partnered with a veteran detective, Ed Layton and for Parker that was unacceptable. She wanted Olivia to herself and that meant they would be partners in all ways. With some gentle cajoling, Parker was eventually able to persuade their lieutenant that she and Olivia should be partners.

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As Parker sat waiting for the light to turn green so she could get on the highway to home and her mother, another thought struck her. “Did she insist that I join the Mayor’s task force on disaster preparedness so she could find someone else? At the time she told me that I was the best tactician she knew and that she would feel safer in a time of disaster knowing I was in on the plans.” She drummed her fingers on the steering wheel as she pondered what to do next until she heard, “All units we have a 10-55 at Samson and Fifth.”

Parker felt a chill run down her spine. “That’s where O is.” She reached under the seat, affixed a bubble light to the roof, and sped towards the scene. All the while, she prayed that the love of her life, Olivia, was safe.

When she encountered the police barricade, Parker stopped her car, got out, and then badged her way through the officers assigned to crowd control. As she neared the scene with her heart thumping, she focused on a body crumpled on the ground. “God don’t let it be O,” she whispered as she got closer.

David Tournay was standing near the body when Parker approached him. “What are you doing here?” he asked with a catch in his voice.

“I was a block away and thought you might need help.” Parker’s gaze fell on the body—Nicky Santos was laying in a pool of blood. Relieved, she asked, “Does Olivia know?”

“Yeah, she was here when it happened. After we arrived she took off.” His sad, expressive eyes seemed to plead with her. “She needs to come back so I can question her.”

“I’ll find her for you David,” Parker said. “Do you know who did this?”

“No, but I think Olivia does.”

“Why do you think that?”

“When I got here she said, ‘that bastard will pay for this’, before she took off.” David sighed as the medical examiner knelt by the body. “I need to work the scene. Find Olivia before she does something she’ll regret.”

Parker didn’t wait. She ran back to her car and jumped in. “She’s at home I know it.” As she neared the house they shared, she saw the Harley parked in the drive. She let out the breath she’d been holding when she entered the house and saw her lover sitting alone in the kitchen.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Olivia felt the hand on her shoulder and for a moment wondered who it was. She looked up and saw Parker, the woman she loved, with tears in her eyes. "You know?" she whispered.

"Yeah, I just came from the scene." Parker knelt down in front of Olivia and searched the red, swollen blue eyes before she said, "I'm here for you no matter what."

"He's not coming back to me ever again is he?" The bleak words echoed in the silent kitchen.

Engulfing Olivia in her arms, Parker whispered, "He will always be in your heart. You just have to look there and you'll find him."

Olivia felt the warmth of another body close to her and an inner craving began to ignite. Not the carnal one she normally associated with Parker but a comforting one to assuage her pain. "My heart feels sore and tired Parker. Why does everyone I love leave me? It isn't fair."

Parker kissed the top of Olivia's head as her heart broke. "I'll never leave you O. I'll always be here for you no matter what." She lifted Olivia's chin. "Never doubt my love."

Tear drenched blue eyes gazed into Parker's concerned filled ones. It was all there for the taking. She was prepared to let Parker go for personal space and she didn't know why she felt that way—it was crazy. Then her thoughts turned to her brother and she sobbed for him. *Oh, god Nicky why did you leave me, it hurts so much.* "It isn't your love that has ever been in doubt it's mine," she said softly. "Why do you still stick around me Parker? I'm not good for you. People I love die."

Moving closer so her body was between Olivia's knees, Parker gently touched the tear stained cheek. "I'm not going to die on you. As for your love...I know you love me O and I also know how hard it is for you to let others in." Her thumb wiped away a tear. "Lean on me and let me help you get through this...please."

A part of Olivia wanted to let go completely. However, the part of her that shouldered responsibility and the hard-nosed attitude she needed to survive in the cruel environment of policing, reared up and fuelled her depression. "If I let you in completely Parker you'll die. That's the bottom line. I won't have the only person left that I love on this earth die before me. It isn't going to happen I'll ensure that."

Parker frowned for she heard something other than Nicky's death in Olivia's words and tone. "How can you say that?" She eyed her lover. "What aren't you telling me O? Why would anyone want me dead...it doesn't make sense."

Olivia released the grief of the moment with one clear moment of transparency and curved her lips into a bitter smile. "Nothing makes sense anymore Parker. If I tell you something, it has to remain between these four walls. Can you promise me that?"

As her hand caressed Olivia's cheek, Parker let their eyes lock. "I would never do anything to break your trust in me. What you tell me is between only us." She sucked in a deep breath. "Remember when Hal Blankenship was shot and how worried I was that it might happen to you?" Olivia gave her a slight nod. "You told me that as long as we had each other and were strong in our love, nothing would happen to us. I believed you then and I believe in you now." She shrugged and she waited for Olivia to reply.

Strong hands grasped the hands that caressed her face in a vice like grip. Olivia's eyes were feral and haunted and for anyone who didn't know her, she looked dangerous. "Nicky was on to something big. After you left, he called me to meet him at that...place." Her voice broke as she recalled vividly the carnage of seeing her brother gunned down. With her stomach in turmoil she continued. "He told me there was a hit out on me because of what he'd discovered. They weren't going to hurt him directly but the people he loved. He loved you too Parker." Olivia suddenly stopped talking as a far away expression appeared in her eyes.

The information had Parker's head spinning. She knew that Nicky had to live in the gutters and his contacts were the lowest sort of lowlife and somehow his murder tied into that. "But they killed him not you." Her forehead creased in confusion. "Who...who is responsible for the murder? What did he know?"

Olivia's brow creased in tenderness as she recalled the swift movement of her brother shielding her to take the bullets. "He protected me to the end, he always said he would." Tears flowed freely down her cheeks as she softly spoke. Then she wiped them away with a vicious swipe of her hand. Absently and only partly making sense, she replied, "Who can tell exactly who a lowlife is? You'll never believe me when I tell you the name...I didn't believe Nicky. That was the last thing I said to him. The last thing I said..."

"You know who killed him...or had him killed?"

"Yes." The single word bounced in the room heralding a deathly silence.

A shiver ran down Parker's spine as she tried to think of what to say next. She needed Olivia to tell her who was responsible so she could protect her. She stood up and pulled Olivia out of the chair and into her arms. "Let me share your burden O...together we are strong apart we will falter." Her mind flashed on Olivia's earlier words. *Get out Parker. Get out before I do something we'll both regret!* The words haunted her. Once she knew the name, the bond between them was forever. "You can trust me," she whispered.

The solemn words that followed didn't even sound to Olivia as if she was speaking even when her lips moved in sync. "Damien Reeves...the DA to you and me."

Parker couldn't hide her disbelief when she heard the DA's name. "You know that for a fact?"

Olivia didn't hide her distain at the remark. "My brother never lied to me! Are you calling Nicky a liar?"

"No, never O," she said pulling Olivia into a tighter hug. "We need to be sure before we tell David about him." She took a step back. "David was Nicky's partner for a long time...did he know too?"

"We never got the chance to have a cozy chat Parker. I think the fact that it's etched in blood...Nicky's blood...tells the story. You're going to say exactly what I did aren't you. Well you'd be in good company since that was the last thing I said to my brother. I called him a liar. How do you think I feel now? He died in my arms and I have to live with the knowledge that his last words on this earth from his sister were callous? Not for long though. Revenge they say is sweet."

With a swift move, Parker engulfed her lover in an even tighter hold. "Shh, let me help you O. Let me ease your pain and grief." She kissed Olivia's cheek then both her eyes. "You need to rest and while you do I will hold you and keep you safe. Then, we

will walk down your path together and see that Nicky's given a proper send off. After that we can figure out what to do about the DA."

From the depths of her despair, Olivia heard the words of comfort. They were like a morsel of food to a starving man. Right now, she needed to feel the love and companionship to eradicate the loneliness that enveloped her. "I'm so tired Parker, so very tired."

"Lean on me O," Parker said as she took Olivia's hand. "Come with me." She led the woman by the hand down the hallway, past Nicky's room, and climbed the stairs to the room that they shared. With great care and gentleness, she undressed her lover before she pulled back the sheets. "Lay down for a while." After Olivia complied, Parker crawled in next to her and wrapped her in a protective hold. "I'll watch over you Olivia. You're safe with me."

Olivia gazed into Parker's eyes as hers filled with the trusting expression that said she trusted her lover implicitly. As the emotional trauma dragged her to sleep, she mumbled, "You'll protect me won't you Parker...promise," as her eyes closed.

"I promise that I'll stay by your side always, Parker responded as she laid her head on Olivia's shoulder. Her tears breaking free for the man she'd called brother.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Parker stood in the doorway and watched a listless Olivia sit in her favorite chair and stare blankly at her. She walked softly toward her lover and when she reached Olivia, she gently touched her shoulder. "Hey, you want something to eat?"

Olivia shrugged and blew out a breath. "I'm not hungry."

"O, you need to eat something. Nicky wouldn't want you close out the world."

Olivia's response was an icy stare.

With a change of tact, Parker said, "Why don't you get a shower? You've had those clothes on for the last three days Olivia."

"So what."

"The viewing starts this afternoon...you don't want Nicky seeing you like this do you?"

A derisive laugh followed by a sneer and it made Olivia oddly feel better. "How stupid are you Parker? Nicky is dead! He doesn't give a damn how I look!"

In a voice that was so soft, that Olivia had to strain to hear it, Parker said, "How can you dishonor him like that."

Parker wiped away an errant tear as she shook her head. "Have it your way," she said before she turned and left the room.

Struggling to hold back the tears until Parker left, Olivia let them fall once again. Nicky was her life he was the one person who grounded her and now he was gone. "Thanks to you Reeves, bet you think I don't know but I do and I will find you and then justice will be mine." Her thoughts turned to Parker who was now her rock. She had spent the days since the shooting making all the arrangements for the funeral. "And I've treated her like shit." As her thoughts turned morose, Olivia tried to pull herself out of her spiraling depression. She needed to get rid of Parker before someone killed her too. Then her mind wound around the person responsible for her brother's death—the district attorney. She required justice—even if it was only Santos justice.

As Parker's words finally filtered into her consciousness, she realized that her brother would never have wanted her to shut the world out as she was doing. She remembered what he said to her after their father died. 'Oli, you can't just sit there and grieve it does no good. You have to pick yourself up by the bootstraps and get on with life'. "But that is so hard Nicky. How will I get through life without you to guide me?" The tears that seemed to be flowing non-stop suddenly dried up. "I need to honor him before I do anything else." Gathering all her strength, she stood up and went in search of Parker.



The black limousine pulled up in front of the Santos home and a man dressed in black got out and stood by the limo's back door. It was a gray dismal day, which Olivia thought fitting since it matched her mood. "The limo is here," she said to Parker who appeared by her side.

Both, dressed in their formal police uniforms, strode out of the house and toward the waiting man. When Olivia seemed to falter, Parker took her arm and steadied her. "We'll get through this," she whispered as the man opened the door.

Olivia remained silent as the vehicle pulled out into the street. Neighbors stood outside their homes to pay respects to the man who was always willing to help. "They all liked Nicky," she said.

Parker patted Olivia's hand and said, "Everyone loved him O. He was a kind decent man who put his life on the line so they would be safe."

The limo driver watched the two women through the rearview mirror. When he noticed them in conversation, he discretely began listening.

"I'm all that is left of my family and it is up to me to vindicate Nicky," Olivia said matter-of-factly.

"Tomorrow we can go see David and tell him what you know." Parker looked out the window and noticed a number of people exit their business establishments and bow in prayer as they passed. "Today will be difficult and it will be for some time but eventually you will get back to your old self."

Glacial blue eyes fixed on Parker as Olivia growled, "I'll never go back to that person Parker...she's dead."

"You don't mean that. It will take time but you will heal."

"Who the fuck do you think you are," Olivia screamed. "Nothing and no one will ever replace Nicky and that includes you."

Parker closed her eyes and breathed deeply. "We're here," she said as the limo pulled up to St. Anthony's Catholic Church.

The parish priest, Father Johansson, approached the vehicle and opened the door. "Olivia, I'm so sorry for your loss my child," he said as he extended his hand to Olivia.

After Olivia got out, Parker fell in step behind the priest and her lover grinding her teeth as they climbed the stairs. Olivia was pulling away from her and she chalked it up to Olivia's depression. In no time, Olivia would realize that she needed her more than ever.

The limo driver watched his two passengers disappear into the church and smiled. He picked up his phone and dialed a familiar number. "It's me. I've delivered them to the church. As we suspected she has planned the funeral out to the last item." He listened than said, "Yeah it was a stroke of genius to get her on the Mayor's commission." As other mourners filed past the car he added, "The plus in this might be the Santos woman. From what I overheard she knows who killed her brother and she wants revenge."

An hour later, the driver slide out from under the wheel and positioned himself by the back door again.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The funeral for Nicky Santos drew hundreds of people. His burial was with full police honors as nearly all the police officers from Portsmouth paid their respects to their fallen comrade. In a solemn procession, more than a mile of cars followed bagpipers who preceded the vehicle carrying Nicky's body. As the hearse rolled slowly down the street, cameras snapped and film crews jockeyed for position.

Olivia lingered by the casket long after the others left the cemetery. For the better part of the day she remained stoic and in charge of her emotions. Now, the reality of the situation was painfully real and she felt her heart sink.

"O, we need to go to and meet the others," Parker said in a gentle tone.

For a long moment, Olivia didn't respond as she rested her hand on the casket. "I can't leave him here alone," she whispered.

Parker draped her arm over Olivia's shoulders and pulled her close. "He's in your heart O...he'll never leave you. Besides, he's with your parents now they'll look after him." When Olivia pulled away, Parker wasn't surprised. "We need to leave so these men can do their job. Come on...we can come back later and visit him. Would you like to do that?"

Tears drenched Olivia's shirt and they streaked her cheeks with moisture. "I didn't realize you believed in the afterlife Parker. I guess it's who you are. Right now, I don't know if I ever will. Look, this is the sum total of my family and their all dead."

A warm arm wrapped around her waist as her lover gently pulled her away. "Let me take care of you. I won't let any harm come to you Olivia."

Olivia reluctantly gave in and let Parker lead her to the limo. Once they sat down and the door closed, the vehicle made its way to Nicky's favorite haunt—Nick's Bar the local police after hours hangout. He jokingly would tell people that the owner, Nick Belisarius, named it after him since he spent so much time there. The crowd was raucous as they celebrated Nicky's life with liberal amounts of alcohol.

Olivia sat alone at a table brooding while the party carried on around her. Her mind set on the district attorney and her plans for his demise.

"O, do you think you can speak to some of your guests?" Parker asked. "They're here for you."

Olivia closed her eyes hoping that Parker would go away. When she opened them, Parker was still there and that caused her to sigh heavily. "I can't...I just can't."

"Can I get you anything to eat or drink?"

With a shake of her head, Olivia pursed her lips. "Can't you just go away and leave me alone?" When she looked into Parker's eyes, she saw the hurt she caused and shook her head again. "Look, I'm sorry. I need some fresh air...can you give my regrets to everyone. I really appreciate them being here but I'm not ready to socialize with anyone." She glared at Parker then closed her eyes. The woman was the one person she wished would leave.

Leaning in, Parker gently kissed Olivia's cheek. "Sure. I'll take care of everything. If you don't come back I'll see you back at the house ok."

With a brief nod, Olivia stood up and said, "Thanks," before she left.

Watching her lover leave, Parker sighed as she felt her body stiffen. She couldn't let her lover go alone. Before she could leave and follow Olivia, she felt a tap on

her shoulder. Turning, she smiled at David Tourney. “Hi David, how are you holding up?”

“I’m ok. It’s Olivia I’m worried about.”

“Me too...she just can’t seem to get out of her funk. It’s been less than a week and something like this will take time. I can’t imagine what it is like to watch someone you love shot down.”

“I’ll need to speak with her about what happened soon. Do you think you can arrange that for me?”

Parker shook her head. “I’ll try but don’t count on it. She’s closed herself off to everyone...even me.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

There is a defining moment in your life when what you know and what you expect of yourself suddenly turns on its head and you act in an uncharacteristic manner. For Olivia, at the precise instant that she walked blindly towards a nondescript city building, her moment had arrived.

Glancing at the plaque, on the outside wall indicating the offices of the District Attorney, she calmly walked inside confidently. It was mid-afternoon and having donned her police jacket and taken the entrance reserved for police officers, she knew there was little chance that anyone would stop her. She recalled her brother's words, 'always walk into a place as if you're supposed to be there Oli, and people will believe you do'. For the past two years, since she and Parker became detectives they had virtually lived in and out of a vehicle. Having spent most of her working life as an officer on the graveyard shift, those that would recognize her wouldn't be around for at least another four hours. With her head down, she steadily progressed via the stairwell to the main corridor that held the offices of the District Attorney.

If asked at that moment, what was on her mind, Olivia would have said nothing. No one would have believed her but it was true. She had no exact thoughts of what she was going to do when she came face to face with the man who had been responsible for her brother's death. The process of her thinking that deeply wasn't possible. Her concentration was in moving her body by sheer will to the place where her life might change forever. That much she knew was certain...one way or another over the next few minutes her current life was going to change drastically.

Her eyes glanced at each door plaque and the names were a blur until she found the one she needed. The name hit her forcibly with its clarity—Damien Reeves, District Attorney.

Olivia came out of her funk and surveyed the corridor. Several people scurried along adjacent corridors with folders and sheaves of paper. They were all in a hurry and far enough away from her that they couldn't recognize her. She held her gloved hand by the left side of her face to obscure the surveillance camera view of her. She gazed at the frosted window of the office and spied two figures. The other person was probably his secretary. Checking out the office space closest to the door, she saw a name plate...Susan Fitt. "I'll wait for her to come out," Olivia mumbled as she found an unmanned cubicle where she could watch for a change in the status quo. It was also close to an exit door, which made it the perfect spot.

Fifteen minutes later her vigilance paid off as the person who turned out to be a woman opened the door and walked over to the desk Olivia surmised was hers earlier. Then a handsome man with a ready smile dropped his head around the door and spoke to the woman. "Susan will you go over to Charlie Squire's office and pick up that case he wants my opinion on?" He didn't wait for her reply as he shut the door.

Olivia continued to watch as the woman threw the files she had on her desk and then walked down the corridor. Just in case the office in question might have been close by, Olivia gave the woman two minutes before she moved. Olivia pulled up the collar of her jacket and stealthily moved from her position. Her eyes darted up and down the corridor—it was empty. Then, she entered the DA's office.

The dark headed man at the large highly polished oak desk lifted his head and frowned. "Do I know you?"

Olivia had a moment to digest the features of the man who would be pivotal in her future. Then her lips curled into a feral smile and she calmly said, "Me, no, not personally." She shook her head. "My brother...for sure."

Reeves scratched the corner of his left eye before he rolled them. "Look, I think you have the wrong office. Do you know who I am?"

Olivia's head twitched as he asked the pertinent question. "Perhaps it should be me asking, do you know who I am?"

"Hey, I'm a busy man, if there's a problem on a case that involves your brother see the assistant DA who's handling it. You've got the wrong office and man." He glanced at the phone and was about to call security when a hand, covered in police issue leather gloves, seized his in a vice like grip.

"I wouldn't even think of it if I were you Reeves." Olivia's voice dropped an octave and became more menacing as her eyes drilled into his.

Reeves felt the piercing gaze rip off his skin and skewer his heart, as adrenalin rushed around his system in fear. "Look, let me rephrase that how can I help you Ms...?"

Olivia's body hummed with the power of life and death over the man—it felt good. Her mind toyed with several scenarios before she finally stated in an icy voice to match her glacial expression. "Santos, as I said you knew my brother."

The man's gaze was incredulous as he locked eyes with her. "Of course I know him...because of his death the whole god damn police force is taking a day off instead of catching criminals."

With that simple statement, Reeves signed his own death warrant. Olivia pulled a pistol with a silencer from inside her jacket pocket, took aim, and shot him at point blank range. The blood splattered and hit both the wall and her jacket. With a disinterested flick of her finger at the offending liquid, she gave Reeves a cursory glance. He was dead. The gaping hole between his eyes and the brain matter covering the wound along with the blood made taking a closer look irrelevant. Pocketing the gun, Olivia slipped unseen out of the room, pushed open the stairwell door and headed down toward the underground parking garage.

When she opened the door, two officers who were about to enter the building blocked her escape. The first, a middle-aged burly man with brown distrusting eyes gave her the once over. The other much younger one, with flaxen haired with a baby face and grey eyes that were much more inquisitive, Olivia thought was a rookie.

"What's with the blood?" the younger man asked refusing to move out of Olivia's direct path to the outside world.

Olivia grimaced then bit out tightly, "What's it to you?"

Her tone alerted the older officer to a potential situation, as he looked her over seriously then with his hand on his gun handle he nodded his head. "Answer the man?"

Through all the morass of what she had suffered in the preceding week, her own adrenalin levels were shooting for the sky. Killing the DA had boosted her's to an emotional plane she'd never before known. When they solved a case, her sex drive went into overdrive but the rush she felt after killing the DA was even better. With a derisive flick of her eyebrows, she answered, "A suspect I just brought in decided to make my day by bleeding over me after he accidentally ran into a wall."

The younger man blushed slightly confirming that he was a rookie. The older one on the other hand, didn't look convinced.

"You can't be too careful these days so I'll need to see some identification."

This time, Olivia's expression changed and she managed a slight smile as she reached inside her pocket before flashing her badge. It was so quick she knew they couldn't have seen her name but they did see that she was a detective. "Does that satisfy your curiosity gentlemen?"

The older man moved aside and tipped his hat. "Sorry detective, but you can't be too careful now can you? Are you..."

"No you can't," she said with a tight smile not allowing him to finish the sentence. "I'll see you around." She side-stepped them both and as a precaution if they were still watching her, she headed for the area where the detective field vehicles were parked. When she reached the end of the row of vehicles she turned around—they were gone.

Olivia felt invincible as endorphins filled her body and libido. She needed an outlet and knew exactly where to go. She smiled cynically at her thoughts and she walked to the nearest exit of the garage and headed for the subway to take her home. As the sirens went off and an ambulance converged on the building, Olivia was skipping down the stairs to the subway station. If she timed it right, she would be gone before they locked the place down.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The house was remarkably quiet when she arrived home, inserting her key in the lock, she entered and called Parker's name. There was no answer. She growled. Any other time she couldn't get away from Parker and now that she needed her the most, she was gone. Glancing around the comfortable but shabby hallway, she felt the memories of her family invade her thoughts of sex with Parker. She vividly recalled her mother saying goodnight to her and Nicky. She would tell them not to worry that when their dad got home he'd kiss them goodnight—he always did. Shaking her head, she tried to dislodge the happy memories as the reality of the past hour worked its way to her subconscious. If her folks or her brother knew what she just did, they wouldn't believe it and certainly wouldn't have agreed that it was the right way. She was certain that she would never see them again. There was no way the Catholic Church would grant absolution for a cold blooded murder.

Dragging her feet, she entered the sitting room and settled in her dad's, which then became Nicky's, favorite chair. Her hand reached inside the jacket and she took out the gun she'd used to kill a man in cold blood. Such a small object and in the wrong hands a lethal one. The man was a scumbag that would never have come to justice so it seemed perfectly fitting for her to be judge and jury. One day she'd meet the man in hell and make his afterlife the purgatory, what he made others suffer. The thoughts fueled her libido and as she breathed in deeply the door opened and she heard Parker call her name.

"Olivia, are you here?"

Olivia debated whether to answer. The thought of Parker seeking her out was deliciously arousing. She'd miss Parker. Olivia didn't love the woman enough to let it all go and let the justice system punish the DA. In that brief moment she realized that her brother, even though he was dead, meant more to her than Parker ever could. Before she could answer, Parker walked into the room and stood in the doorway looking at her.

"Hey, you ok? I was worried about you. Do you feel better after taking in some air?" Parker walked into the room and knelt by her chair. It was then her eyes took in the handgun in Olivia's hands. "O, what are you doing with your dad's gun?"

Olivia glanced at the weapon held between her fingers. "Nothing," she shrugged before laughing cynically. "You didn't think I was going to do something silly did you...like take my own life?"

Parker found it hard to muster a smile but she managed. "You never...me on the other hand, sure. Especially after, I spent the entire afternoon being nice to everyone. I could murder for a drink." Although her words indicated that she believed Olivia, her thoughts were chaotic. She placed her hands over the gun and gently pried it from Olivia's grasp. The fact that Olivia released her hold easily made Parker draw a measure of reassurance.

"I'd rather we went to bed," Olivia said flatly.

Olivia grasped Parker's hand and jerked it. After enduring Olivia's inattention for days, the pain the grab inflicted was oddly stimulating. The lips that kissed her savagely fueled her building passion. She found the violence she felt rising in Olivia anything but repulsive as she responded in kind. She had missed the sexual charge that Olivia had kept locked away over the past week. Why Olivia wanted to make love to her in that fashion

really didn't matter—her need was too great. Through released lips she whispered, "For you lover, I'll do anything."

Olivia felt the surge of sexual excitement wash over her body. In one fluid movement, she stood up and grabbed Parker's wrists before dragging her to the bedroom. She ripped off Parker's clothes as she let her teeth mark a trail down her neck grazing the flesh. Olivia greedily licked the blood that seeped through the bite marks.

From deep in her subconscious Parker noticed something odd—red stains. *Blood?* The thought disappeared as she felt her lover bite her breast hard. She became lost in the passion of making love with the woman she loved—nothing else mattered.

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In the blind rage of a sexual obsession that transcended all else, Olivia pinned Parker's arms above her head. "Stay there and don't move," her husky voice ordered. When she came back, she handcuffed both of Parker's wrists before attaching them to the headboard. She looked down at her lover as a predatory smile curved around her lips. Once she tightened the last strap around her waist she growled, "You want me don't you?" She climbed on the bed resting on her knees as she bent to lick the blood that the deep bite on Parker's breast produced.

"God, O it's been so long and I want you so bad." Parker lifted her pelvis and tried to make contact with the large dildo strapped around Olivia's waist. "Please," she begged.

Olivia began her assault by thrusting her hips and penetrating Parker hard. Repeatedly she pushed going so deep that Parker cried out. Olivia stopped for a moment as the small sane part of her brain noted her lover's distress.

When Parker screamed, "Don't stop." She renewed her assault by pushing deeper inside Parker as she ravaged the woman's breasts.

No part of Parker's body was off limits as Olivia greedily took what she wanted. Shooting Reeve's and seeing his terrified eyes before the bullet entered his forehead only fueled her desires. She knew Parker was more than willing to satisfy the need that raged inside her body and mind so she took everything. Each time she heard Parker crying out as her orgasm peaked, Olivia would remember the power she felt as she killed the DA. Finally, an hour later, Olivia pulled out of Parker and removed the handcuffs before she rolled onto the bed.

Parker looked at her lover sprawled beside her on the bed in what seemed like a stupor. Olivia's lovemaking, if Parker could call it that, left her bruised and sore. If she was honest, what occurred over the last hour was nothing but a cold impersonal fuck. Even before Nicky's death, she couldn't shake the feeling that Olivia was leaving her and if the last hour was anything to go by, she knew it was true. As she moved slightly, she felt a searing pain emanate from between her legs and she let a small trickle of tears leave her eyes—Olivia had already left her emotionally. She rolled over and kissed Olivia's cheek. "You ok?" she asked.

"Why wouldn't I be," the words echoed sarcastically in the silent room.

"You seem...so...I don't know what the right word is." Parker shrugged. "The last time you made love to me like that was when you shot that suspect in the Bergamo case."

“What are you implying? That I’m lousy in bed unless I’ve shot someone and have an adrenalin buzz? You’re unbelievable Parker.” Olivia rolled away from the close proximity of Parker’s inviting body. A part of her wanted to feel Parker’s hands make love to her but the mention of the Bergamo case was like a cold shower on her overheated emotions.

Parker reached out tentatively and touched Olivia’s shoulder. “No one has ever made me feel that way you do. I always want you and just the thought of you touching me makes me want you more.” She moved closer and kissed Olivia’s shoulder. “Let me make love to you ...please...let me show you how much I love you.” Inside she tried to quell the growing fear that Olivia was lost to her forever.

Olivia shrugged away the hand on her shoulder as she perversely ignored Parker’s pleas. Swinging her legs off the bed, she stood up with the dildo standing at attention ready for another go at the woman. Once the device tumbled to the floor, she looked at the woman who was lying naked, bruised, and bleeding from the sexual onslaught. How could she love or respect someone who allowed that to happen to her body. It was Parker’s fault—she didn’t say ‘no’. Her thoughts were chaotic, as she remained stoically silent. In some corner of her mind, Olivia knew that what she had done to Parker was unforgivable. Swallowing hard, she kept her face devoid of expression. “It’s true.”

Once Olivia left the bed, Parker had the overwhelming feeling that there was more to her actions than she previously thought. The only time Olivia was that aggressive in bed was when she felt out of control. That knowledge gave her some measure of hope that Olivia wasn’t leaving her. Her greatest fear was that whatever Olivia did, it involved some sort of violence. “What’s true?” she asked cautiously.

Olivia’s eyes darted around the room, giving the impression she expected someone to be listening in. “I shot a man today. Not just shot him...I became judge and jury and executed him.” As she said the words aloud, the enormity of the situation finally hit her. Her thoughts traveled to a conversation she’d once had with her father a few weeks before he died. She lived up to her father’s expectation—she was the one that went to the dark side not her brother.

As she heard the words, Parker sucked in a breath. “Hey,” she said as she got out of bed and winced in pain before wrapping her arms around Olivia. “Everything is going to be ok. We’ll work it out together.” She gently kissed Olivia’s lips. “Come back to bed and let me love you.”

“How can you love a murderer Parker? I’ve ridden roughshod over all the things we stand for. I’m not worth loving.” Olivia’s eyes turned almost black in the half-light of the room mirroring the self-loathing she felt. “There’s no redemption for me Parker...I can’t let you love me. I need to go. I won’t drag you down with me.”

With her grip firmly on Olivia’s shoulder Parker looked directly into the blue eyes. “Don’t shut me out. Nothing you do will ever change the love I have for you...don’t you know that? Your fight is my fight, your sorrow my sorrow, and together we will fix whatever has happened.” She kissed Olivia again. “Remember our vow? Remember that together we are strong apart we are lost. Let me help you.”

The feel of Parker’s warm body and her equally heated words covered Olivia’s raw emotions like a blanket. Was it as simple as that? Could Parker make it all go away? She knew nothing was ever that uncomplicated. Allowing the moment of calm to tame the savage beast that she allowed to have free reign, Olivia rested her forehead against

Parker's skin. "I have never understood you Parker...not really. Even now, after what I've told you, you still defend me, you continue to love me."

"I've always loved you. Nothing you do or say will ever change that for me." She wrapped her arms around Olivia and let their bodies melt together. Inside she was trembling for she feared losing one thing more than anything else—Olivia's love. "You do love me right?" she asked and immediately kicked herself.

Olivia masked her annoyance with Parker whose arms wrapped around her like an octopus. Then she guided them back to the bed. Her actions were obviously to Parker's delight as she heard the woman in her arms sigh gently. "It isn't about love anymore Parker. Love is for people who can make a life together. I can't anymore...it's time for you to let me go." Her hand slid down Parker's body as she began a circular motion on her belly.

"Never, I'll never let you go," she whispered, as her eyes grew heavy. "I will always love you and will stand by your side." She fought the sleep she knew was inevitable and tried to brush Olivia's insistent fingers from circling her belly. "We have to find David and tell him."

"It isn't we anymore Parker. I'll take care of everything myself. I made the mess I'll clean it up." Her fingers continued to weave their magic as she pushed away Parker's feeble attempts to restrain them.

As sleep began to overtake her, Parker's mind screamed that Olivia was going to run. "You have to tell David...if you don't I'll have to. Don't make me do that O," she slurred. The fingers that felt like a feather touching her finally won and all thoughts ended as she slipped into the deep sleep that always occurred when Olivia rubbed her belly.

Olivia watched Parker and smiled. It was a calculated move on her behalf to stop the never ending questions and the entreaties of love. The woman's tenacity was one of the things she loved most about Parker. She bent her head slightly to kiss Parker's forehead. She would miss Parker and the way the woman made her feel. However, Olivia was in a place where she had to be alone. Unwrapping herself gently from Parker's arms she knew the action wouldn't disturb her for the rhythm of Parker's breathing indicated she was sound asleep. "You were my first love Parker I'll never forget you," she whispered as she collected her clothes from the floor and left the room.

Chapter Thirty

Parker awoke, stretched, and instantly felt pain. She kept her eyes closed as she recalled how Olivia ravaged her body and then admitted to committing a murder. The question of who surfaced and she opened her eyes to ask her lover that question. Her hand felt the place where Olivia usually laid—it was cold. Creasing her brow, she eased out of bed acutely aware of the pain between her legs. “Olivia,” she called.

As she ventured out of the bedroom, cold air hit her naked body and she felt her nipples swell as a smile crossed her face. When she found her lover, her breast would be perky just as Olivia liked them. Her eyes roamed the room for any evidence of her lover. Once again she said, “Olivia where are you?”

The overwhelming feeling that had haunted her for a week reared its head—Olivia had left her for good this time. Fearing the worse, Parker entered the kitchen and peered out the window—the motorcycle was gone. “Shit!” She stood in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room and cast a critical eye around the room. Everything seemed in place until she saw or didn’t see the wooden box that Olivia prized over all else. It held mementoes of her family.

She dialed Olivia’s work cell number and it went right to voice mail. “Fuck, where are you O? I can’t let you leave me.” Repeatedly she kept redialing and finally in frustration slammed the phone down. Her mind flickered back to Olivia’s confession of murdering someone. “Is she on the run?” She looked at her cell and frowned. “Better not use that anymore...too easy for them to trace.”

Forgetting all the pain her body felt, Parker walked with a purposeful stride into the bedroom. She closed her eyes as the pain between her legs escalated. If it were anyone else, she would have cried rape—she knew she was compliant. She pulled on black jeans and slipped her arms through a black silk blouse that she tucked into the jeans before running a belt through the loops and fastening it. “I’ve got to find her.” Once she put her boots on she secured her holster and gun, donned a black leather jacket, and headed for the door only to stop.

Parker listened as the phone on the other end rang until she heard, “Tourney.”

“David this is Parker have you by any chance seen Olivia?”

“No,” he said harshly. “Listen, I can’t talk right now we’re in the midst of a high profile murder investigation.”

She closed her eyes as a chill ran up her spine before she said, “Nicky’s?”

“No, the DA. I’m sorry I need to go.”

“Don’t hang up on me David...we need to talk. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

“I really don’t have time...if you find Olivia tell her I’m looking for her.”

The line went dead. “Shit,” she said under her breath. The uneasy feeling that David was looking for Olivia screamed for recognition. It only took seconds for her to go out the door, jump behind the Mustang’s wheel, engage the engine, and speed toward downtown.

Chapter Thirty-One

Olivia dismounted from her bike, with a swift kick set the bike stand, and strode in the direction of the wall of remembrance in the Good Shepherd Cemetery. Climbing the few steps to the bank of lockers holding the urns of the departed she proceeded to number three sixty-five and stood beside it for a few seconds as she stared at the name—Paul Santos.

She reached inside her leather jacket and took out the wooden box that held what she considered her most beloved treasures—memories. Opening the small catch, she selected from the contents a key, placed it in the keyhole of the locker, and listened as she heard the tiny mechanism release the lock. With a heavy sigh, she opened the door and gazed at the small urn made from the same wood that made her mother's coffin that contained her father's ashes. In the sixteen years of her life with her parents, she had never expected that in death they wouldn't share the same burial preparations since in life they shared everything. Their father's will had been specific he wanted to be cremated and their mother had been equally as adamant about being buried. They had seen to it that they appeased both their wishes. The final sensitive touch of using the same wood had been Nicky's idea. With an almost fearful movement of her hand, she touched the urn and then stepped back, tears running copiously down her cheeks. As she tried to brush them away, they fell even heavier. Finally, ignoring her tears, she rested her hazy gaze on the contents of the box.

Inside, were pictures of her parents getting married along with some of her and Nicky as babies and toddlers. Another was of her dad receiving the Medal of Honor for bravery, in the line of duty along with a few others. Her personal favorite was the one taken the last Christmas they were all together. Her mother had finally given in and decided to allow a restaurant to cook. One of the waiters had taken the photo. She smiled at the pudgy little girl she once was. Her brother looked so young and innocent and her parents were such a handsome couple. She could see in their eyes how much in love they still were.

Picking her way through her scattered memories, she touched the rings her parents had worn—family heirlooms from her father's side that went back at least two hundred years. The eldest child received them when they reached twenty-one to share with the one they chose to love and cherish for all time. She felt sadness wash over her. Nicky was gone and she would never share her life like that with anyone.

She closed the box, placed it inside the sepulcher next to the urn and shut the door. She turned the key locking away the things of her family that she held dear, for safe-keeping. "You were right Dad. I did go over to the dark side and I'm so sorry I shamed our family name." Bowing her head Olivia gazed unseeingly at the floor as her thoughts traveled down the years to a conversation she'd had with her father a few weeks before he died.



"Hand me the spanner Oli. We need to keep the old girl tuned up or she'll not ride well for you." Paul Santos grinned at his daughter as she handed him the spanner and watched him avidly as he worked on the Harley-Davidson 1983 Super Glide® - FXSB.

Olivia was excited about her first bike. She never expected her dad to buy the used Harley for her. Her mother hadn't been so happy about the fact that her tomboy daughter was interested in her husband's manic hobby, motorcycles. From the first ride at five on the back of her father's bike, she had been hooked. Now there was no going back in less than a week, she was going to be the proud owner of her own bike and she couldn't wait. "Nicky's sixteenth wasn't as contentious was it?"

Paul Santos looked at his youngest child and smiled, she and Nicky were so different in personality. Olivia had more of his traits and Nicky had many of his mothers. "He wanted to travel to the Antarctic and see the animals in their true habitat. Made your Mom happy she got to go with him."

"I figure he's going to be a vet or animal scientist types one day don't you Dad?" Olivia remarked as she watched her dad finish the tweaking of her new bike.

"Yeah, I do." Paul Santos turned to his daughter and with an exaggerated wave of his hand indicated the bike was ready. "You know with this bike comes great responsibility. People aren't always nice to bikers you have to respect that others have a different point of view."

Olivia shook her dark head. "I'm going to be an evil biker dad, everyone will be afraid of me." She grinned as she spoke, amazed that her words had a sudden unusual effect on her father.

Paul Santos took Olivia by the shoulders and gazed into her eyes seriously. "Olivia, never ever make people afraid of you. Respect you and your views sure but afraid...never! When you make them fearful of you they retaliate and that isn't good—trust me on that."

With a wide eyed expression, Olivia quietly asked, "I don't understand Dad. I was only teasing."

With a shake of his head, Paul Santos drew his daughter into a warm embrace, "I know Oli, but you and me both have a mean temper when crossed, call it that dark side like in the movies. Your Mom and Nicky are placid kind of people they think before they do things, you and I rush into the breach. We're the other side of the coin and we need to be in control all the time Oli...all the time. If for a while we let that slip, anything could happen and it probably wouldn't be good."

"Dad we're not bad people...you're a cop?"

"Yeah I get to put my dark side on to a good cause. When I think of your mother or see her and feel the love I have for her, I know I won't do anything stupid. I couldn't face not having her in my life. When you meet the right person Oli you'll know what I mean and crossing that line isn't an option."

"Then I hope I meet that right person early rather than later in my life," Olivia remarked in reflection.

"Oh I figure in a couple of year's time every boy around for miles will want to have you in their arms. You have your mother's stunning looks baby." Paul Santos kissed the top of her dark head.

"Dad I've been meaning to tell you and Mom, about boys..."

Her father was right and Olivia tried to squash the memories but they called to her as she sank down on the hard cold floor and cried for her family and the shame she'd now brought them and, for the future that could never be.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Whenever Parker walked into a room, the raw energy she emitted commanded that everyone look up. As she strode toward David's desk, she knew everyone was watching her. *Do they know?* Before she could get to David's desk, her captain, Roger Beasley stopped her. "Let's go into my office." He turned to walk away expecting Parker to follow him.

"I can't...I need to speak with David."

"I wasn't asking you Davis," the man said. "Now."

Parker closed her eyes before following the man into his office and closing the door. "Ok, I'm here," she said in a belligerent tone.

"Where's Santos?"

With a shrug, Parker said, "I don't know."

"Don't fuck with me," he growled. "I've got a dead DA and the prime suspect is one of my detectives." Noticing that Parker didn't seem surprised by the information, he leveled her with a malevolent gaze. "Where is she?"

Parker wiped a hand over her face as she centered herself. "I don't know where she is. I came here looking for her." She cocked her head to one side. "I haven't seen her since she left after her brother's funeral."

Beasley churched his fingers and tapped them together. "Are you sure about that?"

With a nod of her head, Parker said, "Yes, why would you think otherwise?"

For several minutes, the man stared at the woman as he decided his next approach. "If you are protecting her...I'll charge you for obstructing an investigation."

She felt her teeth gnash while her heartbeat increased. "Who else knows you suspect Olivia," she asked.

The man looked out the window to the detective's sitting at their desks. "For now, just me and David Tourney."

"That's all," Parker said in disbelief.

"Yes," he said fixing Parker with his eyes. "Her father was once my partner and out of respect for him, I'm hoping to keep this quiet...she needs to turn herself in." His voice softened. "What happened to her brother was horrible. All she had to do was come to me and we would have investigated...instead she killed the man." He swallowed hard and saw what he thought was confusion on Parker's face. "Two officers saw someone leaving with blood on her clothes. I confiscated the tapes from the garage and got a positive ID. The longer she hides the worse it will be for her so if you know where she is you need to tell me."

Parker rubbed a palm over her mouth before she said, "I don't know where she is. When did it happen?"

"About two hours ago."

"She couldn't have...the murder took place while she was at Nick's with a bunch of us after the funeral."

The man cast a disparaging look at Parker. "What game are you playing Davis? I know for a fact she didn't stay there long."

As she blew out a breath and shook her head, Parker said, "No game."

Beasley nodded and stood up. "Don't ruin your career Davis." He shook his head. "Go on, get out of here. Just remember what the consequences are if you're protecting her."

Parker pushed back her chair, stood up and headed for the door. Before she left, she turned back and said, "I don't know where she is so I won't ruin anything." Sure, that everyone was looking at her, she looked straight ahead, as she walked through the myriad of desks. She needed to find Olivia and time was not on her side. There was no doubt in her mind that someone would follow her. First, she'd check the house again then go to the cemetery. She knew Olivia would never leave town without first saying goodbye to her family. That left a bitter taste in her mouth... Olivia hadn't said goodbye to her.

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The red Mustang slowly entered The Good Shepherd Cemetery and weaved down gravel roads until coming to the resting place of Nicky Santos and his mother. Parker saw no sign of Olivia or the Harley but stopped anyway and gazed at the mound of fresh brown dirt covering Nicky's casket. "Where are you O...I need to find you."

She started up the engine and again began the slow drive along meandering roads as her eyes scanned the area for any sign of Olivia. When she saw a motorcycle parked outside a mausoleum, she felt her heart skip a beat. She parked her car on a road adjacent to the motorcycle and cautiously moved in the direction of the concrete and plaster building. As she walked up two steps to the crypt, she saw Olivia sitting motionless on the marble floor.

Parker crouched down next to her lover and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Are you ok?" she asked before sitting next to Olivia.

Brooding eyes filled with desolation turned up to gaze into Parker's face, words unnecessary as the look penetrated even the most insensitive. Olivia dropped her gaze back to her contemplation of the marble floor shaking off Parker's hand from her shoulder as if it burnt her.

In a hesitant voice, Parker said, "Hey, look I know you didn't mean to kill the DA and if you turn yourself in that will be in your favor."

A hollow sound almost maniacal emitted from Olivia then she raised her eyes and caught Parker's troubled gaze her own reflecting distaste. "You know nothing, absolutely nothing Parker. I killed that scum and would do it all over again without hesitation."

"I went to see David but the captain pulled me into his office. They're looking for you O...you've got to turn yourself in." When there wasn't a reaction she said, "We can run and change our identities."

"There isn't a 'we' anymore Parker. I won't bring you down with me. I made my choice and for once it wasn't about you and I'm sorry about that, really I am." The sincerity of the words echoed around the cold marble interior of the building.

All Parker heard was 'there isn't a we' and she grasped at her chest. "You can't mean that Olivia. We've pledged our love to each other...your pain is my pain."

For a moment, Olivia forgot about her dilemma and realized not for the first time how Parker had ingratiated herself into her life and assumed that they thought the same way. It had been one of the reasons she'd contemplated asking for some personal space—now she was going to get exactly what she wanted forever. "I'm not in pain Parker.

You've assumed once more that you know all about me, but you don't. Killing that low-life freed me."

Closing her eyes and breathing in the cold stale air of the mausoleum, Parker tried to digest all of Olivia's words. "Are you telling me that you never meant forever? Am I that much of a burden to you?" She took hold of Olivia's chin and jerked it toward her. "I've never begged for your love and I won't now. Look me in the eyes and tell me you don't love me."

"No not a burden. Do you really want the truth? Can you take it?"

The simple words surged through her body making her shiver in the knowledge she didn't want to know. "I love you O...I have since the first time I saw you standing at that bar. You bring me happiness and joy beyond anything I ever imagined...if you no longer love me it won't matter ...I will always love you." Parker looked away from the cold blue eyes. "If you need me to cover for you while you get away I will, but you will be making a big mistake."

Reflecting on the words Olivia gave a tight smile as she reached out, stroked Parker's soft skin, and silently said three words, *I love you*. She didn't repeat them aloud as she shook her head and softly said, "I don't need you to do that for me Parker. I know what the next step is. I made a drastic choice and you need to get as far away from me as you possibly can. Why not go home and see your folks."

Parker's eyes searched Olivia's for any sign of love and when she saw it, she knew what she had to do. Without thinking Parker replied, "My place is with you. I won't desert you or let you flounder through a trial. I'll be by your side forever."

Closing her eyes, Olivia felt the frustration that had been building for some time with Parker now at fever pitch. They were in the perfect place for what she was going to say next—the death of their relationship. "I don't want you in my life forever Parker. I've never felt the depth of emotion you have regarding me. I love you but eventually you were going to smother me with your love. Now you can't because I won't be here for you anymore."

Parker felt the death blow to her relationship with Olivia and her heart cried out. She knew that the police would arrive any moment and considered the notion that if Olivia were in prison she would always be available to her. The sound of tires on the gravel drew her attention to outside the mausoleum and she held back the smile of satisfaction that threatened to erupt. A dark sedan pulled up alongside the motorcycle effectively blocking its movement forward. "I guess that decision is out of both our hands now," she said pointing her chin toward the two men exiting the vehicle. David Tourney and Roger Beasley entered the building.

Olivia glanced at the two men approaching. Neither had their weapons drawn and that was something for which she was grateful. As she stood up, her mind filtered through the fact that they were there and she wondered how they knew where to find her. Then she gazed at Parker who didn't seem at all phased by their appearance. With gritted teeth, she savagely whispered, "It was you! You told them where I'd be. There I was feeling sorry for you, and you led them to me. Is that what you call love?"

"NO!" Parker exclaimed. "How could I have done that Olivia? I didn't know where you were...I had to search for you." She saw the cold detached gaze her lover gave her and she shivered once again. "You have to believe me...I never did that!"

With a bitter laugh, Olivia bit out, "You knew...from the first day we met you've known where I was every damn second of my life! Well aren't I the lucky one. Not only have I freed up my demons I've become free of your smothering love too." The words echoed ominously as Roger Beasley placed his bulk in front of her.

"You're going to come with us now Olivia... peacefully. It's what your daddy would have wanted."

Parker stood with her mouth opened as she felt her world falling apart. She couldn't and wouldn't lose Olivia...not to another woman, jail, or even death. "I want to come along," she said as she gently placed a hand on Olivia's arm. "I'll find a lawyer for you."

David Tournay saw the dark expression in Olivia's eyes and as she was about to speak, he chose that moment to intervene. He liked Parker and he understood that Olivia was creating an unreachable chasm for Parker's own good. Placing his body between Parker and his friend, he insisted quietly, "Leave it be Parker. We can sort all this out at the precinct. Right now, Olivia needs to come with us. Why don't you follow behind?"

Olivia seethed inside. She didn't want anyone's help especially from Parker. Her anger fed on the woman's insistence to attach herself like a limpet to her side. Her expression turned ice cold before giving Parker one last concentrated look. "You're out of my life Parker. I never want to see your face or hear your voice ever again." She then turned to Beasley and said, "The air is getting stale in here. Let's go Captain."

Stunned, Parker watched as David fitted handcuffs around Olivia's wrist and he began reciting the Miranda warning. As the two men walked Olivia outside, Parker watched them as she tried desperately to awake from the all too real dream she was sure was taking place. Then, what was surreal became crystal-clear as she heard, "Olivia Santos, you're under arrest for the murder of Damien Reeves. You have the right to..."

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Looking out of the mausoleum door Parker watched a handcuffed Olivia being lead to the squad car and ushered inside. The whole ordeal was bizarre until she saw Olivia lean forward and stare at her from behind the pane of glass. She shivered. The malevolence in her partner's eyes transcended the distance between them. Parker stood rooted as the lone vehicle pull away.

"I can't let this happen," she growled. "There's no way I'm going to let them take her away from me."

Chapter Thirty-Three

Captain Roger Beasley pulled at his elongated chin extenuating it's ugliness by drawing attention to the prominent feature. Then he gazed long and hard at Olivia before speaking. "This is a fine mess you've gotten yourself into Olivia. I wonder what your daddy would say."

Olivia knew by his tone that he wasn't taunting her just stating a fact. "He would probably be standing here looking like you do Captain, or..." As her words seemed to echo ominously in the room, Olivia didn't finish.

"Ok I'll take the bait or what?"

This time Olivia moved her head a fraction and gave the man that she'd known for years, a cold look. "He'd be kicking my ass so hard I'd never be able to sit for the rest of my life...probably."

Beasley shook his head at the comment. He knew Paul Santos would have done exactly that before trying to find a way to help his daughter. There weren't many options left. He had to book his detective for murder and hope that the new DA would be lenient. "Fat chance of that," he muttered. When he saw Olivia's puzzled expression he said, "Your father would have done that but would have found a way to help you. I'm not sure I can do that for you Olivia. All that's available is a guilty plea with mitigating circumstances. I know Nicky's death was a blow to you. A good lawyer could plead diminished capacity."

With a bleak expression Olivia said, "Nicky wouldn't lie to me...not about something as important as a crooked DA. He was responsible for Nicky's murder...I know it."

Beasley shook his head and then scratched his forehead before he replied. "We have no positive proof Olivia. All we have is your testimony about what Nicky told you. I can't see how that will be enough of a defense. I figure that's why you killed him...am I right?"

The room was heavy with the question and as time drifted slowly by without an answer. The captain didn't need her answer—he knew she murdered the man.

"Vengeance is a crime few get away with. You crossed the line and the best we can hope for is a smart lawyer who uses the system."

Olivia reflected on the word 'vengeance' for a few moments then remarked, "I won't go to prison Captain. We both know that I'll live long enough to take my first shower then I'm dead meat."

"Don't go there Olivia. You'll get protection...that's one thing I can help you with." He shook his head. "Damn it Olivia...what a mess. I had great hopes for you kid."

The door opened to the room and David Tourney gave Olivia a bleak smile. He motioned for the captain to join him in the observation room.

Once outside, Beasley saw two men he didn't recognize in plain, well cut suits. Annoyed by the interruption of his interrogation, he looked at David and barked, "Yeah what is it?"

The censure made David's cheeks color slightly as he pointed to the two men. "They wanted to talk to you about Olivia. They say they can help."

Beasley glanced across at the men who waited in silence. The one word traveled through his head was *bullshit*. Without any of the preambles of politeness he asked, "Who are you?"

The men moved forward and the taller of the two held out his hand. "My name is Drew Simpson. If you'll allow us a few minutes with Officer Santos I'm sure we can help." When he saw the disbelief on the captain's face, he gave the man a card. "Call the number if you're not sure."

Roger Beasley took the card and saw the name and organization—DOCO. He'd never heard of the government department before. He held up the card and said, "Tourney, keep them company while I check this out."

David Tourney crossed his arms over his muscled chest and nodded. "They will be here when you get back," he said. David wondered how the men could help Olivia for in his opinion she was beyond help. A high profile murder wasn't something you could just push under the carpet. Curious, he asked, "How can you help Olivia?" His eyes then turned to look at the woman he considered a friend through the one way glass.

Simpson, the taller man looked down at his polished shoes and said, "It's up to her."

"How? She's about to be booked for the murder of the DA." His voice rose in irritation as he added, "It is close to impossible to get her out of that." His anger was aimed at his own inability to help someone he cared for deeply. He'd lost too much in the last couple of weeks. His former partner and best friend and now the only sister he'd ever known even if she was only a surrogate.

The men didn't reply as they continued to wait in silence. When they heard the heavy footfalls of someone rounding the corner of the corridor, they looked up.

Roger Beasley stormed toward them before he stopped and gave the men a disgusted look. "Let them in Tourney."

David looked to his boss in question. "Shouldn't one of us be there as well?"

"We need privacy," Simpson said. "I will expect you to leave the room and not monitor what we are saying."

With the shake of his head, Beasley replied, "Not this time Tourney." He leveled the two men with his eyes as he switched off the sound. "You have thirty minutes."

Reluctantly, David opened the door and let the men inside. He saw Olivia give him a despondent gaze that tore at his gut—he couldn't help her. He closed the door behind the men and heaved a heavy sigh as he watched them sit opposite Olivia.

Roger placed a hand on his arm. "It's up to her now David."

"That's what they said," he said. He turned, gave the door to the room one last look before disappearing around the corner. "Don't you think we should stay, she might need..." Beasley shook his head. "Not this time David. Trust me these people mean what they said. No monitoring includes body language via the one-way mirror. Come on, I think we both need a drink."

David couldn't help but feel that there was more to this than met the eye. He looked around the empty corridor—he wouldn't get any answers there. "I need more than a drink...I need answers."

"When the time is right David, you'll get your answers."

Chapter Thirty-Four

"We have a proposition for you Officer Santos," Simpson said as he leveled Olivia with a gaze.

With heavy lidded eyes, Olivia pursed her lips and tilted her head for them to continue.

A smile creased the man's face. "A woman of few words...even better. Of course you know that it's a foregone conclusion that you'll end up with life or possibly the death penalty for what you did?"

Olivia lips curled churlishly. "Where's the innocent until proven guilty part? I haven't been booked on the charge or faced a judge and jury..." she said as she sized up the men. "...unless you're it?"

"No, we're the get out of jail free card."

Olivia moved out of the seat. "Bullshit! No one has that ability." She sneered at the men. "Or did they leave something out when they told you what I did...sorry, suppose to have done."

"You haven't admitted it then?" the man said. "Interesting, why? Wasn't it vengeance for your brother's murder...an eye for eye situation? I thought you'd want the world to know it was you."

"Like I don't know that this conversation is being monitored...what do you take me for a fool? Go to hell! If that's all you have to say, you can just get out...this is over," Olivia snarled before she kicked the chair in rage.

Simpson glanced at the man at his side and once he saw the imperceptible nod he continued. "I assure you that no one is monitoring this conversation," he said. "We work for a government agency called DOCO, otherwise known as the Department of Covert Operations. We want you to work for us. Your talents match our organization perfectly. What do you say?"

Olivia gave out a crushing laugh. "Pull the other one it has bells on it. Last time I checked, no one was recruiting murderers into government agencies. Aren't you supposed to be the good guys?"

Simpson inclined his head to the left slightly then replied, "Sometimes it takes special skills to make the country safe. It isn't always prudent for the public to know how we handle certain situations. You are perfect for the role." He eyed Olivia. "You think you murdered him for justice...right?"

Olivia turned the word over in her head. 'Justice.' It was a simple word with a wealth of meaning. It could take forever to dissect and never understand its terminology in today's world.

Mentally Olivia conceded that she did murder the DA out of a sense of justice. "If I agree, how do you sell it to the rest of the department? They think they know what I did."

"That's a fair question. You simply disappear. As far as they'll know, you're turning state's evidence. A new identity and leaving the old life behind is something they are familiar with."

Olivia closed her eyes as she tried to get her head around what they were offering. Could it really be that easy? "What about people who care about me...friends and"

Simpson tipped his head to one side as he heard the hesitation. She hadn't mentioned her live in lover, Parker Davis, and thought it odd. "They'll know you're not in prison that has to be enough."

Quietly Olivia turned over the word that passed her lips. "Enough."

"Yes. The subject is not up for negotiations. This is a one shot deal Detective. Are you interested?" Both men fixed her with their eyes before Simpson said, "If you say yes we will take care of the mess you created here."

Olivia blinked rapidly and softly said, "If I say no?"

Simpson gave her a hard gaze then with a tight smile replied, "We leave. You face the consequences...end of story."

"End of story." Again Olivia repeated something the man said as if hearing it in her own voice would have a bigger impact.

"We haven't all day, Santos. Yes or no?"

Olivia had the opportunity to live again if she took the offer. Or, she could go to jail, where she would surely die at the hands of the other inmates, or get the death sentence. Either way she was screwed. She had made her bed now she had to lie on it. "I accept."

Simpson smiled, nodded to his partner and then shook Olivia's hand. "Let me introduce your handler, Herald. He'll be your contact for your duration in the department. Welcome aboard Olivia Santos."

Chapter Thirty-Five

She drove to the station with the bubble light on her dashboard flashing. The fastest route was the freeway and after driving two miles, she came to a screeching halt. A dump truck was lying on its side blocking one lane of traffic. "Shit," she screamed. "I don't need this now." With the light still flashing, she tried to pull onto the shoulder and drive but other cars blocked the way.

When the Mustang finally came to a stop in the parking garage, Parker got out and hurried into the building. She stormed past the other detective's desks and pushed her way into Roger Beasley's office slamming the door closed. "Why the fuck couldn't you let her turn herself in, you shithead. Do you know how humiliated Olivia was when you and David arrested her?" An indiscernible look passed over the man's face so quickly that Parker wasn't sure that she saw it, but she had. "What's going on?"

The man slammed down the phone he'd been using and flew out of his chair and took a threatening stance. "She killed a man! Shot him between the eyes. I don't care who she is...in my book, no murderer gets special treatment," he said in a low voice. "Now sit down!"

Something in the man's tone put all of Parker's senses on alert. She leveled the man with a glare as she took a seat.

Roger Beasley shook his head at the woman who looked so wired he'd swear she was taking drugs but he'd bet his badge that it wasn't her style. "I'll be back in a few minutes. When I get back, if you've simmered that attitude down, maybe we can talk." He left the room without another word.

No one was going to tell her what to do so Parker stood up and looked out the window at the other detectives. When she did, she saw them all turn their heads away. "They know...they think I turned her in," she whispered before sitting down. "Fuck," she growled. "This can't be happening." She dropped her head as the minutes ticked by.

The door opened and the captain's attention drew immediately to the silent woman. He heaved a sigh of relief for right now they all had to stick together and uphold the integrity of the department. Concerned, he asked, "How are you holding up?"

Parker leveled the man with a grim look. "I want to see Olivia."

"Out of the question, besides Olivia made it plain she didn't want you near her." He moved over and took his chair at the desk.

Parker blew out a breath. "I don't believe you."

He stared at the woman facing him and curled his lip in derision. "Did the mausoleum strike you deaf or just dumb Davis. I never approve of relationships...personal relationships with fellow officers. It never works out. Get over it Parker so we can get back to normal."

Her eyes searched the man's face. "Why would I care what you think? If you won't let me see her I'll find a way without you."

Beasley didn't answer immediately then he sighed. "Look, it isn't as simple as that Davis. Right now Olivia's with people who can help her. We can't and don't give me any bullshit about how you can—you can't!"

Parker let out a sarcastic laugh. "You have no idea what I'm capable of so don't underestimate me." She stood up and leaned into the desk. "I want to see Olivia and I really don't care what you say or do...I will see her."

The captain just shook his head. "I've sent Tourney for coffee." He rubbed a sweaty hand over his face. "I for one sure as hell need a caffeine fix. After that, I'll arrange an interview with Olivia. Once you're through that's the end of it Davis...we go back out there and do our jobs. Do we have a deal?"

The captain's words were like music to her ears. All Parker wanted was to see Olivia and explain what happened. "Sure as long as you hold up your end of the bargain we do."

He raised his eyebrows at her attitude. "You know Davis if you weren't so good at what you do I'd put you in the next cell to Santos for insubordination."

It was impossible for Parker not to laugh at the man's ridiculous statement. "Go ahead and try."

Beasley stood up irritated at his junior detective's attitude, he walked over to the door and bellowed, "Tourney did you go to fucking Brazil for those beans?"

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David Tourney stood at the coffee machine with his mind brimming to overflowing with the current situation. His gaze landed on the captain talking to Parker Davis. Then his attention turned to several officers standing behind him. He was aware of the whispers that started when he and the captain brought Olivia in and decided to squelch them before they got out of hand. "You have a problem?"

A burly officer gruffly stepped forward. "Did the cocky bitch give up Santos Lieutenant?"

"Yeah, did she?" another man asked.

"If so, we want a piece of her...we don't give up our own." A chorus of others suddenly appeared growling in background.

David frowned. It wasn't the time for in-fighting they would have enough shit flying once the media got hold of who killed the DA. "Forget it guys. You all know that just because we are questioning someone it doesn't mean we suspect them of anything. Look guys all will be revealed soon enough, right now let's not go all hot headed."

"But what about Davis...did she squeal on her partner?"

"Whatever you think Davis did or didn't do doesn't matter right now," he said knowing that the other detectives had already convicted Parker. He considered letting them continue to think she had but knew that wasn't fair to the woman. Just as he was about to set them straight they all turned toward the sound of laughter coming from the captain's office.

"Look at that, she doesn't even give a damn she thinks it's a joke. I can't wait to get her in the locker room and see what she thinks when things aren't going her way. That bitch has been trouble since day one." Alec Manheim stepped out of the shadows and forced his way almost into David's face.

Before David could reply, the Captain bellowed at him and he quickly placed three coffee cups on a tray and walked into the office.

Alec Manheim stood with his arms folded as straight as a ramrod and snarled as the lieutenant walked away. Then, he quietly said, "It's time to take care of our own dirty washing and I know just how." The others nodded in agreement.

David entered the captain's office and placed the coffee cups on the table then he glanced at Parker. "Hey, you want to share why you were laughing? I could do with a good joke right now." He turned his attention to the captain. "The boys are pretty riled up out there Captain"

Parker hooked her thumb in the direction of the captain. "Yeah, he thinks he can stop me from seeing Olivia." She chuckled again and fixed David with a glare. "Do you think you can do that too Lieutenant?"

Beasley snorted. "They'll settle down. Davis wants to see Olivia. I said she could once we had coffee."

"Glad you see it my way," Parker said with a sly grin.

David frowned. "Ok, but what about..."

The phone rang at that moment and Beasley answered it. Moments later, he jabbed the remote control and the TV blared to life. "You're never going to believe this."

Parker's eyes glued to the screen as a picture of a man she did not recognize flashed. Her brow furrowed as she listened to the commentator say, "He was the chief suspect in the murder of Portsmouth's district attorney, Damien Reeves. In a stunning attempt to escape the cops that were surrounding him he ran toward them firing a gun..."

"What the hell is going on," Parker demanded.

David watched in fascination. "Shut up Parker so we can hear it all." A sense of relief flooded him even though he felt certain this was all a fabrication.

Once a commercial began to play, Parker looked at the two men in question. "He didn't kill the DA...Olivia did. What kind of game are you playing?" With her resolve returning she said, "You said I could meet with Olivia...let's go."

Beasley held up his hand. He'd been surprised as much as the rest of them but as he heard the cheer from the squad room, he acknowledged it had taken the edge off the situation and the department. "You can't see her Davis she isn't here."

Fuming, Parker went toe to toe with the captain. "Either you let me see Olivia or I'll make sure everyone knows about your little cover-up." She jammed her finger into his chest. "Do I make myself clear?"

Feeling his temper rise at the detective's attitude, David decided to step up to the plate. "Who do you think you are Parker? Olivia's off the hook and you want to put her back on it. What kind of partnership is that? She was here and now she's gone...it was her choice."

Disbelief filled Parker's heart but she knew the truth—Olivia had left her for good. As she tried to piece together her shattered heart she whispered, "Where did she go? I need to talk to her."

Roger Beasley looked at his two officers and shook his head before calmly saying, "She's turning state's evidence with information her brother gave her. We won't be seeing her again. She'll get a new identity and new life that none of us can be a part of...even you Davis. From what I saw, these people are good and you'll never find her if they don't want you to. Believe me Davis when I tell you that they don't."

Parker nodded and turned for the door. "I guess we'll see if that's true," she said as she opened the door. All the eyes of her fellow detectives turned to her in disgust and loathing.

David felt relief and sadness all in the same moment as he realized the words the captain said earlier, 'it's all up to her now,' made perfect sense.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Parker stood in the kitchen of the house she shared with Olivia and listened intently. There was nothing. In the living room, she sat in the chair that both Nicky and Olivia loved and closed her eyes. She tried to get a handle on all that had happened in less than a week. Nicky, dead at the hand of an assassin, was gone. Olivia had killed Damien Reeves in revenge and now she too was lost. The bitter truth filled her with sadness and remorse. "I should've known what she was going to do. If I hadn't gone to the police station and found O first we would still be together."

She got up and walked into the bedroom and her eyes fell on the strap-on still lying on the floor. Then her eyes tracked to the bed where rust colored stains that once were crimson gave testament to what happened there. She picked up Olivia's pillow, held it to her face and breathed in deeply as her tears saturated the fabric. It was all she had left of the woman who she deeply loved. Shaking as her tears continued to fall, she crawled on the side that was Olivia's and curled up with her knees to her chest.

The ringing of the phone three hours later woke Parker from a demon ridden sleep. "Hello," she whispered. "Is that you O?" She listened and thought she heard breathing but no one was speaking. "Please talk to me O...please," she begged as tears created streams down her cheeks and into her ears.

A gravelly voice said, "You bitch...you sold your partner out!"

"NO! No I didn't," she screamed.

"You'll pay bitch," the caller said before ending the conversation.

"I didn't sell you out O...I didn't. They followed me." She held the pillow clinging to the last traces of Olivia that lingered. A voice deep in her subconscious struggled for acknowledgement until it screamed. "You would have turned her in."

The truth of the words cut her so deep that she looked at her chest—it wasn't bleeding. How could blood escape her for her heart scattered in sharp shards and was cutting her from the inside out? "What you did O was wrong...it went against all we stood for. How could you betray our love like that?" She clutched the pillow close to her and began to cry again.

Sometime in the night, Parker awoke and got out of bed. She wandered through the memory filled house while she tried to formulate a plan on how she would get Olivia back. First, she needed to find her and that seemed like an insurmountable obstacle. She sat at the desk in the living room and began rifling through the drawers in search of names and places. There had to be someone that Olivia would contact or some place that she would go—nothing. She took her search into the bedroom and searched all the drawers and the closet and still there was nothing.

After several hours of searching, Parker had left no stone unturned. She found a stash of pot along with several porn movies that she thought belonged to Nicky. In the back of their father's closet, she found an old shoebox that obviously belonged to Olivia's mother. It contained books, baby teeth, clothes, drawings of the family along with pictures of the significant events in Nicky and Olivia's lives. It gave her new insight to the woman she loved but it held no answers.

Looking at the clock on the wall, she realized that soon she needed to be at work. "I'll look in O's desk at work," she said as she stepped into the shower. "If I have to

prostitute myself or sell my soul to the devil, I will find her. There's nothing I won't do for you Olivia."

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Parker walked somberly past the other detective's desks with her eyes fixed on the furthest wall. She heard the derogatory remarks the other detectives made but held her head high. There was no way she would react to their words for that would only give credence to their lies. She hadn't intentionally sold out her partner and nothing they said could taint that.

She took a seat behind Olivia's desk and opened the middle drawer—it was empty. “What the fuck,” she said as she pulled the others open. Pushing back, she stood up and headed for the captain's office.

Walking in without knocking, Parker found the man on the phone and glared at him. Holding his hand over the receiver he said, “The door was closed for a reason...get out.”

Ignoring his comment she demanded, “Where's all of Olivia's stuff?”

Roger Beasley said, “I'll call you back in a minute,” and hung up the phone. “Don't you ever walk into my office again and demand an audience,” he growled. “As for Olivia...get it through your thick head...she's gone and doesn't want to be found. Do yourself a favor Davis and move on.” He leveled his eyes on Parker. “We don't need a hot headed bitch working here!”

Parker squared her shoulders and traded glances with the man then said, “I will find her you can count on that,” before she walked away.

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For the rest of the morning, Parker fielded phone calls and used the police network to start her search in earnest. At lunch time, she left and made her way to the Mustang. As she closed in on her vehicle, she frowned. A brown paper bag sat on the hood. With eyes scanning the parking garage and with her hand on her gun she cautiously picked up the bag and opened it. Feces filled the bag. Jerking her head around, she ran her eyes around the area as she walked to the driver's side.

When her hand hit the handle, she pulled back immediately. Smears on the handle, window and side of the car was more shit. Sucking in a deep breath, she pulled the door open and slid behind the wheel. Pulling a rag out from under the seat, she wiped her hand before starting the car. She'd spend her lunch at the car wash. “Damn shitheads,” she muttered as she guided the car out of the garage.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Over the next month, Parker grew weary of the daily assault on the Mustang. Not only did the entire police force shun her but the phone also rang constantly throughout the night as various voices screamed epithets at her. Stubbornly she came to work and sat at her desk seemingly unfazed by the treatment.

Roger Beasley approached her desk. "Get your butt up to Dr. McKinney's office."

With a defiant tone, Parker said, "Why?"

"This is not something that is up for discussion Davis. The doctor is waiting for you so get going."

"I'm busy."

"Listen, I've had about as much of you as I care to take. You either do what I tell you to or...you can give me your badge."

Her chair scraped loudly across the tile floor. "Have it your way," she growled.

"I'm the one that's in charge here Davis."

Parker shook her head and silently gave the man the finger as she walked away.



Eliza McKinney heard the knock on her door and said, "Come in." When she saw Parker Davis standing in the threshold she smiled. "I'm glad you could make it Parker," she said softly. "Come on in and take a seat."

The doctor was the first person in over a month that smiled at her or treated her civilly. "Why am I here?" Parker asked without moving.

The doctor came out from behind her desk, approached Parker and gently took her arm. "Come, sit and we'll talk."

Reluctantly, Parker allowed the woman to pull her into the office as she took a seat. Her brow furrowed when the doctor positioned herself in the seat next to her. She blew out a breath and said, "Why am I here?"

"I understand that you've had quite a hard time lately and I thought we could discuss strategies to make things easier for you."

Parker bent her head and rubbed her forehead. "A hard time you say...exactly what do you mean by that?"

"Your interaction with fellow officers is strained."

"I don't know who told you that for it isn't true. I do my job then go home...end of discussion."

"What about Olivia Santos? I understand she has left the police department. That must have been quite a blow to you."

Parker's eyes bore into the doctor. "Olivia leaving had nothing to do with me...circumstances did...she'll come back."

"And, you'll be here waiting for her?"

"Of course," Parker said with a knitted brow. "Why wouldn't I...once her situation is straightened out she'll be back. I don't know why you would question that."

Eliza gently placed her hand on Parker's arm. "How would you feel if she didn't come back?"

Parker shook the woman's hand away, stood up and glared at the doctor. "She'll be back! Now if there's nothing else I have a job to do."

The doctor watched as her patient began walking toward the door. "We're not finished... please sit back down."

"Well I am!" Parker growled.

With her eyes squarely focused on Parker, Eliza firmly said, "Sit down Detective. I'll tell you when you can leave."

Parker reluctantly sat down and folded her arms. "You can keep me here all day but I won't discuss Olivia with you."

"Ok, I will agree to that but I want you to tell me about what the others are doing to you." When she saw Parker's eyes flinch she added, "I know how they've been harassing you. I want your take on what is happening."

For a long time Parker stared out the window refusing to answer. Then she blew out a breath, sighed and said, "They think I am responsible for Olivia leaving."

"Are you?"

"No!"

"If they hadn't arrested her would you have turned her in?"

With eyes blazing, Parker said, "Who said she was arrested?"

"It is my job to know."

With her thumb and forefinger, Parker rubbed her eyes. "She broke the law. We swore to uphold the law...if we don't comply with the rules and pick the ones we'll follow then anarchy follows. Olivia..." She shrugged.

"What about Olivia?"

"She should've trusted me."

Eliza again touched Parker's arm. "You trusted her?"

Parker frowned. "Of course I do...I love her."

"What have the others done to you since she left?"

As she sucked in a breath, Parker could feel her anger rising and disguised it so the doctor couldn't see her vulnerability. "It isn't anything I can't handle."

"You don't want to retaliate?"

"No, if I do that they will have power over me." Her mind flashed to Olivia and how she ravaged her the last time they made love—Olivia had power and always would. So caught up in her thoughts she didn't hear the doctor's next question. "I'm sorry, what did you ask?"

"Is there any way you could condone what Olivia did?"

"No."

"What if it was in the line of duty?"

"It wasn't."

"I know that...what if the job calls for actions that are for the greater good?"

For a long time, as she digested the information, Parker didn't answer. Then her eyes focused squarely on the doctor. "It would depend on the situation but I can see where it could be useful to bend the rules."

Eliza nodded. "Good. I think that is all for today." She patted Parker's arm. "I'd like to chat with you again next week."

As her back went stiff, Parker stood up. "I wouldn't," she said as she walked quickly to the door and left.

For a moment, Eliza stared at the door before she picked up her phone and dialed a familiar number. “I’ve interviewed Davis again and I think she will be useful to us.” She listened for a moment then added, “No, we don’t need her now but from what I know of Santos, we will need her eventually.”

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Parker closed the door behind her and took a deep breath. There was no way she wanted the shrink or anyone else to know how rattled she was. She turned and ran smack into Elisabeth Hill. Holding the woman by the waist, Parker let a lascivious grin cross her face as she extended her arms while still holding the woman. “Well aren’t you a vision,” she said as her eyes raked over the woman.

Elisabeth took a step back and Parker relinquished her hold. “Parker, it’s been a long time.”

Parker winked and said, “Not so long that you forgot me.”

The doctor distanced herself further and said, “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You just trembled when I held you.”

“I can’t have this conversation with you.” The hurt Elisabeth saw in Parker’s eyes was evident. She turned and said, “Come into my office.”

Once inside with the door closed, Parker pulled Elisabeth to her. “Hmm, I like how this feels and judging by your reaction you do too.”

With a firm push, Elisabeth disengaged from Parker’s hold. “I won’t allow this to happen.”

“Why not,” Parker said as she moved closer.

“Just because your Latin lover left you, it doesn’t mean you can waltz back into my life as if nothing has happened.”

Parker felt her blood go cold. “She didn’t leave me.”

“Get real. Everyone knows that she left. Since you didn’t go with her I’d say that sounds a lot like she left you behind.”

“She’ll be back,” Parker snarled.

“Bull...you can’t really believe that can you?” She looked deep into Parker’s eyes. “You do believe that,” she said before laughing. “You used to be fun Parker a real taker until that bitch came into your life. Then you became whipped...even now when it’s obvious she walked out on you you’re still whipped.” Elisabeth laughed louder. “How delicious...you finally got a taste of your own medicine.”

With a fierceness that conveyed her anger, Parker pulled the doctor into her arms and kissed her hard.

Elisabeth wrestled herself free and slapped Parker’s face. “Don’t you ever touch me again. I’m not some whore that is waiting for you to come back. I’m through with you! Now get out!”

With her hand holding her cheek, Parker felt the wall she constructed around her begin to crack. Her world was collapsing around her and she needed to take control or she would lose everything. “I’m sorry that I hurt you in the past Beth. You deserved so much more and I...” She closed her eyes hard so the tears wouldn’t come—they did anyway.

When she saw Parker dissolve into tears, Elisabeth’s heart went out to the woman. She tentatively stroked Parker’s cheek. “I won’t be your lover but I can be your friend.”

With a swipe, Parker pushed the doctor’s hand away. “I don’t need friends,” she said before she turned and left. She needed to feel in control and she knew just where to find it. The bar at Sixth and Maple had more than its share of women who wanted a good time.

Chapter Forty

Parker opened the side door to the house to leave and the stench of death immediately assaulted her nostrils. Laying on the walkway was a dead vulture with a red painted letters—traitor. Through clenched teeth she said, “That’s it!” before she stepped past the dead bird and headed for a small shed that held gardening tools. With shovel in hand, she dug a shallow grave before scooping the carcass and burying it.

The incident only added to her foul mood. The rejection by Elisabeth sent her on a path to find somebody...anybody...to take control over—she found none. The only person she wanted was gone and until she returned, Parker would remain celibate.

After finding feces smeared on and in the vehicle for five days in a row she took action and no longer parked in the police garage. She pulled the Mustang to a stop in the now familiar private garage two blocks from the police station. No longer would she allow anyone to intimidate her for she believed it was only a matter of time before the others would realize they needed her to solve the more complicated cases.

As she did every time she passed by her co-worker’s desks, she held her head high and squared her shoulders. There was no way she would allow any of them to see the annoyance their assault of the last month caused. Sitting at her desk, she began to review incidents that occurred on the night shift. She was so engrossed in her task that she didn’t notice someone standing by her desk. When the person shifted slightly, she looked up—David Tournay was looking at her.

“What do you want,” she snarled. She detested the man for he was part of the conspiracy to keep Olivia away from her.

“We need to talk...privately. Let’s go into the interview room.” He didn’t wait for her to answer as he walked toward the empty room opposite them, opened the door and waited for her to join him.

Parker felt her heart ramp up in beats, as she was certain that he had information about Olivia. As she entered the interview room, she eyed the man critically. “Ok, I’m here what do you want?”

David bristled at her attitude. He wasn’t surprised that some of the guys were playing crude jokes on her for she did go around the place with a superior attitude. “Sit down Parker and maybe if you take that condescending look off your face I’ll tell you.”

“Fuck you David. I’ve had enough of the shit you and your cronies are dishing out. You’re punishing me for something I never did.”

“I’d rather you didn’t Parker...my wife might have something to say about it. Look if you want to complain about what’s happening to you, go ahead, I’ll listen...or you can take it to internal affairs...your choice.” He didn’t have the details but heard the rumors.

Parker let out a sarcastic laugh. “As if you didn’t know.” She glared at the man. “As for your wife...I’d never sink as low as to have anything to do with you. Your wife might be a better proposition though. How’s she in the sack?” She knew her coarse remark had hit a mark as his face turned red with anger. Through gritted teeth she said, “Listen, if this is all you wanted me for I have better things to do than to be here with the likes of you.”

David clenched his teeth. “Olivia called me.”

It was impossible for Parker to hide her dismay as her heart boomed out of her chest. “She did?” When she saw, what she thought was a confident look on the man’s face she frowned. “I don’t believe you. Olivia would never call you instead of me...she never would do that.” In a low ominous tone she said, “Exactly what kind of game are you playing?”

“No games Parker.” He shook his head as he took a seat opposite the agitated woman. “I was as surprised as you but she had her reasons. If you’ll listen, I’ll tell you what you need to know. Although I warn you it probably isn’t what you want to hear.”

“You’ve had it out for me ever since Olivia and I started dating so why would I believe anything you tell me.” She shrugged, “Go ahead, and say what you need to so I can get back to something that is important...like my job.”

This time David let his temper show as he thumped the table. “This isn’t all about you Parker! I lost not only my best friend but someone I called a sister too. If you can’t see that you’re not the only one hurt then go, I’ll let the lawyers handle it.”

Parker cocked her head and considered the man’s words. It was true that David had close ties to the Santos family and she may have read him wrong. “Ok, what do you want to tell me?”

David cleared his voice as she replied, “Olivia called me to tell me that I was going to get a letter from her lawyer.” He held up his hand. “Yeah, yeah before you say anything it isn’t about her troubles. She left me the house Parker and she wants me to get rid of everything in it except her family’s personal stuff and the motorcycles.”

Parker grabbed the table in an attempt to steady her knees that went weak. Her stomach churned as she felt her world collapsing inside her. There was no way she would allow the man to get the upper hand by knowing the effect Olivia’s decision had on her. When she was alone, she would hash over the information and come up with a viable reason for her lover to make such a move.

“Those items are going into storage and I’m to keep the key safe until such time as she can claim them back. The indication from her conversation was that it would never happen but I’m an optimist and have to have faith that it will, especially when we prove she did the right thing about the DA.”

“Exactly where does that leave me? Are you putting me in storage too?”

David hung his head in embarrassment. “She asked that you leave the house without any trouble.” He wasn’t going to rub salt in the wound by telling her that Olivia hadn’t wanted to speak about Parker and that she blamed her lover for her lack of trust.

“I don’t believe you,” she whispered. “Olivia would never do that to me.”

“I never said you’d like this Parker. If you want to read the letter from the lawyer here it is.” He slipped a white envelope from his jacket pocket and slid it along the table toward Parker.

Trying to steady her shaking hand, Parker reached for the envelope only to pull her hand back. “How do I know it is authentic? Maybe you and the rest of my fellow officers thought this would be a sick joke to play on me.”

With a heavy sighed David stood up. “You’re not a fool Parker. I’m not your enemy and you know I loved Olivia like family. Right now it’s what she wants that’s important...not what we want. If there’s any hope she’ll come back to...us. We have to do this. I’ll give you as long as you need to move—but you will move out,” he said with determination.

Parker would not give the man the satisfaction of seeing her melt down emotionally. She shook her head and pursed her lips. "I'll be out in two days," she said before she turned and walked away. Once in the bathroom, she buried her face in her hands and began to sob silently.

Chapter Forty-One

With the Mustang loaded with her belongings, Parker looked back at the house she and Olivia shared for over two years and sighed. Although she could no longer live there, it didn't mean she would stop her search for the woman she loved beyond all reason. For now, she would go back home, back to the farm and draw from the strength that her family and the land gave her. Leaving Portsmouth was a minor setback that was temporary. Once she could get her head clearly around all that occurred she could begin to move forward again. She touched a locket around her neck that belonged to Olivia's mother. She found it in one of Olivia's drawers buried under t-shirts. Wherever she would go from that time forward, Olivia would always be with her.

As she drove out of town, the conversation she and David had played over in her mind. It was a relief to know that Olivia was alive and was apparently able to communicate with the outside world. Although it was a blow to know that Olivia chose to speak to David instead of her, she rationalized that the action was typical of the woman she loved. Most likely, Olivia wanted to make sure that she didn't have to cope with paying the mortgage and all the other bills that their combined income accommodated. She was convinced that her lover never intended for David to kick her out of the house. If Olivia knew what he did, Parker was certain she would be very angry.

As the vehicle ate up the distance between Portsmouth and the farm, Parker listened to the CD's she and Olivia created. The more she listened the deeper her depression grew. When she guided the Mustang down the familiar gravel and dirt road to the farm house, their song began to play. *When my body is done and my soul disappears, I will love you...I'll love you.* The tears that she held at bay flooded her eyes and created unstoppable rivulets down her cheeks. *When the sun starts to cry and the moon turns to blue, I will love. Will you stay with me for all time and keep my heart safe? If you do then I'll give my heart for all time.* As she pulled her car in front of the house, her body, wracked with sobs, was shaking as she turned off the ignition and listened to the words that Olivia sang to her every time they made love. *I will love you.* When she looked up, she saw her mother coming toward the car and that made her cry even more. How her mother loved Olivia.

She flung the door open, got out and melted into her mother's loving arms. "Olivia is gone and I don't know how to find her," she sobbed.

Chapter Forty-Two

Parker looked out of the plane's small window at the clouds covering the land below. She pulled the business card that she received and read it for the hundredth time. The offer of a job as a private investigator for an organization based out of Philadelphia seemed legitimate enough, but she still had a lingering suspicion that more was involved. Whatever that was she would find out once she met with the man who had called her six weeks earlier.

For a little over two years, she hid out at her parent's farm attempting to find Olivia while nursing her shattered heart. Her parents were supportive to a point—as the days stretched out into months then years they encouraged her to move on with her life. They never understood that for Parker, her life ended when Olivia disappeared. Until she found her, life for her would be nothing more than going through the motions.

If she took the PI job, it would afford her the opportunity to use the agency's resources to find her lover. When the light above the seat flashed, *fasten your seatbelt*, she did so and watched the land come into view as the plane approached the tarmac.



Parker exited the terminal and let her eyes scan the people waiting for passengers. The person requesting the interview said that someone named Dan Estevez would meet her and escort her to the meeting. Her eyes fell on a man she guessed was of Spanish decent and approached him. "Are you Estevez?"

Dark brown eyes raked over Parker's body before the man shrugged. He knew who she was when she disembarked from the plane but he was testing her skills as an observer. "Yes," he said. "You must be Ms. Davis." He held up a picture of her and said, "This doesn't do you justice."

"Shall we go then?" She held up a small bag and said, "I have no baggage to pick up." Parker began to walk a few steps then stopped and turned to the man. "Seat three D, you were on the same flight as I was." She eyed him cautiously. "Exactly what is going on here?" she asked cautiously.

A sly smile filled Dan Estevez's face. "They will be pleased to know that your powers of observation are highly honed." He began to walk away and when he noticed Parker still rooted in the same position he motioned her forward. "Come on...they do that to all potential employees." When the woman still didn't move he added, "Ninety-nine percent don't make the connection."

"I don't appreciate your deception Mr. Estevez," Parker said as she began to walk.

"It is important to the company that their detectives have a leg up on the competition," the man replied as he too walked. "It is a very competitive business and the company only hires those that are at the top of their game." Dan walked to the exit before he spoke again. "No deception...that's why you are here. Had you failed to recognize me the chances of your being hired would be slim. Since I've been doing this, only one other person not only recognized me but knew the seat number."

As they moved out of the terminal, Parker noted that a Lincoln Town Car pulled up and a smartly dressed man exited and held open the door to the back seat. When the man that met her, motioned for her to get in, she did and he followed.

The drive down highway ninety-five into the city was in silence as Parker concentrated on the route. If she had to leave suddenly, she wanted to be certain she knew how to get away. Once in the city proper, the car weaved its way through multiple one-way streets, she closed her eyes—a quick getaway meant using streets she didn't know. *Damn.* She saw what she recognized as the Liberty Bell just before the vehicle entered an underground parking garage. They passed by parked cars before they veered off into a small area that was void of other vehicles. Finally, the car came to a stop in front of what looked like an elevator. The driver got out and hurried around the car to open the door.

Once Parker and the man were out, she heard the man say, "Don't wait Fred, I'll call you if I need you again." Dan turned to Parker and said, "This way," as he led them to the elevator door.

Parker's eyes scanned the area for potential danger and noted that the area was dark and desolate. Her defenses were on a heightened alert as her body prepared for battle with the man at her side or others that might be in the shadows. Her mind flashed back to the vitriolic life she led in the waning days of her employment as a detective for the Portsmouth PD. In her mind, she considered the possibility that the job offer was a ploy to make her pay. She reached in her pocket and fingered the small, very sharp plastic knife that she had stitched into the lining. With very little movement, she pulled the single thread that released the weapon. If she was going down it wouldn't be without a fight. She watched as the man inserted a key and the doors to the elevator opened. Once inside, she saw that the only buttons were up or down—there wasn't any indication of floors. Before the man could punch at the up button, she slapped his hand away.

"Where the fuck are you taking me?"

"Relax," the man said with a tight smile. "This is a private elevator for the agency." He looked at the woman and saw the distrust in her eyes. "Look, I mean you no harm I'm just doing my job."

Parker released the man's arm and allowed him to press the button. "You should know that I won't go down easy if this is a ruse."

The man only smiled as he waited for the elevator to come to a halt.

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When the elevator doors opened, Parker saw a number of people all seemingly oblivious to their arrival, milling around a reception area. As they walked forward, she saw on the wall in bold letters *I Spy*. "I Spy, what kind of corny name is that?" she mumbled as she followed the man further into the office area.

The man knocked on a door before he opened it and turned to allow Parker to go first.

With her senses on high alert as she clutched the weapon in her pocket before she walked through the door. If there was an unwelcome surprise for her, she was ready to do battle. Instead, she saw the man with snow white hair sitting behind a desk get up and hold out his hand. Ms. Davis, I'm pleased to meet you at last."

Parker cautiously took the man's hand and found it to be warm and strong. "I'd say the same but I don't know who you are."

"Carter Malloy. I'm the company's representative who will interview you for the position. Please take a seat."

Again, Parker heard the word 'company' and wondered if the detective agency was nationwide. "Exactly what position is that Mr. Malloy?"

The man in front of her smiled slightly and said, "Please sit down and we will discuss all the particulars."

She pulled her hand holding the small knife out of her pocket and sat rigidly in the chair. "Ok."

Carter Malloy sized the woman across from him up as he shuffled the papers on his desk. "I understand you recognized Dan from the plane...that is an important factor in your favor. We only hire people who are of the highest caliber for in this business competition is fierce."

"How did you know I recognized him? He's been with me ever since I made the connection."

Malloy smiled before saying, "We have our ways. It's something you will learn if you join us." His eyes tried to read the woman's reaction—he saw none. "The company feels you would be a perfect fit."

"You just met me...how do you know that?"

The man sat in quiet contemplation before speaking again. "We have people that monitor most colleges and universities for those students that show exceptional aptitude in the law enforcement field." He motioned to the papers on his desk. "You are someone we've been watching for a number of years." When he saw objection and what he thought was fear in the woman's face he held up his hand. "Please listen. You did an exemplary job on the mayor's taskforce in Portsmouth in devising and implementing the disaster preparedness plan. We were most impressed by your attention to detail and ability to be flexible in planning." He smiled at Parker. "You are exactly who we are looking for."

Parker's outward demeanor was calm but inside a shiver ran up her spine. Whoever the man was, he was well informed and that put her at a distinct disadvantage. "That was a long time ago...why are you approaching me now?"

Carter rubbed his hand across his face before remarking, "We are aware of your problems with the police department in Portsmouth. What they did to you was unconscionable...you deserved better. However, that was to our advantage. When the unfortunate incident of the district attorney's demise happened we were about to approach you with a job offer. One of our people works for that police department and highly recommended you."

With a cock of her head, Parker asked, "Who."

"Dr. McKinney."

Parker knitted her eyebrows. "She works for you?" When she saw the man nod his head, she continued. "Exactly what kind of detective agency is this?"

"Legitimate. We assign each member with specific cases. Some work as teams others work alone, which is what you will initially do." He motioned to the office and said, "This will be your office along with an unlimited budget." He slid a piece of paper across the desk. "This is your salary."

Parker took the paper and fought the urge to let her surprise show. "A hundred and thirty thousand is extravagant and that leads me to believe that there is something more." She fixed the man with a cold stare. "Exactly what are you trying to sell me? Obviously, you think I can be bought...well you're wrong."

“Detectives are a dime a dozen...highly competent ones are rare. You fall into that category and if we are to keep you we need to pay you accordingly.”

“Again, what’s the catch?”

“The company recognized your potential for excellence in planning when you were in college and saw it grow while you were with the Portsmouth PD. Then you dropped off our radar.” She didn’t need to know that they watched her at her parent’s farm. Malloy eyed her critically. “We...the company would like to reinvigorate that talent in you. We can help you hone that ability by sending you scenarios of various situations that you will critique and point out any flaws or...ways of preventing the situation from happening.” Carter Malloy watched as imperceptible hints of various expressions flitted over the face of the woman opposite him. Only a highly trained observer could read her face and that was a plus in her favor.

“I thought you wanted a private detective,” Parker said as she eyed the man skeptically.

“We do. The critiques would be in addition to being a private detective.”

Parker shook her head and let out a small snort. “This sounds like a bad B movie. I think I’ll pass.”

The man sat silent as he waited for sufficient time to pass before he dealt the final card. He knew that once he spoke again, Parker Davis would be theirs. He watched as the woman stood up and took a step toward the door. “We get a lot of missing person cases. You will have access to search the databases from all government offices...nationwide.” He saw Parker, who had her back to him, stop in her tracks before adding, “You’ll have the full use of all our resources and the latest technology in locating missing persons. The detective game is cutthroat so we provide our detectives with everything they need to stay ahead of the others.”

For Parker, she didn’t hear everything the man said but she did hear the words ‘missing persons’. In spite of all the warnings that were going off in her head about the man and the job, her focus turned to Olivia. Her search for Olivia while living on the farm always came up empty because she didn’t have the right connections or resources. If the man’s words were true, she would have access to all the resources she needed to track down her lover. Without turning around she said, “How do I know you’re telling me the truth?”

The man pushed back from the desk, stood up, and walked over to Parker. “Come with me and I’ll show you.”

Chapter Forty-Three

Over the next year, Parker worked at I Spy and for the most part, she liked what she was doing. The scenarios she analyzed for the company were what she found the most interesting and when they suggested she go to the various locations she readily agreed.

Her one disappointment was her inability to find Olivia. True to Carter Malloy's words, she was able to access every conceivable database, even the ones that had restricted access. She did find Olivia's name in one obscure database but it only said that she was responsible for the death of a district attorney. Beyond that, there was no mention of her—alive or dead.

The day before, Parker received a message that she was to meet with Carter Malloy for what she assumed was an evaluation. The now familiar black Lincoln was moving west out of Philadelphia to a destination she did not know. From signs, she knew they were in Chester County and had traveled west on highway one and passed Longwood Gardens before proceeding down several small, unmarked streets. When the vehicle pulled up to a closed gate, the driver reached out and punched a code into a gooseneck panel. The driveway, flanked by a dense growth of trees made the area seem camouflaged as they traveled deep into the vegetation before revealing a well manicured lawn with a house sitting atop a slight incline.

The house was a large Garrison Colonial with a porch running the length of the building. To Parker's way of thinking, the setting was all wrong for a corporate office so she surmised it must be Malloy's residence. She knocked on the door and waited. A large man in his mid thirties and dressed in a business suit opened the door. "Ms. Davis, come in. Mr. Malloy is waiting for you.

The man escorted Parker to a door that lead to a library. Carter Malloy smiled and came forward to greet her. "Parker, it is good to see you again. Please take a seat."

Once seated, Parker eyed the man who took the seat opposite her. "It is good to see you again sir. I hope my work for the company is satisfactory." She knew it was but to her way of thinking, it didn't hurt to be humble at times.

"Exemplary," the man said. "But that isn't why I called you here. We feel it is time for you to take on a more significant role in the organization."

Parker raised an eyebrow. "As in a promotion?"

Malloy inclined his head slightly. "In a way." He paused for a moment then continued. "We are impressed with your plans and strategies concerning the scenarios you've worked on. You have an eye for detail and that protects our operatives while they complete their missions."

As she listened to the man, Parker realized that perhaps the plans she had implemented were more than they appeared. "Can I take it that you have used my plans in actual events?"

The man smiled. "You have good instincts and that is what we are looking for. The company as I have referred to it is actually a highly classified government organization that works in the underbelly of society to eradicate terrorist, arms and drug dealers as well as dangerous people in positions of power." Malloy watched for any reaction and when he saw none he said, "I take it you already had your suspicions."

Parker nodded for in the back of her mind she always felt there was much more to the job than the obvious. “Yes, I did.” She eyed the man critically. “Aren’t you taking a chance by telling me this? What if I decide not to play your game anymore...it could prove disastrous.”

Carter Malloy fixed Parker with his gaze. “No. We thoroughly vetted you before we ever contacted you Ms. Davis. You won’t turn us down.”

Parker felt her anger rise. “And just how do you know that?”

The man ignored the question. “We would like you to work with several of our operatives by providing them with the means of carrying out their missions. You will be directly responsible for their safety. Of course, you will work closely with them along with the other planners we have on board.”

“I don’t think so,” Parker said before she stood up.

“Please,” the man said. “Before you go, come with me and take a look at who you’ll be working with.” Without waiting for an answer, Malloy took her arm and guided her to what looked like an elevator door. He pushed a button and the doors opened. The elevator moved downward effortlessly and soon the doors opened to a large room. Once they exited the elevator, Malloy lead Parker to a window that overlooked another room. “This is where you will work. It is the main planning area for all our worldwide endeavors.”

Parker struggled loose from the man’s grip. “I will not be a knowing party to assassins.”

Malloy laughed. “Sure you will. Take a look at the operative sitting at the computer console to the left.”

All Parker could see was black hair that she surmised belonged to a woman. Just then, the person looked up and turned her head toward another person. Parker felt her heart stop before it began rapidly drumming in her chest. “O,” she said.

“Yes, Ms. Santos will be one of your operatives.” The man shrugged. Of course you will need a disguise when you deal with her.” He watched the various expressions that crossed Parker’s face before she schooled her features. “You’ll require intensive training before you begin the job. From what I’ve seen of you and your expertise, that shouldn’t take long.” With practiced patience, Carter waited while the woman next to him digested the information. “Are you in?”

“Yes,” Parker whispered—her prayers answered.

Chapter Forty-Four

Parker stormed into the office of the section director and threw a file on the man's desk. "Who the fuck dreamed up this scheme? It is destined for failure and we could lose some of our people!"

The man, Wilson Bigalow, looked at the folder and shook his head. "It's a little late to be giving me this information, Davis. You know damn well that they are already in position. Besides, you signed off on the mission."

"You won't put this on my head!" Parker exclaimed. She pointed to the folder on the desk. "That isn't the plan I signed off on. Recon clearly told us that the building underwent extensive renovation. I don't see anywhere in the plan that consider those. On top of that, Herald diverted Santos at the last minute to be the lead operative. Had this been my team something like this would never have happened!" Inside she was shaking for Olivia was in danger and she could do nothing to stop the event from happening.

"In case you've forgotten Davis, I'm the head of all the teams and it's my prerogative to send who I think will be the most successful on the missions. We needed Santos's expertise on this one. She is our most experienced long distance shooter...and the most accurate."

Parker felt her body shake with rage. "I thought you directed that we share plans so we come up with the one that is the most fool-proof." She glared at the man. "It was only after the plan was implemented that anyone bothered to include me. Mark my words, the entire team will not come back from this one." She shook her head. "I thought this was a big time operation. How could you miss seeing the holes in this plan?"

"I went over the plan myself and it will work," Bigalow said.

Parker shook her head and walked away. She would monitor the situation and pray that Olivia would come out of it unscathed.

Chapter Forty-Five

Olivia Santos lazily gazed around the briefing room she and her small group used for briefings and debriefings. Her body language, however, was in total contrast bristling with carefully concealed energy, waiting around wasn't one of her many talents. As she tapped her fingers against the table waiting for the handler to arrive, she pondered not for the first time how she'd eventually ended up in this place and the role she played there.

She could almost sum up the last several years of her life in three distinct actions—training, evaluation and mission accomplished. DOCO honed her skills to become an assassin. It wasn't a big leap in faith from the time and place she'd been recruited—if you could call about to be arrested for murder. Recruitment was hardly the term really. No choice was the more descriptive words Olivia would have used if asked directly.

Over the years, she did her job and was still alive. Her extensive training had worked and she had to admit that she enjoyed it. There had been a primal energy pulsing through her as she gained knowledge in the tactical moves to the deadly art of being an assassin for the good guys. At least she'd told herself they were the good guys. It appeased the last vestiges of conscience she had left to think that way. In fact, she felt at times that DOCO had trained her so efficiently that she frightened them. The nickname her fellow operatives had given her, 'the she devil', became her calling card and code name. She sold her soul to the devil when she'd killed the man responsible for her brother's death. DOCO appeared out of the blue to make a collection on the devil's behalf. It fit together so neatly. She was perversely proud of climbing the ladder of the world top list of assassins. In her strange world, it was her challenge to become the best at what she did. She had the right to achieve little else in her life. The bounty on her head from foreign governments and terrorists exceeded that of the scum she took off the streets. She considered it poetic justice.

Constant evaluations had been the side of the coin she'd never been comfortable with from the beginning. At first after each training session, the interrogation was by three shrinks that over time lead to five. After six months of intensive therapy, as they called it, she hated the sight, sound and mention of a psychiatrist. So much so, she'd held one at gunpoint to make it clear to her handler and anyone else who ignored her warnings that enough was enough. Ignoring her request not to undergo any more 'counseling' would have deadly consequences. Her outburst and threat worked. However, they continued to evaluate her and her actions in the field from a distance. As far as she was concerned, she was no longer capable of being anything but a killing machine. Machines didn't need a conscience and she epitomized that creed by making emotional baggage outdated. If anyone came within a foot of wanting to help her with her issues, she'd shoot them between the eyes and not even blink.

She had to admit that her mission portfolio was impressive. Ten single assassinations and five in a bombing raid were the things that made legends. Except the last mission had gone wrong—one of her team was killed due to a faulty plan and all because her handler didn't have due diligence concerning the plan. He'd sent them into the mission zone without all the facts. Grainer hadn't a chance in hell of getting out of the rigged building in time as the exit plan took them to a wall—it was built a year earlier.

Her handler John Herald was luckier than the dead Paul Grainer was. Herald was still alive but just. It had taken three agents and handcuffs to prevent her from killing him

with her bare hands and she'd growled at not having that feral satisfaction. After she calmed down, her superiors agreed that it was time for Olivia Santos to have a new handler.

Chapter Forty-Six

Olivia's jaw clenched and ground as she waited for her new handler to arrive. If she didn't like the person or the way they prepared her for missions, they could screw themselves for she didn't care. She would keep requesting handlers until they came up with someone that would match her skills. Besides, what could they possibly do to her that she hadn't already done to herself a hundred times over?

She had no family or friends. The only personal possession she had was her audio equipment in her room. Her life was as cold and barren on the inside as it was on the outside. Everything she treasured was gone or she'd instigated its demise in one way or another. Her mind flashed back to the only conversation they'd allowed her a month after she'd gone to bed with DOCO.

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"Hey David it's me Olivia, how are you doing and the family?" Olivia smiled briefly as she recalled the man who had been her brother's best friend and like another brother to her.

A muffled incredulous sound was the first thing heard then in an astonished tone, "Olivia? Is that really you Olivia? My god, are you ok? Where are you? What are you doing?"

Olivia chuckled. It was the first time since killing the DA that her lips had moved into anything other than a straight line. "Yeah David it's me. Look, I don't have much time. What I need to say must be fast with no arguments, ok?"

"Sure, anything you know that."

Yeah, she knew that and it made her smile last a bit longer. "My lawyer will be sending you a letter soon...maybe even by tomorrow if everything holds together. I need you to accept what's in that letter without argument and know that you'll be doing me a favor...the Santos family a favor."

A puzzled voice asked, "What's going on Olivia? I don't understand...you're making it sound as if you're dead."

Olivia let out a dry chuckle. "As close as David...as close as. I'm in a dark place right now and where I am is the best place for someone like me to be. I just wanted you to know that you're the closest thing left I have to family and I need you to accept this for me and be ok with it."

There was silence for a few moments then David asked, "What about Parker surely she's..."

"No! No, don't you mention her name to me ever again. As far as I'm concerned, Parker is dead to me. What she intended to do or even did means she went too far. I can't forgive her for that or understand why she did it. I would have given myself up at the end. She always said she understood me but she didn't because she sure as hell didn't trust my judgement."

The forceful words had David sighing heavily. "She didn't tell us where you were Olivia. The captain had her followed. She's not doing so good maybe if you called..."

“No! This is my only call and I wanted to use it on the one person I know I can trust. You’ve never lied to me David and because of that it’s important you understand that the Olivia Santos you knew isn’t ever coming back.”

“Why...because they won’t let you? If those bastards...”

“David, please stop. You always did look out for me just like Nicky.” There was a quiet silence as they both brought up their own memories of Nicky Santos. “The Olivia you knew can’t come back because she doesn’t exist anymore. When I shot the DA I killed her with the same bullet.”

David let out an anguished cry. “Olivia, you did what you thought was right. I would have done the same in your place. Maybe we can work things out if we find the proof that shows he was corrupt.”

Olivia closed her eyes for a few seconds then blinked back the tears. If they had proof. She’d never had to take the matter into her own hands. Instead, she was a cold blooded killer and there was no turning away from that fact. “I hope one day you do David...for Nicky rather than for me. I have to go, take care of your family...it’s the most important thing in life to ensure your loved ones are safe and they know you love them.”

As she was about to replace the receiver she heard him mutter, “One day Olivia I’m going to prove you right and get you back I promise...” She set the receiver in its cradle and stared at the wall.

Then she sucked in a deep breath as a picture of Parker came to mind. One of her laughing with the sexy sparkle in her eyes—yeah that was one image she’d gladly take with her. After all, it was the picture of how love could go completely array and you never see it coming. Silently she made a pact with another devil...the one that chained her heart—never to fall in love again. The love her father talked about, the one that ruled the head and the heart, could never happen now.

Chapter Forty-Seven

The door to the briefing room opened and Olivia dragged her thoughts back to the present as a woman walked confidently into the office.

“Hello, I’m Kate Edstrom, your new handler,” Parker said holding out her hand. The new face, name and the British accent she learned in training seemed somehow strange to Parker. She schooled her demeanor as her blue contact eyes gave the assassin a once over.

Olivia refused the handshake and eyed the woman slowly going from her spiky bleached blonde hair, to the deep set intelligent blue eyes. At first glance, the eyes appeared to have a familiar glint but she ignored the feeling as she let her gaze take in the accentuated high cheek bones that puffed out like a gerbil fully stuffed with food. The pastiness of the complexion in keeping with someone not used to sunshine, which figured if the British accent was anything to go by—it mostly rained in the UK. Then her eyes moved lazily and with a hint of pleasure over the toned body that meant this woman worked out—hard. “You may think you’re going to be my handler but can you prove it,” Olivia said cynically.

It wasn’t the first time she saw Olivia but it was the first with a one on one encounter and Parker found that disconcerting. She longed to reach out and touch her but that wouldn’t be in keeping with DOCO’s plans for either of them. Right now, she needed to reign in Olivia. With a sly smile she said, “If I must I will. The choice is yours.” She took a seat at the desk and laid several file folders on it.

“Lady there isn’t any choices unless you want to end up in a body bag. You’ve read my file therefore you know I’m good for that threat. What do you bring to the table?”

An imperceptible flash of fear at what Olivia had become seared Parker’s heart. “You do have choices Ms. Santos and I know you are aware of those. As for me proving that I have the stuff to take you on...I must warn you that I too have a history that will match yours event for event.”

Olivia heard the bravado in the woman’s voice but she’d seen the fear too and that made her smile cruelly. “You and I are hardly a match, Ms. Edstrom. In fact, how many people have you killed since you began working here—I’d wager my reputation it’s a fat zero.”

Parker hesitated for a moment as she considered her reply. The folder on Olivia and the reasons for their superiors assigning her as the handler were clear. Now she had to give an answer that would be plausible but at the same time give nothing away. “It is not my job to murder but to ensure the safe return of all operatives I handle...and you are one of them.”

“Is that what they told you to tell me? You do know I hate people I can’t trust they’re better off dead than alive in my book.” Olivia languidly watched the woman’s body language as she settled back in the chair and began to rock.

With a shrug of indifference, Parker focused squarely on Olivia’s blue eyes. She found it difficult not to melt into them as her focus went to the place where she knew a camera was recording their actions. “Look, I’m in a position to keep you alive and you can hate me all you want I really don’t care. What I do care about is completing a mission with the as little fallout as possible.” She held the assassin’s eyes in hers. “Your choice—

you can play nice or...well you know what happens if you don't. As for me I don't care one way or another."

Cool under pressure. Olivia liked that. "What was your last mission?"

"That's none of your business...it has nothing to do with you Ms. Santos. All you need to know is that it was for the greater good which is how I like to view anything I'm associated with." Parker shook her head. "Why don't we quit this little dance we're doing and get down to business? Like it or not I'm your new handler and from now on what I say goes." The thought of being in complete control over Olivia gave her such a rush that she felt the tightness of sexual excitement begin to grow—always had and always would.

"The midnight mission, tough terrain, virtually impossible to retrieve a clean slate unless you had the perfect tactician at the helm. It was a clean slate. Mission accomplished with no casualties except for the ones we wanted. The greater good, well only God can say for sure, if that's right. I guess there's no harm in giving you a trial," Olivia said with a blank expression. She was silently pleased that she hacked into the DOCO database and knew all about the woman. She also looked at her file and was pleased that they had no idea about her outside curriculum activities.

"I think we can leave God out of this," the handler said. "You are in no position to give me a trial Ms. Santos. It is what it is. In this case I am the one in charge and I say whether we continue to work together or not." She eyed Olivia and added, "Granted you are very good at what you do but harbor no doubts, there are many more that fit that bill too." Parker shuffled the folders and looked away. "Shall we get too it then?"

"You bring my people home safe and we'll never have any trouble."

"Shouldn't that be I'll bring you all home safe?"

Olivia gave a feral smile. "As you pointed out, I make my own choices Ms. Edstrom. It was good to meet you. Is that all or do we have a mission to discuss?"

"That's all for now, we'll talk again soon."

With a wink of her left eye Olivia replied softly, "I'm sure we will." She held out her hand for the other woman to take and was surprised at the hesitation.

The sexual charge that sparring with Olivia brought out in her had Parker balking at any physical contact. Finally, she held out her hand and the feel of Olivia's hand in hers sent all her emotions reeling. "Good evening."

Olivia whispered so low that even the microphone in the room couldn't pick it up. "Oh and if I were you, I'd go out and get laid or you'll do yourself an injury keeping all that tension bottled up. It isn't good for you."

Speechless, Parker watched Olivia leave the room as she felt herself erupt in pleasure.

Chapter Forty-Eight

A tall dark figure loomed in the doorway of the noisy bar and then proceeded to scan the interior. It must have satisfied the curiosity for the figure moved lithely through the throng of Friday night revelers to a woman seated at the bar. She slid into the surprisingly free seat next to the woman.

Without looking up the woman said, "Glad you could make it. Everything work out to plan?"

"Of course. Did you expect any less?" the sultry voice said.

There was a faint chuckle then the spiky haired blonde said, "Nope, it was my plan after all. I expected to see you at least two hours earlier. Is there anything I should know about?"

Olivia Santos heard the tone of carefully controlled interest. She'd spent the last hour with a whore to release the pent up tension that missions always created. The submissive Japanese woman, who was sent to pleasure her, had been taken on a wild ride that always manifested in Olivia when she finished a mission. The tiny woman begged for mercy from the passion rather than any fear. When she'd left, the young woman gave her a card with 'call me privately' scrawled on the backside. As with all the women she bedded, the card found its way into the trash—'never bed the same woman twice' was her mantra.

"Are you going to answer me?" Parker was seething with jealousy.

She knew exactly where Olivia was, she always did. However, this time something had snapped inside her. Normally they met at DOCO for the debriefing, but this time she suggested Olivia meet her at a bar. The meeting place was a bar only two blocks away from the place where she knew Olivia went to relieve the sexual tension the missions always created in her. She knew of Olivia's penchant for bedding whores and the vision of a naked Olivia in the arms of a stranger sent her on a roller coaster of emotions. She was the one that Olivia always turned to when they lived together. The idea of another woman filling that role created intense jealousy.

Olivia waved for the bartender to bring her a drink and cocked her head on one side indicating that he should refill Kate's drink too. "I always figured English women drank Pimm's or gin. You never cease to amaze me Kate, a beer drinker no less."

"God you're aggravating sometimes. It's like talking to a brick wall." She gulped down a third of her beer and sighed heavily.

Olivia smirked as she sipped the soda water and then, with her eyes capturing the ones of her handler, she moved her hand and with the tip of a finger wiped away the froth on Kate's upper lip. In a low sexy voice she said, "Hmm, brick walls can be useful sometimes." Then she winked and grasped her glass with both hands and continued as if the moment hadn't happened. "Nothing important just needed to take some exercise. Why are you here anyway? You usually wait until I get back to headquarters."

Parker managed to remain upright on the stool. Olivia's gentle touch to her upper lip was so sensually exciting that she had a hard time keeping her emotions in check. It would have been so easy to take the finger into her mouth and suck it deep inside. Instead, she swallowed hard and was able to maintain her cool even though it was wavering on shaking ground. Even the scent of sex that Olivia hadn't managed to totally eradicate had turned her insides upside down and she knew the only way to release her

own tension was to do some 'exercise' of her own. If Olivia touched her again, she'd be running to the bathroom. "I wanted a change of pace. I thought it was time we interacted socially."

"Really...what makes you think I want that?" Olivia lazily replied as she sipped her drink.

Parker tried to gauge Olivia's reaction but she couldn't read the eyes that heavy lids hid. "I've found in the past it helps to maintain a good working relationship." She smiled before taking another swig of her beer.

Olivia remained silent as she listened to the rumble around her. Someone who couldn't sing was at the karaoke machine wailing like a cat in heat. Then she returned her gaze to the woman at her side. She was attractive in an odd kind of way, although Olivia thought the woman really needed to cut back on the bleach. The one word that always came to mind when she was in the personal space of Kate Edstrom rang loud and clear—repressed. The woman obviously needed to pay a little more attention to her own personal needs on occasion, as she did with the missions.

"Is this what you're always like after a mission...deathly silent?"

"Some call it the calm before the storm. I'd call it normality. You and I should stay on a professional basis Kate. You've turned out to be a great handler and an excellent tactician. You remind me of..." the memory of Parker invaded her thoughts for a few seconds then she banished them.

Parker took the lead and with the fluttering of her eyebrows asked, "Remind you of whom?"

Olivia felt disinclined to speak about her past for it was all over, or that's what she kept telling herself. "Churchill, yeah you remind me of Winston Churchill."

With a dumbfounded look on her face, Parker reacted with a splutter. "Churchill, are you bloody blind Olivia. I'm not a tubby cigar smoking egalitarian."

This time Olivia laughed aloud. It was enough to cause a couple of interested looks from two men to her right. She gave them a wink and turned back to Kate. "I meant the tactical side of your many talents Ms. Edstrom. Although, if you drink too many beers, tubby might be in your future...I'd keep that in the back of your well ordered mind."

When Parker saw the twinkle in Olivia's eyes it tore at her gut as her mind worked overtime with memories. She couldn't help herself. She reached out, placed her hand on top of Olivia's, and unconsciously began to stroke the warm soft skin. "You and I could have some fun Olivia."

Olivia watched the movement of Kate's fingers on her hand in contemplative detachment. Then she plucked the fingers away in a swift motion. "Sorry Kate, professional status only. Do you want anything more from me tonight? I'm tired and need to go to bed."

The dismissal rekindled her previous anger and Parker had to draw on every bit of self control she had. "No, not tonight, but I'll expect you in the briefing room tomorrow morning at six sharp."

Olivia raised her eyebrows at the early meeting but said nothing. She nodded her head, threw a tip on the bar and left with a casual wave.

Parker watched as the dark figure melted into the crowded room before she was gone. She downed her beer quickly and contemplated how she could get back at Olivia

for the rejection. It would take some doing but she knew with the proper planning she could devise a scheme that would not alert Olivia or anyone else. All she needed was time. When a woman a few years younger asked if the seat next to her was free, Parker indicated it was. Since the last encounter with Olivia after the murder of the DA, she remained celibate, which was something Olivia obviously wasn't. Since all Olivia ever bedded was prostitutes, Parker took solace knowing it was only for relief until her lover could return to their committed relationship. Why else would she reject Kate's advances? Nevertheless, she would get back at Olivia and the woman next to her was a perfect way to start. Within seconds, she'd begun flirting with the young woman.

Parker actually thought she wouldn't have to be alone in her bed until a man sat on the other side of her. She looked at him and sighed before looking back at the woman on the other side. "Give me a minute so I can get rid of him," she said before she shrugged. "He has a crush on me and every time I come in here he makes a pass. I say I'm not interested and he just keeps coming on to me."

The girl smiled and said, "Don't you just hate that? I'm not going anywhere."

With a nod and a smile toward the girl, Parker turned back to the man. "What do you want Dan?"

"That was a very dangerous game you were playing with Santos."

"I'm off the clock so get lost."

Dan grabbed her wrist and said, "Haven't you figured out by now that you're never off the clock." Once he knew, he had her complete attention, he let go. "Trying to seduce Santos is strictly against policy. You could have blown everything or didn't you think of that?"

Parker sucked in a breath deeply then shook her head. "I wasn't trying to seduce her I was testing her."

Dan cast a critical eye on her. "Testing her...I find that hard to believe."

With a shrug, Parker said, "Believe whatever you want. The fact is that if she had allowed herself to give in to her baser instincts with me she would no longer be useful to us. She is content with whores and that is what I wanted to know."

"As Kate or as Parker you can never be with Santos on any level but as her handler."

"And that is exactly what I am."

"It didn't look that way earlier."

Parker shrugged. "Whatever."

For a long moment, Dan searched the woman's eyes for deception—he saw none. "I'll let you get back to it then," he said nodding toward the woman next to Parker. "Remember we meet at five-thirty."

"How could I forget," Parker said before she turned her back on him. As sure as she was that Olivia trembled when she covered her hand, she was equally sure they would be together again—it was only a matter of time. With a dazzling smile, she moved closer to the young woman. "What do you say we get out of here?"

Chapter Forty-Nine

Parker paced the floor as she waited for Olivia to arrive from her latest mission. She had given her ex-lover more and more challenging and dangerous assignments and much to her surprise, Olivia took to them like a duck to water. The red light above her door began to blink—Olivia was back. A smile curled around her lips as she thought of the next hurdle that she'd make Olivia jump—the target was in Portsmouth. "I wonder how you will react. Will you balk at the possibility of meeting me again?"

The door to the debriefing room opened and Olivia Santos and Dan Estevez walked in. They looked tired but otherwise there was no outward sign of the deadly mission they'd undertaken at least to the casual eye.

Olivia cast her eyes over the bleached blonde head of Kate Edstrom that peered at a file on her desk. The woman's refusal to look up caused irritation to cross Olivia's features as she snarled, "Another dirty deed complete."

Parker lifted her head and cocked it to one side. "Dirty deed you say...that is a curious expression considering what you do for a living." She looked at Dan and said, "Leave us."

"Don't you speak to him like that you cold bitch...he deserves more respect. What gives you the right to order him about anyway?" Olivia flashed Kate Edstrom a malevolent glare and sank down on one of the chairs wearily.

Irritated, Parker had to remember to use her British accent as she replied, "Excuse me...exactly who do you think you are Santos. I am the one in charge of your missions and I am the one who takes the heat if anything goes wrong." She sucked in a breath. "Never speak to me with that tone again. Do I make myself clear?"

Dan chose that moment to vacate the room as the friction in the room became almost palpable. He didn't want to be the middle of the sandwich between the two egos. He could monitor their discussion from a distance to make sure Parker didn't blow her cover.

Olivia felt the heat of her temper rising as it did with all her missions. This time she hadn't had the luxury of releasing it in the usual way. "Yeah and whose army is going to stop me from doing anything I damn well please. Let's face it lady, you're hardly in a position to chastise me. When was the last time you pulled a trigger and a person died." Her fingers drummed the table as her frustration increased so did the tempo. Her eyes indolently took in the great shape of Edstrom's body—it would be so easy to take her.

With the sharp sound of a chair scrapping across the floor, Parker stood up and rested her hands on her desk. In case you've forgotten Ms. Santos, we own you. If you would rather, we can arrange for you to live permanently in a high security prison. As for pulling a trigger...I am responsible for every target's demise." Her eyes blazed at Olivia before adding, "I am also the one that ensures that you and every member of your team go undetected. Thereby, as far as anyone knows, none of you have any culpability in the assassination." Parker forced down her anger and returned to her chair as she matched glares with the woman across from her.

"We, we? Last time I checked no one owned me and I've certainly paid my dues over the last five years, in particular the last three months. How many fucking missions have you sent me on that the outcome didn't have a reasonable chance of success? All of them in recent months! You call that taking responsibility...I call it madness. It would be

the same as my team, in particular myself, involved in suicide missions!” Olivia exclaimed as her fingers drummed louder on the chair arm.

“Did all of you survive those ‘suicide mission’? Yes! So what is the real problem Santos? Are you not up to the job anymore?” Parker said through clenched teeth. A sense of déjà vu filled her mind as she remembered the many times she and Olivia had similar fights only to end up in bed as the heat of passion overtook them.

Olivia left the words hanging in the air as she considered them seriously for a few moments. An element of truth rang out in her head as she tersely replied, “You might be right Edstrom.”

Parker nodded and drew in a calming breath. “Do you want out? Would you rather be in prison? That can be arranged within the hour...your choice.”

Placing her head to one side Olivia considered the proposal. “It has merit going to prison at least they might grant me parole someday. From what you say I’m never going to be released from this place.” The words resonated from the walls as she caught Kate’s eyes.

Parker reached for the phone. “I’ll arrange it. I’m sure the girls in the prison will just want to eat you up....literally.” She rapidly pressed the numbers before waiting for an answer. “This is Edstrom. Olivia Santos prefers prison to working for us...what’s available?”

Olivia laughed and the sound became almost maniacal as she thumped her hand down on the table and goaded. “Well it would sure be better than the meetings I have with you. Besides, I’m getting used to the variety of sex partners at least there I won’t have to pay for it...literally.”

Silently eaten up inside with jealousy, Parker shrugged. “You’ve got it,” she said before returning to the phone conversation. “Yes, I think that a maximum security prison with no hope of parole is the best choice.”

Listening to the verbal sparring between the women, Dan wasn’t surprised when his phone rang. “Calling her bluff was brilliant, but she is calling yours now. What are you going to do?” he said to Parker.

She listened then added, “I don’t know how we can keep the other inmates from finding out she was a police officer.”

“Enough of the bullshit Edstrom we both know I’m not leaving...not yet anyway. You need me, and god help me, at the moment I don’t have that many choices. What do you want me to do next?” Olivia resigned herself to the prospect of death in the physical form. The way Edstrom’s missions were panning out these days it was only a matter of time.

Parker nodded slightly and said, “Put that on hold. I’ll get back to you if we need to transfer her.” She turned her attention to the other woman and let her eyes take in the vision that she loved. Olivia was everything she dreamed of and more and if the next assignment worked as she hoped they would be together again. “There is a big drug trafficking ring that’s set up shop in Portsmouth. There is to be a meeting with the head of that organization and a prime player within the Russian mafia in two weeks. They both need to be eliminated.” She held her breath as she watched Olivia’s reaction.

“Are you completely out of your mind? I’m not going to Portsmouth and don’t give me all that crap that I’m the only one for the job. I mean it...I won’t do it.” Olivia held out her hands in a gesture that indicated the handcuff stance.

Parker studied the woman as she considered all the ways she could manipulate Olivia in to taking the assignment. "You really don't have a say in this and I don't owe you any type of explanation but...I will bend the rules this time." When she saw that she had Olivia's undivided attention, she continued. "The man, Caesar Cruise, was directly responsible for your brother's death. The other man Dmitri Vladlena was the one who put out the hit on your brother and his family. I should think you of all people would want them eliminated."

Olivia's head shot up as her nostrils flared and her eyes widened. "You know who was responsible for my brother's death? When did you know that...what do you know? Tell me! Are you saying that Nicky was wrong and Reeves wasn't the one?"

Closing her eyes to hide the foible she made, Parker chose her words carefully. "We recently came by the information. As you know, our operatives are everywhere and the one in the PPD alerted us to the meeting. It seems that your brother's old partner is hot on the heels of the man who actually killed Nicky...we are hopeful that he will be apprehended soon. However, the kingpins are who we want eliminated now. Once we learn the identity of the man who actually murdered your brother he will be all yours."

"Are you telling me David's in danger?" Her mind strayed to the monthly letters she received at a box number from David. They were all about his family, the job and old friends. He was her only true link with the outside world and reality.

"At the moment no, but the closer he gets to uncovering the truth the more danger his life and that of his family will be in. That is why we need to get these men now...to give Tourney more time and provide a distraction for him so the wrong people aren't monitoring his investigation."

"If I do this you have to promise me that I won't be seen by anyone who might know me and I mean anyone!" Olivia's mind began to fill with memories and some were more painful than others were.

Parker shook her head. "Sorry, I can't promise that. We'll go incognito but there's no guarantee that someone won't recognize you by your walk, accent...eye color. We can do our best," she said shaking her head again. "I wish I could assure you that no one will recognize you but I can't."

"Best laid plans of mice and men," Olivia mused absently as she glanced at the manila folder next to Edstrom on the table. "Is that the mission folder?"

"Yes," Parker said. "I was running through all the scenarios deciding which is the most expedient and that will keep our operatives safe." She eyed the woman as she debated on whether to share the information or not—she handed Olivia the folder.

Taking her time, Olivia read the location and frowned before quietly remarking, "I was born in that neighborhood." Then she flicked over the possible scenarios and the planning that had gone into each possibility. Unconsciously she said, "God this reminds me of Parker. She used to drive me nuts with all the trivia. Some people never get to the point...they always go around the house a hundred times first." She closed her eyes briefly as she realized she was talking aloud and about whom. It had been a long time since she'd spoken Parker's name—it hadn't hurt as much as she expected.

Parker was doing cartwheels in her mind. Olivia did remember her and Parker was certain she heard a note of love when Olivia said her name. "Plans are essential. Without them, discovery of you and your missions wouldn't have gone so smoothly." With a shrug she said, "Be prepared to leave within a week's time."

“I’ll be ready.” Olivia stood up and walked towards the door. Then, glancing back, she said, “Remember one thing...you don’t have a job without me.” Then she opened the door and left.

Parker laughed. “Right and you think you’re in charge. That’s so rich.” She picked up the phone, dialed a number then said, “Did you get all that?” Then she frowned. *Did DOCO hire me to control Olivia?*

Chapter Fifty

The steps to the church entrance were dimly lit by an overhead lamp that dimmed every twenty seconds or so, a testament to the age of the equipment and its neglect. A booted foot crunched on the graveled surface of the pathway to the churchyard, the sound echoing with each step accompanying the sound of the wind whistling eerily through the trees leading to the steps. As the figure came under the dim spotlight of the lamp, it projected a dark foreboding mass against the stonework of the religious building as the person read the name, St. Anthony's Catholic Church.

The figure mounted the steps, pushed open the creaking door, and for a split second, she hesitated going over the threshold. Then she entered the equally dim interior. From left to right the pews were empty, or if someone was there, they were lying on the wooden benches rather sitting or kneeling. A cursory glance to the front of the church indicated that the pulpit was empty but there was a figure kneeling beside the statue of the Virgin Mary. As the figure moved forward into a more receptive area that shed a little more light on the scene of the figure, apparently praying, was clothed in a black garb—a nun.

As the figure moved a step or two closer to the nun a voice gently echoed from the left of the figure.

“May I help you child?”

The figure's back straightened imperceptibly as the voice triggered memories that were long since buried but not destroyed. Swinging towards the voice, the figure's features came into view.

A hand went over the mouth of the man who had spoken. “Bless my soul. Am I seeing things? Is that you Olivia?”

Olivia felt her lips tug into an involuntary smile of acknowledgement as she nodded. The man had recognized her and the one thing she didn't want happening didn't seem to matter now. “Yes it is Father Johansson; I'm surprised you remembered me after so long.”

The priest moved closer and shaking his head held out his hand. When she placed hers in his he pumped it hard. “I'd never forget someone like you Olivia. You're a hard one to forget. Besides, I remember when your parents brought you to your first mass, you cried the whole service.” He chuckled as he saw her frown of consternation.

“Well I'll take your word for that Father.”

The priest gave her a long steady look and then smiled cheerfully. “Aye, I'm sure you will. Now what have you been up too my child. Are you here for confession?”

Olivia vehemently shook her head. “No. I'm afraid any confession I take will be with God when the time comes.”

“Ok, but confession is good for the soul. So you're here to pray then, well we can accommodate that no problem.” The old man pointed to the empty pews.

Olivia glanced at the empty seats and then at the woman still prostrate beside the statue. “Maybe another time.” The mission had been successful and she added two more notches to her belt. Including the bodyguard it was three but she didn't consider the man important enough to add to the list of those she'd assassinated. She looked at the nun again and wondered how praying beside a nun would absolve her of her crimes?

The priest had heard all the stories about Olivia and then some. He suspected that the truth was inside many half truths and he preferred to think the better rather than the worse of the young woman. As he gazed into her face, he saw experience etched heavily into her face and the depths of her eyes. Experiences he suspected weren't happy ones. If she needed a safe haven, this was the place—the house of God never turned anyone away no matter how far one had fallen from grace. Olivia probably had tumbled from a high mountain. “I was going to light some candles. Why don't you light one for the family Olivia?”

Olivia looked at the bank of candles and sighed softly. “Sure.”

Moments later, she was standing staring at the four candles she'd lit. One for her Mom, Dad, Nicky and the fourth one for Parker—it was time to let it all go. Her family would be good memories from now on. The disappointment and anger at the woman she had once loved could join the past and become a memory too. She would remember all the good ones and not the bad for Parker deserved that.

Turning away, she saw the Father speaking quietly to the nun, whose face she couldn't see. With a swift backwards glance at the candles flickering vigorously, she began to walk towards the exit.

“Olivia you will be back won't you?”

Olivia turned to gaze at the priest who was standing at the foot of the altar. She moved closer until he was within a foot of her. “I'm not sure this is the right place for me anymore Father.”

“Nonsense. If you feel unsure then it's the perfect place to be. God won't judge you Olivia he'll listen and if you allow it, he will heal your wounds and restore your faith.”

Olivia considered the words. They were hollow for she had no wish for redemption from God. Her acts were too barbaric to consider asking forgiveness. “You make it sound so easy. I'm beyond that Father. I guess you and yours,” her head inclined to the nun on her knees and praying, “Don't have any problem with accepting that. All you have to do is ask God and it will be ok. Some of us in the real world don't think it's that easy.”

The priest gave Olivia a fatherly smile. “We each have our burdens to carry Olivia. Take the good sister there she has issues of faith. Can she be a good nun, will she disappoint God? Is she really in the right place at the right time? You're not the only one who asks questions that God might not provide an instant answer for.”

Olivia shrugged her black leather clad shoulders and shook her head. “And if he doesn't then where do we look for them?”

The priest laid a hand on her arm and smiled warmly pointing to the center of her chest. “Inside your heart Olivia...just as I've explained to the Sister, it's all a question of listening to the heart and understanding that God resides in the inner recesses there where we love.”

Olivia glanced at the back of the nun and felt a tinge of sympathy for her. “I guess if I ever find that part of my heart again Father I'll have that confessional. I have to go. I've completed what I was here for.”

Like a dog with a bone the priest continued. “I have a friend who needs some help if you have a mind to stick around. His name is Max Anderton, he's a private detective... let me get his card.” The priest swiftly left her standing in the middle of the aisle.

Olivia didn't want to get involved but it was easier to take the damn card then get out of town without offending the old man. At least she was attempting to be normal. Generally, she would have left as quietly as she'd arrived while not caring who got hurt in the process.

The priest gave her a beaming smile as he saw her still standing where he'd left her. "Here Olivia, who knows, this could be the sign you're looking for."

Frowning, Olivia glanced at the card and then at the priest. "Who said I was looking for a sign?"

The old priest chuckled. "We all are Olivia. We all are. You just have to know when it's the time to accept it."

He watched her leave before wandering back to the nun who turned and gave him a slight smile. He sighed nodding his head. "Now my dear Sister Amelia, shall we pray together."

The roar of a motorcycle in the background was the only sound heard as they began to pray in earnest. If the priest had looked outside, he would have seen the she-devil herself leaving the church on her journey back to hell. It was the only path she knew how to follow.

Chapter Fifty-One

The tall dark haired beauty placed her palms on the desk of the director and leaned in before her cold blue eyes pierced him. "I've paid my debt," she growled. "I'm not going to be your assassin anymore."

The gray-hair man with a craggy face lined by many years, closed his eyes briefly before he gritted his teeth and said, "Sit down I'm not finished with you."

Something in the man's almost black eyes told the woman it would be in her best interest to sit. "But, I'm finished with you," she said as she retook her seat.

"Your choice as I see it Ms. Santos is to continue working for us or joining the ranks in a maximum security prison." He let his eyes overtly evaluate her body before he said, "I'm sure you will be a favorite of many a butch there."

Blue menacing eyes fixed on the man anger simmering dangerously in the orbs. "Ah, so that's your game, why do you always use the prison card as a threat? It's not going to work this time around. Let's face it, I'm a trained assassin and have numerous means of survival. You think anyone inside can take advantage of me surely that would be the other way around." She sneered as she watched his expression carefully. "Right now a lethal injection in jail is preferable to working here!"

"That can be arranged. Assassins are a dime a dozen these days."

Feral eyes fixed on the man. "If that's the case then why are you so desperate to keep me here? Besides, now that you know how I feel do you think you can trust me not to really screw up the organization?"

Dark eyes became slits as the man set his jaw. "Try it and see how far you get. Remember we own you."

Olivia bristled at the statement for no one owned her she'd worked that out all on her own. "I'll do exactly what is necessary to rid myself of you vultures. Do you want me to say, 'opps sorry' in advance before I go out the door?"

The man pressed his fingers against an earpiece and heard a whispered voice say, "You've pressed all her goddamn buttons, you need to reel her back in or we'll lose her." His eyes tracked to a dark recess in the room and gave an imperceptible nod. "Tell me what it will take to keep you."

Olivia blew out a breath she'd been unconsciously holding and cautiously replied, "I know others have outside jobs and are called upon when needed. I think that would be a mutual compromise."

The man closed his eyes and breathed heavily before he looked back at the woman. "If we agreed you understand you will be expected to drop everything when we call."

With caution Olivia replied, "Sure, whatever it takes. I want something from you in return."

"Reel her in gently we don't want to spook her." The man heard in his ear.

He gave a little shake of his head and captured the woman with his eyes. "You're acting like I'm a used car salesman and you are trying to get a better deal. I assure you Ms. Santos what we are doing here is nothing like that."

Olivia nodded and shrugged. "The way I see it you want my services and if you are to get them it will be on my terms."

“Let her cool her jets a little before you concede...that way she’ll think she has the upper hand,” the voice whispered in his ear. The man played along with the ruse by rubbing a rough hand over his face and letting his eyes fall to his desk before he shook his head. “And what terms are they.”

“You let me test all the latest technology and weaponry as soon as it hits the organization. You don’t want to have me killed by a stray bullet from a punk do you...or another assassin.”

Once again, he shook his head. “You do understand that if we agree your terms that we will need to know your whereabouts at all times.”

Olivia flicked a glance at her forearm. First thing she would do is get rid of the tracking device in her arm. “We both know you already have that ability.” Olivia searched the man’s face for any sign of deception. Satisfied, she added, “Is that all?”

The man clenched his jaw. “And it better stay that way. If we find you’ve altered it in any way you will pay.”

“Oh I’m aware of that. Now, I’m out of here to find work on the outside.”

The woman in the shadows smiled. She knew Olivia would take the device out of her arm—it was a given. What Olivia didn’t know was another device was under her scalp. She said, “Ask her where?” the insidious voice echoed in his ear.

“Exactly where do you propose on going? We will need to know if this arrangement is to work.”

“What the hell difference does it make to you?” Olivia didn’t want them to know what she was planning if indeed she had a plan. Finally deciding they’d conceded and maybe she’d do the same. Compromise was a two way street and she knew deep down she needed them as much as it stuck in her craw. “I’m going home.”

Pacing himself for the full effect he asked, “Do you mean Portsmouth? You know that some of the more intelligent fraction in the DA’s department not to mention the police still suspect you killed Reeves...even after that cock ‘n bull story they made up. You want that identity change or maybe cosmetic surgery.”

“I’ll take my chances. You know he was as guilty as hell...and I know you can make it right. I figure you owe me that much.” Olivia knew she was treading on thin ice but she needed to know exactly what lengths they’d go to, to keep her sweet.

“And what do we get in return Santos? We really don’t owe you anything...we saved you from a certain prison term and maybe even from death.”

Olivia considered one word in his reply—death. She quietly replied, “You think you saved me from death? Think again, I’m deader now than I would have been if they’d carried out a lethal injection. Death is my shadow. It will be for the rest of my miserable life.”

“Appeal to her ego to make the deal. She needs to know that she’s the best,” Parker told the man. The poignancy of Olivia’s words hit home hard. All she wanted to do was to take Olivia in her arms and say everything was going to be ok. “She may have gotten religion,” Parker whispered. “She went to a church...perhaps for confession.”

“There is no other operative I would do this for Santos...if you agree to the terms we will see to it that no one will ever suspect you of the murder. Just out of interest, why are you going back there? Atonement isn’t in our creed.”

“Assassins have a creed, wow they really brainwashed you Hurst. Although you did give me an idea though,” her hand went to the inside of her pocket recalling the

conversation she'd had with the priest. Flipping the card on the desk in front of the man, she smiled cynically. "You wanted to know everything...that's it. When my services are needed you'll find me working with that guy."

Parker said, "Gotcha," and smiled before adding, "We're done with her. The one thing Olivia does is keep her word." Her mind flitted back the promises of undying love and forever and muttered, "At least to everyone else."

The man turned his attention to a file on his desk then looked up at the woman. "You can go."



Once the door shut, a woman dressed completely in black emerged from the shadows at the edge of the room. "Great job Hurst, now I understand why they made you director," she said as she moved to the window. "Of course she will only get the prototypes that we want her to have." Her eyes traveled to the street below when she caught a glimpse of the Harley that held a lone rider.

"That's a given," the man said. "You know she's going to alter that tracking device."

When the motorcycle and rider were out of view, she turned and after she took several long strides, she stood in front of the man. "Of course she will. That's why we gave her a backup."

"She could prove to be loose cannon. I hope we made the right decision." A smile that didn't reach the woman's cheeks was his answer. He tried to look away from her face but it was impossible. He felt his heart rate increase as the moments stretched into minutes.

"Olivia and I share the same demons. The difference is that I recognize them and she doesn't. It is those demons that will keep her..." The smile on her face soured. "...faithful. She needs to excise them and her role as an assassin, is her outlet. We won't need to rein her in...she'll do it herself." She picked up Olivia's card from the desk and held it up. "I'll take care of this," she said before leaving the room.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Back in her own office, Parker fingered the card Olivia threw on the director's desk. She picked up the phone and dialed the number on the card. When a man's voice answered she said, "Mr. Anderton, this is Kristen Drake and I need your services."

The man said, "Exactly what do you need?"

"I need to locate a person that I believe resides in Portsmouth." Parker let a smile cross her face. "We have something in common...I'm a private eye too."

"Why do you need my services?"

"It's a long story...do you have the time?"



Once the conversation was finished, Parker returned the handset and leaned back in her chair. Olivia had driven off satisfied she'd severed the stranglehold DOCO had on her. *Some people never learn.* There was no way she would allow her to break all contact. She whispered, "We will meet again Olivia...you can count on that."

Keeping Olivia in the game would now be her only priority. To that end, she would do anything to make that happen. Eventually a case would come across her desk that would allow her to contact Olivia and renew their love. She knew fate would intervene and if it didn't she'd make Olivia's fate be a reunion of old souls in any way she could—even death. Until then, she would bide her time and keep on maneuvering Olivia with DOCO assignments.

The next story, The End Game

When Hell Meets Heaven Series

When Hell Meets Heaven

Fatal Hesitation

Echoes of the Past

Paradox of Love

The End Game

Wolf at the Door

About The Authors

JM Dragon

Born in England, JM Dragon is and now a New Zealand citizen, living in the beautiful Canterbury countryside. JM Dragon loves to garden, travel and has a love of animals. Her animals, many of them strays, even the odd chicken, have proved a new focus in her life. Sharing her life with her family, two cats, two alpacas and over forty Bantam chickens in differing breeds; she's found a totally different focus in her life than when she lived in England.

Her writing is a long cherished release for the characters that invade her mind on many an occasion. Always having written stories from a child, she found the Internet a place she could share her creative world with other readers. Having stumbled across venues on the net for her writing, she found new subjects to explore. She currently loves the creative, readership and friendship genre she has comfortably taken residence in for the last twelve years.

A keen reader of sci-fi, crime/mystery, classic and romance of course, JM Dragon is here to stay and loves to experiment with storylines – who knows what she will tease us with next.

Erin O'Reilly

Now residing in the Texas Hill Country on Lake LBJ for the last five years, Erin previously lived in various cities around the world. When not enjoying the lake, she owns and runs a computer consulting business. A lifelong bird watcher, Erin also likes to cook, sew, read, and do various crafts in her spare time. Erin belongs to the Sapphic Readers, which is a lesbian book club in Austin, Texas.

First challenged by a friend to write a story, Erin has since written numerous online and published works. Her story Deception was a GCLS Finalist in 2008. That book also garnered the Sapphic Readers Award in 2009. Story creation involving strong characters always seems to dictate the story and invade her mind at all hours. It always amazes her when the characters she is developing suddenly take on a life of their own and lead the story down a completely different path. She thinks that, when the story is completed that the characters making an impact on the storyline improves the story.



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