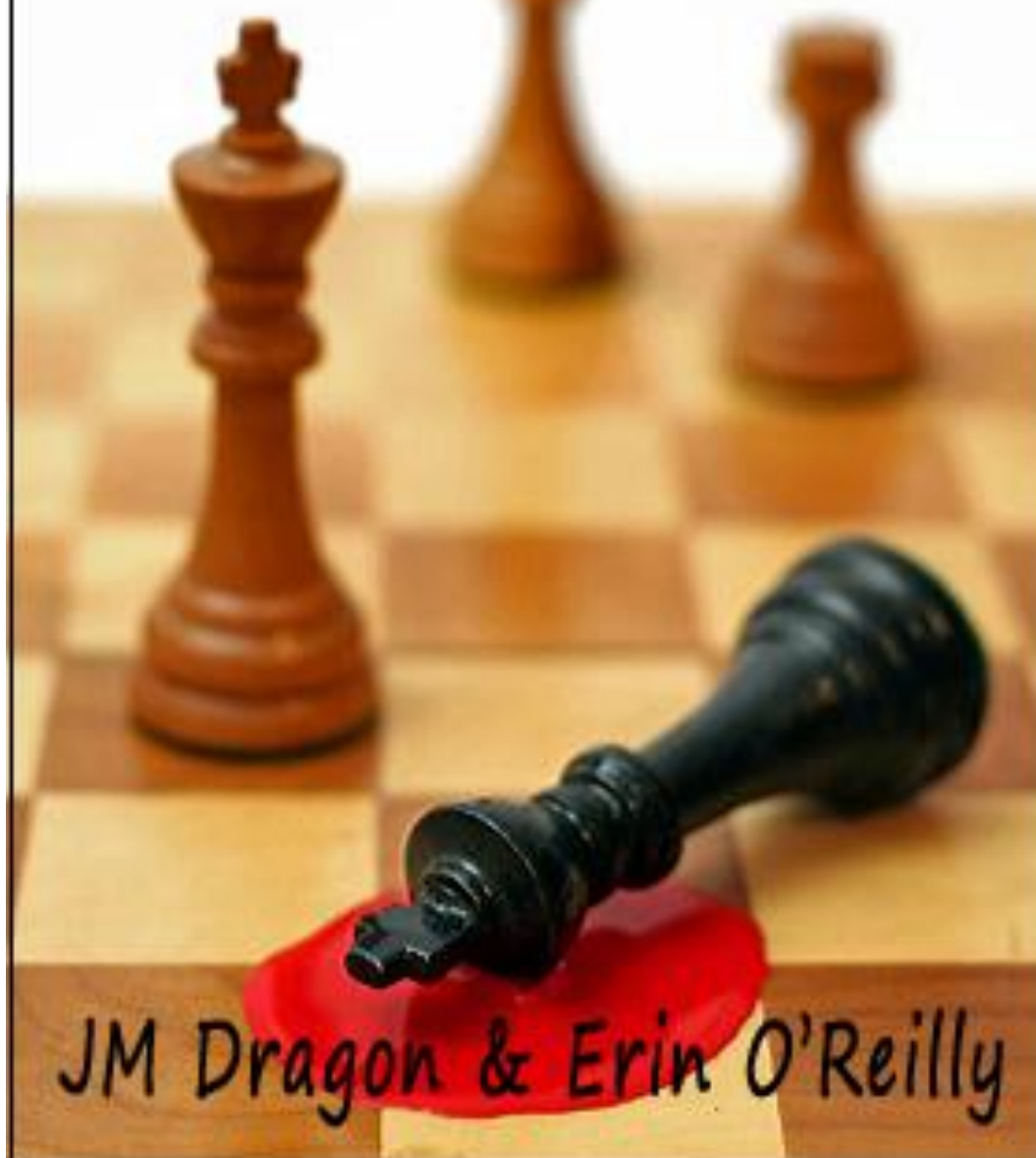


The End Game

When Hell Meets Heaven
Book Five



JM Dragon & Erin O'Reilly

The End Game

When Hell Meets Heaven Series

Book Five

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Affinity E-Book Press NZ Ltd.

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

Reparations (working title)

Final Story (title TBA)

Back of the Book

The fifth story in the When Hell Meets Heaven series brings about a deadly game of cat and mouse that can have dire results.

A new patient begins therapy with Amelia and attempts to weave a web of doubt about Olivia's feelings for her. Who is this mysterious person and why go to such lengths?

For Olivia Santos, this becomes a nightmare of her iron will and confidence, over an insidious plot to weaken her resolve, and effectively tear away the protective sleeve she has over her hold on 'normal' life.

Are the people you once trusted now the enemy? There is only one question all avid readers of this series will want to find out—can their love survive?

The End Game

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Chapter 1

Looking out of a grimy pane of glass to the warehouse across the street, a small satisfied smiled wreathed Parker's feature. Her eyes slowly moved to the monitor to the right and watched the flash of a small blip moving toward the center. "Soon my love, soon we'll be together again," she whispered.

Parker Davis met Olivia Santos when they both were police officers for the Portsmouth PD. It wasn't long after that initial meeting that they became lovers in a tumultuous affair. Their intimate moments just as their arguments were passionate and intense. For Olivia, Parker was in her blood like an opiate that never satisfied her sexually, however unconsciously she wanted a more fulfilling relationship and Parker wasn't that person. When a crooked District Attorney arranged for the killing of Olivia's brother, an undercover cop, she became judge, juror, and executioner.

When the light reached the middle, she turned to the window again.

A black Jeep sat in front of a bay door of the warehouse as it folded upward. Soon the vehicle disappeared inside the building and the door rolled closed again.

The woman moved from the window to stand in front of one of the many large plasma screens and watched as the Jeep came to a stop and the driver exited. A hand went to the back of the driver's head and released hair from captivity. When the woman shook her head, much as a lion did to its mane, the observer held onto a table to still the raw emotions the scene evoked. "You always did that to me O."

When Olivia took a seat in front of her computer, Parker hit a few keys and the screen showed Olivia at her computer. As she watched what Olivia saw she said, "Yeah yeah, I know what you did today...give me something interesting."

When a rattling of the door signaled someone was entering the room, the woman didn't turn—she knew who was there. "Have they started on the office?" she asked.

"Not yet," Dan Estevez said. "They had to wait for the shrink and midget to leave. Shouldn't be long now." He opened his phone and read a message. "They just signaled that the coast is clear and they're going in."

"Is the plumber at the switching station?"

"Yes. Once he gets the signal, the power will go out. The team needs about forty-five minutes max."

"Did you reiterate that every room must be monitored...even the bathroom?"

Dan's face scowled. "I still don't agree with that."

The woman spun around and fixed the man with her eyes. "I didn't ask if you agreed only that you followed my orders."

"Look, I was about to retire when you called me for this job. If you don't want my input then I see no reason to stay."

Parker ignored the man's comment. She knew there was no way he'd leave. Once again, she watched the warehouse and the monitor where a new blip appeared. When the white Element pulled up to the bay door, she gritted her teeth. "How apropos...virginal white for the nun," she said as the vehicle disappeared into the building.

Dan joined the woman who was now standing in front of a monitor. He watched as the woman in question got out of the car and joined Santos who greeted her with a hug. "Are they lovers?" he asked.

"No."

"How do you know that?"

The woman turned and looked at the man. "Olivia is many things but she has some sense of valor. She'd never defile a nun. It isn't in her nature."

Dan watched as the women on the monitor embraced tightly before they kissed in a way that wasn't chaste. "From the looks of things I'd say they are."

The woman chuckled. "Olivia was out whoring three times this week. If they're lovers the nun isn't satisfying her."

"Hard to believe. The Santos I know always takes what she wants."

"Not this time."

"Do you think she knows about the cameras?"

"Santos has gone soft since she left the company and taken up with that woman. She still thinks she has the most up to date security." The woman laughed. "She only has what we want her to have. We can breach her security at anytime."

For two years, Parker worked through a multitude of scenarios to come up with the best way to bring the woman back into the fold. After Olivia killed the DA, a covert government agency known as the Department Of Covert Operations recruited her. No one ever walked away from DOCO and that included Olivia Santos.

For Parker, the mission was personal. She'd lost track of Olivia after her arrest and spent years looking for her. Once she found that Olivia was working for DOCO, Parker joined the organization. Olivia blamed her arrest on her lover and refused to have anything to do with Parker after that so Parker shadowed Olivia until an opportunity arose that allowed Parker to reunite with the woman she loved. As it turned out, it was necessary for Parker to fake her death. Once her plan worked, she would reveal herself to Olivia so they could be together forever.

"All we need to do is plant the smallest doubt in her little friend there. She will fill in all the holes and then walk away. Once that happens, Olivia will be ours."

Dan's phone rang and when he completed the call he said, "Everything is in place."

A peel of devilish laughter echoed around the room. The woman in front of the plasma screen trailed her fingers over the outline of Olivia Santos. "Now the game begins."

Chapter 2

Black boots covered half way with a film of light brown dust stepped up to the door of a building that was typical for the area. A leather gloved hand reached out and opened the door. The person's steps increased as they walked across the polished wooden floor of a reception area—a trail of boot prints followed in its wake.

With a confident gait, the person moved to the reception counter. With a sharp tap on the pristine surface fingers ran across its length and saw a small head bob up from behind.

A diminutive woman glared at the tall black leather encased woman. "Christ, Olivia, you nearly gave me a heart attack! Do you always have to do that?"

With a curl of her lips, Olivia gave a mock sardonic laugh. "I'm keeping you on your toes...although, in your case, it's the tiptoes. How have you been, Teal?" Olivia Santos removed her gloves and placed them inside the black leather jacket that she wore like a second skin.

Teal chuckled at the reference. Usually accompanied with a hint of teasing, as she suffered the pet name Olivia had for her. In most cases, she'd have been angry, but with Olivia, she knew it was a familiar term as close to an endearment she would get.

"I'm great. Phil wanted me to tell you that she's finished the work you wanted. Give her a call whenever you're free."

Nodding Olivia considered the message then replied, "Thanks." Blue eyes travelled to the closed door leading to the When Hell Meets Heaven inner sanctum.

Without waiting for any words, Teal smiled brightly and said, "She's in, but working—booked solid for the next month. Suddenly there's been an epidemic of paranoia. I hope it's not catching."

"I see," Olivia's hand reached over the counter top and deftly stole the appointment book from under Teal's nose. When the small woman frowned, she winked. Flickering over the pages of the ledger, Olivia kept a bland expression on her face. "Book me in for her last appointment this evening. Tell her it's a consultation for a new client."

"Oh, Olivia I can't do that! She'll freak." Teal relented when she saw the penetrating gaze she received. "Ok, but she's going to be mad if after a month away you don't at least pop your head in and say hello."

Olivia gave a wry twist of her lips. "It builds up the suspense, Teal. You should try it. Phil will love you all the more for it."

"She will not and she loves me anyway. Amelia feels the same way about you, Olivia," Teal stated quietly. Olivia could be so weird—even more so now that she and Amelia were an item. Though over the past year her two bosses hadn't spent that much personal time together as you'd expect from a newly in love couple. They were both so busy. Amelia clammed up when she broached the subject. As for Olivia, Satan himself wouldn't ask her about the relationship.

With a wave of her hand and retrieving her gloves from her pocket, Olivia headed back out the door without another word.

Five minutes later, Amelia wandered out of her office and ushered her client to the door. "Goodbye, I'll see you next week."

Once the door shut, Amelia turned to Teal and sighed. “I must be going mad, Teal. I could swear I smell engine oil and Olivia’s perfume. She’s been away too long. Ok. How long do I have before my next patient?”

The words were hardly out of Amelia’s mouth when the door opened. “Ms. Lewis, it’s good to see you again.”

Teal was thankful she hadn’t had to lie to Amelia. *Olivia owes me big time—again.*

Chapter 3

Arriving at the warehouse home she shared with Amelia, it didn't take Olivia long to gravitate to what her partner laughingly described as the first love of her life—the central control panel. It housed the inner workings of her *toys* and security equipment. With a flick of her head toward the main monitor, she reached out and switched it on.

She watched as a stream of numbers and ciphers filled the black void as she waited for the prompt for a password. Duly delivered, the screen then filled up with a log of how the equipment had functioned. She noted a minor glitch that didn't seem serious but would require further investigation. Otherwise, everything was secure.

She'd check out the glitch later. *There's an explanation...there always is.* Amelia was and always would be her first priority in the security stakes. She needed a shower more than she needed to find what would probably turn up as a meaningless system error.

She made her way to her bedroom that still maintained the stark decorative features it always had. There was nothing personal there—it was a place to rest a weary head. Her room was unlike Amelia's, which had become almost a shrine to the many trinkets she avidly began to collect over a year earlier. Not that she minded. Most of them she'd bought for her—how could she complain.

Divesting herself rapidly of her clothes, she opened the shower door, got in, and turned the knobs. A cascade of cold water immediately engulfed her body. A feral smile of delight crossed her face when she felt the adrenalin rush the cold made her feel. She basked in the pleasure of ridding her body of the grime of her month long surveillance. That particular journey had reached its end.

Gradually she let the water turn hot then began lavishing her body with D&C, her favorite body wash that Amelia bought for her just before she left. She relaxed and allowed her sense to indulge in the perfume of the soap when she suddenly felt a chill go down her back—instinctively she felt that someone was watching her. Her eyes scanned every inch of the shower stall and the ceiling. She saw nothing and laughed. "I've been gone too long," she said glad that no one was there to witness her ridiculous imaginings.

Soaping her breasts she lingered on the pointed nipples, knowing that self-pleasuring would sustain her for a while. It would help keep her frustration in check when Amelia was finally in her arms. She wanted to make love to Amelia but something—her past—always held her back.

"Maybe now is a good time to put the past finally behind me." If need be, she'd find a shrink and work all her kinks out. Then, she could make love with the one person in the world who literally held her heart. As she thought of Amelia, her hand slipped down her belly before the pleasuring began in earnest.



Amelia West pulled off her reading specs and flexed her aching back muscles. Whoever said that sitting all day listening to people was a cushy job didn't know what they were talking about—it made a mess of her posture. Olivia was going to be mad. She had neglected the exercise regime her partner had set up for her before she left and now she was paying for it. At the thought of Olivia, a warm feeling settled in her belly while her lips tugged into a half-smile. It was the same smile she always had when her thoughts drifted to the woman she loved. "I've

got to hand it to you Olivia. You're never out of my mind longer than the professional sessions. Every private thought these days is about you these days."

Placing her specs on her desk, she stood up and groaned softly. Yep, annoyed wouldn't be the expression from Olivia's lips—she'd probably curse when she finally arrived home, whenever that would be. Each trip was getting longer and longer. If she had a complex, she'd think her partner was trying to avoid her. Since their mutual confession of love over a year earlier, the only base she ever reached with Olivia had been first. Beyond kissing and cuddling, she never managed to persuade Olivia to go any further and the frustration level was becoming harder and harder to control. Since she had no experience in making love she could only surmise that Olivia must be silently going up the wall—she did have a track record of bedding other woman. That blonde bimbo who came to the office one day was an example. *Maybe it's me.* She needed to have that serious talk with Olivia when she came home—it was time.

Walking through her office door and going down the corridor, she went through the inner door to the reception area—silence. Glancing in the direction of the counter there was no activity. She'd told Teal to leave for there was no reason for them both being late. Although, she was slightly miffed at Teal for adding another appointment on her already full schedule. It was seven-thirty and she was tired. She was looking forward to a hot shower, takeout from the local Chinese restaurant, and a glass of chardonnay in front of the TV.

Moving around to the counter, she sat down on Teal's chair and bent to look at her appointment book for the next day. She groaned—it was another full day. Her clientele had increased dramatically and she wondered why. She hadn't taken on an advertising campaign yet people kept looking her up. Not that she was unhappy about it for the extra income was helping her to make inroads into the loan her folks gave her when she opened her practice after she'd left the nunnery.

Chapter 4

The peel of the electronic bell that announced the last of her clients had Amelia taking in a deep breath as she lifted her head. Startled, her eyes caught the woman she loved before they flashed rapidly as she silently drank in every feature of the dark, beautiful woman. Olivia had captured her life and heart catapulting her into a maelstrom of one of life's richer experiences.

Olivia felt her heart rate increase radically as she felt the warm scrutiny of her partner. She asked, "Nothing to say?"

Blinking and realizing she hadn't released the breath she held, she rushed out of the chair and went around the counter before throwing herself into the much larger frame of her partner. "Olivia, you should have called me. Oh, this is wonderful. Were you reading my mind? I was just thinking about you," she said as her arms tangled possessively around Olivia's neck.

Chuckling warmly, Olivia placed her much longer arms around Amelia's smaller body and lifted her off the floor. Holding her easily a few inches off the floor she rasped, "I missed you too." Her lips captured Amelia's in a kiss that demanded yet, at the same time, gently explored until they were both out of breath.

Locking her gaze with Olivia's, her expression told the taller woman all she needed to know. "You do pick your moments Olivia. I have a client, who is late." Her eyes dragged themselves from Olivia to glance at the time on the wall clock—seven-forty.

A lean finger turned Amelia's head. "Not late, but right on time to take her best girl out to dinner. Teal tells me that you've been working hard," she said eyeing Amelia. "Maybe too hard." Her eyes caught the dark circles under her partner's eyes. "Is that true?" Amelia glanced at the floor, and Olivia understood her wish to bring her back down to earth—although she didn't remove her arms from around the warm and inviting body. Her instinct with the petite woman in her arms was to ravish her.

"There's been an influx of work and I have to admit it's been a challenge, but I've coped. Can I take a rain check on dinner and ...?" At the surprised and somewhat hurt expression on Olivia's face, Amelia tenderly stroked a finger down her olive skinned cheek and felt the muscles under her touch flicker slightly. "I'd rather have takeout and have you hold me at home in private. What do you say?"

"I guess I can accommodate that. You must be beat anyway. Come on Doc let's get you home. A snuggle sounds like a wonderful alternative to dinner in public." Olivia bent her head and kissed Amelia again. She wasn't sure if the thunder she heard was her own heart beat or Amelia's—probably both.

Amelia nodded. "I'll get my things and be right back."

Olivia didn't bother to go with her. There would be the temptation to go to her office and check on what things required her attention. *It will wait until tomorrow.* As she looked around the reception area, the hair on the back of her neck rose for the second time that day. She had the same feeling—someone was watching her. *Maybe I've been working too hard too. We both needed to relax.*

Amelia, sporting a wide grin, came back to the reception area. They left the office together and when they got to the street, Amelia pointed to her vehicle. "I guess I'll see you at home."

Olivia glanced at the car and then at her Jeep beside it. "Not a chance Doc. You're with me. I'll bring you back in the morning."

Amelia chuckled. "Thought you'd never ask." She walked around the Jeep, stepped into the vehicle, and moments later they were homeward bound.

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Both women were ravenous after their long work day. They demolished the Chinese takeout without much in the way of conversation.

"I need to take a shower," Amelia said.

Smiling, Olivia said, "I'll make some coffee and meet you in the lounge later."

Amelia excused herself and once in the bathroom took one of the quickest showers in history. Now that Olivia was home, she wanted to spend as much time as she could with the woman. Dressing in casual slacks and t, she walked back into the main center of the warehouse and headed toward the lounge.

When she heard a muttered oath, she shook her head. "Nothing changes." Padding softly toward the console she smiled wryly as she saw her partner's head bent over information streaming onto the computer screen. As she reached within three feet of Olivia, she chuckled.

"I know you're there. I can smell you a hundred yards away." Turning, Olivia's blue eyes crinkled the skin around them in tiny laugh lines as they pierced Amelia's brown ones.

"Hmm, now that's an interesting thing to say to your best girl." Amelia stepped closer but not in the line of sight of the computer information. They ironed out a personal space issue when they first began living together.

Olivia grinned, waved her forward, wrapped her long arms around Amelia's waist, and hugged her close. With her head pillowing directly below Amelia's breasts, Olivia said, "I love you."

Amelia sucked in a deep breath at the admission. In her opinion, people used the simple statement more frequently than they should. Often it was merely lip service. In this case, it was heartfelt from the enigmatic woman she had fallen in love with. She still marveled at her good fortune. Bending her head, she kissed the top of the dark head and replied, "The right words in the right place. Who can ask for more? Except... for the coffee you promised."

The love Olivia had for the small woman in her arms grew exponentially. Over the time they'd spent together, they'd grown to understand each other's quirky ways and because she hated over the top emotion, Amelia pandered to that by quietly accepting her words. It was just another aspect of the ex-nun that amazed her. If it weren't for her hang up about the final hurdle in their relationship, she'd never want to leave again. Any other profession in the world and she'd have gone with the flow but a nun, something stopped her in her tracks. She quietly contemplated her life now and was surprised when Amelia spoke again.

"Amelia to, Olivia...are you there? You mentioned coffee." Amelia had seen the muscles tighten and flex in Olivia's face. She was thinking and whatever it was, it had the taller woman perplexed.

"Yes that coffee. Take a seat, relax and I'll be with you before you can find us some music to listen to." Olivia moved out of her seat and as she did, she gently pulled Amelia toward her and kissed her soundly. With a wink, she was gone taking the stairs to the upper level and the kitchen.

Amelia chuckled and began to walk away then curiosity got the better of her and she glanced at the console. What she saw it didn't make any sense to her. About to turn away, a program completed its cycle and the words BREACH FOUND etched the screen with a prompt flashing as it waited for additional input. Amelia sighed heavily. "I've never seen that before. This might squelch my plans for a cozy evening in Olivia's arms." A sound from above had Amelia looking in that direction and the object of her thoughts was confidently walking down the iron staircase with two steaming mugs in either hand.

"Hey I thought I was the only one who had a fascination with the small screen," Olivia said. Seconds later, she was standing next to Amelia and passed her a coffee mug.

"We might have to take a rain check on the cuddling. Looks like you have a problem." Amelia sipped her drink while waiting for the reply. When Olivia flicked the screen a look and then switched it off, she was flabbergasted.

"That can wait. You, me, and a cuddle needs to happen now." Olivia snaked a hand over the smaller woman's shoulders and they headed for the lounge.

Half an hour later, Amelia felt her world was at peace. Resting her head against Olivia's chest, she listened to the rhythmic beating of her partner's heart. "Hmm this is good. It gets harder every time you go away. Next time you leave on a long mission I'm coming with you."

Olivia kissed the top of Amelia's head and rested her lips there. If her life ended right here and now, she'd be contented. Her fingers gently caressed Amelia's belly and unconsciously slid under the bottom of her t and felt the soft skin. "I think that would create more problems."

"Why?" Amelia asked. Her breath began to grow shallow as Olivia's fingers touched her body. *Does she have any idea about what she's doing to my libido?*

Olivia removed her hand from Amelia's belly then placed both her hands around her partner's face. Turning it tenderly to look deep into her eyes she said, "You and I can easily be distracted these days. Just take a look at us now." She moved her hand and gently tickled Amelia. There was another reason that was far more critical. Parker's entrance into her life and subsequent death made her realize that losing Amelia wasn't an option. Placing her in danger on one of her cases was no longer acceptable.

"I know." Amelia giggled in reaction to Olivia's hand but her words held a tinge of regret.

Seeing the disappointment on Amelia's face, Olivia added, "For the record, it isn't that I don't think you can take care of yourself or you'd be a burden."

Amelia nodded and snuggled back down into the muscular yet infinitely comfortable body pillow, Olivia had become. In fact, even before they'd admitted their love for each other, personal space hadn't been a problem with either of them from the beginning. "I was thinking that maybe if you have a few hours this weekend we could spend it together. What do you think?" Amelia sighed. "I know you'll want to catch up, so if it isn't convenient..."

Amelia's words stopped as a very satisfying deep kiss with their tongues entwined cast her adrift in the sensations that flooded her body. When their mouths unlocked, Olivia said, "All weekend...from tomorrow evening through to Monday morning, I'm all yours and I hope you'll be all mine."

Still gliding back to earth after the kiss, Amelia was unable to reply until she said, "Yes." Then her eyelids flared as she remembered something. "Darn, I promised to have lunch with my parents on Saturday. I can cancel..."

Olivia placed a finger to silence her and smiled. "Lunch with your parents sounds good. I've never had the pleasure of meeting them formally and I think it is about time."

Amelia, with her eyes wide open, stared at Olivia. "You want to meet my parents?"

With a short laugh, Olivia replied, "Yeah I do."

"I...I can't believe it! Oh, Olivia, I love you. Thank you." Amelia threw her arms around the lean muscular body and hugged her hard. Kissing her collarbone where the skin was exposed, she nuzzled the musky scented skin. Soon she was lost in an exploration of lips against olive flesh.

Olivia closed her eyes as she allowed her raging senses to relish the touch of her love for a few precious moments. Then, in a move worthy of a gymnast, she deftly flipped Amelia over. They ended up on the floor as Olivia's eyes bore into Amelia's and in an act of possession she dipped her head and captured willing lips as they spent some time lost in the luxury of a long deep kiss. Then as they parted she placed small kisses along Amelia's jaw line and whispered, "For you anything," before capturing the kissable lips again and spending a long, long time indulging in that expression of their love.

As Amelia's senses reached the point of no return, her hands began to tear desperately at the shirt Olivia was wearing. The taller woman stopped the kisses and moved fractionally away to look deep into Amelia's glazed eyes.

Frantically Amelia gasped, "What, what's wrong?"

Olivia felt ashamed. Her own raging emotions had her ready to tear Amelia's clothes off and take her on the floor—it wasn't right. "Nothing's wrong but it isn't the time." Olivia slid off Amelia's body and she sat beside her on the floor.

Amelia felt angry and frustrated all at once and screamed, "Isn't the time? When will it be the time, Olivia? We've been together as a couple now for almost two years and we never do anything more than kiss and cuddle. Tell me which one of us is the nun?"

Sighing heavily, Olivia ran a hand through her hair. Quietly she said, "That's the point. When you and I make love for the first time I want it to be right."

Frowning heavily, Amelia replied, "You've just got back after several weeks away. We are in the comfort of our own home. Look around you, Olivia, no one else is here. We are two consenting adults and you don't think it's the right time? So help me, Olivia, I know you aren't the easiest person to fall in love with but at least I thought you and I would have at least gone to second base. Or, is there something I should know? You don't want to have sex with me. Is that the reason? I don't turn you on."

Olivia burst out in her own frustration, "You know that's not the case."

Amelia moved to sit opposite Olivia and knew that the moment had passed. Tonight, once more, she was going to be in bed alone. "Actually right now I don't. In fact you and I could be strangers."

"That's complete nonsense and you know it. I want you, Amelia. I love you. All I want to do is make it special when we make love. Is that so wrong?" Olivia realized she was out of her depth. It had been a long time since she'd had a serious discussion about relationships and it hadn't been with Amelia—not on this level. No, that discussion had been with Parker many years ago and it had turned out to be a disaster.

Amelia shook her head. "I love you, Olivia. I'm in love with you and that means you get the entire package. I want to live with you, grow old with you, and share my whole life with you. That includes my bed. If you can't say the same, then I think we need to reevaluate exactly what kind of love you have for me. Because right now, I'm so frustrated I could even have a cold shower and you know how much I'd hate that."

Olivia didn't know what to say. It would be so easy to take Amelia to bed but she couldn't—there was something stopping her and she didn't have the answer. "Will you give me a little more time? Please. I promise that soon you and I will share everything."

Standing up, Amelia snorted. "Yeah you can have time. I know you, Olivia, and I'm hardly likely to share everything with you. You on the other hand, I'm offering you exactly that. It's going to have to be your choice which path you take. Unless you're coming with me to bed I'll say goodnight."

Olivia listened as angry steps took Amelia away and the slamming of her bedroom door hurt her more than she'd anticipated. Softly she said, "Goodnight, Amelia." Then she looked down at her shirt and the puckered nipples that protruded. She was ready. She could feel the heat between her legs and as she stood up, she felt moisture. That night, as most nights, she was going to have to have a session of self exploration. She headed for the bedroom to do just that and wondered if Amelia pleased herself. That thought alone made her even wetter.

Amelia stood opposite the bathroom mirror and allowed her eyes to wander down her body. Her nipples were large and pointed and she felt her stomach contract as a hand moved over one of them. The frustrated feeling between her legs increased and she allowed her free hand to wander and touch the mound that pulsed with pleasure at her touch. Then, as she had at other times of intense frustration with her partner, she allowed her fingers to roam as they eased the pressure inside her. As she came to the brink, she mouthed out one word in ecstasy—Olivia.

Chapter 5

Olivia flicked on the console and selected the program she'd been running earlier and concentrated on the words. *BREACH FOUND*

As she did, she couldn't help but smile as the memory of the evening she'd spent with Amelia invaded her thought patterns. "God she's hot." Then she lifted her eyes heavenward and rolled her eyes. "You knew that right." Taking the seat opposite the console, she returned her attention to the message. It didn't last long. She recalled the heavy kisses and the small hands that had gripped her back as their passion increased. *It would have been so easy to go all the way.*

Punching in an instruction on the screen, she waited for the information to display. Her senses clouded as a sensual wave of what Amelia looked like after spending an hour indulging in kisses and touching each other's skin. It soon became clear that Amelia was winning the battle of their passion as she'd felt the first tentative touch of her lover's hands on the underside of her breasts. It had sky rocketed her own passions and she began grinding her leg between Amelia's thigh causing her to moan in ecstasy. Then she'd stopped as she tried to take control of the situation and diffuse the passionate flare up.

Amelia had given her two options in the equation. She either gave in allowing them to go onto the next level of their relationship, or, she had to come clean as to why she couldn't then they'd have to decide what to do next.

The screen flashed in front of her with the information she requested. "How the hell has that happened?" Reluctantly pushing away the thoughts of Amelia, she rapidly began to key in sequences of code. "This is going to be a long night. Maybe someone is watching me...us after all." Her eyes flashed around the semi-lit area for a few seconds then she concentrated on what was happening with the computer.

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Amelia woke up the next morning to the sound of voices. Definitely more than one—Olivia didn't talk to herself that she knew of. Glancing at her radio alarm clock, she frowned—it was only seven am. Admittedly, her partner was an early starter going out for a run before setting off to work but hearing voices was strange.

Walking into her bathroom, she stretched and frowned. The night before had been a reawakening of her senses all over again. It made her more determined that Olivia and she needed to be closer. It made her confront Olivia in her frustration—she needed to know the truth and solve what was at the root of the problem. She knew she would eventually figure it out —no, they would.

Turning on the jet of water, she walked into the warm water and soaped her body looking down at her full breasts and picturing Olivia's lips on the alabaster skin—her nipples puckered. She was sick of self-pleasuring. She wanted Olivia to take her and make her a woman in every way. The books she'd read early in her frustration had helped for she learned how to pleasure herself. But, the only one that could solve her dilemma was Olivia. She slowly soaped the sensitive skin of her breast and felt the heat between her legs. With a shake of her head, she groaned in frustration and let her fingers do their magic—getting to work on time took a back seat.

Fifteen minutes later, showered and ready for the last day of the work week, she left her room and walked toward the two figures at the console. Her smile widened when she saw Phil, Teal's wife. Closing in on them, she figured they were so engrossed in what they were doing that they wouldn't know she was there—wrong.

"Morning, Amelia, did you sleep well?"

Blue eyes caught hers as Amelia saw a ghost of a tender smile on the lips that had just spoken. She shook her head. "Can't get past you can I? I did thank you...and you?"

Olivia shrugged. "Oh hit and miss. I had things on my mind."

"Figures with Phil here." She grinned at the woman who was furiously typing on the computer keyboard. "Good morning Phil."

"Morning, Amelia. Teal says you owe her big time for getting me out of bed so early," Phil said, never raising her head.

Shaking her head vigorously, she captured the attention of Olivia who gazed at the motion in silent appreciation.

With a chuckle Amelia replied, "Me? She needs to speak with the big O here not me."

Phil did look up this time. "The big O?"

Olivia rolled her eyes. "Let's get on with this and then we can have breakfast. What time do you need to be at the office?" Her eyes wandered back to Amelia.

"My first session is at eight-thirty. I'll need to leave in half an hour." Amelia smiled apologetically.

Nodding Olivia pursed her lips. "I'll spring for breakfast at the office. Phil, I'll need you to continue to work on this until you're done. Then the office computer needs purging too. Are you up for it?"

"Sure, though you'll owe me big time. Do you know the other love of my wife's life?" When Phil saw the questioning looks on the two women's faces, she said, "The computer system at work. She's not going to be happy with anyone that takes over her baby and tinkers with it."

They all laughed at the thought—Teal was definitely going to be pissed.

Phil went back to her task and Amelia walked past them toward the kitchen. Hot tea was on her agenda. "Anyone want something to drink?"

Phil mouthed *no thanks* and Olivia didn't reply. Then, with a quick glance at Amelia, she smiled. "A caffeine fix would be great."

Amelia frowned slightly but didn't say what was on her mind. "You got it."

Minutes later, she busied herself in the kitchen making the drinks when the door opened and then shut behind the visitor. Looking in the direction of the doorway, Amelia wasn't surprised to see Olivia there. "Hi."

Olivia's eyelids dropped in such a way that it sent Amelia's pulse rate through the roof. "Hi yourself...I just wanted to say sorry about last night and I promise to fix things. I really will." She left the doorway and wrapped her arms around Amelia kissing her slowly.

Amelia felt her world rocket into the stratosphere at the touch and relaxed totally into the kiss. When they broke for breath, she gently traced a finger over Olivia's face, feeling that familiar muscle movement at her touch. "I love you. You should know that this is getting harder and harder every time. I want to rip your clothes off and take you regardless of your doubts."

“Amelia, I’m shocked,” Olivia said as she chuckled. “I love you too.” Olivia’s lips captured Amelia’s once more for further exploration.

The tea kettle whistling dragged them back to reality.

“You haven’t slept have you?” Busying herself with making the drinks, Amelia didn’t look directly at Olivia.

There was silence for a short time. “I could lie and say I did like a baby but…”

“But we don’t lie to each other, right. That was the first rule we made a year ago.” Amelia smiled at the old conversation that stemmed from the disasters of Parker’s stay with them.

“I was about to go I swear. However, that message you saw earlier in the evening called to me and I thought I’d check it out and before I knew it. Well time simply disappeared through my fingers.” Olivia said with a shrug as she flexed her fingers.

“What time did you call Phil?”

Olivia didn’t answer immediately as a hint of embarrassment tinged her face. “Around four-thirty.”

Amelia turned and glared at her partner. “Oh no, Olivia, Teal is going to be like a rampant bull all day. You can most definitely deal with her today.”

Olivia chuckled at the picture of Teal as a rampant bull. “I will. I promise.”

Passing a mug of coffee to Olivia, Amelia sipped on her tea and stared into the liquid. “Do we have a problem?”

Understanding perfectly the question, Olivia replied, “We may. I can’t confirm it yet but I think our security system was breached.”

Amelia’s eyes flared opened. “We’re compromised? When?”

“That’s the hardest part. I can’t pinpoint it. Whoever did the hacking is good…maybe too good. Phil is a genius in this field but even she’s struggling.”

The words floated between them like a mist.

“What exactly does this mean?” Amelia finally asked.

Olivia shrugged. “I honestly don’t know. It could have been a lucky break by a kid or…” Olivia stopped speaking and looked directly at Amelia. “Well, let’s see what Phil finds out first. Right now, I need to take you to work and battle the bull in my best matador fashion.”

The light teasing made Amelia smile as she placed her cup on the drainer before moving to within a few inches of Olivia. She kissed her thoroughly the pulled back. “Now that’s what I call a spectacle and can’t wait to be a witness to what happens. See you in a few minutes.” She walked out the door and down the iron steps.

Olivia stood there for a few moments simply watching and enjoying the closeness they were developing. She frowned and whispered to the empty kitchen, “My god, I’ve just realized I really can’t live without her in my life.”

She left the kitchen and took the steps two at a time to reach Phil and check on her progress.

Chapter 6

“Mom, how are you?” Amelia listened with a smile to her mother’s voice and checked the time. It was five-thirty on a Friday evening and she knew her parents would be home.

“I’m good as is your father darling. You’re not going to cancel our lunch date tomorrow are you?”

Amelia felt her lips tug into a wide smile. “No, not at all. On the contrary. I’d like to bring along a friend.”

There was silence for a second until her mother asked, “Really, well I see no problem with that. Any one we know?”

Wanting to laugh at the curiosity but refraining from doing so she said, “Well you kind of know her. You’ve spoken to her on numerous occasions. It’s Olivia.”

“Really? I never quite seemed to have her down as the lunch with the parent’s type.”

It was an innocent remark but had Amelia’s cheeks stinging with color. “Mom, the reason she’s never...look is it ok?”

There was a chuckle at the other end of the line. “Of course darling. I know your father wants to meet her personally. He’s never quite forgiven himself for what happened to you over that Clayton boy. He’s wanted to thank her personally for her timely intervention during that terrible episode.”

Amelia had shelved that episode and its memory. Don Clayton, a friend from childhood, refused to believe she didn’t love him. He held her captive and if it hadn’t been for Olivia’s arrival, he’d have raped her. Strangely enough, once she’d gone to live with Olivia her life seemed to take on a surreal safe mode as if nothing could touch her. She only felt that way around her partner. “Great, I...we’ll see you at one, love you Mom bye.”

Replacing the receiver on its cradle, Amelia touched her cheeks. She still felt the slight heat from her reaction to her mother’s words. *Does she know? Surely not.* They’d gone to great pains to keep that distance and information from her parents. Not that they were embarrassed or ashamed—they agreed it wasn’t the time. *Maybe now it is.* Certainly, Olivia’s rapid agreement to join her for lunch, knowing full well her parents would do their own kind of interrogation, hadn’t seemed to bother Olivia.

There was a soft knock at her door and at her *come in*, the dark head of the person she was thinking about appeared around the door. “Hi.”

The rest of the body encased in her classic all over leather look stepped inside. “Hi yourself. I wasn’t sure if you were done yet.”

“Teal didn’t tell you? Isn’t she there?”

Scratching her chin and frowning Olivia replied, “I had to give her a couple of hours extra leave this afternoon. Call it saving me from more headaches.”

Amelia sighed and saw the chagrined expression on the beautiful face staring at her. Stepping from behind her desk, she walked up to the taller woman and wrapped her arms around her lithe figure. “Has Teal made it tough for you darling?” Exaggerating her concern, Amelia tried to stifle the giggle that threatened to pop out at any second.

“Tough isn’t the word. She was like a Minotaur! Next time I want to call Phil at some ungodly hour, please explain to me the folly of my deeds.” Olivia gave a wry smile then bent her head and kissed the lips close to hers. “Are you done yet?”

Amelia lost all sense of time and place for the few heady seconds that the kiss lasted. She shook her head. “I’m afraid not. Since I knew I was going to my folks for lunch tomorrow, I called the clients I’d scheduled for the morning and brought them forward. Now that you’re back, I figured you’d be busy for hours today and I wanted a clear calendar for the weekend.” Amelia shrugged. “Except for lunch with my folks tomorrow, I’ll be all yours.”

Their gazes locked and both women sighed deeply when the buzzer on her desk broke the spell. “That must be my next client. Are you done?”

Reluctantly, Olivia released Amelia. “No, not really. I just...,” she said with a shrug. “When’s your last client?”

“You just what?” Amelia reached up and tenderly touched the cheek that felt like velvet under her fingertips.

“I’ll tell you later. Now scoot Doc or your next client will become impatient.”

Amelia grinned and walked toward her door then turned and answered the earlier question. “Nine, do you want to do something afterwards?”

Olivia smiled. “Let’s see how you’re feeling at the end of the day.”

“Yeah good call,” Amelia left the room.

Olivia gazed around the comfortable office that, if they knew her, no one would ever say belonged to anyone else but Amelia. Then she left the room and headed for her own office and the encrypted file Phil had couriered over.

Chapter 7

Olivia knew Amelia's parent's address but she'd never been there before. As they drove up the sweeping drive flanked by pencil conifer trees and neatly cut lawns, she was impressed. When she saw the three storied building that probably was built in late eighteenth or very early in the nineteenth century, she felt her mouth open. It had that affluent look about it of the early wealthy settlers. That type of building in its present condition was as rare as hen's teeth. It would cost a fortune to buy in today's market. The ivy climbing all over the building gave it that old colonial feel that was intimidating.

Turning to her passenger, she said, "I didn't realize you lived in such a prestigious house. How old is it? I bet it has some stories to tell over the years."

Under most circumstances, Amelia could detect the envy and surprise in people's manner and voice when they saw where she grew up. However, Olivia's tone had been quizzical and interested and that was refreshing. She hadn't brought anyone home in years. Once she'd gone into the convent fulltime, the worldly goods of her previous life became trivial baubles that she'd given up.

"Do you have tennis courts?" Olivia asked as they pulled up to the front door.

"What...yes, yes we do. I'll give you the ten cent tour after lunch," Amelia replied absently as her eyes flashed to the entrance and her parents who had opened the door just as the car stopped.

"I'll look forward to it." Olivia reached across and squeezed Amelia's hand. "I promise to behave."

Amelia grinned. "Yeah right. Let's go meet the parents Ms. Santos."

Olivia wanted desperately to kiss Amelia but she controlled the urge and nodded. "After you, Doctor West."

Amelia rushed to greet her parents before hugging and kissing them warmly. Then she swiveled around to gaze at her partner who was indulgently watching the affectionate reunion. The only way Amelia knew Olivia was nervous was that she constantly threaded the Jeep's keys between her fingers. The love she felt at that moment for the beautiful woman standing waiting silently threatened to overwhelm her. Then she motioned Olivia forward. "Mom, Dad this is Olivia."

Olivia moved forward and held out her hand to Amelia's mother who was the older version of her daughter down to the quirky half smile they shared. *So this is what you'll look like in thirty years. I like it.* "Hi, good to meet you, Mrs. West."

"Don't you go Mrs. Westing me. It makes me sound ancient. Shauna is good enough for me. It's good to meet you in person, Olivia. You're as stunning as my daughter described."

Olivia gave Amelia a furtive look. "I'm glad we've finally had this opportunity to meet Shauna. Thank you for inviting me to lunch."

"Away with you, Olivia, Bill here has been waiting to meet you ever since that terrible business with Don Clayton."

Amelia sucked in a breath and Olivia turned to her and saw the look of shame on her face. Two years later and it still had an effect on her. *Why did she have to bring it up?* Before she could say anything, Amelia's father moved forward and pumped her hand.

“Good to meet you at last Olivia. Come on inside. Lunch will be in half an hour. What do you want to drink?” The man pushed her gently toward the door to the house.

Amelia closed her eyes and looked at her mother shaking her head. “Why did you have to mention that?”

Annoyed, Amelia’s mother asked, “What, exactly what are you upset about?”

“Nothing, forget it.” She walked rapidly after her father and Olivia but a hand on her arm waylaid her. “Yes Mom.”

“She’s a keeper. Now come on we don’t want them to drink on their own.”

Amelia stood like a statue on the drive trying to understand what her mother was saying. The stupid thing was that she made it obtuse and her mother had been crystal clear. Shaking her head, she drew a deep breath and muttered, “Olivia, you’re now part of the West family I hope you can cope with that,” as she followed the others.

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“Shauna you have a beautiful garden, how much is original?” Olivia asked as they wandered through the three acre property after a sumptuous lunch, which would keep her going for the rest of the week she thought.

“We’ve been lucky, it’s been in the family from the beginning, all the trees are original and even some of the shrubs and flowers. Over the generations, there have been additions. I planted a Zen garden near the pony paddock ten years ago. Do you like gardening, Olivia?”

“My mom was the green fingered one. I was a grease monkey. I can appreciate the love that’s gone into this property. Is it your family’s line or Bill’s?” Olivia glanced over to where Amelia was talking animatedly with her father and a tender smile crossed her face.

Shauna lifted her head and proudly replied, “Mine. It sparked from the civil war. The male line ended in the war and that left only two daughters. The eldest who never had issue willed her part of the house to her younger sister’s first born female. Strange back then but I think it was a flick in the eye to the colonial male dominance, although there were rumors.”

Olivia shifted her attention back to Shauna. “Rumors don’t tell me there are skeletons in the family.”

“Every family has skeletons. Anyone who says otherwise is a liar or worse living with their head in the sand. I don’t do either, nor does my child.”

Swallowing hard, Olivia felt disconcerted. *Shit I was, or, was up until recently, an ace assassin. That’s a whole lot of shaking bones in my cupboard.* “Amelia is the most open and honest person I’ve ever met in my life.”

Shauna caught Olivia’s eyes and kept contact with them for a short burst of time. “She loves you. Before you do the stupid thing and deny it, you should know that I know you love her too. Life isn’t always that easy though, particularly with her background.” The woman gave Olivia another long look. “I suspect yours could probably match it in different ways.”

Olivia, in partial shock at Amelia’s mother’s announcement, managed to reply, “Is that a problem?”

“With me? Hardly. Think about what my ancestor did and you’ll understand. We’d like grandchildren. One will be great two would be wonderful.”

Olivia felt her real world slip as she digested the words. Frowning, she replied, “Does Amelia know any of this?”

“My goodness of course not, and you’ll not tell her either. All I want to know before I tell my husband is, do you love my daughter enough to marry her?”

Amelia and her father walked up to them at that moment. “Hi have you seen everything? Dad said he invited you sailing one weekend?”

“Great...just great.” In all her years, Olivia had never felt so out of control. She felt certain that her expression was one of shock and Amelia was going to ask why—she didn’t.

Bill West cleared his throat and then looked at his wife who winked at him. “It will be good to have grandchildren.” He spun Shauna toward the house leaving the two women alone with similar expressions of disbelief on their faces.

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Olivia made a decision, rash perhaps, but she knew deep down it was right. She gazed like a faithful puppy into the shocked expression of Amelia and whispered, “I love you. We’ll make it happened.”

Amelia felt the tears threatening, as she shook her head. *My parents know. How do they know? Grandchildren what on earth had Olivia said to my mom.* “I don’t understand any of this.” With a puzzled look she drew out a heavy breath, “It isn’t that simple.”

“Yes it is,” Olivia replied as she took hold of Amelia’s hand.

“Did you tell my mom we were together? How on earth did they make the leap to grandchildren? That amazes me. What’s going on, Olivia?” Amelia asked as she glanced wildly in the direction of her parents who seemed oblivious to the bombshell they’d exploded on their child.

Olivia saw the demented air of her partner and wanted to calm her down. The whole thing was weird —it should be the other way around. “Your mom told me you loved me and that I loved you. She said she wasn’t surprised and that your parents would like a grandchild or two. That is the honest truth Amelia I never said anything.”

Amelia digested the remarks and she shook her head. “I guess they never expected grandchildren when I was a nun. Now they’ll take a chance that it’s a remote possibility now I’ve fallen in love. This is all crazy of course.”

“Is it?” Olivia had actually taken to the idea of having kids with Amelia. Sure, it had been a bolt out of the blue and it was something she never considered before. However, to see kids with her partner’s smile and eyes what could be better? The idea of bringing life into the world instead of extinguishing it added a poetic symmetry to her life.

“I think the meal and family trappings have gone to your head, Olivia. Of course it is,” Amelia said emphatically.

Deflated, but not giving in, Olivia nodded. “Ok, right now it’s out of the question, but can we talk about it another time. What do you say?”

Amelia closed her eyes tight. This was everything she wanted and at the same time impossible. “We can’t even make love to each other, Olivia. How can we bring up a child when we don’t understand our own relationship?”

Knowing she was the cause, Olivia gulped back tears at the heartfelt admission. She couldn’t remember the last time she shed any real tears and that disconcerted her. “It isn’t a child or children it’s our children that makes all the difference.”

Amelia shifted her gaze to her parents and then back to the woman she loved. “When you make love to me as any woman should be made love too, we’ll consider our first child.”

“I think that’s a good idea. How about I show you what a Saturday, Sunday and the rest of the weekend means to you and I...oh and let’s not forget junior.” Olivia smiled. Somehow or another she needed to cross the line and she would. Now more than at any time in her life, she was prepared and ready to commit her life totally to one person—Amelia West.

“We’ll talk about it another time. Come on, we’d better go play happy family if they might think we’re arguing.” Amelia felt her heart race at the options that had miraculously opened up for her. She wouldn’t compromise. Their lives had to be together on all levels or it was a sham. “Next thing you know they’ll be booking a wedding venue.”

Olivia, with a half smile, refrained from commenting as she walked alongside Amelia back to her parents.

Chapter Eight

The rest of the day had been a blur. They left Amelia's parents at around five and then strolled around the Saturday evening market, browsing the cd's, trinkets and suspicious looking items termed antiques. They finally decided to have a drink at the bar down the block from their home. Once inside, the owner of the bar recalled Amelia and a drunken night of karaoke. After the initial embarrassment, they lapsed into quiet conversation with the owner. After that, they spent some time there alone enjoying the time together.

Finally, they arrived home around ten, with the security system screeching alarms and lights flooding the building.

"What's going on?" Amelia asked, as Olivia's expression grew grim as she slid the jeep into its parking space.

"Not sure. Must be a glitch in the system I didn't get the cell phone notification that I programmed into the system. I'll be a minute ok." Turning off the engine, she swung open the door and about to jump out turned to Amelia. "Stay inside until I give you the all clear, ok?"

Nodding Amelia gave her a brief smile as she watched Olivia race across the open area to the console station, her eyes flicking in every directions as she did so. Within a minute, the room was silenced and the lights had dimmed to their normal operation. Olivia then waved her inside.

Moments later Amelia stood beside Olivia who sat on the chair in front of the computer screen. "Is everything alright?"

Olivia didn't reply immediately and then she glanced up with a satisfied expression on her face. "Yes everything is just great. The hacker tried to interface with the computer again and it set off the bells and whistles Phil set for it. I now have the details of what the hacker was trying to do."

"I'm glad. I guess I'll make us a hot drink and then go to bed. I'm figuring that right now you'll be engrossed in finding out who the culprit is." Amelia began to turn away until a hand caught her arm.

"It can wait. I promised you a weekend and a weekend it shall be. How about we make the drink and then..." She trailed off a half smile tugging at her lips.

Amelia had seen that look before it sent mini waves of pleasure to the pit of her belly. "And then?" She curled her arms around the muscular shoulders, bent slightly, and placed butterfly kisses all over the bare olive skin.

Olivia lifted her head slightly and captured the lips in a light kiss as she said, "You've got the message."

Half an hour later, both cradling their cooling drinks, Amelia sighed heavily. "We need to talk don't we?"

Olivia felt her heart miss a beat as she tenderly kissed the top of Amelia's head. In a muffled voice she said, "Hmm I guess we do. It kind of makes you feel that way and at the same time actions would help."

"Makes you feel what and what actions?" Amelia asked unsure that Olivia had quite grasped what she said.

"Love. Falling in love and being in love. I can honestly say I've thought I've been in love before, but never has the emotion been this powerful. My dad was right."

“Your dad? What did he say?” Bewildered, Amelia turned and gazed at Olivia’s far away expression. It was clear that whatever memory she was reliving it was a good one.

“He said something along the lines of when you meet that special one, you’ll know and when it happens you’ll never let them go.” The words tripped almost glibly from Olivia’s lips except she continued, “I never really understood that until now.”

Amelia’s breath caught. It was yet another completely out of character statement from Olivia. Their visit to her parents, talking about children and now this admission, made her take pause. *Has she taken a knock on the head recently?* Not, that she didn’t bask in everything that was happening, but it was strange. “Well, I agree with him wholeheartedly? I wish I could have met your parents.”

“Yeah I wish you did. They would have loved you. Although I’m kind of glad that you didn’t meet Nicky. He’d have swept you off your feet before I had a chance to understand what I wanted.” Her soft chuckle didn’t disguise the pain the mention of her late brother still caused her.

Olivia and her brother Nicky followed their father’s footsteps and became police officers. Nicky chose a life as an undercover cop and that was his undoing along with changing Olivia’s life forever. When a crooked DA had Nicky killed, Olivia avenged her brother’s death by killing the man responsible. That revenge killing set her on the path she was on now.

“He never would have stood a chance once I’d met you Olivia—no one does. I think I can categorically state with some confidence that your mine and I don’t share.” They kissed deeply and it was sometime before they came up for air.

As they sank into each other’s body, Olivia mulled over what Amelia’s mother had said to her. *‘Do you love my daughter enough to marry her?’* The question ran deep as she kissed the top of Amelia’s head and then it became crystal clear to her. Allowing a chuckle to escape her lips, she whispered, “Of course.”

“Of course? Is there more to that statement?” Amelia asked.

Shifting slightly, so that she could capture Amelia’s gaze, Olivia nodded. “I haven’t been completely honest with you and the reason for that is because I didn’t understand myself. I do now. I’ve placed you on a pedestal because of what you were before. You know—the nun part. To make love to you completely would have been like ...well I didn’t think I was the right one. Even though I know you love me and I certainly do you.”

“That’s why you haven’t slept with me you think I’m untouchable because I was once a nun?” Amelia had inkling this was the case but to have it out in the open smarted more than she anticipated.

Knelt on the floor, Olivia gently pulled Amelia forward to hold onto her hands as she spoke directly to her. “Yes. I guess I didn’t feel worthy of taking your innocence.”

“And now?”

Olivia gave a wry grin, “I might still not be worthy, but I love you and the one thing that will make me happy and allay some of my fears is if you, Amelia West, will marry me.”

Amelia felt her eyes bulging out of the sockets they must be. She’d dreamed of this very thing but never for a moment expected it to become reality, especially after the Parker episode. “You’re serious aren’t you?” she touched a finger tenderly to the full lips of her love.

There was a faint smile as Olivia nodded.

“If I said can I think about it, would you be upset?” Amelia asked. She desperately wanted to say yes but she felt she was missing something and needed time to figure it out.

Slightly disappointed, Olivia smiled. “Sure as long as you need. I guess I was getting carried away.”

Amelia smiled tenderly. “No, never think that. Your getting carried away is a rather wonderful thing. I love you Olivia and being married to you wouldn’t change the strength of that love I have, if that’s what’s worrying you.”

“It isn’t. I figured that if we have kids, we would want them to have a stable background. I want them brought up in a happy family home as we both had. Is that too much to ask for?”

There was silence for a few seconds and then Amelia shook her head. Before she had time to change her mind, Amelia said, “Yes.”

Perplexed, Olivia asked, “Yes? As in yes there’s a problem with having a stable home together?” Olivia’s hand flew to her mouth. “Oh my god, you didn’t mean that did you?”

“Yes, Olivia Marie Santos, I will marry you.” Amelia grinned and saw a reflection of her smile cross her partner’s lips. Then everything blurred as their lips came together to seal the vow.

A part of Amelia was feeling the frustration arise once again, but at least now, she had an explanation. They could move forward from there.

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Parker Davis paced the wooden floor as she listened to the declarations of love between Olivia and the nun. When she heard Olivia ask the nun to marry her, she scowled at the screen. “Not going to happen.”

She smiled that the small, untraceable program they put in Olivia’s computer as a ruse finally wormed its way to the top echelons of the system file—it was easily discovered—what a brilliant move. It allowed Olivia to concentrate on a phantom hacker and not on the actual surveillance system, which DOCO placed in both the residence and the office. Not that Olivia or the so called expert that scoured the computer for the intruder would ever discover the true nature of the intrusion—it was too sophisticated. Even if someone stumbled onto the program, there was no way anyone would recognize it as something that didn’t belong there.

That wasn’t her problem—the nun was. Come Monday, she would become a patient of Dr. West and then the fun would begin. She flicked through the photos of Olivia and her many liaisons with prostitutes dated as late as days earlier and smiled. “It will be so much fun to mess with the nun’s head.”

In a moment of clarity, Parker remembered the first time she met the nun and how taken she was with her. Even after they met formally, she still found the woman charming. “When did that all change? Ah yes, when she stood between me and Olivia.”

The woman laughed as she initiated a sequence of numbers that began a countdown. “No way are you two making love tonight.” Her eyes flicked to the screen and watched with glee as the alarms inside the warehouse began blaring and Olivia broke contact with the nun and scurried off to her control console. The bells and whistles that Olivia’s so called expert installed came in handy after all. Until Olivia disabled them, they would go off ever hour.

Chapter Nine

The woman tapped her fingers until she heard a diminutive voice say into the receiver, “When Heaven Meets Hell, this is Teal, how may I help you?”

“Yes, I need an appointment with Doctor West.”

“I’m afraid Doctor West is rather busy at the moment, is it urgent?”

“Yes, this can’t wait. I need to see her immediately,” the woman said with a tremble in her voice.

Teal frowned as she flicked through the pages of Amelia’s diary. “As I indicated, she has a full schedule for the next few days. However, I can slip you in for a brief consultation on Thursday around noon.”

“That won’t do. This is a matter of life and death.”

Silently Teal rolled her eyes—how many times had she heard that before. He gently said, “Tomorrow morning at eight is the best I can do. I’ll have the Doctor arrive early just for you.” Yeah that usually appeased them and Amelia would be mad but at least it wasn’t four in the morning.

Sighing heavily, the woman said, “Are you sure that is the earliest I can see her?” To make her case more believable the woman began to sob. “I really need to speak with her.”

“I’m sorry it really is. I can refer you to another professional in this area if you like. Doctor West has many colleagues who she personally recommends.”

“I don’t want to see anyone else.” Once again, she sighed. “I guess I have no choice then. I’ll be there at eight tomorrow morning.”

Teal smiled. Yep she was good—it worked every time. The inner door to the reception area opened as she replied, “Good, I’m sure Doctor West will be happy to see you. I’ll need a few particulars. Name, address contact details, Ms.?”

“Teal, do you have my mail?” A deep voice echoed in the background.

The woman felt her body tremble when she heard the voice and had to catch her breath before speaking again. “My name is Mary Christian and my phone number is five-five-five-four-six-three-eight.”

“Ok, Mary, and your address?”

“I live at three-ninety-six Baker Street.”

“Thanks.” Teal wrote the address in her neat script before passing the mail to an impatient Olivia. “Just a second, Mary.” Then she glanced at Olivia with her hand over the receiver, she said, “That’s the first batch. I have at least a box full for the last month. When I’m done here I’ll bring it in.”

With a grimace, Olivia nodded and walked back through the inner door.

“Sorry about that, Mary, but right now it’s murder here. Both sides of the operation are busy. There must be an epidemic.” She chuckled and realized that perhaps her comment wasn’t appropriate.

Watching the monitor, Mary saw the exchange between the midget and Olivia. Affecting a sob, Mary said, “Oh my, what epidemic? Am I going to catch whatever it is?”

Teal shook her head. This woman certainly needed Amelia's help. "Don't worry, Mary it was a figure of speech. I can assure you nothing is catching." Teal glanced at the small switchboard that indicated she had three other calls to field.

"Ok, if you're sure I'll be safe." Flipping through her Blackberry, Parker noted that one of the DOCO operatives had a five o'clock appointment with the good doctor. Wiping the grin off her face, she said, "If you have a cancellation for today will you call me?"

"Yes, I'll be sure to do that. Have a nice day, Mary. We'll see you tomorrow bright and early."

Once the connection with the nun's receptionist ended, Parker dialed another number. "Rudy, it's me. I see you have an appointment with Dr. West today."

"Yeah I do. How much longer am I going to have to keep seeing her?"

"Depends on what story you gave her," Mary said with a laugh. "Cancel your appointment for today and you'll be done with her."

Hanging up the phone, Mary laughed. "Now all I need to do is to wait for the midget to call."

Chapter Ten

Teal heard the bell peel as a figure appeared tentatively in the reception area. She had to prevent the amusement that she felt show on her face. The woman was standing nervously wringing her hands through the strap of the purse she held. From top to bottom, she was out of a retro movie. The big lacquered hair, with not a hair out of place was in a style that Teal had never seen before. The woman's clothes were frumpy with tiny pastel flowers dotting the matching blouse and pants. *The only time I've seen that getup is on the old shows on TV.* The highly polished shoes made nurse's footwear trendy. A pasty complexion, hardly enhanced by the over use of makeup completed the picture perfectly.

"Hi, can I help you?"

"Yes, I'm Mary Christian," the woman said adjusting her large framed black glasses. "I have an appointment with Dr. West at five."

Teal gulped back her surprise. From her getup, Teal surmised that the woman was from the south, maybe Texas, but she second guessed herself when she didn't hear an accent. "Mary, great you have perfect timing. Amelia will be with you shortly. In the meantime, I need you to fill in these forms. She passed the forms attached to a clipboard and a pen to the nervous looking woman with a gentle smile. Teal let curiosity get the best of her and asked, "Did you by any chance live in the south at one time?"

With owl-like eyes, Mary stared at the woman. "How do you know that? It said outside on the sign that this is also a detective agency—did you have me investigated?"

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The inner door to the reception opened and a tall formidable presence seemed to fill the room as Teal glanced at Olivia, who was staring at Mary Christian as if she were on exhibit. "Perfect timing, Mary, this is Ms. Santos she heads the detective agency. Ms. Christian was wondering if you'd ever had her in your sights."

Olivia took several seconds before she turned to Teal after her observation of the strange looking woman who had dropped her gaze and began scribbling away on the forms. Amelia certainly had some strange people share her day. "No."

Mary let her eyes dart around the room when Olivia arrived. Her heart was pounding by the proximity of the woman. She held her breath as Olivia's eyes focused on her. When she didn't see any recognition in the woman's face, she tentatively smiled. "Oh," she said grasping at the buttons of her shirt. "That's a relief."

"Yeah that's what we do here—give relief." Olivia replied sarcastically. "Teal, is this Amelia's last case for the day?"

Teal smiled at Mary then turned her attention to Olivia who looked tired. She knew that her boss hated office paperwork and she'd been doing that all day. "Yes, Mary's new today." With that information, Teal knew that Olivia would work out that the session wouldn't take more than an hour.

"Good. When she's done, ask her to drop by my office. Ms. Christian, it was a pleasure to meet you." Turning on her heels, she moved back through the door and almost collided with Amelia. She instinctively placed her hands around her partner's waist. "Hey, be careful. You never know what you might bump into."

Amelia feeling drained suddenly got a new lease on life as she soaked up the sexy whispered words Olivia spoke in her ear. The feeling of those strong arms on her body gave her a new lease on life. With a dreamy smile, she softly replied, "Oh some things are just too wonderful not to bump into."

Olivia gave a heartfelt chuckle and released Amelia as she allowed her inside the reception area.

Mary closed her eyes as she felt the room become suddenly cold and lonely. Olivia standing close to the nun and mooning over her made her want to vomit. When Olivia finally left the area, she gave the nun a cautionary look. *Not the time to make waves. I have plenty of those for her later.*

"Doctor West, this is Mary Christian," Teal announced as Amelia walked into up to the counter.

Amelia had hardly caught her breath from her close encounter with the leather kind when Teal introduced her new client. With a warm professional smile she used on her clients until she got to know them, she held out her hand. As she did, she scrutinized the woman and had to stifle a grin. A thought came to her that it reminded her of Parker and that idiot get up she'd been wearing when they first met. She allowed the thought to disperse as spoke to the woman. "Mary, hello."

Mary took the doctor's hand and gave it a limp shake.

Amelia looked closer at the woman. "Have I met you before? You seem familiar to me."

"I don't think so. Besides, no one ever remembers me," she said in a trembling voice.

Amelia smiled reassuringly. "Well then, let's get acquainted shall we. Teal, how about a drink, Mary what would you like?" Amelia turned to Teal with a slight perplexed expression.

"I...I'm not thirsty. Can't we talk...I need to talk to you." Mary's wildly eyes darted to Teal. "Alone."

"Yes, of course. Teal, forget the drink. Come this way, Mary." Amelia pointed to the door leading to the corridor of the offices.

Teal watched them leave her sanctum and shook her head. Whispering to the empty room she said, "Wow has Amelia got her work cut out for her with that one." Her attention turned back to her own role as the phone lights flashed into action.

Mary took the chair the doctor offered and fixed a wet gaze on the woman who sat near her. "I don't know what I'm going to do," Mary sobbed. "My whole world is crashing down around me and I have nowhere to turn." She covered her face with her hands and began to cry softly. "Sometimes I think I'd be better off dead."

Amelia had hardly opened the door to her office and brought them inside when this woman seemed to emotionally spill out. Didn't happen often but when it did it usually meant big trouble and long sessions. "Hey, don't speak like that. You did the right thing coming to see me. We'll work it out."

"I...I don't think we will." Mary swiped at the tears that coursed down her cheeks. "How can you stand by and watch the one person you love most in the world cheat and lie? Just tell me how I do that!"

Amelia didn't reply at first and then smiled gently. "Mary, why don't you start at the beginning and tell me what happened."

Sucking in a cleansing breath, Mary began her story. “I gave someone all my love and trust and in return all I got was lies. *Oh, Mary, that doesn’t involve you*, he said and I’d believed him until I’d found evidence of what he was doing behind my back.”

“Mary, tell me how you met this man and why you fell in love with him?” Amelia needed to find the cornerstones of the relationship to decide on how to approach the problem.

“Ok. I own a small bookstore in the middle of town. One day a man came in, flashed a badge, and said he needed to observe the business across the street. He asked if he could do it from my store.” Mary swallowed hard. “I let him use my apartment that is upstairs from the store.” Mary felt her heartbeat slow as she gathered her emotions. “At first he was so standoffish and acted like he didn’t want anything to do with me. But I could feel his eyes following me everywhere I went. After someone tried to break into the store, he moved into my spare bedroom. We live together but it’s not sexual.”

After blowing her nose, Mary continued. “He goes away for days and I don’t know where. He says he loves me but he doesn’t trust me enough with what he does and where he goes. “Do you think he doesn’t want me because he has someone else? I just don’t know what I’ll do if he leaves me.” Mary began to wring her hands. “I think he has someone watching me through the television. I know it is some kind of coded message.”

Amelia nodded. “Carry on.” For the next forty-five minutes, she listened to the emotional ramblings of Mary Christian. She’d heard a similar story before but this one seemed to strike a personal note as she watched the pitiful emotional destruction of the woman in the room with her.

Through watery eyes, Mary watched the doctor’s face for any sign of recognition that the woman saw the parallel to her own life. Several times, she saw a twitch and inwardly she smiled. *Score!* “All I know is that my heart is breaking.”

Amelia nodded and discreetly checked her wrist watch. The session had lasted longer than she anticipated. It was already six-thirty. “Mary, you’re doing wonderfully. How about we carry on with the session at the same time next week?”

“A week...can’t it be sooner? Just talking with you has given me so much hope. I don’t think I can wait another week to see you.”

The pleading and the woman’s watery eyes played havoc with Amelia’s promise to Teal and Olivia that she would be more businesslike in her appointment structure. Didn’t they know that some things didn’t conform to a plan? “Mary, until you’re feeling more confident, how does this time for the rest of the week sound. Then we can review the situation at the end of the week. How does that sound to you?”

Relieved, Mary smiled slightly. “Oh, thank you, thank you so much. You’re so wonderful. I just know with your help I can get better.”

“I’m sure we can. Now, if you’ll give this to the woman at the desk she’ll make you an appointment for tomorrow.” She would let Mary deal with Teal who she knew would be upset that the schedule would include someone else.

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Amelia felt decidedly jaded after her session with Mary Christian. What was it about the woman and her story that had rung so many bells in her head? Now she had an even longer week that she anticipated and that wasn’t going to go down well with either Olivia or Teal. Sighing heavily, she stood up from her seat, glanced through her window to the street, and saw Mary

Christian leaving the building. “Now where is it that we’ve met before? Darned if I can remember. I must ask her again if we’ve met before.” The door to her office opened and she grinned and let the worries of the day simply wash away. “Hey, you in for a nice cuddle and candlelit dinner at home?”

Olivia returned the grin as she moved to take Amelia in her arms. “Anytime, as long as it’s with you.” She dropped her head and eased in for a kiss.

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Once she was out the door, Parker disguised as Mary smiled broadly. Her campaign to discredit Olivia in the nun’s eyes had begun. She laughed during her drive to the building across the street from Olivia’s warehouse. “The nun was like putty in my hands,” she said chuckling as she got out of her vehicle. “I can’t wait to see the look on her face when she puts all the pieces together.

She opened the door to the ‘observation’ room and saw Dan along with another operative, Ruta, looking at the bank of flat screens.

“What did you think of my performance?” she asked as she crossed the space between them.

Ruta nodded before she said, “If I didn’t know better I wouldn’t have recognized you.”

“Yeah,” Dan said. “You gave her pause. Wait till you listen to what she said about you.”

Parker frowned. “You mean, Mary. What exactly did she say?”

“That her initial diagnoses—paranoid with a sever psychosis.” Dan silently added, *isn’t that the truth.*

The laugh echoed throughout the room “Perfect,” Parker said unable to curb her laughter. “Absolutely perfect!”

Chapter Eleven

Amelia felt herself squinting through the small rimmed spectacles she wore to read small print. Her eyes flashed over the additional notes she'd made after listening to the recorded sessions with her final client of the day Mary Christian. The woman had serious confidence issues but at least now, she wasn't talking about suicide. If she wanted to kill the guy who had lied to her, that would be a whole new ball game and probably a more normal reaction.

Her pen scribbled jealousy on the note pad as she listened to the final minutes of the session. There was that familiarity about the whole situation once more that plagued her thoughts. The question was, why?

There was a knock on the door and it opened slightly to reveal a dark familiar head. She smiled warmly and motioned for Olivia to step inside.

"Hi, I'm nearly done. Want to take me out to dinner? I could use some personal time with you right now. It's been one heck of a week."

Olivia opened the door wider. Amelia saw the valise she held in one hand and the apologetic expression on her partner's face. "I'm sorry, Amelia. There's a case that's just blown up and I promised to help this couple several months ago if things turned sour."

Amelia felt the euphoria of seeing Olivia drift away at the words. They'd barely shared more than breakfast and the odd supper together during the week because of their combined commitments. She'd been really looking forward to spending down time and hopefully moving their relationship on to another level. Hope was probably the wrong word—yearn was more like it. "I guess it's too much to ask if it can wait until tomorrow."

Olivia wanted desperately to take Amelia in her arms and sooth away the tension she not only saw in the woman but also heard in her voice. If she did, she'd never make it to Tucson in time. "I would if I could but I made a promise and ..."

"Can I come along? I might be of some help. Exactly where are you going?"

A frown appeared above the bridge of Olivia's nose before she replied. "Nowhere special. I'll be home Sunday night. We can go out to dinner then...my treat?"

There it was—the prevarication. Olivia never told her where she was going or what the case was about anymore. "Sounds like a plan to me."

Olivia smiled and turned her back to leave then heard Amelia call her name. Swiveling back, she said, "Yeah?"

Amelia with a placid expression on her face that defied the annoyance that hit the pit of her stomach, said, "Haven't you forgotten something?"

Olivia frowned hard as a puzzled look took residence on her face. "No, what would that be?"

"Forget it," Amelia said as her body sagged in disappointment. "Have a safe trip. I'll expect that call." Olivia was going to go without a proper goodbye. *So much for taking our relationship to the next level.*

For a few seconds Olivia stood watching the crestfallen expression on Amelia's face. Then it dawned on her. *Crap.* Stealthily she walked over to where Amelia sat and placed her hand gently under her chin. Lifting her face so that they made eye contact, she said, "I love you. Behave, be

careful and most of all stay my best girl.” She kissed Amelia passionately for the briefest of moments and then left the room.

In a dream like repose, Amelia felt her world rock back on its axis again. Then she turned her thoughts back to the Christian woman’s case. As she did, it dawned on her why this woman’s life was so familiar. With an exclamation, she dropped her pen and notebook, pushed her chair away from the desk, and stood up as if she burnt. “Oh my god this is my life!”

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Parker couldn’t believe her good fortune. Olivia was unknowingly solidifying her plans. A peel of glee escaped from her lips as she saw the look on the nun’s face when she finally realized that Mary’s life was her own.

“Can this get any better?”

Olivia was off on another case that Parker had contrived. If the operatives at the other end lived up to her expectations, Olivia would be gone for at least a week. Judging by past actions, Olivia would find herself a prostitute. Parker wanted to use one of her disguises and be that prostitute but, she reconciled herself to the fact that she’d come too far to blow the sting now.

“She’d know it was me.”

She turned her attention to the monitor that was tracking Olivia’s moves. “While the cat’s away Mary will play.”

Chapter Twelve

Teal watched as Amelia sluggishly entered the office and walked over to the counter. It was a few minutes past eight. Without speaking, she quickly retrieved the coffee she'd made moments earlier and handed it to her friend. "Good morning, Amelia, lovely morning isn't it?"

The cheery welcome made little impact on Amelia's tired brain. She merely smiled and mouthed, "Thank you," as the coffee cup reached her lips, and she savored the first mouthful.

With a concerned expression, Teal continued to watch her friend devour the coffee. She knew that once Amelia had her caffeine she would begin to respond. The work regime she'd taken on had been grueling. In particular, the client Mary Christian, who seemed to demand more and more of Amelia's time. Teal stayed one evening to catch up on some paperwork and was surprised when the woman left at seven-thirty—the one hour session began at five. The bill the Christian woman was going to receive would be astronomical—she saw Amelia five days a week for over a month.

"How was the weekend? Did you and the big O make it to the farmer's market I told you about?" Teal asked after Amelia placed her empty coffee cup on the counter.

Amelia frowned and replied, "No. I didn't want to go on my own. Olivia was busy. She's been busy for the last four weekends."

"I see, I didn't know. You should have called. You could have come over to dinner with Phil and I."

"Thanks Teal, but you deserve your free time with Phil. I just wish I were as fortunate with Olivia. We appear to be ships that pass in the night. During the week, I'm so busy that I hardly do more than go home to sleep and eat. When I do have some free time, she's off on one of her mystery cases. We can't seem to catch a break."

Teal nodded. She'd seen the workload of both of the partners—the business was mushrooming over the last couple of months. It wasn't good to have a life filled with work when they had a relationship to nurture. "Why not agree to take time off. I know it might seem ludicrous with all the work you two have, but if you don't make the time you'll both burn out."

Amelia smiled at her friend. "You're right, of course you're right. And she wants to bring a child into the mix," Amelia mumbled as she picked up her briefcase and headed for the inner door.

Teal blinked rapidly. *Child what child? Why don't I know about this?* "Hey, you can't go off like that when you drop a bombshell. Come on, Amelia, spill the beans."

Amelia shook her head and gave her friend a warm smile. "Later, Teal. If I don't get started now I'm not going to be ready for my first client. Lunch ok." She stepped into the small corridor leading to her office.

Teal, still in shock, whispered, "Wow the big O and a child. I'd pay to see that scenario." She retrieved the used coffee cup, went to the small kitchen at the back of the counter, and placed it in the sink. She retrieved a new cup and filled it. Returning to the reception area, she saw the mail carrier arriving with the morning mail bundle. She grinned at him and asked, "How is your day going?"

Teal smiled at Olivia Santos when she appeared in the office. She looked like she hadn't slept in a week and that was probably the case if she knew her dark brooding boss. "Hey, it's good to see you. Amelia didn't say you'd be back today. Did you wrap up your current case?"

There was a low mumble and Teal shook her head, "I take it you're in need of a caffeine fix?" She walked over to the coffee machine and within seconds had a steaming black brew ready for the morose looking woman who stood towering over her.

"Here take this. I wonder how you and Amelia live together in a morning. You're both the most amazing sour pussies when it comes to lack of caffeine. I had the same reaction from Amelia this morning. She wasn't fit to speak to until she had her coffee."

With a faint smile at the mention of the woman she loved, Olivia drank thirstily from the cup and drained the contents in one go. "I haven't had a chance to speak with Amelia for a few days. I was out of cell range and when I did get a signal I figured she'd already be with a client."

Teal retrieved the coffee cup and filled it again along with one for her. As she handed it over to Olivia, she asked, "Don't you think that's odd?"

"What's odd?" Olivia sipped on the beverage this time her eyes capturing Teal's in cautious enquiry.

"Oh that you both have this sudden influx of work and we haven't advertised."

Olivia contemplated her answer carefully, "Maybe the church put Amelia back on their lists and are sending her folks again."

Teal mused over that for a few seconds. "Could be, but the people that are new are more affluent. If you ask me, most of them don't need a shrink—they don't have that crazy vibe about them. If you know what I mean."

This time Olivia threw back her head and chuckled—she could always rely on Teal to make her laugh, "Crazy vibe? Now, if the good doctor caught you saying that about her client base, you'd be running for the hills. However, I must admit she barely has any free time and when she gets home she's exhausted and eats very little and then goes to bed early."

Teal caught the look on Olivia's face that meant she was seriously considering the situation. "What about you? For every weekend for the past four weeks, you've been gone on different cases. Not to mention the other week long cases that has flooded your way. Not that I'm one to complain for it keeps us in a job but ..."

Olivia remained silent for a little while as she sipped her coffee.

Teal saw the furrow on her forehead, which indicated from previous knowledge of her boss that Olivia was thinking hard about their discussion.

"You have a valid point Teal. Leave that with me. Now don't you tell me I have lots of other weird cases waiting for my personal attention?"

"You do, but first can you fix this darn computer it's having a hissy fit."

Chapter Thirteen

Mary Christian sat in the outer office of When Heaven Meets Hell and listened as the diminutive office assistant cursed out her computer. “They never are fast enough or work the way you want do they,” she said in an upbeat manner.

Teal glanced up at the woman. She wanted to scream but held her tongue. “Yes, it seems that way. I’ll buzz Amelia again. Unfortunately, we’ve had a busy day and I was late with some urgent mail.”

Mary made her way over to the counter that hid the woman from view. “I’m pretty good with computers. Would you like some help?” She peered over the counter and let a smile cross her face.

“Thanks, we have an engineer due here anytime.” Teal continued to buzz Amelia who appeared to be ignoring her.

Amelia glanced at the phone and saw that Teal was buzzing her again. It was two minutes after five and she knew who was waiting for her—Mary Christian. She could do without that particular client. Her hand reached for the small package marked urgent and for her eyes only. Ripping open the envelope, she was surprised to find another envelope marked photos. She reached for the phone and connected with Teal. “Can you bring in Ms. Christian?” As soon as she said it, she dropped the receiver on its cradle.

Opening the second envelope, she gasped. Clearly, Olivia was the center of attention but the other people in the photos made Amelia’s insides rage—other women. There were twenty photos with each picture showing various stages of nakedness. One very explicit scene left nothing to the imagination.

Pushing back her chair, Amelia grasped the photos and strode out of her office. In her peripheral vision, she saw Teal opening the door to the inner corridor. She barked, “Give me one minute, Teal.”

Then, without knocking, Amelia barged into Olivia’s office and threw the damning photos on the desk.

Olivia looked up and her lips curled into a familiar smile until she saw the look on Amelia’s face—it resembled a thundercloud. Her smile froze on her lips as she looked at the scattered photos on her desk.

“You and I are over!” Amelia screamed. She turned around and exited the office slamming the door behind her.

With a carefully controlled smile, she opened her office door and walked into the room. “Hi, Mary, how are you today?”

When she saw the doctor storm out of her office and go into another one, Mary raised an eyebrow. *Hmm seems as though there’s trouble in paradise* she thought as she went into the doctor’s office and sat down.

“Oh, Doctor West, I had a fantastic weekend. John actually stayed home and we went out both Friday and Saturday nights.” She beamed a smile in Amelia’s direction. “He told me he loved me,” she gushed.

“Really, how nice and convenient.” Amelia couldn’t help her sarcasm. The effect of the photos caused an emotional meltdown leaving her vulnerable and less than professional.

“Oh no...do you think he didn’t mean it?” Mary said as she let her tears fall.

Amelia gazed at the woman. *Right now, that’s exactly what I want to do.* She wanted to run away to lick her wounds and find some answer to her current dilemma. Instead, she shook her head. “I’m sure he meant it. Look, I’m afraid I’ve a migraine coming on.”

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Olivia sat stunned as she looked at the pictures. “Where the hell did these come from?” She studied each one. There were clearly marked with a time and date. “I can’t let this happen,” she said as she stood up and made her way out of her office. She ignored the session in progress sign on Amelia’s door and grabbed the knob.

When the door to Amelia’s office crashed open and a tall formidable figure filled the entrance, both women turned to look.

Mary’s eyes grew wide. “Oh, my goodness...what’s happening,” she cried as she shrunk away from the enraged woman.

Amelia stared hard at Olivia and then down to the bundle in her hands. “I’m busy get out of here.” Turning to Mary with an apologetic smile, she said, “We can schedule a double session tomorrow, Mary. I really do need to leave right now.”

Grabbing at her pocketbook, Mary stood up as she kept an eye on the dark haired woman standing in the doorway. “O...Ok,” she said. “The same time?” When she saw the doctor nod, she carefully maneuvered around the angry woman and left the office.

“You can go too. We have nothing to say to each other.” Amelia glared at Olivia who moved further into the office to allow the other woman to leave.

“This isn’t true,” she said holding up the photos. “I don’t know who is responsible for this hoax but trust me, I’ll find out.”

“Give me at least the benefit of some intelligence. They have a time and date stamped on them. I can see it’s you...right down to that tattoo on your back.” Amelia grabbed her purse and moved to within inches of Olivia’s position.

Olivia grabbed Amelia’s arm. “Did you ever consider that there are people out there that make a living out of doctoring photos,” she growled. “The thing that really gets me is that you didn’t even give me the courtesy of asking me if it really happened.”

“People like you?”

“What’s that suppose to mean?”

Amelia felt her anger surface even more at the calmness of the Olivia’s words. Had she been wrong in her accusation? “Why don’t you ever tell me where you go and what cases you’re working on anymore? You never discuss anything. Right now it’s clear to me that the reason you don’t is because of those,” she said pointing at the photos still clutched in Olivia’s hand.

“You think so little of me that you believe that I’d do this?” Olivia swiped at a tear that threatened to fall. “Do you have any idea how hurt I am by your lack of trust?”

The words took Amelia off guard for a few seconds. *Am I wrong? Did the sessions with Mary Christian spark my own self doubt in my relationship with Olivia? Did I allow that to color my judgment?* There was only way to find out. With chin held high, she faced Olivia and captured her eyes. “Can you truthfully say you’ve never had a carnal relationship with anyone since we decided to commit to a permanent relationship last year?”

With a steadfast gaze, Olivia looked directly at Amelia. “I’ve never betrayed our love.”

“Prove it?”

Without a word, Olivia attempted to pull Amelia into her arms but was thwarted as Amelia held out her hand and shouted hoarsely, “don’t.”

Frowning at the rejection Olivia quietly entreated, “Let’s go home and I’ll show you just how much I love you.”

Amelia hesitated. It was what she wanted to hear but wasn’t that the point. Then she recalled Mary’s words a few minutes earlier and it all came flooding back. She needed more than physical actions she needed the truth. “I can’t. I’m going for a drive. I don’t know when I’ll be back.”

Dumbfounded, Olivia took a step back. “Ok. I’ll be there whenever you chose to come home.”

Defiantly Amelia stared long and hard at Olivia. It was as though she was seeing her for the first time. “Maybe one day you’ll get pictures like that of me and you’ll understand what I’m going through.” She walked away her heels clicking on the polished floor.

Teal looked up in surprise as Mary Christian reentered the reception area. “Is something wrong?”

Mary, with wide eyes replied, “I’ve never been treated so unprofessionally in my life. I’ve never been so terrified in my life. Oh my, I really hate myself,” she wailed as she exited the building.

What the heck is going on? Teal left her desk, opened the inner door, and heard raised voices. For a second, she was going to intervene but decided against it. From the odd word she could decipher, it was personal rather than business. *It’s definitely not a good time to interfere.* She retreated to her desk and waited.

Moments later, Amelia shot out of the door and stalked past her with a vague, “Good night, Teal.”

With hands on hips, Teal shook her head and muttered, “Well I guess they don’t call this place heaven meets hell for nothing.”

Olivia stormed back to her office, picked up the phone, and dialed a familiar number. “Dan, this is Olivia Santos. I need your help.”

Chapter Fourteen

In a car parked outside of When Heaven Meets Hell, a woman chuckled as she listened to the exchange between the two women. “You’d throw your grandmother under the bus if it was to your advantage Olivia—save your ass at all cost.” When she saw the white Element move out of the parking lot, she turned the ignition key on and began her pursuit. What she missed seeing was the black Harley that sped it’s rider in the opposite direction.



Amelia drove along the streets caring little for where she was going just as long as it was away from Olivia. A part of her had hoped that her partner would follow but she didn’t. When she finally stopped the car opposite a large recreational area, she stared blankly out of the window and allowed her tears to fall.

Finally, she gulped back the lump that had lodged in her throat and took in her surroundings. Green grass stretched out before her with a tree lined boundary. Several women pushing buggies were chatting and Amelia surmised that they were sharing stories of the children under their care. Beyond them, other kids were playing with balls, sliding down a slide, swinging, and going through the tall maze-like structure that was made of wood. In the distance, she saw older kids playing soccer.

The more she looked at the park, the more she realized how far away from being a family entity she and Olivia were. There was no way they could have children either of their own or through a surrogate. In a nutshell, their lives were too complicated. *Yes, that’s the correct description—complicated.*

As the content of the photos flashed in her mind, she knew without a doubt that it had been Olivia in them. Her partner was right. The pictures could have been from a long time ago. That would mean that the time and date were false. *How did I lose my trust in her so quickly and effectively?* Perhaps her workload had finally taken its toll and she was heading for a breakdown. It happened more than she cared to admit in her profession. Listening daily to other people’s problems and paranoia had to leave its mark and no more so than with Mary Christian’s case.

As she thought of the woman, Amelia groaned. “Darn it Olivia, you’ve made me look a complete idiot in front of one of my clients. I don’t do that to yours,” she cried to the confines of an empty vehicle.

Snorting her disgust, she realized how impossible that was. “How could I do that—I’ve never met any of your clients. You won’t let me.” She blew her nose before shaking her head. “It just brings it all back home again doesn’t it? If she can’t trust me how can I her.”

Her cell phone rang and she picked it up and looked at the caller ID, it was Teal.

“Hi, Teal. Is there a problem?”

There appeared to be a grateful sigh at the other end of the line before Teal replied, “No. You did kind of rush off and I just wanted to check that you were ok. Well, you know me.”

Amelia felt her lips twitch into a tiny smile. “Yes, I do and thanks for your concern. Something came up and I needed a break.”

“If you need a friend’s shoulder to cry on or just to listen you know I’m here for you Amelia.”

Choking back a sob of gratitude, Amelia quietly said, “Yeah I know. Is...look I’ll be in the office bright and early. You don’t need to worry. Ok?”

Teal didn’t need to be a mind reader to know what Amelia was going to ask. “She’s gone. Left like a demon on the Harley shortly after you. I figured maybe she was going to catch up with you.”

“No, she’s not here, Teal. Look, I need to go. I think an early night is what I need. See you in the morning and thanks again for your concern. I appreciate it.”

Teal softly replied, “Anytime. Sleep well, Amelia.”

The call ended and Amelia stared at the phone in her hand for what seemed to be hours rather than a few minutes. Finally replacing it back in her purse, she fired the engine of the car and reversed out of the parking space. As she did, she saw a K-Mart across the street and knew what she was going to do—at any rate for the night.

Tomorrow was another day and she’d handle whatever came when it happened. For the moment, she was going to do what she told Teal. Have an early night. As she maneuvered out into the traffic, she saw the imposing steeple of St. Agnes and remembered her old friend Father Michael.

Chapter Fifteen

Parker stopped her vehicle and watched as the nun entered a Catholic church. “What an idiot she is,” she said to the empty car. “She is seeking guidance from an organization that thinks what she wants to do with Olivia is abhorrent and against all its teachings.”

She laughed as she punched in a number on her cell phone. “What’s happening with the target?”

“She’s stopped on Vincent. She went inside an apartment building about five minutes ago.”

“Which apartment?”

“Don’t know.”

“You don’t know? How the hell did you ever get into DOCO without the basics of surveillance?” Parker closed her phone, opened a metal case, punched in a series of numbers, and settled a headset in one ear.

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“Dan, this is Olivia. Something is happening and I need your help.”

“What’s the problem,” the male voice asked.

“Am I in DOCO’s sights?”

“What do you mean?”

“Someone has taken pictures of me.”

“What kind of pictures?”

“Me and a whore.”

“Are you familiar with the Hogarth Arms on Vincent?”

“Yes.”

“Find the super’s office—the door will be open—go inside and wait for me.”

“They’re watching me aren’t they?”

“Just meet me there,” the man said.

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When Parker heard the man suck in a deep breath, she knew he was going to warn Olivia. “Fuck!” She felt her heart pounding. “I’ve come too far to let you fuck it up for me now Dan.” She punched in another number and code. When she saw the blip from Dan’s vehicle moving, she opened her cell, pressed four then the star button and waited for an answer.

“Yeah,” Dan said.

“Where are you?” Parker asked.

“Armstrong and Fifth.”

She looked at the street name on her monitor and confirmed that was his location. “Can you get to the place where we took down O’Donnell?” Shamus O’Donnell was a hired assassin that Dan had killed when a DOCO team that Dan and Parker organized had him surrounded. The assassin shot Parker and that caused her to go deep undercover when the organization faked her death.

“Yeah.”

"I'll meet you by the boulder where he died as soon as you can. From your current location it should take about ten minutes tops."

"But..."

"No buts. Just get there."

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From her vantage point, Parker watched as Dan arrived in the park. A grin filled her face as she watched him make his way to the boulder. After he stood in position for ten minutes, she joined him.

"Are you stupid Dan?" she asked. She could see the sweat beading on his forehead and detected a slight tremble in his body.

Dan swallowed hard. "What do you mean?"

Parker pulled a Sig Saur out of her jacket and made a circle on the man's chest. "You were going to warn Olivia weren't you?"

"No!" Dan exclaimed. "I was going to meet her and tell her what we scripted if she ever contacted me."

"You know Dan, I've spent a lot of years studying people, their voices and their body language," she said as she continued circling the man's heart with the gun. "You gave yourself away."

Dan closed his eyes. The woman was crazy and that made her extremely dangerous. "I'm telling you the truth."

Parker lowered the gun. "No, you're not but since this situation has already been set in motion, you will have to see it to its end." She eyed the man and the sweat that was freely streaming down his face. "When you meet with Santos, you will tell her that DOCO isn't involved and ask her if she wants you to ask around about the pictures. Tell her that helping her needs to be kept on the QT."

Parker lifted the gun and pressed it between Dan's eyebrows. "Do you think you can do that Dan or do I need to monitor your activities?"

"Sure, no problem."

"Good, we're on the same page then."

Once they arrived back to where they parked their vehicles, Parker asked, "Those twin girls of yours, how old are they now?"

"Almost six," Dan said as his heart rate sped up—he knew it was a threat. "You leave them out of this."

"You're all they have aren't you? It's a pity how your wife died leaving you to care for them alone. Oh, that's right you have a nanny. Her name is Lena, right? She's on a visa from Slovakia, right?" She nudged Dan. "You getting it on with that pretty young thing?" She saw Dan frown. "Oops touched a nerve did I? Hey your wife is dead so why not."

"Shut up. Shut the hell up!"

"Don't go getting your boxers in a knot," Parker said with a chuckle. "Is it true that you are leaving DOCO after this assignment? You've already scheduled your exit interview haven't you?" She ran a finger down the man's cheek. "You can't go until we finish with Olivia and the nun."

“I only signed on because I think Olivia is an asset to the organization. She’s a good operative...” Dan stopped when he saw Parker look at him with interest. “Otherwise, I’d be gone.”

“One last hurrah for a friend, how touching.” She patted the man’s chest and smiled. “If you decide to say anything to Olivia about what we are doing, your girls will be toast.”

Dan watched as Parker got in her car and drove away. “She’s insane. I’ve got to find a way to tell Olivia that she’s still alive and what her plan is.”

Chapter Sixteen

Ten minutes later, Dan parked in front of the Hogarth Arms. He saw the Harley and knew that Olivia had already arrived. He sat there for a while as he tried to figure out what to do. Olivia was all business when he worked with her. During the down times, she didn't engage with the others but she always had time for him. Of all the DOCO operatives he ever worked with, Olivia was the only one he knew unequivocally had his back.

Finally, pounding on the steering wheel, he got out, walked up to the door, and entered the apartment building. Once he opened the super's door, he spotted Olivia and smiled. He held out his hand and shook the woman's as he spoke. "What made you think I'd know who took the pictures?"

"I didn't. Why did you choose this place?" Olivia glanced round the virtually empty room. The only furniture, if one could call it that was a chair and an old melamine table that sat opposite a grimy window.

"I chose it because it is the one place I know that's safe," Dan said. When Olivia looked around the room again, he covertly scanned the ceiling for any sign of monitoring devices. *There's no way. I didn't know I was coming here until forty minutes ago. Not even Parker can get a place bugged in that amount of time.*

Olivia didn't comment immediately then she caught his gaze with a penetrating stare. "Take a look at these and tell me if they come from DOCO?" she passed over the envelope containing the damning photos.

Dan sorted through the pictures before handing them back to Olivia. With a fixed gaze of his own, he said, "This isn't DOCO's style—you should know that."

"Worth a shot, thanks." She turned her back and began to leave the room.

Dan shook his head. "Olivia, why does it matter? In the old days, a thing like this would have been high amusement for you. Besides, you always said that no one gave a shit about who you were fucking. What's changed?"

Olivia squared her back as the question hit home. "It doesn't matter. Thanks for your time." Her hand reached out of the door knob then she spun around. "I've changed at least I want to change. I got another chance and these pictures have screwed that all up. Is that all you wanted to know," she asked with a face that barely disguised her anger.

Dan fought the need to tell the woman everything. Parker had let him off the hook too easy. All she did was to threaten him and that confused him. *Why didn't she wire me? This doesn't feel right.* When he looked above the door, he saw a miniscule flash and swallowed his words. "Maybe you can make it right." He inwardly cringed as he picked his words carefully. "Sometimes things happen for a reason Olivia. Remember when Parker died we talked about that?"

Olivia scowled. The last thing she wanted to remember was Parker and the circumstances surrounding her demise. She supposed it was fitting for just like then, she was losing everything all over again. "How do you go about regaining someone's trust after you've been arrogantly stupid and selfish? Do you have a way because I'd sure like to know?"

Dan moved closer to Olivia. "Look, we've known each other for a long time. You know I've always thought of you as one of the good ones. The business we're in doesn't lend itself to

successful relationships.” He thought of Parker’s warning and a shiver went down his spine. “Look at me, I took a chance and got married only to have my wife die when I was off on a mission. Now, I’m the only parent to twin girls, I’m getting out of this game,” Dan bowed his head and whispered, “The truth is always the best way.”

“Yeah, I’m one of the good ones all right. I left that business and thought that part of my life was over. Now, I get these,” she said holding the pictures in the air. “Remember that when you try and leave the bastards. As to the truth, who the hell knows what the truth is anymore.” She turned her back and reached for the door again.

“Stop—I know you left the business and have gone on to make a new life. Surely, you realize that not all your training disappears. Like it or not, you are still bound to that—it is for a lifetime.”

“Yours maybe, I’ve affiliated mine these days with a higher cause.” Olivia snorted. “If I was, we never would be having this conversation—you’d be dead.” When she saw the hurt look on his face, she closed her eyes. “Look, I’ve had a really rotten day. I thought you might be able to help me find out who is trying to intrude on my life. Obviously, I was wrong. I’m sorry I bothered you Dan...I didn’t know who else to turn to,” she whispered before focusing on his face. “I always knew I could depend on you.”

Dan put his hands on Olivia’s shoulders and looked straight into her eyes. “Remember to look outside the box. You’ll find the answers there.”

“I’m not interested in riddles.” She allowed her gaze to remain focused on the man. When his eyes moved fractionally, she understood and listened carefully to his next words.

In a low voice he said, “It’s not a riddle. Things aren’t always what they seem. You of all people should know that.”

Olivia dropped her gaze for she had her answer. “I do Dan. Thanks for meeting me on such short notice. If you find anything out...” she left the sentence unfinished knowing he would understand.

Dan nodded. “Since this has nothing to do with DOCO I’m fairly certain I won’t discover who sent you the pictures. But...I’ll keep my eyes and ears open for you,” he said in a louder voice.

“Thanks, you take care of yourself out there. It’s a dangerous world...you don’t want those kids of yours to become orphans.” She left the room without a backward glance.

As she exited the building, Olivia considered everything that Dan said. More importantly, what he didn’t say. Then, it dawned on her. “God help us all—I’m being monitored. Nothing I do or say is secure. What I need to find out is why and I will no matter what it costs.” She mounted the Harley and headed off in the direction of home. No one was safe. All those she held dear were in danger.

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Listening and watching a remote monitor, Parker watched Olivia leave the room. Her attention turned back to the man who stood alone and growled. “You’re a dead man.”

Chapter Seventeen

Parker paced the floor of the command station across the street from Olivia's warehouse. Dan had seriously compromised everything she had been working on for almost two years. Dan would pay for not heeding her warnings but a more pressing matter was how to get her plan back on track.

She stubbed out a cigarette and looked at the monitors. Thanks to the monitoring device implanted in Olivia's head years before, she knew that Olivia was on to the surveillance. The question—would she discover the extent. Pulling out another cigarette and lighting it, she began pacing again. When she heard the door open, she turned and saw Dan Estevez entering the room.

"It took you long enough to get here," Parker said.

"I had to sign some papers for my lawyer," Dan said as she approached the woman.

"Is everything cool with Olivia," she asked.

"You listened to the conversation didn't you?"

"Why would I listen to your conversation Dan? Is there some reason I shouldn't trust you?" Parker carefully scrutinized the man noting the beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Get real Parker. You don't trust anyone."

Parker nodded. "Perhaps you are right. That doesn't change the fact that you fucked up."

"Why do you say that?" Dan looked at the woman's eyes that seemed to be boring into him.

"Apparently, you think I'm stupid. I know how close you and Santos were in the past. You're stupid and a slow learner Dan. I wanted you on this team because I thought you were going to help me not go behind my back and screw me."

The low ominous tone of the woman's voice had Dan wiping a hand across his brow. "I didn't tell her anything. I told her that taking those pictures wasn't DOOCO's style."

A maniacal laugh filled the room as Parker closed in on the man. "Did you really think that Olivia wouldn't get the meaning behind *things aren't always what they seem*? Did you think mentioning my name wouldn't start her wondering why you brought it up?"

"I can't control what she thinks or doesn't think," Dan said fixing his eyes on the woman. "She doesn't know anything."

Again, Parker laughed as she moved to within a fraction of an inch of the man. "Know what she said after she closed the door?" Dan shook his head. "She said, *I'm being monitored, nothing I do, or say is secure*. Now tell me Dan, does that sound like you didn't tell her anything?"

The realization that the monitoring of Olivia went farther than he knew made Dan close his eyes and shake his head. "How do you know that?"

"Do you think that luscious nanny of yours will survive the accident she's about to have?"

"You leave her and my kids out of this! My family has nothing to do with this operation."

An evil smile formed around Parker's lips and she was about to say something when she saw the Harley pull into the warehouse.

"Now let's see which of us is right shall we Dan," she said as she turned the volume up and zoomed in on Olivia.

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Olivia skidded to a stop in the warehouse ignoring her usual meticulous parking of the machine. It was precariously standing on the bracing leg in a haphazard position as she threw her helmet to ground giving the silent area a hollow echo. She strode past the object as it spun around before it finally came to a stop when Olivia reached the console.

“If you scum are listening to me I’m going to hunt you down like the pack of dogs you are. When I’m done with you, there will be nothing left but ashes. Her finger punched in several keys and she walked up and down the area waiting impatiently.

A bleep sounded on the console and ignoring the comfortable chair, she leaned over to look. “Thank you for nothing! That tells me exactly squat.” She closed her eyes and shook her head, “Come on brain give me a sign. Tell me what to do.” Then an idea occurred to her as she punched in another code and the DOCO emblem came on screen. “Now let’s see if I’m thinking outside the box shall we.”

Her eyes scanned the feed she’d called up. It was an old contact link, which she was sure would have been erased—it wasn’t. Another question popped into her head. *Why is it still active?* She knew she hadn’t accessed the files in over a year, but clearly, someone else had. Only she and one other had the password. Punching in more keys she download the log of the last year, it was going to take a while but she’d find out exactly what information was being stored in the private files. “That little shit Dan lied to me.” Her lips pulled into a sneer as she spoke.

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The smile on Parker’s lips expanded as she watched what was unfolding on Olivia’s monitor. “Seems as though she’s found you out Dan,” she said with a chuckle. “Who are you more afraid of—Olivia or me?”

“How does she have access to those files? Weren’t they purged when she left?”

Parker let out another chuckle. “She sees exactly what I wanted her to see.”

Dan stood frozen in place. He suddenly realized the enormity of Parker’s hold over Olivia. *She controls everything. I’ve got to do something before it’s too late for Olivia.*

As if she heard his thoughts, Parker said. “If you’re considering warning her I’d think about the consequences of those actions long and hard. You have two daughters don’t you?”

Dan swallowed hard—nothing was worth the lives of his family. Calm came over him as he thought about the files he put on a disk and gave to his lawyer to mail to Olivia if anything happened to him. “If anything happens to them or me I promise you that she’ll know you’re still alive.”

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Olivia walked over to the answering machine—there were two messages. Uneasily she pressed the recall. The first message was from Amelia’s mother, asking if they wanted to come for dinner next month. The second was a terse message from Teal.

“O, you need to talk to Amelia. She sounds depressed to me and a depressed shrink isn’t good for business.” Simple and to the point.

If Teal knew why Amelia was depressed she certainly wouldn’t be asking her to intervene. However, she needed to hear Amelia’s voice even if it was no more than a blast of anger. “I need

to know she's safe." She picked up the phone and pressed the short code of Amelia's cell. After several rings, her voice mail answered.

"Amelia, will you call me please."

She then headed back to the console and the long session she knew she was in for to solve the puzzle that was as far as she was concerned about to be unraveled.

Chapter Eighteen

Parker sat watching a monitor that lead directly to the one that Olivia was scanning. “Keep looking,” she whispered. “It’s there. If you want a reward you have to dig deeper.”

“I’m going to my apartment,” Dan said. “I’ll be back for the midnight shift.”

In a low threatening voice, Parker said, “I don’t think so.”

“What do you want me to do? Sit around here and watch you?”

With a swivel of her chair, Parker fixed her eyes on the man. “I can’t trust you anymore Dan. On top of that, you threatened me with retribution.” She shrugged. “I think the one that needs retribution is you for sidetracking the plan that took me year to develop.”

“I told you I didn’t do anything. Do you think she would have said that about me if I had?”

Parker got up, walked to the coffee pot, and poured some in a cup. “Here, drink this it will calm your nerves,” she said handing the man a mug. “You take it black right?”

“I don’t want coffee. I’m going home.” The wild look in the woman’s eyes made him shiver—Parker was certifiable. *I need to get out of here. The chief needs to know what she’s really doing with all the resources he’s made available to her.*

Parker grabbed his arm. “I said drink the coffee. You’re not leaving here until you do.” When she saw the look on the man’s face, she brought the mug to her mouth and sipped the coffee. “It’s not poisoned if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Dan nodded and took the cup. He knew she was up to something but obviously, it wasn’t poison in the coffee. “I need some sugar,” he said. He would play along and placate her until he had an opening to leave or figured out what she was going to do next. *She might be crazy but she needs me if she’s going to pull this operation off.*

“Oh, right, you don’t take it black do you?” She picked up two packets of sugar, handed it to him, and watched as he stirred it into his coffee. “I think I’ll have some too.”

After gulping the coffee, Dan looked at Parker who was drinking the coffee. “Look, I think we should get in touch with the chief and see if we are going in the right direction with this operation.”

“Not necessary. He’s given me carte blanche. We are to get Olivia back in the fold at any cost.”

Dan found it incredible that the chief had put his stamp of approval on what she was currently doing. He rubbed his eyes before he swallowed more coffee. “I think if he knew how far you’ve gone he’d...” The man looked at Parker then back to his mug. He said, “Why?” before he fell to the floor.

“Because you pissed me off,” she said as she kicked the body. Once she was certain he was dead, she rolled a dolly to the body and put on gloves. After loading the man on the cart, she wheeled him to the elevator and took him to the parking area under the building. She fished in his pocket, took out the keys to his car, and unlocked the trunk. The man was quite a bit larger than she was, and weight at least a hundred pounds more. The cart had an automatic lifting device and getting him into the truck was a breeze.

“Now where do you want your last resting place to be Dan?” she asked with a cackle. “The river it is.”

Parker stood on the bank of the same river where she and Olivia had made love on many occasions. It was somehow fitting that Dan the traitor would rest there for eternity. Not even DOCO would find him for she removed his tracking device before rolling the vehicle into the river's murky depths. She remembered his veiled threat and laughed. "They have to know your dead before your lawyer will act. Pity they will never know."

She walked quickly back to the highway and entered a small diner. Ordering coffee and pie, she let out a happy sigh. Soon Olivia would start piecing together the parts of the puzzle she had left for her. "It won't be long now O."

The woman standing at her table with the pie in hand asked, "What was that hon?"

Parker looked up and smiled. "Nothing, I was just thinking out loud. That pie looks delicious."

When she finished the last bite, Parker pushed the plate away and smiled. Olivia would be back in her arms before she knew it.

Chapter Nineteen

Amelia smiled as she watched Father Michael Bright listen with an intent expression to one of his parishioners. It was an elderly woman who had a weathered look to her features that would rival any rocky range. As her lips moved, her small shaking hand brought a handkerchief to her eyes. It made Amelia's sensitive nature respond to the compassionate appeal of the priest. Quietly, she knelt and began to pray as she waited for her friend to finish.

Time had no meaning to Amelia until a peaceful voice interrupted her contemplation of her life.

"Do you need any help Miss..." The man's kindly eyes flared open as he recognized Amelia. "Amelia, what a surprise," the priest said as his face beamed as he held out his arms.

Amelia moved from her kneeling position and flew into the priest's arms. Moments later, she smiled warmly at the priest. "I wasn't sure if you would recognize me after all this time. How long is it been—ten years?"

The priest chuckled. "More like fifteen and yes you don't look the same without the habit. However, it never did suit you. As I recall, you were always in trouble for having a less than tidy appearance at vespers."

Amelia laughed. "You make it sound like I'm kin to the Julie Andrews character in the Sound of Music." She felt like a heavy weight lifted as the man dug up one of the many memories they shared of their early days in the church. It also made her realize that when she'd left for good, she also had to leave behind many of her friends. "Yes and if I recall you were never on time. I remember father Johansson chastising you most evenings and always on Sunday. We never did find out what you were up to."

They both lapsed into silence at the mention of the deceased and exorcised old priest.

"Have you time for a pot of tea or did you just happen upon my parish by accident and felt the need to pray."

Amelia smiled her thanks. "I was hoping you'd say that. You were the only person I know who made a decent pot of tea. Although, I still don't know how you can take it with milk."

The sandy headed priest smiled and bowed his head at the compliment. "English roots my dear, Amelia. My grandmother taught her children who then passed the knowledge onto their own children. Now step into my parlor and you can tell me what's been happening since you left."

Amelia knew he wasn't prying. The question, how much should she dare share with the priest? Then, as they walked toward a room at the side of the church, she realized that she could share anything.

Three hours later, Amelia laughed at the anecdote of Michael's last trip to the Vatican. He fell down the steps to land at the feet of the current Pope.

"Well at least he'll remember you. Not many can say they've done that." Amelia felt so much better just talking about old times and both their present working situations. They'd progressed from late afternoon tea to sharing a home cooked dinner by his very competent and able housekeeper. The woman had growled her welcome and given Amelia a look that Olivia would be proud. When the priest had introduced her as a friend from his early church days and that she was an eminent psychiatrist, the woman had thawed a little. At least the meal she'd been

given hadn't been laced with poison. She'd heard some strange stories about the possessive housekeepers of priests.

Michael nodded then his brown eyes caught hers and he smiled slowly. "So are you going to tell me why you came to my church? I think we've skirted around the issue most of the evening."

Amelia shook away his glance and stared at her almost empty coffee cup. "I'm not sure now why I came. I guess I was feeling lost and I hoped you'd still be here and seeing an old friendly face might help and it did."

The priest nodded and then reached out and placed a hand on hers. "Do you want to take confession Amelia?"

"I...no...not at this time. When I do, I'll be back for sure. Thanks it means a lot to me." Amelia turned her hand enabling her to squeeze the man's gently.

"Right, so if it isn't to confess your sins what's eating at you? Do you remember when you'd been at the parish only two weeks? Sister Claudine banished you from the dinner table because you arrived late and Father Jo had already prayed for our supper. Your face was a classic as it is now. 'Deep waters' Father Jo used to say of you." Michael's eyes never wavered from Amelia as he saw the cringe on her face and assumed that she was recalling the memory.

Amelia frowned. She and Michael were both in their early novitiate years when the incident occurred. They were effectively under supervision at the parish. Neither one of them could be called the perfect trainee. "Yeah the battleaxe was Father Jo's right hand for years. He called her his conscience. It makes you wonder doesn't it?"

Michael nodded. "Yes, he missed her dreadfully when she died after that break in at the church. What was it now...oh must be ten years plus. The police never found out who did it but I have a suspicion Father Jo knew."

The sadness of that episode, which neither of them had been present for, brought a dark cloud to the table.

"I'm in love," Amelia whispered. The bland statement probably surprised her as much as the priest who raised his eyes at the announcement.

"Do you want to discuss banns?" Michael asked although he was certain that she didn't want to make a public announcement of marriage.

Amelia shook her head. "I wish it was that easy. We...we've had a particularly nasty argument. I said it was over."

The priest didn't say anything for a few minutes then smiled slightly. "You make it sound so pragmatic. I suspect it wasn't that. Love is often like a roller coaster—filled with highs and lows. Did you mean it when you said it was over?"

"No, of course not but I can't understand the lying. It makes no sense. We agreed to be honest when we realized how we felt about each other. I can't build a relationship when I have serious doubts about the other person's veracity." Amelia stood up, walked over to the window. She realized for the first time how late it was getting. *Olivia will be freaking out.*

"Is this the first time you've been in love, Amelia?"

Amelia hesitated. "Yes, it makes the emotional commitment that I once gave to the church seem insipid to how I feel now."

Michael had always felt that Amelia hadn't placed her heart in the hands of God. She gave him her body and mind but never the true passionate embrace that enabled a person to give up

everything in sacrifice to the Lord's work. "Could you consider spending the rest of your life without this person in it...no matter what they've done?"

Can I? The question swirled around in her brain. She could go through the motions of living but how would she feel if she lost the magical connection that she had with Olivia. "No."

"Then you go back and patch it up with your young man. When you do want the banns read, remember that I'm the priest that would be honored to do that." He grinned and stood up walking toward her as they both gazed out of the window.

"I will," Amelia answered softly. "I guess I'd better go. Thank you again for everything Michael."

The man shook his head. "I didn't do anything. Now don't leave it so long before you come see me again. Next time bring your young man. I'm fascinated to meet the person who can replace God." He chuckled as he felt Amelia's arms go around him and hug him tightly.

A few minutes later, after saying their goodbyes, Amelia began to push the door open then suddenly stopped, turned, and added, "I'll bring her next Sunday if she's in town."

Father Michael stood at the door of the house long after Amelia had driven off as his brain finally registered that Amelia said 'she'.

Chapter Twenty

A blank expression took residence on Olivia's already morose features. The hours she'd spent at the computer console had revealed a big fat zero. Along with that, Amelia hadn't returned her calls all night and it was after ten, which made the situation even more fraught in her mind.

Slamming her fist down on the hard table next to the screen, she cursed. "Damn you! I know you've left me a trail now where the hell is it."

Parker watched Olivia's outburst and laughed. "It is so obvious O. If it were a snake, it would have bitten you long ago. The nun has made you soft."

Punching in the final set of codes that she and Kate Edstrom her old handler at DOCO had used to communicate, she waited for the computer to show her the last three months activity. As she waited, her eyes dropped to the photos strewn on the table where she'd thrown them in temper earlier in the evening. "That's it! That's the key—the dates on those photos," she announced to the empty room.

Shaking her head, Parker chuckled. "Good for you O now you're thinking but as always, you need to look outside the box. The key is there just go back to the screen and see what isn't there that should be."

Olivia manipulated the dates and times on the photos in every way she could—nothing. "Ok, so that didn't work. What the hell am I missing?" Olivia snaked a hand through her untidy hair and glared at the screen in an attempt to intimidate the information from the memory core.

"I guess I need to show you the way." Parker did several keystrokes before she began to type. *Olivia, the path is as familiar as your name.* She pressed send and watched for Olivia's reaction.

"What the fuck!" Olivia's eyes widened as the instant message floated on her screen. "My name, talk about cryptic. Ok dumbo, think, think." She furiously typed in the name *She Devil* with the date and waited. A slight smile tugged at her lips as a file appeared on the screen. Then she entered a line on the instant message pad.

Who are you?

Parker could tell Olivia was rattled and that caused a peal of laughter to echo around the room. "How wonderfully delicious this is," she said as she typed another message. *That's for me to know and you to find out. You've had so many clues that you've missed. Are you getting soft? You always were able to pick out the sublime. What's happened to you, Olivia? Lost your edge?*

Olivia growled and typed, *don't be so sure you know me or what I'm capable of.*

Immediately, Parker typed, *be sure you are ready for the answers you seek before you open that file.*

Ignoring the taunt, Olivia accessed the file. Then her head hit the desk as she digested the surveillance footage. Someone was watching her everywhere—that meant everywhere. "God help me you're in my home." Her voice barely carried as she raised her head and stared at one piece of a video stream that showed her in the shower.

Again Parker laughed. *You've gone soft in the head, Olivia. With your past, nothing should surprise you. The question now, is what are you going to do about it?*

Soft am I going soft? True she didn't have the edge she once had but she gave that up freely when she and Amelia grew closer. *Amelia.* The thought of her partner being in danger at this level made her stomach muscles tighten so hard she felt like they were going to burst through her skin. It finally dawned on her that not only had she been watched twenty-four seven but whoever had the direct feed into her home could hear and probably see exactly what was happening. Sucking in a deep breath, she gave the last message a long hard stare then typed, *why?*

While she waited, Olivia made a few keystrokes and opened up the IP tracking program that Phil had installed.

You know why Olivia. You've always known why. Amelia isn't safe. As she watched Olivia's attempt to trace the IP address, Parker shook her head. *Do you really think that will work?*

Closing her eyes at the reference to her partner, Olivia knew she was in big trouble. Whoever was doing this not only could see and hear her, but also apparently could read her mind. That meant either one of two things—the other party was a telepathist or they knew her as well as she knew herself. She could count on the fingers of one hand how many knew her that well—no one at DOCO was on that list. Her parents, brother, and Parker were all dead. That left only Amelia—no way was she responsible. *Ok so I'm soft. Exactly what do you want from me?*

What they're doing to you is wrong. There's no way to stop it. No one can alter what has been set in motion. You and those you love are in grave danger. With a maniacal laugh, Parker added, *YOU'VE BEEN WARNED!*

Typing furiously, Olivia realized that the tone of message meant the onlooker was ready to cut the connection. *You're not DOCO are you? If you are, prove it.*

Parker took a deep breath and exhaled loudly. The time had come to sever the connection. *All will be revealed when the time is right.*

Olivia snorted as she returned the message immediately. *You want me to leave town, the state, or the country maybe. Come on, you have to do better than a dire warning on a computer screen. How do I know, other than some sophisticated surveillance equipment, that you can do anything damaging to people I care about. You could be a geeky kid in high school who hacked into something they shouldn't and are having fun.* Olivia felt the adrenalin rush of the situation perhaps she had been going soft but not anymore.

Pushing back from the monitor, Parker lit a cigarette and watched the smoke she blew out dance lazily over the screen. The fact that Olivia was taunting her made her smile. *You learned your trade well Olivia. Attack the messenger to get the upper hand. It won't work this time. If you think about it, a geeky kid wouldn't know about the nun.*

For a second, Olivia considered the comment then shook her head as a feral smile laced her lips.

Nun?

Parker considered her next move. She swiveled in her chair and activated another monitor. With several key strokes, she activated the warehouse's alarm and watched a startled Olivia.

You have no control. They have all the power.

Is that it? All you have is trickery with a few bells and whistles. You have to do better than that. Olivia walked over to the panel on the wall closest to the vehicles parked there and opened the casing. Then she removed the circuit breaker and effectively doused the sound and the flashing lights

The game needed to end—it was a stalemate. Olivia was back into *She Devil* mode and that was all that mattered. In that frame of mind, the nun's power had diminished and that was exactly what Parker wanted. She typed, *all you need to do is to put the pieces together*, then severed the connection. As a parting shot, Parker allowed Olivia to see what she did. She watched as the image of Olivia filled the woman's screen before she shut down Olivia's computer.

Olivia briefly saw the final message and her own image before the screen went blank and her computer began to reboot itself. As it did, she sat back in her chair contemplating the events of the evening. There really was only one thing to do. If it meant that Amelia was safe then that's all that mattered. With a heavy sigh, she shook her head. "I guess I always knew my life was forfeit from the moment I pulled the trigger on the DA. Taking revenge isn't the solution it never was, I should have allowed the authorities to do their job instead of becoming a vigilante over my brother's murder. An eye for an eye doesn't always pay off."

Her cell phone rang at that moment and she looked at the caller ID. For a second it made her smile as she allowed her feelings for the caller to impinge just for a second on what was going to be the rest of her life—hell. Then, she powered down the phone. She needed to leave the warehouse before she talked to Amelia. When they did talk, it wouldn't be what she originally planned—it would be totally different. A few minutes later, the roaring sound of her Harley filled the warehouse with a squeal of rubber to tarmac.

Chapter Twenty-one

A knock on the door to the motel room that Amelia had rented for the night broke the silence of the room. She stepped out of the shadows to peer through the spy hole to check who the visitor was. Her fingers shakily lifted the security latch and she opened the door to the darkness of the night and the visitor.

Olivia's heart pounded as the door opened and she ventured inside the comfortable remarkably spacious room. When she'd finally returned Amelia's call, her partner had agreed to see her at the motel. It seemed odd to meet there but considering her current situation it was what was right for her.

"Hi, thanks for seeing me so late," Olivia said as she entered the room and passed close to Amelia.

Amelia wanted desperately to fling her arms around the taller woman and simply hug her but refrained. With a slight incline of her head, Amelia nodded toward the small table with two chairs. The tiny neon clock next to the bed read midnight.

Composing herself, Amelia quietly replied, "You said it was important."

Olivia's eyes flew around the room refusing to make contact with the woman standing near her. "I think it's time I was honest with you about my previous life."

"I thought we'd done the honesty bit a long time ago," Amelia clipped.

Fishing in her pocket, Olivia produced the packet of pictures. "You need to know why I did what I did."

Amelia's eyes dropped to the packet as she silently conjured up the images of a naked Olivia with several strangers. Her lips twisted in distaste. "Ok."

Seeing the look of disappointment on Amelia's face, Olivia wanted to reach out to the woman—she didn't. "I love you more than anyone I've ever known. When you said you loved me it turned my world upside down." Olivia fixed her gaze on Amelia. "I'm not good enough for that love. You deserve so much better."

"Shouldn't I be the judge of that? If these..." Her eyes once more bounced off the packet in the middle of the table. "You lied to me. You were intimate with other women and you think by telling me now that you love me will make it all go away—it's not enough?" Amelia shot her glance back to Olivia and saw the tell-tale twitch an eyebrow as she digested the words.

"Will you at least let me explain?"

Although she was seething inside, Amelia schooled her features to show no sign of her inner emotional struggle. "Go ahead you have the forum. I'm a captive audience."

"You already know that after my brother was murdered I appointed myself judge, jury, and executioner and killed the man responsible." Olivia's eyes searched Amelia's face for any sign of repulsion. When she saw only a blank expression, she continued. "As you know, I didn't go to jail but went to work for a covert government organization. What you don't know is that I was an assassin for them. I've lost track of how many lives I took." She sucked in a deep breath. "I stopped working for them two years ago because I wanted to have a life with you." She looked into Amelia's eyes. "Do you want me to go on?"

The room became eerily silent as Amelia tried to equate the woman she knew with the other beast Olivia professed to be. That was the only word that came to mind when Olivia called

herself an assassin. True, she knew about the original taking of a life along with others committed in the line of duty. Although she didn't condone them, she did understand the reasoning behind the act. Yet, Olivia's confession to the taking of lives for no reason other than a cold blooded murder chilled her to the bone.

As the silence extended, Olivia felt her stomach rebel. If she couldn't make Amelia understand, she didn't know what she'd do. "I don't want a life without you in it," she said. "I know what I was is inexcusable but I've tried. I really have tried to make amends."

"The people you killed, were they bad people? Did you kill them to protect someone as you did for Sister Marie and me? Or, did ordinary people like me become your targets?" Amelia asked in a strangled voice. It took all of Amelia's self control to hide her emotions, but the tenor of her question betrayed her as she fought the urge to bury her head in the sand. I want to wake up and find that this nightmare has disappeared.

Olivia hung her head. "They were drug dealers, assassins, traders of children. Basically, they were the scum that resides in the underbellies of society." She lifted her head and looked directly at Amelia. "I never killed anyone who didn't deserve it." When she saw the question in Amelia's eyes she added, "At least that's what my handlers told me."

The sadness that shrouded Olivia's whole demeanor, made Amelia's heart fill with pity. "I was always taught that if people were truly repentant of their sins they would be forgiven."

Olivia cautiously reached across the table and took Amelia's hand. When Amelia allowed the gesture, Olivia said, "I love you. Every day since you came into my life I've prayed for the strength to leave that life behind and work only for good. You've been my guiding light out of the ugly darkness that I once lived in."

The hand felt warm but it didn't remove the icy chill Amelia felt. "I can forgive your past, Olivia, but those," she said with her eyes focused on the packet in the middle of the table. "You said you left that life behind and yet you can still do that to me. Do you have any idea how seeing those made me feel? I feel inadequate."

Swallowing hard, Olivia said, "Every time I'm near you I've wanted you." She lifted one hand and caressed Amelia's cheek. "You are so pure and good. How can I defile you in that way? It just wouldn't be right. That's why I went to prostitutes."

"You've asked me to forget and forgive your past yet you can't do that with mine. I'd call that selfish Olivia. You've condemned me to spend my life on a pedestal because you can't see me as a woman to share your bed." Amelia rolled her eyes as she dragged her hand from Olivia's grasp and stood up.

Olivia got to her feet and pulled Amelia into a hug. "I don't want any of the ugliness of my life to spill over onto you. Right now, someone is watching everything I do. I fear for your safety," she whispered.

For a few seconds, Amelia felt the security and love she had for Olivia wash over her—it was a cleansing experience. "I love you, Olivia, and until the day I die I will always love you. I know it's a melodramatic statement and one you will no doubt shy away from as you usually do. However, it's the truth. What I want from you in return is that you love me as you would if we each had ordinary pasts. Can you do that? Can you stop using prostitutes for sex? If you can't, it won't matter if someone is watching me or you—we will no longer be together."

Olivia pulled back slightly and looked into the face she loved before they kissed. The kiss they shared out of mutual desire deepened. This time, Olivia wouldn't stop—she would make

Amelia hers in all ways. Picking her up, she carried her to the bed and gently laid her down. With patience and love, she pulled Amelia's nightgown over her head. Her eyes took in the firm round breasts where puckered nipples protruded. Once she took off her leathers, she slowly lowered her body and gently kissed Amelia. "I want to make love with you," she whispered.

All uncertainties and doubts evaporated as Amelia felt Olivia's naked body sensuously skim across her skin. She was in heaven and the hell that might be knocking on the door would simply have to wait. She drowned in the kisses that Olivia placed on her body.

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Parker screamed, "NO," as she listened to what was obviously sex between Olivia and Amelia. "I will not allow this to happen." She jotted down the address of the hotel, stood up, picked up her car keys, and rapidly left the observation room.

Chapter Twenty-two

Parker sat outside the motel and cursed. “Fuck, how could I be so stupid?” In her haste to stop Olivia from making love with Amelia, she forgot a disguise. Now, she couldn’t pound on the door and that angered her. It was her first mistake and it had to be the last.

Formulating a plan, she quietly got out of her vehicle and moved closer to the one the nun owned. With a key protruding from between her fingers, she scratched WHMH. She then returned to her vehicle, parked across the street, and waited.

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Amelia knew she was staring but she couldn’t help it the goofy smile that had been a permanent fixture on her face since she and Olivia made love. Her grin intensified when she saw Olivia’s eyebrow move in a quirky motion.

“Have I developed a zit overnight because you haven’t stopped staring at me since we got out of bed?” The skin at the corner of Olivia’s eyes crinkled as she smiled back at her lover.

“No, definitely not zits. Are you coming home with me or do we go separately?”

Olivia shook her head and pulled Amelia close. “I don’t think it’s safe for you.”

The body close to hers had an immediate effect as Amelia rested her head on the broad shoulder. It was the same position she’d ended up the night before after Olivia broke all her previous notions of what making love was all about. Sated, she would be happy to stay within the circle of those loving arms forever. However, stark reality proved to be the immovable object after Olivia explained the current predicament they faced.

“I need to get some things...clothes and a few documents. I’ll be in and out of there before you know it. If you recall, you encouraged me to put the important things all in one place in case we had to make a quick getaway. I never understood why until now.”

“I’m sorry it has to be this way,” Olivia said. “Believe me, I want to go with you but since I’m a target you might end up in their sights too and I can’t allow that. I’ll need to go undercover and silent for a while until this is over.” She kissed Amelia and wanted to do more but time wasn’t on her side. She needed to expose whoever was watching her before she and Amelia could get on with their lives.

Amelia sighed heavily. In the space of seven hours she’d run the gamut of life—the highs and lows of a relationship in a short space of time. Although Olivia was trying to be gentle with her over the situation, she knew from the telltale lines of strain still evident on her lover’s face. It wasn’t something she could sweep under the carpet and hope it went away. It might well be with them for the rest of their lives.

“Ok, I understand. Will you be able to contact me when you go silent?” *Am I losing it? Silent means silent right?*

Olivia closed her eyes briefly. Amelia didn’t need to know the extent of the threat—not yet anyway. “Once I go undercover there can be no contact.” When she saw worry cross Amelia’s face she said, “It won’t be for long. I just need to flush the person out.”

“If you can’t what happens then?”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t know.” She gnashed her teeth and looked away. “Someone is out there monitoring my every move.” She saw Amelia’s eyes widen. “Well not every move. I’m pretty sure we’re safe here. I need to discover who it is so I can know what I’m up against and how best to proceed.”

Amelia struggled with the emotional storm brewing in her body as she realized that this could be the last time they were ever together. It was hard to take but even harder to remain calm. “If it’s DOCO...they can’t tempt you back can they?”

Shaking her head, Olivia said, “No. That part of my life is over.” She sucked in a breath. “It doesn’t feel like something DOCO would do. They have better things to do then focus their resources on harassing me.” She eyed her lover. “Remember Dan Estevez?” When she saw Amelia nod, she said, “I met with him and he told me they weren’t directly involved, although he indicated that indirectly there was something going on and I believe him.”

“He seemed an ok guy and you trust him?”

“Yeah I do. He and I worked together on a number of missions. I always knew he had my back.”

“We’re in a bad place right now aren’t we? Please don’t spare my feelings...I can take it.” Amelia frowned as she caught Olivia’s eyes and waited.

“I think I am in a situation that’s out of my control. I won’t know the why until I know who is behind this.” She pulled Amelia close again. “Yeah, we’re in a bad place.”

“Then you go do what you have to do and I’ll be waiting.” Amelia kissed the skin closest to her and felt Olivia’s heart rate increase.

After a few minutes of complete silence as they relished the closeness of their bodies, Olivia broke the calm.

“I want you to promise me two things?” Olivia said as she fought her own feelings.

Amelia heard the serious tone and replied, “If I can I will?”

“Don’t waste your life waiting for me. Move on and be happy. If I don’t come back after a year, please find someone else to share your life. You have so much love to give.”

A gasp of incredulity escaped before Amelia answered. “I can promise that I won’t waste my life. I’ll never love another person as I do you. I’m going to wait until the day I die for you and that’s a promise.”

Olivia allowed her emotions to show slightly as tears welled in her eyes. “Ok.”

Amelia nodded then replied, “I want you to promise me two things as well.”

With a slight smile, Olivia nodded, “ok.”

“Don’t become an assassin to save my life—it would be worthless if you did. Don’t get killed. I’d rather spend the rest of my life visiting you in prison or spending my life with you on the run than to have that happen.”

Swallowing hard, Olivia nodded. “I can promise you I won’t become an assassin. The rest is in fate’s hand.”

Amelia looked at the clock on the bedside table. “We have to go don’t we?” She didn’t wait for the reply as she disentangled from Olivia and reached for her possessions.

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Opening the door partially, Olivia’s eyes scanned the area for potential threats—she saw none. Pulling the door open further, she allowed Amelia to exit the motel room.

“Stay between me and the building,” she cautioned. Her eyes continued to survey the area as she walked Amelia to her car. When she saw WHMH scratched into the side of the vehicle, she immediately shielded Amelia.

“What’s the problem?”

“Someone’s vandalized your car,” Olivia said as her eyes widened their scan. Olivia felt bile rise in her throat. The situation had taken on a new twist. “I need to get you to somewhere safe,” she said.

Amelia heard a tremor of panic enter Olivia's voice that she'd never heard before. "I'll find a safe place and you go find out who's behind all this."

Olivia's eyes rested on a dark sedan with heavily tinted windows parked across the street from the motel. "Amelia," she said in a low serious tone. "I want you to go back inside and stay there until I come back for you."

"Why?"

"Just do as I say. I'll explain later."

Petulantly Amelia responded, "I'm not a child, Olivia. I can take care of myself. Besides, graffiti on a car is hardly uncommon. I can get it repaired."

"Damn it, Amelia, will you just do what I say?"

"Actually, no I won't. This is a partnership. Give me the keys. I'm going to collect my stuff. I can't live my life in the shadows like you, Olivia, and you wouldn't want me to." She reached up and kissed the startled expression of Olivia's face away.

Olivia responded by pulling Amelia closer. She whispered, "I've spotted someone watching us. I need you to go into the room and lock the door. Will you do that for me? Give it a half an hour and then leave."

Amelia felt a chill run down her spine at the words and saw the worry etched on Olivia's face. "Ok, be safe." She did a u-turn, went back to the room, and locked the door.

Crouched down in the seat of her car, Parker looked at the monitor that picked up the picture from the small camera mounted on the door. She watched Olivia pull the nun behind her while she surveyed the area. "So you're going to flush me out are you? Be careful of what you wish for O." Her laughter filled the car. "You won't see it coming."

Just as she said those words, she heard Olivia whisper to the nun. "Fuck, she's made me." When she looked out of the window, she could feel Olivia's eyes on her vehicle. Reaching for the ignition key, she turned on the engine and pulled away just as the Harley began to leave the motel parking lot.

After making two sharp turns and pulling into a parking garage, Parker stopped her car. She watched as the Harley passed by and sighed in relief. "I can't make any more mistakes...I just can't." She needed to get a grip on her emotions before her plans spun out of control.

Chapter Twenty-three

Amelia's journey back to home had been a potent mixture of wonder and pain. Wonder at the love making she'd shared with Olivia who had been infinitely tender as she felt the tumultuous passion rise inside her body just before her first ever orgasm. When she tentatively and somewhat shyly began to make love to Olivia, she was surprised at how natural it felt. Olivia's responses had been remarkable.

After their first session of love-making they talked for a short time and Olivia had admitted that her body had been so tightly strung in frustration she'd almost collapsed over the edge once Amelia had suckled her nipples for the first time. After that, it had been several more hours of exploration and sensual appreciation of what they both enjoyed.

Pain had come later much later when Olivia had explained the full extent of the trouble they could possibly be facing. There had been no time for tears. She dearly would love to shed some, as she felt the happiness they had walked the fires of hell to achieve again wrenched back out of her grasp. They agreed that their office code would be the sole contact, no more no less and only in dire emergency. Other direct contact would be impossible until this was all over.

As they lay wrapped in each other's arms prior to their last passionate encounter, Olivia made one request. If the worse happened and they found her body, she wanted Amelia to have her remains cremated and placed next to her dad. It had been a poignant request and one Amelia had agreed upon reluctantly. The look in her lover's eyes when she'd finally said yes, made her own anguish at the prospect lessen.

As the warehouse came into her line of vision, she sighed deeply. The only words rolling around in her head were, *I love you, Olivia, stay safe and please God let her come back to me.*

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Olivia roared out of the motel's parking lot in pursuit of the black sedan. She turned in the direction that the vehicle did only to lose it. She traveled several more blocks before she backtracked to the motel. The dust cloud she created as her wheels skidded to a halt looked like she felt—bemused and angry.

In the space of twenty-four hours, her life had changed completely. The love she shared with Amelia had been more than she'd ever experienced in her life. The deflowering of her lover had been for her a special gift that she had taken and tenderly unwrapped adoringly with every movement and sound that emanated from the woman. The love that Amelia showed her made her realize what true love was all about. In the moment that Amelia reached her first orgasm, she knew that all the other times in her life that she thought was in love paled in comparison. She was amazed at her responses when Amelia had made love to her for the first time. It was like the first time all over again—this time it was more intense and inside, she felt that at last, she'd come home.

She was angry that she had to leave Amelia behind. The thought that they might never see each other again was as if she were deprived of oxygen—she eventually would die. Amelia's calmness and understanding helped her focus on what had to happen. That focus would ensure she found not only who was playing games with her but why. As far as she was concerned, this was the last game they'd play with her. One way or another, it would end.

Olivia pulled her phone from her jacket and pressed a contact number on her list. When the phone at the other end connected, she said one sentence then ended the call without waiting for a reply. "Darker than dreams."

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Back in the room in the building across from Olivia's warehouse, Parker tried to steady her trembling hands. She'd made some major errors that almost caused her plans to crumble. "I've got to get a hold of my emotions," she said to the screen that showed the white Element come to a stop inside the warehouse.

Her fingernails drummed on the table as she watched the nun get out of her vehicle and walk toward the living area. "You need to be dealt with first." When she picked up the sound of the nun's phone ringing she switched to the monitor that would allow her to hear the conversation. Olivia's voice speaking *darker than dreams*, reminded her of the conversation the two women had the night before. "They're still using the same code names. How touching."

As she formulated a new plan, she emitted a low growl. Moving to another computer, she brought up the folder where she kept all the voice recordings of both Olivia and the nun. Rubbing a hand across her chin, she contemplated how to proceed. "Their only contact is with those stupid names." Mysteries of the universe, was the nun's code, small but mighty denoted the midget and darker than dreams was for Olivia.

"Perfect," she said as she began to piece together a new recording. When she finished her first attempt, she clicked play.

"Darker than dreams...Amelia, I'm in trouble."

Parker laughed. "It's a little rough but when I'm done the nun will believe it is Olivia."

Chapter Twenty-four

Amelia retrieved the satchel that held her important documents, passport, birth certificates, and diplomas. She was glad that Olivia had made her organize the items or it might have taken an age to find things. The clothes she decided to take were minimal—anything she needed in the interim she could buy new.

Once she had her suitcase packed along with the satchel loaded in the Element, she looked around. She had an overwhelming feeling that it was the last time she might be there in that capacity—it was odd and rather unsettling.

Then she thought about the computer. Maybe, just maybe Olivia had sent her a final message or instruction. It would be just like her lover to do that. After all, the computer console was her baby. Seconds later, she sat at the chair that still had Olivia's perfume still lingering in the fabric. It made her heart race. Punching in her personal code, she waited for the email to load.

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Parker watched the nun put things into a bag. "She seems to be going somewhere." She chuckled and said, "Like she can hide from me." As she continued to watch, she checked various logs and saw that the tracer on Olivia's motorcycle no longer registered. "You can't hide from me either O. I'll deal with you later."

When she saw the nun sit in front of the computer, she smiled. "Let's see if I can spook you."

A disappointed look flashed on Amelia's face as the screen blinked, no messages. With a sigh she was about to switch the computer into sleep mode when an instant message popped onto her screen. For a second she felt her heart pound in the hope it might be Olivia—it wasn't.

Boo, guess who??? If you think you're safe from me, think again. I know your every move. Parker smiled as she saw the look of amazement on the nun's face after she read the message. "Oh, the poor little nun looks scared."

Astonished at the message Amelia sat at the screen in a daze, at least now she knew that Olivia wasn't overreacting. Well she wasn't going to allow this person to get the upper hand. Her professional instinct kicked in as she ignored the message and moved to switch the machine off.

Parker watched as the woman began the shutdown process. "Oh no you don't...I'm not through with you." She rapidly typed, *if you switch the machine off and ignore me then your life will end that much sooner.*

A faint smile curved Amelia's lips. "So this person wants to play games. Ok, I'll go along with the ruse." Perhaps it might help if she gleaned information that Olivia might use.

You don't have the power over my life, only God does.

Having overheard the nun's comments, Parker growled before she typed, *think again nun, this isn't a ruse. I have the power over your life, Olivia's life and anyone else who gets in my way...perhaps that annoying midget.*

The mention of Teal had her mind reeling in horror as she neglected to notice that the person on the other end used the word 'ruse'. It was worse than even Olivia predicted. Taking a deep breath and attempting to control her shaking fingers, which made the odd typo, she tried to respond as casually as she could.

How do you know me? Have we met?

With a deep laugh, Parker typed, *don't try your psycho babble on me nun it won't work. Just know that I am the one who is pulling all the strings. You and your friends are my puppets.*

Exactly what do you want from me...from us?

Parker leaned back in her chair and digested what the nun had asked and how she would respond. *I think you already know the answer to that. By the way, that's a swanky place where your folks live. It would be a shame to see it go up in flames.*

Amelia frowned. Whoever was communicating with her had no sense of balance in their life. If they were puppets, the puppet master usually manipulated rather than destroyed. It was an odd mix of words. She tried to decipher just how dangerous the person was to her and Teal. Olivia could and would take care of herself and perhaps that was the key. She typed a reply and sat back in her chair waiting for the response.

You aren't interested in me or anyone else but Olivia, are you?

The conversation was beginning to bore Parker as she lit a cigarette and let the smoke flow over the monitor. Finally, she typed, *all you need to know is that you no longer have someone watching your back. That will be your undoing.*

Calmly Amelia replied. *That's where you are wrong.*

"Damn it why isn't she taking the bait? She isn't taking my power seriously. Well we'll just see about that!" Parker typed, *your days are numbered so make the most of them*, before she ended the conversation.

Amelia gazed at the blank screen. Melodramatic, power trip and dangerous, were all words that came to mind. The most insistent description of the personality that was hounded them was sick bordering on insane. It made for a very heady concoction and, under different circumstances, she would have loved to research. As it was, the best thing for her to do would be to leave. Obviously, their home wasn't safe and there was reason to think that someone compromised the office too. "Oh no I need to speak with Teal." Amelia stood up and walked rapidly to her car, leaving the building shortly afterwards.

Chapter Twenty-five

Parker watched the nun leave the warehouse and ran a finger lovingly over a picture of Olivia. Sucking in a deep breath, she knew what she needed to do next. The nun would keep until she did what was necessary. Quickly putting on a disguise and gathering a bag she'd already assembled, she left the command post. Outside the building, she walked hurriedly across the street, punched in the code, and entered the warehouse.

Going directly to Olivia's room she laid down on the bed and pulled a pillow that smelled like the woman that she loved and that she knew loved her. She pulled off the pillow case and stuffed it into an inner pocket of her coat. With the tenderness of a lover, she ran her fingers over Olivia's clothes then took out a leather jacket.

"I gave this to you O and you still have it." She buried her face in the garment and took in the heady smell of Olivia and leather. When she felt tightening between her legs, she snaked her hand under her jeans and began to masturbate while she held the jacket next to her face.

"Oh god O," she screamed as a powerful orgasm shook her body. "Soon you'll be mine again."

Rifling through Olivia's drawers, she opened the familiar box that held all of her lover's memories of her family, removed all the contents and put them in the pillowcase. With one swift motion, she left the room and entered the nun's bedroom.

Pouring gasoline over the bed, Parker laughed. "This is only a taste of what I have in store for you bitch."

Parker went throughout the warehouse placing small remote controlled bombs everywhere. When she was done, she lit a match, threw it on the nun's bed, and quickly left the warehouse.

As she walked back to her building, Parker heard the fire alarm go off in the warehouse. Once she was inside the door, she pressed a button and watched as the building exploded spewing dust and debris out into the street. A maniacal laugh floated around her and for a moment she looked around and frowned. "Who's laughing?"

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Amelia drove as fast as she safely could through the streets of Portsmouth. Negotiating the final corner, she slid into her parking spot at When Heaven Meets Hell and climbed out of the vehicle locking it as she left.

Entering the building, Teal shot her a worried look. "Morning, I was just going to call you. After yesterday, I wasn't sure if..."

Rolling her eyes, Amelia nodded. "Yeah, sorry about that. I need to talk with you—now."

Teal frowned. "Ok. You're lucky your first appointment canceled. What's the problem?"

Wondering where to start, Amelia decided the truth, or as much as she could tell her friend, was the only option. Sometime later, as she watched the expressions on her friend's face change from interest to astonishment to downright dismay, she knew she'd made the right call.

"I know it's hard to believe. I'm not sure I did when Olivia first told me but after what just happened at home, I know it's all true. All I can say is that we need to become low keyed. I want you to close up the office for a while. You can say Olivia is on a major case and won't be back for some time. As for me, you can tell my clients that there was a family emergency and talk to someone in my absence they can make an appointment with Dave Davidson. I've called him and he's agreed to see any of my patients that might need his services. If you'll collect the mail and if anything is urgent we contact each other with those absurd codes Olivia made up.

"I...do you think Phil and I need to move too?"

Amelia shook her head. “No, for the moment I think you’re safe. From what I could make out with the little indirect contact I with this person is that they are more interested with Olivia...and maybe me.”

Teal nodded. “Where will you go? To your parent’s home?”

Amelia paused before replying as her eyes shot around the empty reception area. “I know a place, but it’s best if you don’t know that way you can’t be compromised.”

“My god this feels like we landed in the middle of a spy thriller.” Teal, in an effort to change the subject to something less disturbing asked, “Did you make up with the big O?”

Amelia’s smile almost split her face from ear to ear. “Oh yes, we made up. When all this is over, Teal, I might tell you about it. Then again ladies don’t tell about their lovers do they?” Amelia winked as she headed to her office to retrieve her laptop and a few of her more sensitive papers.

Teal felt the heat of the smile and the words as she placed a hand to her mouth in wonder. She whispered, “Oh my god they finally did it.”

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Parker listened to the conversation between the nun and the midget. She laughed when the nun said they were going low keyed. “Ha, I did get to you. Wait until your phone rings and see how you feel then.” When the conversation turned to the nun making love with Olivia, she growled. “I won’t let that happen again.”

When Parker heard the fire truck sirens wailing, she laughed, picked up the phone, and dialed a number. When she heard the midget’s voice, she closed her mouth tight to prevent another laugh.

“Hello this is WHMH, how can I help?”

“Tell the nun to check out the news. It is all about her,” a deep male voice said.

Teal dropped the phone and switched on the TV in the reception area. There was a breaking story about a fire in the older part of town. When she recognized the name of the street, she rushed to Amelia’s office and almost dragged the woman to the set.

“That’s...” Amelia cried as she placed a hand to her mouth. She watched the decimation of her and Olivia’s home and clutched at her heart. Her gut feeling had been right—she wasn’t going to go back there again. “I’ll need to talk to the fire department and the police I guess. I’ll go downtown and try to see David. He’ll know what to do.” David Tourney was Olivia’s late brother’s best friend and looked on Olivia as a sister. Being captain of the police was going to be a bonus for them. “Someone called and told me to tell you to switch on the television...that it was all about you.”

Frowning, Amelia asked, “Who was it.”

“It was a man’s voice. I didn’t recognize it.” Teal shook her head. “What’s going to happen next?”

“I don’t know but if this is any indication of what this person is capable of it won’t be good. It might not be safe here. Close up the office and go home. You can clear the schedule from there. I’ll call you after I’ve seen David. Please be extra careful, Teal.”

Amelia hugged her friend hard and after retrieving her laptop and notes from her office, she left the building. She pulled her car into the traffic and headed for the police station. Their old friend, David Tourney who was a police captain might have some answers for her.

Chapter Twenty-six

Parker stood at the window clutching Olivia's jacket as she watched firefighters trying to get the upper hand on the warehouse fire. The flames whipped into the air as water tried to contain its rage. When she left the area to break into the nun's car the fire was at two alarms. When she returned, she noted that more fire engines had arrived. She smiled. The fire she created was garnering so much attention that Olivia was sure to return. "Burn baby burn

As more fire engines arrived, she smiled in the knowledge that the fire was now at three alarms.

A part of her wanted to shout, "I'm the one responsible," as she watched in fascination. The power of the fire that she created caused such a strong need that an orgasm rocked her body with the sight.

A shrill sound invaded the soundless room. Parker looked at the phone as if it were foreign to her before she picked up the receiver. "Yes."

"Davis, what the hell is going on?" her immediate supervisor at DOCO asked.

"With what?"

"The fire at Santos's place."

"It spontaneously exploded," Parker said. "Santos must have been careless with explosives."

"The director wants you to come in."

"I haven't finished my..."

"He wants to see you tomorrow at nine. Be sure and bring all your documentation."

Parker's eyes tracked to the flashing light that represented the nun's location and the one for Olivia. She needed to deal with the nun first. "Why the fuck is she there?" she whispered as the nun's tracking device flashed steadily in front of the police station.

"What did you say? Davis, did you hear me?"

"Yeah, I did. I'll be there at nine sharp."

Replacing the handset, Parker picked up the satchel that she removed from the nun's vehicle. "She won't be going far. I wonder how long it will take her to discover that her identity is missing."

The meeting with the new director was unexpected and that angered her. Who does he think he is to demand a meeting? She would adapt—she always did. As she watched the flash that was Olivia, she smiled.

She could tell by the direction of travel where Olivia was going. "You're heading towards Dan's place how fitting. He's hardly going to tell you anything—he's dead. Ah, there you go you've picked up on the fire and in one, two, three, yes predictable, you changed your course. You're heading home to check that your dear little nun hasn't been injured or worse...dead." Picking up the keys to the black sedan that Olivia had followed the day before, Parker laughed.

"Soon my love...soon we will be reunited. Then, I will reveal myself to you and we can leave this hell hole and start a new life for just the two of us." She laughed as she left the command center. "For now, I have an urgent task. I need to make sure our safe house is ready." As her vehicle headed south, the Harley approached the warehouse from the north and roared to a stop in front of the smoldering building.

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There was the acrid smell of burning complete with whispers of smoke from the drenched embers that had once been a thriving hub. As a booted foot moved aside a charred beam and slowly progressed through the wreckage of what once had been a marvelous old building

transformed into a place she called home. That part was over. In fact, the life of the building had terminated, much as she had once extinguished people. From the corner of her eye, she saw a metallic object that miraculously hadn't burned. Except for water damage, it was salvageable.

She gently held the silver frame that had held one of Amelia's favorite photos of them together. They were at an old pier in a town she barely remembered on one of the earlier jobs on which they had collaborated.

She smiled as she remembered standing with Amelia at the end of pier laughing. A fisherman had offered to take their picture with the water inlet in the background. They both had huge smiles on their faces. She recalled how she slung a casual arm around Amelia's shoulders as they huddle together so the tiny lighthouse in the distance was in the shot.

There was no saving the photo but she could still discern the blurry features of them both. If she could go back to that point in time, she'd do it all again but differently. Had she changed her way of life, she wouldn't be standing alone in the burnt out shell of a building she had figured would be her and Amelia's family nest.

There would be no family nest now. A lunatic had seen to that in their glorious madness of manipulation. If this was the start of things to come then she knew deep down that she and Amelia would never be together again. Squaring her jaw, she felt the pain of the loss and of losing someone so special in her life. It might have been easier to take if Amelia had died, but to have their relationship destroyed by a mad unknown person was worse, far worse. What made it even more unpalatable was that she was to blame in many ways. There were so many secrets and so many lies. She was unable to face the truth that what she always had with Amelia from the moment they met, was a bond that she should have trusted and nurtured.

Instead, her own insecurities and need to control her destiny had elicited the road she'd taken. That choice had effectively placed Amelia in a bubble away from her past and the horrors she experienced in life. She'd been wrong and so far off the target that it was almost laughable had it not been so tragic. Had she allowed Amelia totally inside her life earlier, she was sure things would have been different. As it was, she was here in the remains of her ruined life for the second time in a lifetime with the potential of losing the only person in her life that meant a damn.

Closing her eyes, Olivia savored the memory the picture in her hands evoked and for a moment she was lost in a dream world of happy times—especially the night before. She would never regret taking that particular fork in the road for a single moment. It was simply the happiest time in her life—loving and being loved by Amelia.

Opening her eyes, she realized what she had to do. If life was as barren as she predicted, there could only be one outcome. Whoever was doing this to her had to die. There was the distinct possibility that the outcome might result in her death too. To keep Amelia alive was the price she was willing to pay.

She turned around and exited the broken building without a backward glance. She placed the picture frame inside her leather jacket before mounting her Harley. After kicking the kickstand and placing the key in the ignition, it roared into life as she and the Harley sped away down the empty road. Life for her now held a purpose. The devil was in control. She had a target and that target held only death and destruction for everyone involved. She knew where to start her search—DOCO headquarters.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Amelia gazed at the man standing at the church altar. If it weren't for his vestment, he'd look like anyone else except the perception the clothing gave had that forbidden ring about it. The power the position wielded was like magic. Those that tried to mess with a priest never really got over it. As she found in the numerous cases, she either researched or was involved in over her time affiliated with the church.

These days she was just a parishioner—no more and no less. For a second, she wanted to run away. Her flippant remark that her partner and lover was a woman might have soured the path of friendship she always had with the man. Except, somewhere deep inside, she knew that wasn't the case. In their early friendship, she felt sure he had his own secrets.

The time seemed to go on forever as she sat waiting as before for the last parishioner to leave the church. In hindsight, she could have gone to the church house but...

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"Amelia, what a pleasant surprise this is. Two consecutive nights, I must be doing well," Father Michael Bright said as he welcomed his old friend.

A ready smile crossed Amelia's at the greeting for his tone didn't falter—he genuinely was glad to see her.

"Well, what can I say? I was always drawn to the word of God, particularly when you give the homily." It was true that she had keenly felt the message of God from a child, but somewhere along the way, she had transmuted that to a cause, which was why she became a nun. Time, coupled with her adult development, had shown her that it was an impulsive move. Nonetheless, she still felt close to her religion even if it might not approve of her current personal status. Considering the road she chose to take with Olivia, disapproval was a lukewarm term for the church's reaction—condemnation was more fitting.

The priest chuckled softly. He was a quiet spoken man and often in, the past, people thought him the shy and retiring. When in fact, he was an outgoing personality—Michael Bright suited his name perfectly.

"That's pandering to my ego and I'll take it. Any morsel in a cynical world is a bonus. Are you here to pray or is there something else that I can help you with?"

"I need your help."

The priest nodded and took hold of her arm as he steered her to the door that led to the passageway between the church and his house.

Once inside and the formalities and frowns of the housekeeper were over, they settled with tea in the priest's study.

"Now, I don't want to pry, Amelia, but you did drop a bombshell as you left yesterday. I'm not sure I was happy with the way you did it."

Amelia said, "I'm sorry, Father Michael, I just..." She didn't complete the sentence when the priest held up his hand.

He smiled reassuringly. "In light of what you admitted I'm not so sure I would have done it any differently."

Sighing in relief, Amelia caught his concerned gaze. "Thank you, Michael. It means a lot that you don't judge me."

Michael chuckled. “Ah, I didn’t say that now did I? As you’re back and need help do I take it that the relationship still isn’t working?”

Amelia dropped her gaze from the priest’s as she contemplated the question. Then, with a tight smile she replied, “Olivia, my partner...business and personal for the record. We worked out the kinks on a personal level, but ...I’m not sure how to tell you or how much I can about the trouble we’re in without you being made a target too.”

The priest’s features barely moved except for a second before a look of astonishment crept over the craggy features. He quietly asked, “A target? That sounds rather dramatically dangerous, but from the previous situations you’ve been in perhaps it isn’t.” They both looked at each other knowing what he was talking about—Father Johansson. The old priest’s involvement in drugs and murder had caused the upper echelons of the church to exorcise him posthumously from the church. It had been a very bad business at the time. However, their original memories of the father Johansson were good. He continued, “Tell me what you can and how you need my help.”

Amelia sucked in a breath and told him as much as she’d told Teal earlier that day. “Our home was burned to the ground. I need a place to stay where I can still be in the city but not in a high profile situation.”

There had been no appreciable change to the priest’s demeanor until Amelia completed her story—he stood up. “I know there’s a lot more you’re not telling me but from what I’ve heard it’s enough for me to offer you sanctuary if that’s the help you need of me.”

For the first time since her world began to spin out of control, she felt the tears trickle down her cheek. Standing, she walked over to him and threw her arms around the man who was willing to accept her half truths and them. “Thank you, Michael. I’m confident Olivia can deal with the problems we face and find a suitable solution.”

A serious expression crossed Michael’s face. “If she can’t and she doesn’t come back, what then?” He held her away to look closely at her tear stained cheeks and the expression in her eyes.

“I made a promise to her that I would live my life as fully as I could without her in it.” Her voice sounded strange to her ears.

“Then I shall pray she comes back safe and well to you, Amelia. We both know living without someone you love that much isn’t really living at all.”

Amelia frowned slightly as she pondered whether she heard a note of melancholy in Michael’s voice or did he merely understand her predicament. She didn’t have time to ask since the housekeeper knocked and entered the room. With an aloof manner, she asked how many there would be for dinner this evening.

The priest smiled gently at the older woman. “Two for dinner if that’s no problem, Mary.” The housekeeper shrugged and began to turn away then the priest spoke again with a little more emphasis. “Oh, Elizabeth, will you make up the room with the study attached in the north wing of the house. Amelia is going to stay with us for awhile.”

Amelia had to look away as she scratched the side of her head. The housekeepers expression at Michael’s request had been worthy of an Oscar performance.

When the woman left, Amelia looked at Michael. “Thank you Michael. I’ll get the few things I salvaged from our home out of my car. I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

Michael nodded. “You’d best bring the car around to the back of the church. Follow the driveway at the back of the house. You can park your car in the garage.”

Amelia once again thanked her friend. As she was about to leave the room, she asked, “If you wondered, she wasn’t the reason I left the church Michael. Although now I think the hand of God was in there somehow leading me to her. I just didn’t want you to think...”

The priest smiled. “I never thought it, nor do many of your old friends. Most were amazed that you finally made the decision while some of us thought you should have broken away a few years earlier. You have a wonderful caring spirit Amelia but you were spiritually independent and as we all know, you have to give yourself totally to our Lord for it to work out. I think now you’ve found out what that finally means.”

Amelia merely nodded as she left the room. On her way to the car, which was parked a block away, she contemplated what her old friend had said and how it all made sense. The enigma of her existence fit together. At last, she found the final piece to the puzzle that was her life—Olivia.

Much later, as she lay in the bed of the room made up for her, she closed her eyes and felt the tears trickle through the closed eyelids as she recalled the passionate lovemaking of the previous evening. Whatever else happened, she knew the broken circle of her life had completed and if it meant that she had only the memories of that one night with Olivia then she could cope. It would be difficult, but she’d spend the rest of her life living for the two of them.

Then, she pushed the thoughts of Olivia as far back into her mind as she could, and contemplated the strange instant messages she’d received and the odd phone call Teal had answered. Her initial thought had been that it had something to do with the old life Olivia had. As much as the word was abhorrent to her, she washed it around in her head—assassin. If it were an assassin out to murder Olivia, surely they would just do the deed and leave as unobtrusively as possible. The whole situation smacked of more, much more. Her thoughts turned to her discussion with David Tourney.



“Amelia, thank God! I’ve just received the report. Where’s Olivia?” his eyes looked behind her half expecting the reluctant ex-cop to be there too—she wasn’t.

“I’m fine, David, thanks for your concern. Olivia isn’t harmed, at least not in the fire.”

David motioned for her to sit as he glanced at the preliminary report about the fire—suspected arson. He knew Olivia had probably created more enemies than friends working undercover. However, as far as he knew, Olivia hadn’t hurt a fly. “You want to tell me what’s going on? I figure from the tone and what you haven’t said there’s more to this than meets the eye.”

Amelia hung her head. Olivia was going to freak when she found out that the warehouse was set alight she probably already knows and will be taking it as arson. “Someone is out to get her...us I think. Although from the brief contact I’ve had with the person, I think he is more interested in her. It looks like they will go to any lengths to intimidate her. The problem is Olivia doesn’t think it’s the government agency she worked for.”

With a rising of an eyebrow, David was impressed. He never figured that Olivia would share that part of her life with Amelia. He didn’t know the details, but he knew enough to know Olivia hadn’t been a desk jockey. “You know who this person is?”

Shaking her head, Amelia said, “No not exactly. Someone contacted me online earlier today from the home computer. Then, our office administrator, Teal, received a phone message.”

“What was the message?”

“Tell the nun to check out the news. It’s all about her. Teal said it was a man’s voice,” Amelia said reluctantly.

David gave her a shrewd glance. “And you say you think Olivia is the main target? That isn’t how I’d interpret the message.”

“Don’t you see David? If she finds this person she’ll do what she needs to do to make it right?”

“Hold on,” David said holding up his hand. “She’s out hunting this person?”

“Yes, she said it was the only way.” Amelia glanced at him and caught his concerned expression. “You think she should have brought it to you don’t you?”

David sighed heavily. “If it was anyone else then sure that’s what we do. Olivia isn’t just anyone else is she? I should know. I was here the last time she decided to go on a vengeance spree.”

Amelia swallowed hard. “It isn’t the same as before. I know all about that and I’m telling you that this is different. She just wants us to be safe so we can get on with our lives.”

“Don’t kid yourself, Amelia. Olivia Santos on a mission when people she cares about are in trouble will do anything. Remember I was involved when she went on a rampage the last time. It destroyed more than one life that day. I can still see Parker after Olivia went away. She thought like you—that Olivia would be back for her—it didn’t happen.” The pain and gritted determination of Parker to have Olivia back in her life replayed in his mind.

Amelia didn’t say anything for a few moments. “This is completely different,” she said in defiance. “Trust me David, it is way different.”

“Oh you mean that incident where she was supposed to die. If you ask me that was another cover up. I’ve seen how they operate. Remember, I was here when they took Olivia away. You know there was never a death certificate filled out.” He frowned, “Look this isn’t about the old stuff, what do you want me to do other than hope I’m not the one to have to hunt her down again.”

Amelia wanted to ask more about his thoughts on Parker but her own pressing problems with the fire and keeping a low profile took priority. “Will you be our go-between with the fire department, right now I don’t think I could cope with the questions? Besides I need to keep a low-profile and separate myself from the norm.”

David nodded. “Sounds like a good plan. I won’t have any of your folks coming around posting a missing persons report will I?”

“I’ve called them and told them I’m ok and I have to go out of town for a few weeks. I’ll call them once a week as I usually do so they won’t know there’s a problem until I have to go down that path.” Amelia sucked in her deep breath. The call to her parents had been especially hard as her mom waffled on about wedding plans.

“Sounds like you have everything under control. Where are you staying?”

“I’d rather keep that a secret David. The fewer people that know the safer it is for everyone. Even Olivia doesn’t know where I’m going to be. It’s better this way.”

David pulled at his lower lip then quietly commented, “That stuff with Parker. I should never have mentioned it. It was a long time ago and as you say, she’s dead.”

She stood up and was about to leave when she said, “Did Olivia mention that we were getting married?”

The look of happy surprise made Amelia smile. “I guess not. You should know she told me you were going to be the best man. I’ll call you tomorrow David.”

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It was typical of Olivia not to mention it to the man that was her brother’s partner. When the time came, she would divulge the details of the wedding. Until then, the one name that came to mind and sat there uncomfortably until finally an exhausted sleep claimed her—Parker.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Olivia rubbed her tired eyes as she watched the meager comings and goings from DOCO headquarters. Her vigilant watch over the mainly concealed entrance had been boring. Her trip to Dan's house had been a waste of time—he wasn't there. His cell number wasn't being answered either. The fact that the signal was turned off puzzled her more.

Then, as she stretched her lean body, she saw a car heading in the direction of the electronically controlled gates. Lying on the hard rocky surface, she picked up her powerful binoculars and watched as it came closer. It looked familiar. Moments later, she realized why—it was the same sedan she'd followed the day before.

The car slid noiselessly through the gates and headed for the underground parking garage. Her immediate thought was to go down there and face whoever that person was. She knew that Dan had been lying to her about DOCO's involvement. *But why did he lie?* No, she'd wait and when the car came out again, she'd follow and this time there would be no getting away. Settling in for what she hoped wasn't an interminable wait she watched and listened intently.

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Parker stole a quick glance at where she knew Olivia was hiding. She felt her heart swell in anticipation of the reunion with her lover. Parking her vehicle, she made her way to the secure door, swiped her card, and then she pressed her eye against the optical recognition monitor. Going through several other checkpoints she finally arrived at the director's door and knocked.

A deep voice from inside the room bellowed, "Enter."

Once inside the office, Parker sized up the small man who sat calmly behind a large metal framed desk. "I understand you wanted to speak with me," she said.

Large steel-rimmed spectacles turned in the woman's direction. A faint look of anger curled his lips before he replied. "This mission you're on, you've been using copious resources. To what end?"

Annoyed by the man's obvious lack of understanding, Parker narrowed her eyes. *Like all small men, he has a Napoleon complex.* "Exactly what are you implying?"

The man flipped a report in her direction and he waited for her to pick it up. "Is that the mission?"

Without picking it up, Parker's eyes scanned the folder. "Your predecessor made it clear that he wanted Olivia Santos back in DOCO. I'm merely following his orders—bring her back no matter how long it takes or how much it costs."

"You don't work for my predecessor. You work for me. Santos isn't required here anymore. We have younger operatives in the field that can do what we require of them without the backlash that woman caused. The operation is defunct. I've already given the termination instruction." He made eye contact with the woman and wished he hadn't.

"You and who else are going to stop me?" Parker let out a low, ominous, sarcastic laugh. "I'm well aware of my mission and will see it to its conclusion. A weak little man like you won't stop me."

"That's enough, Davis. The reason I have this job rather than my predecessor is that we want operatives that wish to be here not those that are forced. If you don't want to carry out my policies then you can go the way of Santos and leave. Is that strong enough for you?" There had been whispers for some time that the woman was off balance. He'd allowed her eccentricities

bearing in mind her exemplary record. It was up to her and if she decided to stay, the next trip she'd be taking was to the psyche department for an evaluation.

For several minutes, Parker sat and stared at the man. She hadn't liked him before his appointment as director and that was now reinforced a hundred fold. He had been out to get her for years. She was certain he was the person who would always alter her plans at the last moment. *Now, he wants to run roughshod over another mission. I will not let that happen.* "You don't have that authority."

"I do," the director said tapping his finger on a piece of paper. "It's as simple as a signature on this sheet of paper. Your call Davis."

Parker smiled at the man. He was clearly out to get her. *He's jealous of my abilities. I can run rings around him and he knows it.* She would not do his bidding but he didn't have to know that. "Of course I will abandon the mission."

The man smiled. "Good. I want you to make an appointment with Doctor Jerome for an evaluation. After such a stressful mission that, as far as you're concerned, had an unsatisfactory ending, I want to ensure you're up for your next assignment." When he saw her shift uncomfortably in her chair at the mention of the shrink, he added, "Actually, I'll make the call then you will be able to see the doctor immediately."

"No need," Parker said coldly. "I already have a shrink. As for the mission being unsatisfactory, I believe that's in the eye of the beholder. Now, if that's all, I have to sanitize the mission's command area."

The director's anger increased at the arrogance of the woman. "That's already taken care of. As we speak, the records are enroute to a secure destination. It is protocol Davis. I expect you to see Dr. Jerome. He will be waiting for you. I think that's all for now."

The mention of the area was already sanitized angered Parker but she couldn't let the man know. Besides, she had an alternate area that they knew nothing about. Putting on her best smile, Parker said, "Thank you Director, I'm sorry about earlier. You were right. The mission has been stressful. I'll gladly speak with the doctor." She blew out a breath. "I think it will do me good. Can it be tomorrow? I have an appointment with Dan, in a half hour."

The director hesitated then nodded. "Yes, tomorrow at nine be there or..." He left the sentence unfinished and picked up his phone effectively dismissing her.

As Parker turned away from the man, she felt her heart pounding in her chest as she seethed. The little man would get what's coming to him and she was the person to see that it happened. *Then, I'll be the next director.* But first, she had to finish her mission and she knew exactly where she had to go to accomplish that.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Parker slammed the door to her vehicle and once inside she screamed. “How dare he cut me off like that? Shit!” She blew out a breath—her plan was in shambles and it was the nun’s fault. “Why the hell did they have to make love,” she growled.

As a sudden chill came over her, she looked in the backseat—no one was there. She got out of the car, began inspecting it for tracking devices, and found none. Her eyes scanned the area noting that all the cameras were on her. “I need to get out of here,” she said as she got back in the vehicle. “I can’t wait any longer—it’s time to make myself known to Olivia.”

Exiting DOCO headquarters from an alternate gate, Parker guided her car to a place that was behind the area where Olivia was observing DOCO. Quietly opening and closing the door, she walked noiselessly toward the woman she loved. Putting her gun in her waistband, she made her way through the stand of trees and stopped when she saw Olivia lying on a rock.

With gun in hand, Parker moved forward and stopped when she reached Olivia’s position. “Hello O,” she said. As the woman turned around, she pulled something out of her jacket pocket.

The back of Olivia’s neck tingled as a voice she recognized but thought gone invaded her mind. Closing her eyes for a second, she allowed the sensation to invade her senses, and then turned slowly to look at the apparition in front of her. “It can’t be,” she whispered as her eyes bulged in astonishment and for a moment, forgot her vulnerable position.

Taking advantage of Olivia’s surprise, Parker was on her in an instant plunging a hypodermic needle into her arm rendering the woman helpless. “Sorry I had to do that to you but time is running out,” Parker said as she caressed Olivia’s cheek before she kissed her lips.

“You’re dead, it’s an illusion,” a dazed Olivia replied as she felt the drug entering her system.

“Did you really think I’d leave you, O? Now, you don’t have to put up with the nun—I’ve come back to you.”

Pulling the woman to a standing position, she wrapped her arm around her waist and began the trek back to her vehicle. “Once I get you home everything will be perfect.” She felt Olivia’s initial struggle to free herself and smiled when the woman began to move in step with her.

Olivia tried to remove the hold the person had on her but her muscles were like jelly and didn’t respond. *Parker is dead. This is an impersonator. It has to be.* With her lips forming the words that were barely discernable, she said, “You can’t do this. Who the hell are you anyway?”

A maniacal laugh floated through the air. “I’m the love of your life O. I’m taking back what belongs to me.” She kept pulling Olivia along with her. “We’re almost there. It won’t be long now.”

From deep inside, Olivia screamed, “No,”

Once she had Olivia secured in the backseat, Parker started the car and began her journey back to the safe house only she knew about. She glanced at Olivia and smiled. “I love you so much O. I’m sorry it has taken me so long to come back to you. I know your life was hell all these years. No more going to prostitutes or having to do the nun—I’m the only one who ever satisfied your needs.” She noticed that Olivia tried to speak. “The medicine will make you groggy. When we get home, I’ll give you something to take the edge off and you can have more control. Then, you can take me just as you did so many times before.”

Olivia’s brain functioned, but all her muscles now refused to move as she tried to look out of the window to track where the woman was taking her. Like the rest of her body, her eyes wouldn’t cooperate.

The dark sedan pulled to a stop in the parking area under the building where her safe house was. “We’re here, O,” she said as she opened the back door and pulled Olivia out. “The elevator will take us to our home.” Parker laughed. “We have the penthouse suite and our own elevator,” she said as she dragged Olivia toward the elevator.

Vaguely deciphering the whirling noise of an elevator, Olivia couldn’t make out much more. All she could think was—*who the hell is this woman?*

Once inside, Parker guided Olivia to the bedroom, undressed her, and then made her lay down on the bed. “I’ve been waiting for this moment for so long O, just as I know you have. Let me get you something to give you to have more control.” Parker stepped into the bathroom then returned with a glass of water. She produced two small white pills and put them into Olivia’s mouth. “Take this aspirin my love. It will make you feel better.”

After swallowing the pills, Olivia felt the muscles beginning to free themselves from the drug the woman injected in her. Her anger fueled the adrenalin rush she felt flowing through her veins yet she still had minimal control of her body. Her mind filled with what she was going to do to the woman who dared to impersonate Parker. *Did she really think I wouldn’t know she is some wacko stalker?* Then, the woman returned and placed another pill in her mouth and was about to place a glass to her lips when Olivia moved suddenly and swiped it away. The vessel hit the floor sending shards of glass and water everywhere.

“Feisty as always,” Parker said with a laugh. “You always knew how to turn me on.”

The pill in Olivia’s mouth was dissolving on her tongue and as her lips, which had been the last to numb, still refused to function, she was unable to spit out the offending substance. Now, as her eye sight cleared she saw the woman who was impersonating Parker clearly. As she did, she saw Parker’s face but knew it was plastic surgery. Appearances can change especially if you have the right people to work with. However, as she caught the eyes of the woman she realized it really was Parker. Then a feeling of total relaxation began to invade her senses and she really didn’t care, in fact, she was jubilant that Parker wasn’t dead. Reaching up, she tentatively stroked the woman’s cheek in wonder.

Once Olivia reached out for her, Parker took her clothes off, slid on the bed, and wrapped the woman in her arms. The first kiss was familiar and welcomed. Soon their bodies melded together as one as they indulged in the bliss that only true love can make you feel.

Parker indulged her fantasies and longing with a trail of bites from the neck and breasts to the inner thighs. Revealing in the aroma of Olivia’s musky scent, her tongue forged its way between willingly parted legs. This was her dream come true. There was no one who could come between them. Olivia was hers again and it would be forever this time. As she heard the strangled sound of Olivia’s orgasm begin, Parker smiled—Olivia was home at last.

Chapter Thirty

Amelia stretched and yawned as she peered around the comfortable room where she'd spent the last ten days. The rectory had been as safe a haven for her as she thought it might be. Other than the calls she received each day from Teal, and the ones she made to David to let him know she was ok Olivia hadn't contacted her. Other than that, her sole communication was with Father Michael and Elizabeth the housekeeper—the dour one word sentences from the older woman weren't all that communicative.

David told her there weren't any suspicious deaths that he recognized as something that Olivia had a hand in committing. That fact was in itself was a relief to everyone. However, as the days passed, Amelia felt the knot in her belly tighten. She had the weirdest feeling—Olivia was moving further and further away from her grasp.

Climbing out of the bed, she drew back the curtain and smiled. The view from the window looked onto the garden. The birds had begun their songs early that morning and as she watched them hop around the lawn and dash in and out of shrubbery, either courting or fighting, she smiled slightly. Life went on regardless, which was exactly what she had to do if Olivia never came back to her. Then her thoughts traveled to the only odd thing that had occurred since the eventful happenings of a week earlier. She'd lost all her private papers.

She was certain that she'd placed the satchel in the car with the other items she'd taken with her when she last left the warehouse. However, the next day when she'd gone to retrieve the rest of her belongings from her car, it wasn't there. Admittedly, the time had been hectic and fraught with stress. When she'd mentioned the loss of her passport and other documents that made up her identity and professional life David had been sympathetic but told her not to worry. Consequently, she requested copies of her birth certificate, cancelled her passport and asked for copies of her professional certificates. Thankfully, her driver's license, credit cards, and banking details had been in the purse she'd carried with her.

There was still that niggling though that she did place them in the car. That then begged the question, how did they disappear? It was yet another mystery in a long line of them since she'd met Olivia. Although some had been tragic and traumatic on a very personal level, she wouldn't have missed a second.

Half an hour later after a quick shower, she arrived at the dining table and wished Elizabeth and Michael good morning.

"Morning, Amelia, did you sleep well?" The priest beamed a smile at her as he lowered the morning newspaper.

With an answering smile, she nodded. "Like a baby. Is there anything interesting in the news?" She sat down and poured out a bowl of breakfast cereal as Elizabeth noisily deposited the coffee pot opposite her. She glanced up at the older woman and smiled. "Thanks, Elizabeth you make the best coffee in town."

With a sniff in the air, the old woman shook her head and left the room, but Amelia had seen the look of pride enter the aged eyes before she left.

Michael resisted the urge to tease his friend at her friendly overtures towards the not so friendly housekeeper. It had been one of Amelia's greatest assets. She never gave up on anyone no matter how nasty they were to her.

“The usual I’m afraid. More crime than we want and only the odd happy story delegated to the inner pages. Makes you wonder about people these days. Are we so sad that we enjoy other people’s misery over their triumphs?”

Amelia didn’t reply at first for she had often wondered the exact same thing and voiced it many times to Olivia. The woman had initially ignored the tentative question and then one day had surprisingly answered her.

Smiling, Amelia quoted Olivia word for word, as she spoke to the priest. “People become what we train them to become. In the west, we carnivorously consume anything the newshounds place in front of us as the truth. Along the way it becomes the norm and people become desensitized to the subject matter.”

Michael gave her a sharp look. “Is that your view these days Amelia?”

Was it? No, she still had that faith and no matter what happened she’d always hold that dear to her and hope things would change for the better. Besides, she’d seen it first hand with Olivia. If they really wanted to, they could change no matter what they’d done. “No, I still believe that humanity is alive and kicking in all of us even if some resort to evil primal practices.”

“I’m glad. I would have been severely disillusioned if my friend had become so cynical. Do I dare ask who that might be?”

“Olivia,” she said with a smile of fondness. “I was working on her though and if I get the chance to continue she’ll maybe change her mind.” Her smile didn’t reach the eyes this time as the thought of never seeing Olivia again—her stomach did nosedive.

Michael came around the table and placed a hand on her shoulder. “You’ll get the chance. We’ll both have faith.”

After breakfast, Amelia retired to the study that Michael had allocated her and she sighed as she looked at the folders of the cases she’d been working on. Then her cell phone beeped. It was Teal.

“Morning, Teal how are you today?”

“Great, never better. Amelia, as we’re not exactly open for business right now, do you mind if I go to Brazil with Phil. She has a job there that will take three weeks and ...”

“Hey, go enjoy yourself and bring me back a present. You know I love those piñatas.”

Teal chuckled. “I’m not going to Mexico, but for you ok. Look, I went by the office today and we have mail. I should have known better than not to check it since last Thursday. Anyway, it’s mostly general stuff but there’s a package for Olivia from a law firm. It’s marked urgent and I figured, as you’re her partner, you can open it.”

Amelia frowned. “Oh, I don’t know. Personal mail for Olivia marked urgent...I’m not into opening her mail, Teal.”

“Well, let’s have coffee as usual, your turn to chose the spot. I’ll bring it along and you can keep it for her.”

They’d agreed to meet most days, and share mail and any business problems of closing the office. However, they never met in the same place twice and so far, they hadn’t felt watched or uncomfortable. “Ok, I’ll see you at ten-thirty. Do you remember the coffee shop we used to haunt in college?”

“How could I forget?” Teal giggled as she recalled the dingy place they’d spent more time in than their dorm room.

“Meet you there then, Teal, bye.”

Amelia smiled. It was going to be interesting to see the old place again where there were many good memories.

Chapter Thirty-one

Amelia sat alone at a table in one of her and Teal's old college haunts. Teal had just left on her way to buy new clothes for her trip away with Phil. Amelia felt a little better after seeing her good friend and sharing some old memories of their times in the coffee shop. As she gazed around at the customers and staff it was like being in a time bubble. The staff still sported the same uniform they had almost twenty years earlier. Black shirt and trousers or skirt with a white full length apron. It had always amazed her that in this college area they'd even bothered to make the effort.

Once she and Teal had gotten to know each other, the small woman teased her mercilessly. She told Amelia that the only reason she spent time there was because it appeared like familiar territory since the wait staff was dressed in black and white too. She'd acknowledged the teasing and probably some place deep inside her psyche she probably did feel more comfortable—black and white were her colors at least back then. Over the years and the professional career path she'd taken, the wearing of conservative clothes as opposed to the habit had been more functional for the patients she treated.

The more she wandered down memory lane the more she fingered the manila packet was addressed to Olivia that Teal had given her. It was marked urgent and was from a local law office—Bennington, Smith and Aldrich. In light of their current circumstances, her urge to open it burned at the core of her ethic of not opening other people's mail.

A young man with a goatee and pale blue eyes that stared at her expectantly arrived at her side. "Can I get you anything else?"

Blinking rapidly, she looked up at the man who seemed taller than the building. "Just the check please."

The young man smiled slightly and wandered off to the counter to prepare the check. As he did, Amelia pondered the envelope in her hand and made a decision. Her fingers adroitly tore open the seal and she removed several papers. The top one a short letter of explanation from Rachel Aldrich, the lawyer who had sent the information. As she read the note, her eyes flew open. It clearly stated Dan Estevez had generated information for Olivia's eyes only. That statement had Amelia second guessing her decision to read her partner's mail—but she read on. In the event that the man didn't contact his lawyer after a week's time, the lawyer's instructions were to send the information to Olivia.

Just as Amelia was about to flick over the papers, the young man arrived back at her table and placed the check in front of her.

With an apologetic smile, Amelia said, "Hey look, I'm sorry about this. Can you bring me another espresso and delicious blueberry muffin?"

The man nonchalantly nodded and picked up the check and left as he muttered, "Women never can make up their minds." His comment brought a smile to Amelia's lips that changed quickly to astonishment as she began to read the information.

Fifteen minutes later, with her coffee growing cold and the muffin untouched, Amelia tried to digest what she had gleaned from the notes. It didn't make sense and yet at the same time it was all perfectly clear. *Didn't David and I speak about her only a few days ago?* "No it can't be," she finally whispered.

Trying to compose her mind and fit the pieces of the puzzle together, she knew she needed to have a plan of action. She also needed to figure out who she could trust enough with the sensitive information without drawing them into the situation—there was no one she could think of immediately.

Collecting the papers and replacing them in the envelope, she stood up and walked towards the door only to realize that she hadn't paid the bill. She went to the cashier and paid the bill complete with a generous tip for the young man. As she left the café, she saw the happy expression on the young man's face when he saw his tip—it was more than the bill.

Sitting in her car, Amelia drew out her cell phone and dialed Olivia's number. It went as she expected to voice mail—she had hoped to hear Olivia's voice. She said, "Mysteries of the universe. Look, I know you said we couldn't do more than the code but you need to know something. Parker isn't dead! In fact, she's the one causing you all the trouble. Dan left a detailed report of her activities over the past few years including when you were working at DOCO. Call me."

Cradling the phone to her breast Amelia wondered if she'd done the right thing and then nodded—she had. Then, as she tapped her hand on the steering wheel, she thought of what to do and dialed another number. After speaking with several people, she finally connected to the person she needed to speak with about the information. "I know Parker Davis isn't dead. Dan Estevez has confirmed it."

Five minutes later, she was heading back to the rectory hoping that Olivia might call. As she drove around the alley to the driveway of the house, her cell phone beeped and she looked at the caller ID. Stopping the car dead in the middle of the drive she quickly flipped opened the phone and answered, "Mysteries of the Universe."

Chapter Thirty-two

Parker stretched, opened her eyes, and smiled. Olivia was back in her bed and they would be together forever. She let her eyes roam the naked body next to her and saw the familiar telltale signs of their love making. Hickies and bite marks dotted Olivia's body—she knew the same pattern was on her body. She watched as the palm of her hand barely touched a nipple causing it to grow and harden.

Just as she was about to nuzzle her lover's neck she heard, "Amelia, I love you."

It wasn't the first time she'd heard the words but they were becoming less frequent as the days stretched out. Four days earlier, she'd brought Olivia back to her safe house and drugged her with ecstasy. Their love making was phenomenal and grew even more intense when she added other drugs to the mix.

Sliding out of bed, she moved to a closet, pulled out a black doctor's bag and took a black case out. Unzipping the case, she looked over her choice of drugs. Heroin, morphine, ecstasy, codeine, Valium, LSD, and methamphetamine were the ones she favored. She also had a wide variety of psychotropic drugs at her disposal. She'd been giving Olivia intravenous shots of heroin and knew that it was only a matter of time before she was dependent on the drug. She also used ecstasy, rohypnol, and ketamine that gave Olivia an unquenchable appetite for sex.

Filling a syringe, she moved to the bed, tied a band around Olivia's upper arm, and injected ecstasy into her vein. "You'll forget the nun and her hold over you will be broken."

Parker watched as Olivia opened her eyes only to close them as the drug washed over her. When she opened them again, she grabbed Parker's arm. "What did you give me?" she slurred.

With a smile, Parker patted Olivia's hand and crawled into the bed. "It won't be long now my love," she whispered. In twenty minutes, she and Olivia would be making love again. "I can't wait to feel your tongue inside of me"

Olivia tried to fight the effects of the drug but soon her mind was closing down and her body wanted one thing—sex.

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For Olivia, time was subjective. When she looked at the clock radio that said two-fifteen, she didn't know it was day or night. She felt a body close to her and fought the urge to reach out and touch it. Drugs were controlling her body and it was so much easier to let them in than fight their effects.

Closing her eyes, Olivia tried to capture an image that kept coming to the forefront only to drift away before she could fully see it. *Amelia*. The name was so familiar and yet she couldn't remember why. When the person next to her stirred she instinctively closed her eyes. Deep within the recesses of her mind she knew that to survive, she had to play along with the game.

Parker woke and looked at the sleeping Olivia. The sex they shared earlier was the best yet and she wanted more. First, she needed to take a shower. By the time she was done, Olivia would be somewhat coherent and she too could clean up. Looking at the clock, she calculated that in an hour or so she needed to inject the next dose of heroin. *Hmm, maybe I'll wait a little bit longer and then she'll beg me for more. I'll be her savior.*

Humming, Parker headed for the bathroom only to stop and look back at Olivia. She rubbed her face, turned and went for the medical bag. "I'll give her a little more of my ecstasy cocaine mix. Then she'll be ready for me after her shower."

Keeping her eyes shut, Olivia felt the now familiar needle puncture her skin. She was losing all sense of time and somehow needed to regain control if she was to free herself of the revolving drug door. Once she heard the water running for the shower Olivia opened her eyes and willed her scattered brain to help her fight the effects of the drug. Unconsciously she moved to the opposite side of the bed, picked up the phone, and automatically dialed a number.

"Help me...please," Olivia said as she felt the darkness of the drug beginning to take control. "Help me."

Suddenly, she felt the phone pulled out of her grasp. Then, with a loud thud, the receiver was back in its cradle.

"Who were you talking to?" a different and colder voice asked.

Olivia tried to speak but she couldn't produce a sound. The only thing she could see was the naked woman standing by the bed. Her eyes fixed on the woman's body and she reached out and pulled it close. Savagely she began attacking the body as she felt her body cry out for sexual relief. Then everything went black and she was floating in a sea of sexual pleasure.

As her body reacted, Olivia opened her eyes and stared at Parker. Although her vision was blurry, she knew who was having sex with her. Parker always did make her body sing but this time she felt dizzy and nauseous. Pushing the other woman away, she clenched her teeth and screamed, "Where did you come from?"

Parker hid her fear behind a smile. Olivia was having a reaction to the drug mix and she needed to do something. The last thing she needed was to have an out of control Olivia on her hands. She reached out and fondled her lover's clit.

"Oh god, Parker, do that again," Olivia cried before she roughly pulled the woman to her. "You'll do as I say," she said before she nailed Parker's arms with her knees. "Eat me," she growled before lowering her body over the woman's face.

Parker complied with the request. It wasn't long before Olivia moved off of her and began crying uncontrollably. That was Parker's opening—she got up, retrieved the bag, and took out the case filled with pills. Sorting through them, she found what she was looking for and slid the small pink pill into Olivia's mouth under her tongue.

"This will make it all better," she whispered as she gently stroked Olivia's throat.

The taste of the pill was bitter and Olivia tried to spit it out but she had no strength for that—she complied. Soon she felt a blackness begin to wash over her as all thoughts faded.

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For several hours, Parker's eyes scanned different websites that dealt with the effects of the drugs she'd been using on Olivia. It was clear that the mixture she was using could have lethal effects. She reasoned that in the doses she administered that wouldn't happen. Right now, she needed to find which of the drugs would keep her lover under her control.

Underestimating Olivia's ability to fight the effects of the drugs, had allowed the woman to make a phone call. She'd see to it that it wouldn't happen again. Once Olivia was asleep, she handcuffed her to the bed before she took the phone out of the bedroom.

"We will be never be apart again, O," she whispered as she dragged a wet washcloth over Olivia's body.

Olivia felt the wetness run over her body and fought the urge to take the woman again. She kept her eyes closed and willed her mind to come up with a plan of escape. *I have to get back to Amelia*, she thought and her eyes flew open. “Amelia,” she said.

“She’s dead.”

With tears filling her eyes, Olivia said, “No she can’t be.”

“She died in the fire O, remember that? Tell me your pass code for your phone messages.”

“Eight-nine-four-three,” Olivia slurred. Closing her eyes, Olivia tried to remember a fire. The image of a burned out warehouse floated into view. Her eyes scanned the skeleton of the building looking for Amelia. “No she didn’t,” she whispered before she grabbed Parker and pulled her close. She roughly kissed the mouth that so tantalized her. She felt her heart racing as her body began to shiver and her agitation increase.

Parker let Olivia have her way when it came to what she craved. What she hadn’t expected was Olivia’s hands around her throat. “Stop,” she cried.

“No,” Olivia screamed as she poised a thumb over Parker’s hyoid bone and began to press down hard.

With a hand, Parker began pulling Olivia’s thumb away only to feel fingers jabbing inside her. “I like this game,” she choked out as the pressure on the hyoid continued.

Suddenly Olivia pulled her fingers out of Parker and glared at the woman. She felt her body begin to spiral out of control and it needed relief. “Give me more or I’ll kill you,” she growled before releasing her thumb’s pressure. Then, she began to cry, as her trembling grew more spasmodic. “I need it now,” she screamed before she hit Parker in the face.

Holding her bleeding nose, Parker said, “Let me go so I can get it for you.” Once released, she went to her stash of drugs, filled the syringe with cocaine, and smiled. “I’ll make it all better for you,” she purred as she slid the needle into an almost collapsed vein.

Olivia felt the drug wash over her. When Parker offered her two roofies, she readily took them—she liked how they made her feel.

When fifteen minutes passed and Olivia was in her drugged haze, Parker snuggled up to her. “Make love to me O,” she whispered.

“God, Parker, I love you so much,” slurred Olivia before she began grabbing for a breast.

Parker picked up Olivia’s cell entered the code and listened to Olivia’s messages. When she heard the nun warning about her being alive, she smiled. “Wait till you see what I have in store for you nun.”

Bringing up a voice file, she opened the one that she had previously created. She dialed the nun’s number and let the recording speak for her. “Darker than night.” There was a pause before the recording said, “Amelia meet me at 6223 Morgan Street. I’m in the penthouse and I’m in big trouble.” Then the connection ended.

Parker laughed. “Take my bait little Miss Nun. Once you’re out of the way, O will belong to me forever.”

Chapter Thirty-three

Laughing Parker put the finishing touches on her disguise. When she looked at herself in the mirror a peal of laughter echoed around the bedroom—she looked exactly like the nun.

Hearing the sound, Olivia lifted her head and looked at the woman. She rubbed her eyes trying to make her vision clearer. “Amelia? You came.”

“Of course I came for you, Olivia,” the woman said.

Olivia shook her head. “I need your help. Watch out, Parker is here.”

With a chaste smile, Parker moved closer to Olivia. “I’m here to take you home.”

Closing her eyes, Olivia said, “Drugs she’s drugged me,” before she began shivering as a sharp pain stabbed her stomach. “I need more.”

Just then, Parker heard the doorbell. “Looks like she took the bait,” she said as she went to the door.

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Amelia drove like a bat out of hell to the building that Olivia had mentioned. She knew at core level that she really should have spoken to someone about where she was going but there hadn’t been time. Bottom line—Olivia was in trouble.

Haphazardly parking the car outside the Morgan street apartment building and ignoring the fact that it was a no parking zone, she ran up the steps and entered the tiny lobby area. As she continually jabbed at the elevator numbers, her stance becoming more irritated. When the mechanical doors eventually opened, she almost shoved the two old women, who were slowly leaving the elevator, aside in her need to get to Olivia.

A few minutes later, she was standing outside the door of the penthouse. For a second, reason overtook her. *What will I do if Olivia is really in trouble? I don’t have the means or knowledge to encounter danger full on.* Breathing in deeply, she took faith in her hands and knocked.

When the door opened, her eyes bulged. Placing a hand to her mouth, she whispered, “You look like me.”

“Ah, Dr. West, you’ve arrived. Now the party can begin.” Parker took hold of the nun’s arm and pulled her inside. She laughed as she ripped open her blouse. “All these are from O. She doesn’t love you anymore and told me to take care of you.”

Amelia struggled to come to terms with the woman dressed and made up to look like her—it didn’t feel real. What did feel real was the roughness of the hand that pulled her inside and locked the door. Shaking her head slightly, Amelia asked, “Parker, why?”

“All in good time, my dear Nun. First, we have to play.”

“Play? I don’t understand.” Amelia softly replied as her eyes roamed the visible bites across the woman’s breasts. Her stomach lurched at the thought of Olivia putting them there. The she gazed at the wild expression on the woman’s carefully made up features. *This isn’t going to be easy even with all my experience with psychotic patients.*

When she saw the nun look at her breasts, Parker pulled her pants down part way to reveal a multitude of marks. Parker laughed. “The game of *where oh where is my lover Olivia.*”

Amelia felt powerless in the face of the woman. When they’d first met, Amelia was certain the woman never showed an obsessive tendency. *If she did, how did I miss it?* “I don’t want to play games, Parker. I just want to see Olivia.”

Buttoning her pants, Parker grinned. “The question is...who is her lover? You can clearly see that she has placed her mark on me. What about you Nun? Has she marked you or merely

used you as my replacement?” With a laugh, Parker added, “Does she know how you taste? Of course she does. Guess what? She prefers mine to yours.” Parker continued to laugh. “She just told me so not ten minutes ago.”

Silently balking at the conversation, Amelia knew if she was to help Olivia then she had to show that this type of conversation didn’t faze her. She could do that—she had to do that. “I think we’ll let Olivia be the one to answer that, Parker.”

“She already has. I’ve shown you the proof,” Parker said as she fingered the syringe in her pocket. “She’s delicious but you wouldn’t know that would you?” Parker laughed. “How did it make you feel to know she preferred hookers to you?” She eyed the nun and nodded. “You don’t stand a chance. She wants real women not someone who couldn’t even make it in the nunnery,” she added as she moved closer to the woman.

Amelia seethed at the denouncements. However, she wisely decided that taking the bait would be playing right into the deranged woman’s hands. “As I said before, shall we let Olivia make that choice?”

“You’re becoming an irritant. What part of Olivia wants me and not you don’t you understand?” Parker grabbed the woman’s wrist and twisted it. “Do you really think you’re a match for me? I know more about Olivia than you ever will.” She squeezed harder as she pulled out the syringe. “Goodnight Nun,” she said as she started to stab the woman with the syringe.

Quickly, in a move that Olivia taught her, she kneed Parker in the groin and watched as the woman dropped the syringe and grunted hard in pain. Her gaze roamed the apartment until she saw a partially opened door, ran towards it, and went inside. She found a chair and wedged it against the door to prevent Parker from entering the room. Then her eyes scanned the rest of the room as she fumbled in her jacket for her cell phone to call for help. What she saw made her heart break. On a king-size bed that dominated the room, she saw a naked and incoherent Olivia. “Oh no, what has she done to you?” Amelia’s legs felt like jelly as she dropped down beside the bed and peered at the woman she loved.

Parker had underestimated the nun. She knew that not giving her opponent the proper respect was a scenario meant for disaster. Taking a gun from the desk drawer, Parker said, “The nun needs to be taught a lesson.” She quickly made her way to the other bedroom and silently opened the bathroom door.

Tears fell as Amelia gently wiped away the hair that covered Olivia’s face. She was unable to comprehend how someone could do that to another human being. Especially one you professed to love—she knew Parker did love Olivia but this wasn’t love. It wasn’t real love. “I’m here, Olivia. I’m going to take you home. I promise she won’t hurt you again.”

A voice barely above a whisper said, “You came to save me. You always were my guardian angel.”

When she heard the nun crying Parker opened the door to the bedroom. Pointing the gun in the nun’s direction, Parker laughed. “What a touching scene.” She wiggled the gun. “Get away from the bed and sit in that chair in the corner,” she ordered. She moved in on the woman as she moved toward the chair. She held out a pair of handcuffs. “Put one end around your wrist and the other end on the rung of the chair.”

When she’d completed the task, Amelia looked up into Parker’s eyes. She defiantly asked, “What happens next? You can’t seriously believe killing me in front of Olivia will make her want you.”

With a smile, Parker moved to the bed. “I’m here my love. Please make love with me.” When Olivia opened her eyes and saw Amelia standing there, she sighed. Putting the gun down,

Parker stripped off her clothes, grinned at the nun, and leaned in to kiss Olivia. It wasn't long before Parker and Olivia entwined in each other's arms. Once Olivia began sucking her nipple as her fingers found their way to a wet clit, Parker knew she had won. Olivia was hers for all time.

Amelia stared at the two women for a few moments then fought the sickness that caught in her throat at Parker's blatant act of making love with Olivia. *Does Olivia still have feelings for her? It sure looks like she doesn't seem to mind what Parker is doing to her.* Then her eyes furtively went around the room wondering what to do next. Her eyes caught the glint of the metal of the gun and without thinking too much, she dragged the chair over to the where she reached out and clasped the gun in her hands. In a trembling voice, she shouted, "Get off her, Parker—get off her now."

Parker let Olivia bring her to a climax before she let out a maniacal laugh that filled the room. Rolling off Olivia, Parker leaned in and began licking Olivia between her legs. She mumbled, "My god does she taste good." Eyeing the nun, she could see the repulsion on her face and she grinned before winking at the woman. Jamming a finger inside Olivia, she pulled it out and looked at the nun.

Amelia stood frozen in place as she watched Parker defile Olivia. She wanted to scream and tell the deranged woman to stop but all she could see was Olivia's face contorting in pleasure.

"You have the gun but I have this delectable taste of Olivia. Want to trade" Parker asked before she charged at Amelia. "Do you really think you can stop me," she screamed. "No one tells me what to do," she said as she lunged forward. "Especially not a nun!"

In that split second, Amelia had two choices. If she allowed Parker to retrieve the gun, God only knew what would happen next. Or, she could use the gun and warn the demented woman off. Closing her eyes fractionally, she squeezed the trigger and a bullet ricocheted off the bedpost into the wall. Parker stopped dead in her tracks and Olivia moved back in fear.

Laughing, Parker looked at the nun. "Give me a break will you? There's no way a nun will shoot me or anyone else—it's against their code." Holding out her hand, she said, "Now give me the gun before someone gets hurt."

The gun wavered in her hand but Amelia wouldn't let go of the weapon. "No! Release me and let Olivia go and then you can have the gun."

A crease formed between Parker's eyes. "I don't believe you. You're nothing but a lying slut. Olivia is staying with me and you...well you'll be dead." She lunged toward the nun with her hand outstretched for the gun.

Instinctively, Amelia pulled the trigger—closing her eyes as she did. Then she waited for Parker to wrench the gun from her hands and kill her—it didn't happen. With one eye open, she peered at the scene and saw Parker on the ground with blood oozing from a wound to the head. "Oh my God, I've killed her."

Olivia stared at the scene going on around her. It was occurring in a fog, which she thought odd since she was on a bed. In the recesses of her conscious mind, she heard the altercation of two familiar voices and then the sound of a gunshot. She wailed, "No."

Parker couldn't believe that the nun shot her. Now, she was fading in and out of consciousness and knew death was near. When the nun knelt down and felt for her pulse she said, "You're a nun. They don't kill people."

Softly Amelia replied, "Don't you see, Parker, I'm not a nun and the code I live by now is keeping the woman I love safe. You of all people should have understood that."

Parker whispered, "I'll never..." before falling into unconsciousness.

Amelia whispered, "I know." And she clutched the lifeless hand in hers and sent up a silent pray for God to take care of Parker. Then her attention caught the sound of the door crashing open had her rushing to Olivia. She was still clutching the gun in a protective stance when two men entered the room.

The two men who entered the bedroom with their weapons drawn, quickly scanned the room. "Mason, check her vitals." The taller of the two men nodded to the squat man who did his bidding. "Doctor West?"

Bewildered, Amelia nodded. "Who are you?"

The man frowned as he saw the state of the woman on the bed beside the doctor. "I believe you asked for our help. We'll take it from here. It's our mess and we know how to clean up."

"You're not taking her away from me," Amelia blurted. "I'll look after her." Amelia's eyes caught the man's as she held Olivia's head cradled into her breast.

The squat man from his couching position said, "Doesn't look like she'll make it. I'll get her in the chopper for all the good it'll do. He flung Parker over his shoulder in complete disregard for her injuries. Amelia watched in amazement, as the stocky man seemed to carry Parker with ease.

The tall man turned to Amelia and fixed his eyes on Olivia. "It would be best if our people take care of Ms. Santos. We do have the experience and she's one of ours."

"No. That's where you're wrong. She isn't yours. She belongs with me now and I'll take care of her," Amelia said with determination.

For a second, it looked as if the man was going to argue—he didn't. "As you pointed out correctly, Doctor West, she isn't one of ours. Good luck," he said before he vacated the room.

Tears flooded Amelia's eyes as she cradled Olivia close to her. "It's going to be ok now, Olivia. I promise you. They won't ever come for you ever again."

Epilogue

Amelia walked briskly from the hospital towards the visitors' parking lot. Her mind dragged unwillingly into a dark time—a time she had worked hard at depositing in the recesses of her memory where they belonged. It hadn't been an easy time after Olivia's traumatic days in the hands of her ex-lover Parker. The worse thing was, if she had been personally less involved she would have seen the signs of the break-down and mental despair that had invoked the final showdown with the woman. Her thoughts drifted to her partner and a slight frown puckered her forehead. It had been an interesting twenty months since the Parker incident.

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The first six months had been traumatic and difficult. When she'd regained composure in Parker's apartment, she called a discreet friend at one of the local hospitals and arranged for an ambulance to come for Olivia. After a week, Amelia had no choice but to contact DOCO. They readily agreed to help Olivia in overcoming her addiction to the potent mixture of drugs that Parker administered. They also arranged for immediate psychiatric care for Olivia. Consequently, Olivia spent the next six months in an undisclosed medical facility.

The DOCO psychiatrist advised Amelia that it would be best for Olivia's recovery if she didn't have any physical contact—she reluctantly agreed. Their only contact was brief phone calls and letters—internet access was nonexistent. The doctor advised her that when Olivia was ready, she would make the decision to go home. Amelia had to keep pushing down the fear that perhaps Olivia might never want to come home—she'd seen it happen in her practice.

Amelia relied heavily on her faith during that time. She also took her own advice and sought out help for her trauma and guilt over the incident. Parker had been right about one thing—it wasn't in her creed to kill. Each time she saw the prone body of Parker in her dreams, it would eat into her soul. The therapy had helped, but a part of her would never let it go—not totally—perhaps never.

Then one day, she received the phone call from Olivia to say she was ready to come home. The day before the scheduled time for picking up her partner, an operative of DOCO turned up at her office for an impromptu meeting. When she met the man, she recognized him immediately—he'd been one of her patients.

"I don't understand," she said as the stark reality of Olivia's world became crystal clear. DOCO's people had the ability to infiltrate anything everything. "I take it this isn't a consultation," she said as she glared at the man.

The man shrugged then shook his head. "My boss thought it would be better if you talked with someone who was familiar."

Amelia didn't move. It was clear that DOCO used her and that realization made her feel dirty and in need of a shower. "Your boss was wrong. What can I do for you...Mr. Lewis...or is that another fabrication?"

"Lewis is good. Before you pick up Santos tomorrow we have a few ground rules." He looked her straight in the eye and saw the distaste cross her pale features—he wasn't phased.

With a barely audible whisper, Amelia said, "Please go on."

The man looked around and as he did it reminded Amelia of Olivia's actions everywhere she went, would she do that the rest of her life —probably. "Can we speak someplace more private than the reception area...your office perhaps?"

"My office!" Amelia exclaimed. "You've got to be kidding. How secure is that Lewis? I'm sure your people have bugged that along with everywhere else I've been. I don't feel safe anywhere not even in my own home. You can speak here. What difference will it make? It looks like there's only you and me here but we both know differently. Don't we."

The man bent his head slightly.

"You have orders for me?" Amelia's expression was blank but the arms folded across her chest indicated her pent up anger.

He held out a file as he began to speak. "This is the rehab file on Olivia at least the pertinent things you're going to have to deal with. Of course, it's the general physical file and only a skeleton image of her mental state. The details are confidential for many reasons."

Amelia blew out a breath. "This is unethical. I'm not her doctor. Did she agree to this information being shared with me?"

"Operative Santos has no rights. She gave them up willingly years ago."

"She left your organization. By doing so it ended any contract she had with your organization."

"When you asked for our help Doctor you invoked those contractual terms again." He thrust the file still in his hand, toward her. "You can take it to help with her on-going recovery or you can wing it—your choice."

Reluctantly, Amelia took the file—she would ask Olivia's permission before she read anything. "Is that all?"

A sneer crossed the man's face causing his moustache to curl menacingly. "As we knew she would be Santos is resilient. Still, there are unfocused memories she's trying to remember. We cannot allow that to happen."

Amelia, confused by the man's comment, creased her forehead. The last information the DOCO psychiatrist gave her indicated Olivia had no memories of the event. Now, it would seem that memories were trying to surface. From a professional standpoint, that was encouraging. "If she knows what happened then she can deal with it and then let it all go," Amelia said. "Why is DOCO suggesting that shouldn't happen?" Personally, she wished that her partner never had to live those nightmares again. "I don't understand the logic of that. It goes against all good psychiatric methods."

The man ignored Amelia's questions. "We want you to encourage her not to remember. Your close relationship with Santos will be helpful in making sure she never remembers. Surely you don't want Santos to relive what happened."

Amelia's cheeks colored slightly at the man's comment about her relationship with Olivia. "My personal opinion has no bearing on what the proper treatment should be. If remembering helps Olivia to move on then I have an ethical responsibility to help her do just that."

The man shook his head. "Not this time Doctor. As I said, you asked for our help and as with everything in life, there are strings attached. I need you to confirm that you will do this or..."

Glaring at the man, Amelia asked, “Or what?” All she wanted was Olivia back and if it meant she had to deal with the devil once more, she would.

“We’ll take steps to have Santos committed indefinitely.”

“You can’t do that?”

Lewis gave a tiny smile as he turned to go.

“Wait!”

Lewis turned around and looked at her but didn’t speak.

Amelia drew in a heavy breath. “If I do this will you stay out of our lives for good?”

“You made a deal with us, Doctor West. I suggest you live up to your part,” he replied coldly.

“One more thing,” Amelia said before the man could leave. “Was it just you who came to my office for treatment?” Amelia still felt the sting of DOCO using her to get to Olivia.

For a second the man didn’t answer. Amelia was ready to press the point, when he said, “There were several but one in particular. It won’t take a great leap for you to know who it was. DOCO came through for you on the Santos matter Doctor, we expect restitution.” Amelia watched as the man left as she shook from head to toe.

Finally, Amelia sank down onto one of the chairs in the reception area and felt hot tears sting her cheeks. “Is this ever going to be over?” she brokenly whispered. Burying her head in her hands she cried for Olivia and herself—it would be the only time she allowed herself that emotion. She had to be strong—wallowing in tears wouldn’t help them move on. As she felt her normal composure righting itself, she frowned as she wondered just how hard keeping the truth from Olivia was going to be. It occurred to her that by what the man said or didn’t say there was the clear innuendo about the immensity of what had happened. She was certain that the implications were far reaching and she had the feeling that it wasn’t over—not by a long shot.

Pulling out the appointment diary on Teal’s desk, she flipped through the last three months of her appointments prior to Olivia’s kidnapping. Then it dawned on her who Parker had been—it couldn’t be anyone else—Mary Christian—a chill washed over her. The horror she felt at Parker’s confidence and arrogance made her retch. She had been so convincing. Wasn’t that the truth of it anyway? Parker was delusional. It would have been easy for her to let go and become the Mary persona. A small part of her was glad that Parker was no longer in the equation. If she were still alive, there would be the possibility that her obsessive stalking of Olivia would resurface—they would never be free. It was the only thing that made sense—in a bizarre way, she could justify murdering one of God’s children.

She and Olivia were going to start again much as they both had when events had conspired against them in the early days of their meeting. She had to hold onto that knowledge if she were to maintain any sort of sanity. She closed her eyes and sent a prayer to heaven that she would have the strength and wisdom to do just that.

The following day when she arrived to pick up her partner, there was a sense of trepidation that things would never be the same again—how could they be? A miracle happened when Olivia captured her gaze and simply smiled. The chasm of the months apart hadn’t changed a thing.

Olivia pulled her in for a heartfelt hug and whispered, “I love you, and I’ve missed you. You and I are never going to be apart again.”

The doctors had concurred on one thing—Olivia’s strength of character would ensure that she had kicked drug addiction for good. As with most professionals, they wouldn’t issue a cast iron guarantee. Addiction to the drugs, especially the ones that Parker injected, had a way of pulling a person back into their grip.

It appeared that the warning she’d been given was premature. Olivia had few if any memories of that time. In fact, a lot of what she went through over the month prior to the incident were washed away like a soothing balm. From outward appearances, they were unlikely ever to resurface. However, there had been a price to pay. Since Olivia had lapses in her concentration, it was deemed unsafe for her to continue in her profession. Instead, she hired a couple of young people and actually relished the challenge of training them. Olivia stayed home more often and that helped to heal the wounds of their separation.

There had been one time in particular when her promise to the DOCO people actually came to fruition.

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Olivia was pacing the floor of her office gnashing her teeth. She knew that the love she and Amelia shared would help her through any challenge. “Will that be enough?”

A quiet voice asked from the doorway, “Will what be enough?”

With a haunted look, Olivia looked at Amelia. “I don’t know what’s happening to me. My mind keeps flashing on images that I don’t understand.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“I don’t know if I can,” Olivia said as she looked away. “There’s a thread loose that I can’t seem to break away from.” She turned her gaze to Amelia. “What happened to me?”

Amelia entered Olivia’s office and closed the door behind her. As she took the steps towards her partner, she felt her stomach pull into knots of tension. This was the one question she’d been dreading since the whole sorry mess erupted. “Why don’t you tell me what flashes you’ve been having?”

“I keep seeing someone from my past.”

Amelia perched on the side of the desk unable to sit because her own demons about that time wouldn’t allow her the calmness she knew that Olivia needed. “Anyone I know?”

Olivia bowed her head. “Parker...I see Parker.”

The room went deathly quiet. Amelia, using her professional façade, evenly replied, “Parker’s dead, Olivia. She died before this incident. Do you remember that?”

Anger blazed across Olivia’s face as her hands began to shake. “Don’t tell me that! Those quacks at rehab said the same thing! I know what I see and it’s Parker and I’m with her.”

“Ok, ok I promise not to psychoanalyze you.” Swallowing the bile that threatened to make her sick, she gently asked, “When you were with Parker in those memories were they of a good time or a bad one?”

Olivia held her head as pain returned and her body began to react in pleasure. Keeping her head buried she said, “Both.”

Amelia moved to touch the bowed head but pulled away in surprise when Olivia looked up and caught her gaze—it was a blank look—as if she were a stranger. “Perhaps because you meant so much to each other at one time it’s a way for your mind to cope with the situation you

were in. Our bodies shutdown sometimes at our weakest moments and we create something familiar to help get us through the pain.”

“Aren’t you listening to me, Amelia? I have these bits of memory that I have no reference for and that’s driving me crazy. I need to know what happened.” Olivia cried, “Please help me remember.”

For a few seconds Amelia felt split between her professional oath to help those in need and protecting Olivia from the DOCO threat. She knew that if she did solve the mysteries for Olivia the shock of the truth might destroy her lover. Uppermost in her mind was the fact that DOCO would make good on the threat and take Olivia away for good. She had no doubt that DOCO meant business. *What choice do I have?*

“I can’t help you remember. The doctors at the rehab told me that the drugs you were given had wiped that area of your memory for good.”

“Don’t give me that shit Amelia...I’m not as stupid as you and your shrink pals think I am. I can see Parker. It’s so real that I can feel myself reacting to her touch, to her lips, to her smile and I want to...” Olivia pounded the wall leaving a dent in the plaster. “I need to know what happened! Can’t you understand that? I’m living in a vacuum and I don’t know why. All I know is that it involves Parker in some way.”

Amelia felt the tears close to the surface. All she wanted to do was to hold Olivia and protect her from the memories. At the same time, if not knowing was destroying Olivia’s mind what right did she have to deny her that knowledge. *Shouldn’t she choose her destiny?* “If you found out that it was Parker who had kidnapped you and put you through the hell that you can vaguely see, would that help you?”

Olivia gritted her teeth and set her jaw. “Don’t go there, Amelia. Don’t try and put this off on someone who isn’t here to defend herself.”

“So you accept that Parker is dead?”

As her body tensed, Olivia closed her eyes and swallowed hard. “Why are you doing this to me? Why can’t you just tell me the truth about what happened.” Her body was reacting in the same way it had when she first went to rehab—she wanted relief and she knew what would help her.

Amelia saw the wild expression on Olivia’s face. It was the tell tale sign that she was craving drugs. With Olivia’s permission, she’d read the medical file and between them they’d countered this side of the addiction—at least she thought they had. With a heavy sigh, she reached for Olivia’s shaking hands, took them in her own, and held them tight. “Why do you think I know all the answers, Olivia?”

“Because I see you in the flashes too.”

With a tight smile, Amelia nodded. “And you think I was responsible for what you went through?”

“No, no, not you...well maybe I don’t know...that’s what I’m trying to tell you...I don’t know.”

“I understand that. Do you trust me, Olivia?”

In a moment of clarity, Olivia saw Amelia standing next to a bed in a strange room. She remembered trying to move her arm but couldn’t—a handcuff held her and there was a shot—yes a shot. “It was you,” she said. “You were there.”

A tear trickled down Amelia's cheek as she nodded. Taking Olivia's chin in her hands, she caught her gaze. "Do you trust me?"

The direct question made Olivia look at the woman she loved with new eyes. "Yeah, I guess I do," she said cautiously. "I did see you...I know that happened."

"Olivia, you think you know what happened, but you don't. I'm going to explain this to you once and only once because it's too painful for me to relive. Will you accept my version of the events as the truth and try and move on?"

Closing her eyes, Olivia said, "I need to know what happened. Maybe if you tell me then all the pieces that I see will come together."

"Ok, that's my girl." Amelia smiled bending slightly and tenderly placed a kiss on the full lips. "The mind plays tricks on us, Olivia. I know you understand that. The drugs this person gave you were powerful and had the ability to place you at their mercy. To compensate, you used the memory of Parker, someone you loved. I'm certain a part of you still loves her."

Amelia smiled gently at the frown that puckered her partner's brow. "It's ok, I understand. You have your old love and I have mine. Remember?" She winked and looked heavenward and the frown disappeared.

"The Parker image you see in your mixed up memories of that time is the old frustration you once had with her when you were together. If you think about it, it makes sense. You needed to insert an image of someone who could drug you and abuse you. She was the one person you felt had the power to love you and to betray you at the same time. Does this make any sense to you?"

Olivia listened to the story Amelia weaved and found it incredible. Parker betraying her didn't stack. *She loved me...she loved me too much.* "Go on."

Breathing in deeply, Amelia continued. "You called me, at least I think it was you and said you were in trouble and needed my help. I would do anything for you, Olivia, and I mean anything. I made the hardest decision of my life when I came to rescue you. To take a life to save us both I killed the person who was hurting you. I have to live with that the rest of my life and I will. Do you know why? It's because I have you to help me."

With a frown Olivia said, "That's all psychobabble, Amelia, and you know it. You killed someone to save me...give me a break." Olivia listened to herself talk and wondered who it was. She loved Amelia more than life itself yet she was attacking her. The look on her lover's face told her all she needed to know. Somehow, she needed to let the past, whatever version it was, go. She felt her body begin to shake—she knew what she needed—cocaine to take off the edge.

"Now you understand what I meant by the mind playing tricks. One thing I want you to know, that it isn't a trick. I love you and we'll work it out together, ok."

"Look, I'm sorry. I know you're only trying to help me and I seem to be taking my frustration out on you." Olivia moved toward Amelia and took her in her arms. "I love you," she whispered before she pulled back. "I need to go out for a little while. What do you say when I get back we have a nice intimate dinner?"

Amelia saw Olivia's shaking hands and knew what she was going out for—drugs. "Tell you what, why don't we both go for a walk. The fresh air will do us good and I'll buy you coffee. Then I'll hold you to that intimate dinner."

The smile Olivia gave Amelia stayed longer than it should. She needed a fix. "Sounds good to me. Give me a minute to go to the bathroom and we'll be on our way."

Amelia reached out and placed a hand on Olivia's forearm. "Please don't do it."

"Do what?" Olivia asked. When she saw the look on Amelia's face she growled, "We've had this discussion before Amelia. I told you I don't use drugs and I have no intention of starting them up again."

"Are you sure?"

Olivia snickered and said, "Since it seems that you don't trust me do you want to go with me? We can start our night off early and have a quickie in the bathroom if you'd like," she said belligerently.

"That won't be necessary, I'll explain to Teal we're going early. I'll see you in reception when you're ready." Amelia turned to go and was at the door when she turned around and quietly said, "I trust you-do you trust yourself?"

With a wave of her hand, Olivia said, "Don't be such a worry wart." She watched Amelia go out the door to the reception area before she dug deep into the inside pocket of her jacket and pulled out a small plastic bag that contained Valium. It wasn't the good stuff but it would take the edge off and that's all she needed. She closed her eyes—she needed a fix and no promise to Amelia could change that. But she would try for her lover. The words of one of the shrinks she had filled her mind. *You have to want to give them up for you not anyone else.* Perhaps that was true. All she knew was when her resolve is the lowest, Amelia who kept her grounded.

As she swallowed the drug, she allowed herself to relive the fragments of the memories that haunted her. Whatever happened sealed her to a life so different from the one she'd worn over the past twelve years. It was a second skin just like her leather jacket. Why did she even bother to try and make sense out of it? Amelia either couldn't or wouldn't help her find the answers. One thing she found out was that Amelia had been there at the end—she'd admitted as much.

That begged the question, had Amelia been there at the beginning? Had Amelia experienced any of the horrors that someone had inflicted on her? As that thought permeated her brain, she felt her stomach churn. *Can that be why she was so reticent to talk about it? Why is she so afraid to share that information?* Shaking her head at her own dumb thoughts, she knew the answer to that one.

"No way would she admit anyone had defiled her because she knows how I'd react. I'd want to kill the bastard that harmed her. Oh shit," she said in sudden realization. "Here I am and it's all me, me, me, and she's so damn calm and collected. What did she say earlier? She killed the person who did this to me?" Her face turned ashen as she pondered how she would feel if it were true.

"Absolutely shattered to the core. I'd want to die. If I brought her into the gutter that I've wallowed in for years it would be the worst thing I've done in my life. It pales in comparison to taking revenge for my brother's murder. She means that much to me."

Her words seemed to echo off the walls of the empty room. She came to a decision that she would stick by for the rest of her life. At that moment, she knew she was going to make a new life for them both and become a better person. Her hand reached for the small plastic bag that still contained valium and threw the contents into the toilet bowl before flushing it away—it was a start.

Going out to the reception area, she saw Amelia and said, "Come on beautiful, let's go to Starbucks and you can have one of those fancy coffees you like so well."

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The journey home for Amelia had been quiet. It was well after the normal rush hour and it allowed her to reflect on the months after Olivia had finally accepted that what was in the past had to remain there or they couldn't move on.

Another memory of that time came to mind, as another bombshell hit them. This time it was a pleasant one. Dan Estevez had made another request of Olivia—if he were missing or presumed dead he wanted her to be the guardian of his twin six year old daughters. Apparently, their mother had died in a car accident earlier in the year and he had no relatives that he felt could take on the responsibility. Knowing what she did about DOCO agents, Amelia was surprised that the man had a family.

Amelia had initially been worried about Olivia's reaction to the news in a letter from the lawyer that rested on the kitchen table between them.

Finally, Amelia asked, "Did you know that Dan had family?"

"Yeah, he told me that not too long ago. He wasn't cut out to live for the organization. He wanted a family and was going to leave DOCO so he could spend more time with them."

"Like you," Amelia said with a smile.

Looking suspiciously at Amelia for any undercurrent in her words and found none. "There was a time when I was the epitome of what DOCO stands for—until I met you—because of you and your faith and values I want it all too."

Taking a deep breath at the quiet confession she wanted to add she was no saint, Amelia instead replied, "Will you accept Dan's wishes, and become guardian to his kids?"

Quietly Olivia said, "Yes on one condition."

Raising her eyebrows Amelia asked, "Condition?"

"Yes you become their guardian too. I can't think of a better role model than you." Olivia replied her tone even but her blue eyes pierced Amelia's eyes with the intensity of their feeling.

For a second, Amelia wanted to explain that Olivia's faith was misguided she was not innocent—she'd taken a life. In many ways, the same blood was on their hands in for they both were protecting someone they loved. Then she reached an inner goal of her own, she let the guilt go. She counseled Olivia to let the past go—now, she had to do the same. She knew that neither one of them would be able to completely forget. Occasions would arrive that would affect them in different parts of their lives. They would go forward together, and that's all anyone could ask for in this life. God would be her judge and jury when the time came for her wrongs on this Earth.

"Hey, look, if that's too much, I understand," Olivia said after what she thought was a long silence from her usually gregarious partner.

Amelia stood up, walked around to Olivia, bent her head, and kissed away the frown that formed on her features. "Thank you. I'd be delighted to take care of children with you. I couldn't think of a better role model than you either."

Olivia's cheeks stained red at the compliment—for a second like a child herself and that made it all ok. Then, quickly to mask her embarrassment, she said, "Well that takes care of that problem then."

Amelia said, "What problem?"

“If they’re living with us and we end up adopting them your folks will have grandchildren. Right?”

All Amelia could do was smile as she hugged Olivia. “I love you.”

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Once Olivia accepted the guardianship, she knew she needed to have a home for them. While Olivia recovered in the hospital, Amelia stayed with her parents. Once Olivia left rehab, she too moved into the home. A month later, the twins arrived and the two women still didn’t have a home of their own. It was comfortable and natural for them to live in the rambling home so they never felt the urgency to find another place to live. Once the girls arrived, they too became entrenched in the lifestyle of West family.

Amelia’s mother joked that it brought the house back to life and it did. The permanent arrival of the twins, Daniella and Florentina Estevez, added to the love that enveloped them all. It also helped Olivia and Amelia in overcoming the burden of guilt and trauma they had about the past.

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Stopping at a light, Amelia smiled. It was exactly a year ago that they shared vows in front of their family and closest friends. Afterwards, everyone joined them in a celebration of their joining in the gardens of the home they all shared. The main theme of the event was love, laughter, and kids.

Amelia stood next to her friend, Teal as she watched a smiling Olivia dance with several of the kids on a makeshift dance floor. “I never thought I’d see her this relaxed again,” Amelia said.

“It’s all thanks to you, your folks and the girls,” Teal said as she squeezed her friend’s hand. “You know, it’s about time you two got together. We all saw it.”

“Saw what,” Amelia said with a smile.

“That you two were crazy about each other and didn’t have the sense to say anything.”

“It wasn’t the right time.”

“Timing is everything,” Teal said. “Phil and I are going to have a baby,” she whispered.

“What...oh, Teal, that is wonderful.”

“We figured if the Big O can do it so can we.”

They were both smiling when David Tourney, Olivia’s old police friend approached them. “Olivia looks like the woman I knew way back when she was a rookie.” He put an arm around Amelia’s shoulders. “There aren’t any more shadows under her eyes,” he added. “For a long time her face looked haunted but now she seems at peace and happy. Thanks for bringing her back to us.”

Amelia looked at Olivia and knew that David’s words were true. *This must be what she was like before Parker came into her life.* She hugged the man and said, “Thanks. Your words mean the world to me.” She sighed before she kissed his cheek. “I intend on keeping her that way.”

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Amelia smiled as she pressed the gate opener on the dashboard and the metal gates swung open. Shortly afterwards, the house came into Amelia’s vision and she parked the vehicle under the carport by the side of the garage. The impromptu visit for a consultation at the hospital meant that she was later than expected. A few minutes later, she entered the house, stopped, and tilted her head—silence. All she heard was the ticking of the grandfather clock.

Since the twins had arrived on the scene, the only time it was quiet was when they were in bed. Glancing at the clock, she frowned. It was only six-thirty they were usually getting their baths before someone, usually her dad, read them a story. Noise was a prerequisite.

Proceeding down the hall, she looked around the main house—no one. After checking the kitchen, she headed for the annex where she and Olivia had their on-suite bedroom with a private sitting room and tiny galley kitchen. No one was in the sitting room and usually that's where she and Olivia and the twins watched cartoons or read books—no one. Dropping her briefcase by the side of a long sofa, she headed for the bedroom. Opening the door, she could smell the scent of candles burning, which reflected in the ambient atmosphere of the dimly lit room. Her eyebrows rose and she smiled. "Hey, anyone home?"

The bathroom door opened and a dark head popped out. "Hi, I thought you got lost. The candles are almost burnt out." A wicked smile accompanied the aggrieved tone. Olivia, dressed in a flimsy robe headed towards Amelia and wrapped long arms around her. For a few moments, they were lost in a kiss that said everything.

With a bemused look on her face, Amelia replied, "I'll be late more often if this is the welcome I get."

"Are you implying that I only do this when you're late?" Olivia grinned and kissed the throat close to her lips.

"No, not at all. What have you done with everyone? It's like a ghost town in the main house." Amelia reached up and pushed away the errant strands of dark hair that obscured her view of Olivia's expressive eyes.

Chuckling, Olivia said, "Your parents have taken the girls to the beach house for the weekend. They left at lunchtime, which is when I came home and," she opened the bathroom door wider and Amelia gasped at the number of candles filling the small room. "I plan to pamper my best girl with a bath the likes of which she's never experienced before and then ..."

Amelia's breath held in her throat as she asked, "Then?"

"Then you and I are going to go out to dinner at the swankiest place in town, followed by dancing until you drop and when you do, it will be into my arms and in our bed. That's where I plan on spending most of the weekend...showing you how much I love you." Olivia eyes captured Amelia's as they watched the changing expressions. The more she said the sexier they became. It was a facet she'd discovered in wonder the more and more intimate they became over the past year.

Finally finding her voice, Amelia, with tears shimmering in her eyes, softly replied, "I only got you a card. We said..." she didn't have time to finish the sentence as lips captured hers and silenced any words.

Olivia finally released Amelia as she whispered, "Oh no my love, I've got you, what more could I want. Besides, there isn't a present in the world that could come close to you in the flesh." She nuzzled Amelia's neck. "Why are you late anyway?"

Amelia, lost in the sensually awareness of the body close to hers, had to concentrate hard on the question. She closed her eyes as she recalled the meeting at the hospital that had her set her memories into overtime.

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"Doctor West, thank you for coming. I know it's a great imposition..."

Amelia grinned and waved a hand. “Not a problem Doctor Greenly it isn’t an imposition. I owe Simon a huge favor. How can I help?” Simon Lawrence had helped her with Olivia after she shot Parker. She owed him a great debt.

The young intern grinned. “We as you know take on the odd charity case from the local community.” At her nod, he continued and gave her a file. “About a month ago a woman in her mid-thirties was brought to us. It seems that a car drove up to the front entrance of St Clair, and deposited a woman on their doorstep. She is suffering severe memory loss. We didn’t appreciate how much of a memory loss it was until we agreed to help. Consequently, she doesn’t have any memory of anything except for a waking up on the steps of that church downtown. We’ve tried hypnosis and all the usual techniques but nothing. Doctor Lawrence wondered if you might know of anything else we can try. From the x-rays we’ve taken, he’s not sure anyone can help the woman. There’s extensive damage to the frontal lobe.”

Amelia began to speed read the file as they walked along.

They went through the third set of swing doors since he began his explanation and then the young man stopped beside a glass window overlooking a small sitting room. There were three people inside—an old man, a woman in nurse’s uniform and then another figure seated with their back to the window and facing the wall.

“That’s her. We call her Clair.” The man laughed. “Fitting don’t you think?”

Amelia ignored the man’s comment and concentrated on the woman sitting alone. As if the woman knew they were talking about her, she turned and faced them. Amelia’s hand went to her mouth to repress a scream.

“Are you ok, Doctor West? You look like you’ve seen a ghost. Do you know this woman?” the young man asked anxiously.

Amelia managed to gain her composure as she quietly replied, “No I don’t know her.” Yet, as she looked at the woman, she noticed the scar on the forehead and eyes that bore into her soul.

“Ok,” the young man said as he opened the door to the room and Amelia reluctantly entered. He motioned the nurse over and said, “Take Mr. Rigby to his room.” He turned to the patient. “Clair, this is Doctor West. She might be able to help bring back your memories.”

Amelia closed her eyes briefly. *If only you knew.* Her silent thoughts didn’t stop her offering her hand to the woman she had known as Parker Davis. “Hello Clair.” *No this can’t be...this isn’t happening.*

The woman looked up refusing to make eye contact. “Hello.”

Amelia gestured to the chair opposite Clair. “Do you mind if I sit and speak with you for a few minutes?”

Closing her eyes, Clair said, “I suppose.”

Amelia sat and carefully watched the woman. She showed no immediate recognition of her. “Doctor Greenly tells me that you can’t remember things. Do you mind if I ask you what your oldest memory is?”

Clair sat passively. “I don’t know.”

Gently Amelia asked, “Ok, do you know how you got that scar on your forehead? It doesn’t look that old.” As she spoke her stomach churned—she knew exactly when, where and why.

Reaching up and touching her forehead, Clair began rubbing the scar. “The pain is so intense that I scream out for help. I overheard the doctors say I must have had a lobotomy.” She focused her eyes on the doctor. “Why would anyone want to do that to me?”

Amelia’s fist clenched for a second at the woman’s plea for understanding. She had a good idea why—to create a blank slate. A lobotomy is generally through the eye and not the temple area but from what she knew about DOCO, she wouldn’t be surprised that they would use such an antiquated remedy. It seemed like the typical bulldozer style of that agency. *I’ll have to remember to look at the x-ray closely to see if the damage is from a bullet or surgery.*

“Perhaps you were injured and had to have work done. I’m sure the databases of the hospitals in the country can be checked and we might find out who you are.” They had already checked according to the notes she’d read. She knew if it were DOCO’s doing, there would be paper trail.

Clair closed her eyes as a single tear coursed down her cheek. “I don’t understand. Whoever did this to me must have a cruel streak in them.” She opened her eyes and glared at Amelia. “How can anyone justify taking away a person’s memories? How they must have hated me.”

The words ran rings in Amelia’s head as she tried to remain relaxed and professional when inside she wanted to get away from this woman and all the bad memories it invoked. “I don’t think someone did that on purpose Clair. Perhaps it was necessary to save your life.”

Clutching at the front of her hospital gown, Clair shook her head. “No one saved my life. They destroyed it,” she said in agitation. “Whoever did this to me is evil...pure evil. For all I know I have a family somewhere that misses me and I can’t remember them. Do you have any idea of how frustrating that is?”

The more Amelia listened the less she heard Parker’s voice and more of the new personality called Clair. Yet, she heard the intonation of the persona named Mary Christian. In her professional opinion, there was no deception in the woman’s body language. Since she was duped before, she wasn’t certain it wasn’t all another elaborate hoax. She’d wait for any telltale signs during the conversation.

“Perhaps in time someone will come and claim you Clair. I’m sure the police are doing everything they can to find out where you came from. If we can’t help you regain your memories in the short term, what would you like to do in the future?”

For a brief second, Clair saw a fleeting look cross the doctor’s face. “How can I answer that? I don’t know what my skills are or what my expertise is. For all I know I was a doctor, a waitress, or maybe I worked for the government. Don’t you understand, without my memories I don’t have a future.”

Amelia smiled slightly. “Clair, that’s one of the interesting things about your case. You have the opportunity to reinvent yourself. With a positive approach, you can have a wonderful future.”

The woman grabbed her head and screamed. “The pain, make the pain stop!” Then she glared at Amelia. “You made this happen.” Agitated and clutching her head, Clair began rocking in her chair.

Amelia couldn’t mask her shock as she instinctively moved backward in her chair. *Is this all a lie? Is Clair the persona Parker is hiding behind once again? Is this Mary Christian all over again? I’ve got to get out of here.* Then she glanced at the young doctor who she knew was watching the session from behind the glass window and motioned for him to join her. “Clair is in a great deal of pain. I think she needs her meds.”

“I’ll be right back,” the doctor said before he walked briskly out of the room.

“Clair, Doctor Greenly will be back with your meds. That should help you with the pain.” A part of her actually felt guilt and sadness for the crumpled woman in front of her. Until she thought of Olivia and the crimes Parker had committed against her wife, and her stance hardened again.

Clair lifted her head. “They won’t help,” she said. “I would be better off dead. I can’t stand the pain.”

“The pain will ease Clair. That’s something we can help you with it just takes time to find the right drugs for you. I’ll leave you in peace. It’s obviously very distressing at the moment for you to talk.”

“You asked earlier what I wanted to do in the future,” Clair whispered. “I want to hunt down the person responsible for the pain,” she said looking directly at Amelia.

Breathing in deeply, Amelia calmly replied, “Have you wondered perhaps if you were responsible?”

“No one should make themselves judge and jury. It doesn’t matter who was responsible. Only God can make the final judgment.”

Reaching over and taking the hands that trembled in the lap of the hospital gown, Amelia compassionately said, “Then have faith Clair. Have faith that there is a wonderful future out there for you.”

Clair went silent as she stared at the ceiling and mumbled incoherently. Finally, she said, “My faith in God is strong. Maybe I did something with the church. When the priest came for a visit I knew all the prayers and automatically crossed myself.”

“Maybe that’s your new calling Clair.” Amelia heard the door open and saw a nurse enter. “Here’s the nurse with your meds. It was nice to speak with you Clair.” Amelia stood up and took one last look at the woman that had almost destroyed her life and the life of the woman she loved. This now completed the cycle of Parker—it was over.

“Please don’t go. You’re the only person I’ve spoken with that seems to care about me. They’re all men and they haven’t a clue about what I’m feeling.”

The plea sent a shiver down Amelia’s back—she really didn’t want to get involved. It would only increase the possibility that Parker in the guise of Clair might step back into her life. If she let that happen, there was the chance that the woman might see Olivia again. There was no way she would let her partner go through that trauma again. As it was, Olivia didn’t realize Parker had committed those terrible acts upon her mind and body. Turning back, she nodded. “I’ll speak with the doctors I’m sure that can be remedied.”

“Why are you abandoning me? Have I said or done something to offend you? Clair closed her eyes as tears began streaming down her cheeks. “I’m so alone. It’s like I’m lost and everywhere I look all I see is nothingness,” she sobbed. “Why has God forsaken me? What did I ever do to deserve this?”

Amelia didn’t know if it was the mention of God or the fact that her own heartfelt pity that prompted her to return to the woman and kneel beside her. As she looked at the woman, she saw Parker but at the same time, she wondered if her paranoia was irrational since the woman hadn’t done or said anything that suggested she had any memories of events of the past.

“God never forsakes anyone Clair. Please remember that. Look, I know right now things seem hopeless but trust me it will change.” She glanced at the nurse hovering to give Clair her meds. Amelia held out her hand and took the pills and the nurse left the room. “Take your meds Clair. You’ll feel better when the pain has eased.”

Clair accepted the white pills and swallowed them without water. “The pain never leaves me. I can’t help but think God is punishing me for something I did. If only I could remember then I could make amends.” She took hold of the doctor’s hand and squeezed it. “Will you help me?”

“I will help you Clair that’s a promise.” In a single sentence, had she sealed her fate and that of Olivia by saying she would help? No, she hadn’t. She knew how she could help and it would have to be enough for the woman. Her faith and nature wouldn’t allow her to abandon a soul in distress, but Olivia’s peace of mind and hers were paramount.

“Thank you, thank you,” Clair said as tears of happiness fell down her cheeks. “I knew when you walked in the door you would be the one to help me.” In one fluid motion, she wrapped her arms around the woman kneeling by her side.

The hold was claustrophobic and it took of all of Amelia’s inner strength not to drag herself away immediately in horror. Finally, finding a voice she replied, “Ok Clair, I think it’s time you had some rest.” She gently disengaged from the seemingly grateful woman and stood up.

“God has finally shined down on me and sent me an angel. Thank you.”

Amelia refused to comment and gave her a small smile. “Goodbye Clair. Things will begin to change soon for the better I’m sure of it.” This time she didn’t wait for the woman to say any more. She left the room as fast as she could without it looking like she was rushing out of there.

When she heard the door close, Clair let a minuscule smile cross her lips.

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Doctor Greenly, waiting by the door, eagerly awaited Amelia’s reaction. “Do you think you can help?”

Swallowing hard, Amelia fought the urge to throw up. All she wanted to do was go home, take Olivia in her arms, and feel the reassurance that she was safe and loved. “I personally can’t... I’m sorry.” She took the x-ray and held it up to the light. The damage to the brain was evident. The bullet was no longer apparent and she noted there seemed to be some type of attempt to repair the damage. She was certain it was DOCO’s doing.

“After looking at her x-rays, I concur with the general findings. There’s so much damage that I can’t see how she’ll ever recover the memories of her past. I’m surprised her brain is functioning at all. Is there any information on how she was injured?”

Doctor Greenly shook his head. “There’s nothing concrete to go on but we all agree that someone did brain surgery on her.”

Amelia felt somewhat relieved. “. Rather than trying to dredge up old memories that perhaps are better off lost forever it’s a fresh start for her. There’s something to be said about starting over with a fresh slate.”

“But, Doctor West, you’ve done some wonderful work in this area...” The young man stopped as he saw the closed look on the woman’s face.

“I’ll talk with Simon tomorrow and we can discuss a more practical approach to her returning into society,” Amelia finally said before she turned away.

Eagerly the young man said, “Does that mean you will take the case on?”

“Not personally. However, I know a specialist in this area that will love the challenge. Let me talk to her and she’ll contact Simon with the arrangements. She’s out of state and has generous church funding.”

Amelia looked at her wristwatch and said, “I have to be someplace and I’m already late.” She left the hospital and the only good thing out of seeing Parker Davis again was that the guilt that had been tormenting her since the shooting had disappeared—she hadn’t killed Parker.

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“Hey, are you ok? You look pale. If you’re too tired we can do this...” a slim finger stopped Olivia’s words as a gentle kiss accompanied the action.

“I’m good. Wonderful in fact and that’s all because of you. I was late because...well it really doesn’t matter...it’s not important. Come on lover show me exactly what it’s like to be pampered.” Amelia knew then she would always keep the secret from Olivia and she gladly would carry the burden of the truth.

Olivia took Amelia’s hand and pulled her inside the bathroom before deftly removing her clothes. The only two people that mattered were together and as one game ended, another began—their life together.

Coming Soon: Wolf at the Door

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

Reparations (working title)

Final Story (title TBA)

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

Erin O'Reilly resides 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 publish 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 all is done, the characters make an impact on the storyline the story is better for it her.



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