



Act I

Remy quickly called for the paramedics to send up a kit to him and a backboard. Shaking his hands from the cold, he grabbed the bag and dropped it near his side. As he was opening the bag, he turned to the paramedic who had stuck his head up through the hatch. "Call down and get them to bring the fire trucks as close to the lighthouse as they can. They're going to need a large ladder to bring her down." Somehow on the narrow platform they were going to have to load the injured woman on the board to get her down safely. Quickly, he grabbed a blanket from the kit and wrapped it around Natalia's lower body and then turned to look back to Natalia with an apologetic look.

Olivia could feel the shivers from her partner as the younger woman lay in her arms. Keeping pressure on the wound with one hand, she felt around her with one hand and located the blanket Natalia had been using earlier. She wrapped it around her partner's shoulders, then returned to apply pressure, and noted the wince on the younger woman's face. Continuing to gently brush her fingers along Natalia's face, Olivia wished that somehow she could do more. "Hold on, sweetheart. You're going to be okay. See. Remy's here taking good care of you."

Checking the injured woman's pulse again, Remy noted that it was racing. He slid the blood pressure cuff onto the woman's upper arm and pumped it up. Quickly placing the stethoscope into place, he checked the younger woman's vitals. Her blood pressure was up but that was to be expected, but what worried him more were the wheezes and wet sounds coming from Natalia's lungs. Grabbing a pair of gloves and donning them, he turned and spoke to her, "Natalia, I need to cut your shirt to see where the bullet entered." He looked up and saw her nod. He picked up the scissors and cut a fast line up the front of the shirt, parting it to get a look at the wound. It took actually ordering Olivia to remove her hand before he could check as the older woman's focus had been so intent on her partner.

With the blood coating the younger woman's upper chest, it was difficult at first to see the bullet entry in the poor light. He grabbed a gauze sponge from the kit with one hand and quickly wiped away as much of the blood as he could, while taking over holding pressure. Swiftly, he lifted the gauze and dropped it to the side, grabbing another from the kit. The blood flow was sluggish but still steady. He directed Olivia to return to maintaining pressure on the wound as he turned and grabbed intravenous tubing and a bag of saline. Needing an extra hand, he looked over at Frank and Anna trying to get their attention.

"I need help," Remy called over to them.

Angrily, Anna ripped the mask covering the kidnapper's face, wanting to see who was responsible for causing her friends so much pain. "Oh, God." She reeled back on her haunches. She looked over at Frank, who was still staring over as Remy and Olivia took care of Natalia. She noted that he seemed in a state of shock, but she needed to get through to him. "Frank." No response. In a louder tone, she repeated, "Frank!"

"What?" he asked, still dazed as he turned toward the detective. He looked at her in confusion and then down at the fallen body between them. Then he really looked at the form, glancing up the torso to the revealed face. He started shaking his head, refusing to believe that the body lying on the promenade deck was his daughter. "No! No...this can't be real." Quickly, he went to see if he could find a pulse. Not finding one, he looked over at Anna in disbelief and then back to Marina. He felt sick to his stomach. *NO! It can't be. She's dead.* Oh God, what have I done?! Quickly, he turned and threw up over the side of the deck. Wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his coat, he turned and sat on the deck and stared at the body of his daughter. He didn't understand. She wasn't supposed to be here. *What was she doing here? Why was she here?*

Anna was becoming seriously worried about her boss; his skin color had turned ashen, as the snow coated his hair. Even though the cause was different, he was as just as much at risk right now of shock as Natalia. She heard Remy's call for help and looked over at him before quickly checking back at Frank, assessing his state of mind. There was nothing she could do for Marina. She thought for a moment. She needed to get Frank down off the promenade and into the care of the paramedics below before she could help with Remy.

"Remy, I'll be there in just a minute," Anna said as she made her way over to Frank.

Looking over at the detective, Remy asked, "Why?"

A glance down at the body, then at Frank and back at Remy, Anna mouthed, "It's Marina." She looked toward the ladder opening. "I need to get Frank downstairs now." She noted his surprised look then nod of acknowledgement before he turned his attention back to Natalia. As she looked back at her boss, she noted he still had his weapon in his hand with a near death-like grip on the hilt. Taking a plastic bag out of her jacket pocket, she moved over to him. "Frank, I need your gun."

Nothing.

She crouched down in front of him, waiting for him to acknowledge her. "Frank, I need to take your weapon."

He nodded absently and handed the gun to her.

Anna checked that the safety was engaged and then placed it in the bag, sealing it and placing it into her pocket. Standing, she held out her hand for Frank to take. When he took hold, she pulled him to his feet and then led him around the other side of the deck, and around the narrow edging of the hatch. "Watch your step," Anna said. She knew he was in the beginning stages of shock and not fully aware of his surroundings. Once he was through the hatch and down the stairs, she followed behind.

Catching the attention of the nearest paramedic, she sent the man up the stairs with the backboard and more supplies. Turning around, she spotted another paramedic. "I need you to take Chief Cooper outside and to an ambulance. He's going into shock."

"Yes, Ma'am," the paramedic responded.

"Has Lt. Andros arrived yet?" Anna asked.

"I don't think so. She wasn't out there when I came in."

"Okay. Thank you." Anna turned once she saw them leave the room and head upstairs. She sighed, and swallowed, though her throat felt like it was constricting. She took a couple deep breaths to center herself, and picked up her two-way radio. "Detective Li for Agent Mallet." She waited a moment for the man to respond.

"Agent Mallet. Go ahead," the man's voice came over the radio.

"I need you at the lighthouse now," Anna responded.

"On my way."

Anna turned back toward the hatch entrance; the drifting snow was falling through. She wanted to head back up and see if she could help Olivia but she knew the other woman wouldn't come back in until Natalia was safely secured in the backboard carriage and on her way down to the ambulance. Once she spoke with Mallet, she'd go back up and stay with Olivia. The heavy footsteps on the stairs alerted her to the agent's presence.

"What's going on? What happened?" Mallet asked.

"When Olivia got up to the deck, the kidnapper was trying to throw Natalia over the side rail. Olivia managed to stop it, but when the kidnapper made a further move against the two women, Frank shot her."

Mallet jerked his head back in surprise. "Her? Who was it?"

"Marina," Anna responded with anger still framing her tone.

"What?" Mallet reeled back slightly. He knew his ex-wife had been spiralling, but he didn't know she'd go this far. *Why had I not seen this?* He let out a ragged breath as he ran a gloved hand through his hair. He had just started reconnecting with his ex-wife since he had returned from overseas. He had loved her and been happy with her once. Now he wondered where things went all wrong for Marina. What could make her that desperate to kidnap someone and hold them hostage? As much as it pained him to put Marina's actions and subsequent death aside, a matter he'd have to deal with later, he knew that there was someone alive who needed their help. "What about Natalia?"

"Natalia was shot as well. The bullet went through Marina and hit Natalia. Remy and another paramedic are up there trying to stabilize her for transport."

"Olivia?" Mallet asked, concerned for the other woman.

"Holding on by a thread." Seeing Mallet's face grow more concerned, Anna continued, "No, she wasn't hit, but she finally got Natalia back and now..."

Mallet nodded. He knew all too well what that felt like; Dinah had been shot years ago after stepping in front of a bullet that a loan shark had meant for Mallet. He'd been beside himself.

"Look, I need you to try to keep Lt. Andros out of the lighthouse until we can remove Marina's body." Anna started to pace as she was working through her thoughts. "Once Natalia's securely down, I'll need another paramedic unit to come up with a body bag and take Marina down." She stopped and stood in front of Mallet. "I do not want it being leaked that Marina was the kidnapper, until we can notify all her family."

"Understood," Mallet responded. He blew out a long, low breath and then shook his head. He knew this would be difficult on Buzz and the rest of the Cooper and Lewis clans. "The fire trucks were just outside the lighthouse extending the ladder when I came in here."

"Good. Go on. I'm going to head upstairs and try to get Olivia to come on down," Anna said. She waited for the agent to leave before she headed back to the ladder and ascended through the hatch.

Doris stormed up the path heading toward the lighthouse, but was blocked by the police officer at the edge of the barricade. She debated the merits of just going around the officer but just as she was going to make an attempt she spotted Mallet heading out the door. "What's going on and why the hell does Frank look like someone shot his dog?"

"Short version: kidnapper shot and killed, Natalia also shot. Paramedics are with her," Mallet said. He carefully sidestepped the question regarding Frank, figuring the news about her friends would distract her attention.

Doris gasped. "Is she okay? Where's Olivia?"

"I don't know the details. Paramedics are stabilizing Natalia. Anna's up with Olivia," Mallet said as he held up his hand, trying to halt the mayor's barrage of questions. "Look, Anna's in charge of the case. When she's able, she will let you know what's going on, okay?"

"Look, just keep me in the loop. I have to eventually make statements to the press. I'll hold off as long as I can."

"Should you be doing that, given how close you are to the Spencer family?" Mallet half-heartedly challenged.

Doris glared at him. "Seriously, Mallet? I don't know too many in this town who aren't at least somehow attached to the Coopers or Spencers. This town is entirely too incestuous."

Mallet nodded, acknowledging the statement. "Come on, I need to go see if Eleni has arrived yet. We're not going to be doing any good out here." He directed Doris back out to the Search and Rescue tent. On second thought, he stopped a moment. "Natalia's going to be transferred to the hospital soon. Olivia's going to need a friend there."

"All right," Doris sighed, but realized that he was right. Pivoting, she turned and walked past the tent toward her car. She winced as she arrived at Olivia's car. Feeling inside her coat pocket, she ran her fingers over both sets of keys - her own and Olivia's. Looking back toward the lighthouse, she reasoned that Olivia would be going over in the ambulance. She fished her phone out of her pocket and sent a quick text to her friend: *Have your car. Meet at hospital.*

When the EMTs arrived at Cedars with Frank Cooper strapped to the stretcher and an oxygen mask affixed to his face, he was still conscious but barely responsive; he had an oxygen mask affixed to his face. The EMTs transferred Frank to an ER stretcher and then removed portable cardiac machine leads from his chest, connecting him instead to the department's machine. His rapid pulse was nearing an alarming rate.

Rick shone a light into each of Frank's eyes, noting the dilation of the pupils, then continued his initial assessment. He looked up at one of the first responders. "What happened?"

"From what we were told, he shot the kidnapper as she was trying to kill the victim, Ms. Rivera. He didn't know who it was at first because the person was masked."

"She?" Rick asked, startled. "Who?"

"Marina Cooper," the responder said.

"Oh, hell." Rick turned his attention back to the unresponsive form on the stretcher. He said a quick prayer for his friend before turning back to the responder. "Was there anyone else injured?"

The responder signed off on his report, handing it over to Dr. Bauer. "36 year old female, Natalia Rivera in route now. She was also hit, by accident."

"Marina?" Rick inquired, fearing the answer for his friend's sake.

"She was pronounced dead at the scene, Doc," the young man responded.

"Damn." Rick sighed heavily as he understood the cause of Frank's present predicament. He knew that an emotional shock like this was sometimes more difficult to treat. They could make sure he was stable, but the aftereffects would take a considerable while longer, and could easily affect his ability to heal, or lead to PTSD. Looking back at the responder, he gave his thanks before turning back to Frank.

After ordering blood work and vitals, Rick looked down at the chart then over at his friend and began a more thorough assessment.

Aware of where Olivia's attention was focused, Anna turned to the position of Marina's body. Taking one of the discarded blankets, she moved over and placed it over the body, shielding it.

Once the fire truck's ladder had been extended and secured against the side of the lighthouse to prevent it from shifting in the heavy winds, Anna turned to Olivia and placed an arm around the other woman's shoulder. "Olivia, come on," Anna urged her friend to move. "Natalia's going to be all right."

"But I -," Olivia started.

"They're going to get her down and into an ambulance." She turned the other woman until Olivia was facing her. Waiting until she had Olivia's attention she continued, "If you want to go with her, we need to go down now."

"I want...I need to be with her," Olivia responded as she looked over at Remy and the other paramedic. They'd covered Natalia's wound with layers of gauze dressings, then applied a band around her torso, keeping the dressing in place. They'd also started an IV of fluids running into her partner. She'd had to move back when they rolled her onto the backboard and strapped her in, and only then did she take a look around and saw the covered form. Not seeing the Chief, she turned back to Anna. "Where's Frank?"

"He's already gone down," Anna said, keeping her replies brief.

Nodding her head toward the body, Olivia asked, "Who?"

"Not now, Olivia." She tried to redirect Olivia's focus. "We need to get you downstairs and at the ambulance, ready for Natalia, so you can head to the hospital."

In no mood for deterrence, Olivia rounded on her. "Spit it out, Anna. I deserve to know who nearly killed my wife!"

Anna sighed and lowered her head for a moment. "Marina."

"What?!" Olivia said, seething and looking for an outlet. "Where is the bitch?"

"She's dead, Olivia," Anna said calmly. Again, she waited for her friend's attention to return to her. "Frank shot her when she lunged for you and Natalia."

It took a moment for Olivia to register what the detective had said. Then it sunk in. Frank had unknowingly shot and killed his own daughter. As much as the older man frequently annoyed her when it came to dealings with her family, he had been a friend, and she couldn't wish the kind of hell he was going to go through on anyone. Even though she was still angry with Marina for putting Natalia in danger, for nearly killing her, there was nothing she could do about that, so instead she returned her focus to Natalia.

The younger woman's pallor frightened her. *Oh, God.* Olivia sighed and swiped at the tears that started to streak down her cheek. *I know I don't talk to you much, or pray, really; that's more Natalia's thing. But please, can you help her now? I never thought I deserved someone that special in my life, but she's turned my life inside out, for the better. Natalia is my heart and soul. She makes life worth living.* Olivia glanced fondly at her partner. *She makes me smile.* Leaning over the younger woman, she gently brushed a few wayward hairs from her forehead before pressing a kiss there. "I love you. Never forget that."

Remy and the paramedic placed Natalia into the transport stretcher and ropes were connected to the stretcher to allow for a controlled transfer. Gently, the casing was lowered over the railing. Ropes were dropped to the ground. Rescue crews, as the ladder crew levered the stretcher down. As soon as it was all the way down, the Rescue crew unlatched the stretcher, and quickly transferred Natalia into a waiting ambulance.

Anna guided Olivia down the stairs and out to the ambulance where Olivia climbed in taking a seat on the bench inside. She noticed her friend reaching out and placing a hand on Natalia's arm, trying to maintain some contact with her partner and she whispered a prayer as the vehicle's doors were closed. She watched as the lights and sirens of the ambulance started. A pat to the back of the ambulance and Anna turned back to the lighthouse to await the next paramedic crew to follow her up the stairs to the deceased form of Marina Cooper.

The movements would be done as quickly as they were able and the body transferred to the hospital morgue via ambulance. This one, however, would have no lights or sirens.

"Agent Mallet, I was told to talk to you when I got here," Eleni said as she entered the tent, a portable forensics kit in one hand and a coffee in the other.

"Please tell me that coffee is for me?" Mallet almost whimpered as he caught the scent of the drink.

"Um, no. Sorry. The coffee at the precinct was cold and probably there since last night," Eleni said apologetically. "I needed a caffeine fix."

"Tell me about it." Mallet moved to transfer the kit to the ground, aware that there was no way Eleni was letting him hold her coffee. He relayed the information to her about what had happened at the top of the lighthouse, carefully editing out references to Marina being the kidnapper, at least until Anna had a chance to speak with her. "The ambulance is just taking Natalia to the hospital now."

"What happened to the kidnapper?" Eleni asked, but when she noticed Mallet, hedging. "Mallet?"

"The kidnapper is being transferred to the hospital morgue for examination," the agent responded as he looked around the tent, avoiding looking at the medical examiner's eyes.

"Look, why don't I bring you out to the site where Jonathan found the abandoned vehicle? You can get started on collecting evidence."

"Mallet, what's going on that you're not telling me?" Eleni asked. The man's evasiveness was starting to grate on her nerves. She had moved into his line of sight just as Detective Li entered the tent. Eleni sighed, hoping that her friend would let her know exactly what happened.

"Hi, Eleni," Anna said, addressing the other woman. "I need to talk to you privately. Can we talk in your car?"

"Yeah, sure. What's this about?" Eleni asked.

"Not here," Anna responded before turning to Mallet. "Can you go oversee the transfer of the kidnapper, please?" At Mallet's nod, Anna led Eleni out to the other woman's car.

Settling the other woman into the front passenger seat, she closed the door and went around to the driver's side, then turned to face her friend. Looking down at her hands then up at Eleni, she spoke softly, "Eleni, I'm sorry, but there's no good way to tell you this. Marina was the kidnapper responsible for holding Natalia."

"What?" Shaking her head in denial, Eleni looked at Anna beseechingly. "No, you have to be wrong." She looked down seeing the tremors in her hand. Quietly, she continued, "Please tell me you're wrong."

Anna reached over and covered Eleni's hand. "I'm so sorry. When she lunged at Natalia and Olivia up on the deck, trying to throw them over the railing, she was shot in the back. It went through her and hit Natalia. With Remy and Olivia helping Natalia, Frank and I checked the kidnapper."

"Frank? Where is he?" Eleni worriedly looked out through the windscreen, scanning across the groups of police and fire rescue crews, not seeing her ex-husband.

"I sent him to the hospital about twenty minutes or so ago," Anna replied.

Turning a confused glance at her friend, Eleni said, "I don't understand. Was he hurt?"

"No," Anna started. "He was starting to go into shock." Taking a deep breath, Anna continued. "Eleni, Frank was the one to shoot the kidnapper. With the mask on, he had no way of knowing it was Marina until I removed it."

"Oh, God, no," Eleni choked out. Recoiling back into her seat, Eleni turned facing the front of the car, looking out the window but not really seeing anything. She brought her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them.

Anna turned to look out at the scene playing out before her as various police and rescue crews exited and entered the lighthouse. Needing to make a decision, she looked back at Eleni and then out the window where Mallet stood at the entrance to the tent. Seeming to figure out a course of direction she turned to the other woman, "Eleni, if you can give me about ten minutes, I'll drive you over to the hospital."

For a long moment, there was no response and Anna wondered if the other woman had actually heard her.

"Evidence," Eleni spoke quietly and flatly. "I was supposed to get the evidence..." Her voice trailed off.

"Don't worry about that right now," Anna said reassuringly as she put her hand on Eleni's arm. "I'll make sure that everything is collected and sent to your office."

It wasn't until Eleni had felt the other woman's hand on her arm that she had even registered what Anna had said. "I need to get everything secured."

Turning so that she was fully focused on her friend, Anna brought her hand up to touch Eleni's face, bringing it to face her. "Stop. I will look after this, I promise." She watched her friend's face; it was as if the heart and head were having an internal argument. After a moment, she saw the woman's shoulders drop. "I'll speak with Mallet to get him and the officers to finish collecting the evidence gathered from the lighthouse, the supply house, and the van. Then I will drive you to the hospital."

Absently, Eleni tilted her head. "What about your car?"

Anna shook her head, not expecting the question, figuring that Eleni had much more to worry about than transportation. "I came with Frank and Mallet. Mallet and Remy can take the police truck back to the department when they're finished." Turning and placing her

hand on the door release, she noticed Mallet walking toward the car. Quickly, she turned back to face Eleni. "You'll be okay for a few minutes?" When she received a nod of assurance, she opened the car door and strode to Mallet and redirected him back to the tent.

Act II

The ambulance had barely finished pulling up to Cedars Emergency Department when the rear door was pushed open and the paramedics pushed the gurney out, the collapsible legs stretching out and locking into place. The paramedics had radioed through en-route, so they were bypassed Emergency, heading directly to the Operating Room theaters. Olivia quickly jumped down to the ground and followed them through the hospital doors, trying to keep the pace as the gurney was pushed through the corridors toward the OR, but was blocked from entering.

"Please, let me have a minute with her," Olivia pleaded.

"Just a minute while the surgical team is prepping. She's lost too much blood," one of the OR nurses responded, sympathetic, as she glanced at the chart, giving the women a modicum of privacy.

Pressing a kiss to her partner's forehead, Olivia spoke gently, "I love you, Natalia. Please fight to live. You have so much to live for...our children, me. I need you in my life." The tears that rolled over Olivia's lids this time were not brushed away as she felt the nurse's soft touch on her arm.

"I'm sorry. We need to go in now. Someone will be out to update you when we can. There's a family room just down the hall," the young nurse spoke.

"Thanks. I know where it is," Olivia said, her voice barely above a whisper as she watched the love of her life pass through the familiar corridors of the operating rooms. Try as she might, she didn't move much beyond the entrance. As time passed without any word from inside, she began to pace the hallway, getting more anxious.

"You're going to wear a path down this corridor at this rate," Doris said with some amusement, hoping that the incongruous statement would get her friend to stop her pacing.

She knew her friend was hurting but she was also aware that the stress Olivia had been under for weeks now was not good for her health.

It worked.

"Doris?" Olivia spoke, bewildered, as she stopped pacing and looked over at the other woman. After a brief moment, she continued, "That's really not that funny."

"I had to do something. I called your name three times and you didn't respond." Doris was concerned.

"Sorry," Olivia replied, running her hands over her face. "They've been in there forever and I don't know what's going on."

"Speaking of what's going on, what the hell happened up there up at the lighthouse?"

Olivia sighed and glanced over at her friend. "It all seemed to go so fast, but yet so slow at the same time. When I got up there, Marina was trying to force Natalia over the side of the railing."

"What?!" Doris responded, astounded. "Marina Cooper was behind all this? How?"

"Yes," Olivia seethed as she ran her fingers through her hair. Rolling her shoulders in an attempt to relieve the tension settling in her muscles, she looked over at Doris. "In a nutshell, Marina was trying to push Natalia over. She nearly did go over, but Anna and I managed to pull her to safety as Frank tried to apprehend the kidnapper. When she tried to make a run for us, Frank fired his weapon. He didn't know it was Marina until Anna took off the hooded mask. I didn't know either until Anna told me when we were back on the ground." She looked over to Doris who was trying to take it all in. "With everything going on up there, my only focus was on Natalia." Olivia's voice tapered off as she finished her story when the exhaustion of the day's events threatened to overwhelm her and she felt her knees give way.

"Shit." Doris quickly moved to put her arm around Olivia to guide her to the chairs against the wall. Looking up the hall toward the nursing desk, Doris called out for some help.

"I'm fine, Doris," Olivia said weakly, as she sat up in the chair.

"I'll be the judge of that," Rick said as he headed in their direction.

Doris looked between them and decided it was her cue to go find out about Natalia...or at least to get them to inform Olivia. Rolling her shoulders, she gave the other woman a mischievous grin and responded, "Okay, let me just go scare up some information."

"Doris," Olivia started, "Be nice."

"Where's the fun in that?" Doris quickly retorted. Upon seeing Olivia's raised eyebrow, she relented. "Okay, I won't scare the nurses, but I will remind them of a few facts."

"Doris?" Olivia questioned.

"Nice. I promise," Doris quipped as she headed down the corridor to the nurse's desk. Hazarding a glance over at Rick, she sighed. "Really, I'll be okay, once I know how Natalia is doing. Look, could you go check on Natalia before Doris gets herself into trouble?"

Rick smirked.

"Okay, so more trouble than usual."

"Stay here," Rick responded, "I'll send your cohort back over."

"Thanks, Rick." Olivia reclined in the chair, resting her head against the wall. She knew she'd have to call Ava to let her know what was going on, but until she knew more about Natalia's condition, there was no point in worrying her daughters unnecessarily.

When Doris returned down the hall, sufficiently chastened on the policy of confidentiality, she found Olivia lightly snoring. She smiled; the other woman certainly needed the rest. Digging out her phone, she texted Blake. *Need to talk with you. I'm at Cedars.*

'What? Are you hurt?' came the quick response.

'No. Here with Olivia. Natalia's in surgery. Olivia's resting at the moment,' Doris texted back and then waited a moment before adding another message. *'Who's there with you?'*

'Buzz, Dinah, Shayne, Henry, Josh, Beth, Vanessa, Reva & Colin. Why?'

Knowing that this wasn't news she could give via text message, she just sent a note, '*Will call you when I know more.*' It was a cryptic answer, but she wanted to wait until she was face to face.

"No!" Olivia woke with a jerk, startled out of the nightmare she'd been having. She could feel her heart racing and looked at her surroundings, not settling on any one thing but she recognized that puke green color of Cedar's walls all too easily. *Hospital...why?* She put her hand on her chest and while she knew her heart was beating fast, it wasn't with the piercing pain she'd felt when her heart stopped a couple years ago. Slowing down her breathing, she took a closer look at her surroundings, and it all came back to her with violent clarity. "Natalia?" she said, her voice sounding hoarse.

"She's still in the OR. Hang on, Rick told me to page him when you woke," Doris responded as she reached for her cell.

Rubbing her face with her hands in an effort to pull herself out of her exhaustive fog, she said, "How long have I been out?"

"About an hour. You looked like you needed it. By the looks of things, you could probably do with much more," Doris said sympathetically. "Let me just have Rick paged, then we'll know something soon."

"Thanks, Doris," Olivia responded as Doris headed up the hallway. The constant lack of proper sleep and take-away food, along with the drop in adrenaline was giving her a damn headache. She didn't know if a minute or twenty passed as she closed her eyes again, letting exhaustion overtake her.

Blake looked down at her cell phone with a quizzical expression. Well, that was odd, she thought to herself briefly before looking at the previous messages...Natalia...surgery. "Oh, crap," she said quietly and then realized that there were a few people around her that heard.

Josh immediately turned his head toward Blake. "Oh, crap, what?" he repeated.

"Doris is at the hospital with Olivia. Natalia's in surgery," Blake said softly. "Natalia must have been hit in the shooting." Quickly grabbing her coat, she hurried toward the exit.

"Blake, the roads are probably pretty hazardous out there," Josh responded, understanding the need to get to the hospital. "I've got the truck out there; it has better traction." Wrapping his coat around him, he grabbed his keys. "Did she mention anything about the girls?"

Blake glanced up at him and then realized he was referring to Olivia and Natalia's daughters. "Emma and Francesca? No...that's a good thing, right?"

"I hope so," he said gently. "What else did Doris say?"

"That's just it; not much. Said she'd call me back when she knew more," Blake said, still somewhat confounded, but wanting to be there for her friends.

Josh looked back over the small crowd that had gathered around them. "Anyone else coming?" He noticed Reva put her hand up, though he suspected she was coming more to support him. Reva and Olivia's frienemy dynamic was sometimes still a mystery to him. "Okay, let's get moving."

When Anna Li entered the Emergency Department of Cedars with Eleni Andros at her side, she flipped open her detective warrant card to the nurse at triage. "I need to see the physician treating Chief Frank Cooper."

"I'm sorry, Detective, I can't release that information," the nurse responded.

"Look, he's my ex-husband," Eleni added, her voice sounding full of worry. "Please. He was just brought in from a police incident."

"Okay, give me a minute to just check his file," the nurse responded and then got up to go check. When she returned, she looked somewhat apologetically. "Sorry, you're not listed as next of kin."

Glancing quickly over at Eleni, Anna then turned her attention back to the nurse. "Excuse me, Ms. Gillis, is it?" Anna spoke, taking note of the nurse's identification badge. "I get confidentiality, I do, but, I just need to speak with his doctor."

"Only his next of kin can have that information released," Ms. Gillis responded.

"And that would be?" Anna asked, getting frustrated. At this rate, she was going to have to scare up a judge for a release of information warrant, which she didn't want to have to do. "Let me guess, you can't tell me that either."

"Marina Cooper," Ms. Gillis responded, matter-of-factly.

Anna sighed. "She's dead. Who's his emergency contact?"

"Frank Cooper, Sr."

"Buzz," Eleni quietly responded to Anna's quizzical look. She was about to pull her cell phone from her purse when she saw Lillian Cooper coming up the hallway and she motioned for the older woman to come over.

"Hi, sweetheart. Come with me," Lillian said gently as she put her arm around Eleni's waist, guiding her through the triage doors.

"Thanks," Anna said to the triage nurse as she followed behind the other two women. Catching up with them, she asked Lillian, "How's he doing?"

Looking between both women, she paused briefly before continuing, as her own strong emotions and connections to the Cooper family were at the forefront. "Dr. Bauer is treating him for shock. His vitals are improving, but he has a fair bit left to go. And he hasn't yet become consciously aware of his surroundings."

"Can I go see him?" Eleni asked.

"Sure, sweetie," Lillian responded with a smile as she showed Eleni to Frank's room. "The nurses may ask you to leave the room while they're doing assessments, but otherwise, feel free to stay with him, hold his hand. He may start to come around, but I wouldn't worry if he doesn't for a while yet."

"Thanks," Eleni said and then she paused. "Lillian, do you know if Buzz has been called yet?"

Lillian shook her head. "I don't know. I only just came down when I heard Frank was admitted and I wanted to check his status before I talked with Buzz."

"Okay, with everything going on, he should know what happened," Eleni responded before entering the doors Lillian had indicated.

Anna had turned to head toward the elevator bank when she felt a hand holding her back. "Lillian?"

"What did happen out there?" she asked with trepidation.

Anna directed her over to the row of chairs against the wall, and motioned for the older woman to sit before she started. She held Lillian's hand as she relayed the incidents at the lighthouse then gathered her in her arms as the nurse broke down.

Olivia was startled again from her sleep as she felt the chair next to her stir. "How long this time?"

"About ten minutes. I needed some caffeine, so I just headed down to the cafeteria for a few minutes." Doris held up her large paper cup, then passed one over to Olivia.

"Tea?" Olivia questioned with a smirk as she smelled the beverage. Taking a sip of the tea, she then directed a surprised look over at the other woman. "Green tea with honey? Doris, have you been taking notes from Natalia?"

"It's not so bad. I actually like it, myself."

"Then how about you drink it and I have that coffee you have in your hands," Olivia remarked.

"Uh huh. No, you need some real rest and that won't happen with coffee."

"Now I know you've been talking with her," Olivia grouched, then let out a long sigh. "I wish I could sleep longer than a few hours at a time, but I keep waking up with nightmares. Every time I fall asleep, I see the kidnapper torturing Natalia and killing her, that nothing I can do would save her."

"She is safe now," Doris replied. "You did save her."

Olivia looked like she was having a hard time believing it was for real. "So, where is our illustrious Dr. Bauer?"

"Right here," Rick spoke and startled Olivia, who had not seen him approach from the other end of the corridor. Deciding to skip the preamble, which Olivia probably wouldn't pay much attention to anyway, he started, "Dr. Jordan was able to remove the bullet fragments from Natalia's chest. A couple of pieces had pierced her right lung, so they had to re-inflate it. She's also got a few broken ribs, and she has pneumonia - she's probably had that for a few days. They've given her some pretty strong antibiotics to start with. Dr. Jordan is almost finished with her, then they'll transfer her to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit."

"When can I see her?" Olivia asked, anxiously.

"Probably not for another hour or so. I'll make sure the nurses page you when Natalia can have family in to see her." Rick took another good look at Olivia, assessing her physical state. "Why don't you head over to the family room and get some sleep?"

"How come everyone's so concerned about my well being? Natalia's the one in surgery," Olivia said, a little frustrated.

Putting a hand on her friend's arm, Doris spoke gently, "Because we care about you as well." Then she quipped, "Besides, you're not going to do Natalia any good if you're a patient, too."

Olivia had to concede that point, but her rest would have to wait as the doors at the end of the corridor admitted Josh, Reva, Shayne, Beth and Blake.

Catching her partner's attention, Blake walked up and gave Doris a hug and sighed deeply, needing the selfish comfort it provided her. After a few moments, she turned her attention to Olivia.

"Hey, Olivia, how are you holding up?" Blake asked, then cringed as she realized how bad that probably sounded. "Sorry."

"As good as one might expect when the person who means the world to you is in surgery, after being kidnapped," Olivia responded dryly. Given this town, that sentiment actually had more merit than one might expect.

Phillip winced, as he entered the hallway, having heard his ex-wife's comment. He had left to go check on Ava and the girls but before he got there, he'd gotten a call from Beth that Natalia had been taken to the hospital and Olivia was with her. Deciding that he'd rather have more information when he talked to Ava, he had turned and headed back toward Cedars.

"Can anyone tell us what actually happened up there? All we had to go by was a police scanner," Blake asked. "No one is saying anything."

Olivia let out a deep sigh; she was really not up to reiterating some of the worst moments of her life. Feeling a tug on her sleeve, she turned to see Doris whisper, "Let me," and was immediately grateful. Resting her head against the wall, she watched as Doris lead them a short distance away and began to tell them about what had happened up at the lighthouse. Surreptitious glances her way every so often was unnerving, until she heard a rather loud, startled, "What?" in a strong male voice. She looked up to see Josh's ashen face; it wasn't a sight she ever particularly wanted to see again. Stubbornly, despite her exhaustion, she stood and made her way over to the small crowd gathered around Doris.

"Is all this true?" Josh asked, hoping against hope, that Marina hadn't been the one to kidnap Natalia, for his son's sake. But the brief flash of hatred he saw in Olivia's eyes before she schooled her face told him different. "Why?"

"I don't really know. When I got up there, she was ranting about Natalia and I taking our 'filthy' family away from Springfield." Olivia sighed. "I didn't know who it was - even though I knew it was a woman, the voice was muffled under the mask - until Detective Li told me once it was all over."

After a moment's silence, Phillip asked, "Does Frank know he shot his daughter?"

Anxiety and worry were chief among the feelings of the folks gathered at Company. The coffee pot had been refilled twice already as people milled about waiting for news. When the phone rang, there was dead silence as Buzz picked up the phone.

"Company, Buzz speaking."

"Buzz, this is Detective Li, could you come down to the hospital, please?"

Picking up on the official tone of the detective's voice, the elder Cooper felt as though time had stopped. With a family of cops, he had learned to realize that early on that official tone rarely meant anything good, and with family being police officers, it could just as easily mean they were injured. Plus, he reasoned, if a police officer died, the detectives would come in person.

"Can you give me any indication what this is about?" Buzz asked, trying to mentally prepare himself for meeting with the detective.

"Sorry, I'd really not like to do this over the phone," came the voice at the other end.

"Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Buzz, before you go, do you know where I can find Shayne Lewis? He's not at home and all I'm getting on his cell phone is his voicemail."

"He's here. Do you need him as well?" Buzz asked as he looked over at the man in question. This was giving him a really bad feeling.

"Yes, that would be good. Thank you."

"Okay, we'll be there as soon as we can," Buzz responded and then hung up the phone. After conferring with the remaining friends, they all decided to car pool in the larger vehicles.

By the time Remy and Mallet returned to the police station with all the evidence they'd gathered and stored in bins, the storm had gotten much worse, despite weather forecasts for it to have already passed.

"Whew, that's the last of the bins in. Now the fun starts with having to log all the items into Eleni's program," Remy remarked as he removed his parka, draping it over a nearby chair.

Shoving his own coat into a spare locker, Mallet turned around and asked, "You want me to go start the coffee pot?" The grateful look he got in reply was sufficient response. Reaching around to rub the back of his neck, Mallet still found it hard to believe that Marina could kidnap and nearly kill Natalia. He could understand her trying to kill what was thought to be Edmund - Edmund had been blackmailing her. But Natalia? He didn't understand what

had pushed Marina to harm Natalia. Shaking his head, he realized he perhaps he didn't know her as well as he thought he did.

"Right now, I'd be so grateful for caffeine, I wouldn't care how bad the coffee is," Remy replied as he glanced over three full bins of evidence and the camera case. "This is going to be a long night."

As Shayne entered the hospital corridor where his father stood with Olivia, Blake, Phillip and Doris, he didn't realize what was happening when 5'7" of pissed off Olivia Spencer came at him full force. Pushing her off, he yelled, "What the hell?"

"Why? Why did she do it?" Olivia demanded.

Startled by her aggressiveness, and confused by the cause of it, Shayne looked at the woman who at one point had been his stepmother. "Who did what?"

"Olivia, back off!" Josh intervened, putting himself between his son and his ex-wife. By that point, even more people had gathered, including Dr. Bauer, who had worked his way to the forefront.

"Really, Josh, how the hell could he not know what his wife was up to?" Olivia fired back.

Affronted by her insinuation and still unaware of what had gotten her so riled, Shayne spat out, "Up to what? Will someone *please* tell me what is going on?!"

"Just give me a minute, son," Josh said as calmly as he could. A crowded corridor in an antagonistic situation was not the place to inform him of Marina's part in the kidnapping and the fact that she had been killed. "I'll tell you what happened, but not here." Josh watched as his son clenched his jaw, seeming to be torn between wanting to know right now and acknowledging the tension.

Attempting to diffuse the issue, Rick stepped in front of the enraged woman. "Olivia, Natalia's been moved into the Surgical Intensive Care Unit. If you want to go see her as they get her settled in, now would be the time."

Olivia was conflicted but her desire to see Natalia won over her need to find out why Marina had taken and nearly killed her. Letting out a growl of frustration, she let Doris guide her down the hallway toward the SICU.

After Olivia left the area, Josh guided his son over to a private room and closed the door. Several minutes later, Josh exited briefly to call Reva over. Henry had been sleeping tucked into her side, so Beth came over to look after the young boy while Reva went in to see her son.

Act III

Buzz stood at the doorway of his son's hospital room and shook his head. Yes, he knew what it was like to lose a child in sudden, violent circumstances. He couldn't imagine, though, what it must be like for what Frank was going through. When Coop died a couple years earlier as a result of a tragic accident, it damn near destroyed him, causing him to spiral into a destructive path and ending in a heart attack. He hoped that Frank's loss would not result in the same way. Sitting by his son's side was Eleni, holding Frank's hand. Shutting his eyes against the tears that threatened to spill over, and the lump that formed in his throat, he thought no one ever told him how crushing it would be to lose a grandchild.

"Hey, sweetie," Lillian said as she approached her husband.

"How is he?" Buzz asked.

"The medications to slow down his pulse and breathing are working. His blood pressure is starting to stabilize and they're keeping him hydrated with intravenous fluids. Right now, though, they're really concerned about his level of consciousness."

"Can I...?" Buzz asked with trepidation.

Leaning over to kiss the elder Cooper, Lillian could see the worry and concern etched in his face. Of course, dear," Lillian responded. The Coopers were a pretty resilient clan, having faced many difficulties and challenges, as much or more than

most in this town, and she prayed they would pull through again. Leaning against the doorframe, she watched as Buzz gave his former daughter-in-law a hug. *They'll get through this. They have to.* As Buzz carefully lowered himself into the stiff plastic chair next to Frank's bed, Lillian moved toward his side and wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

When Olivia walked into the SICU, the first thing that assaulted her senses was the incessant beeping of the cardiac monitoring machines and rhythmic hiss of ventilators; they were an unpleasant reminder of her own experiences, and she drew in a sharp breath. After a few deep breaths, she proceeded over to the nursing station but before she had a chance to say anything, a young nurse smiled at her.

"Ms. Spencer, can I help you?" the nurse asked. Noticing that the other woman's puzzlement showed no recognition, she continued, "I helped look after you after your heart surgery."

Truthfully, Olivia was still off-balance, but she covered with a quip, "And I didn't scare you off? You must be good. Or at least you have the patience of a saint."

"I've had worse," the young woman grinned. "I'm Emily, by the way."

Olivia quirked her head to the side briefly as she recalled the young woman's name, she then nodded her head. "You had much shorter hair then."

"Yes," Emily responded to the acknowledgement, then realized the other woman was distraught. "Can I help you with something?"

"Natalia Rivera. She was just brought in from the OR," Olivia said, her demeanor returning to the unknown worry she felt as she stepped foot in the unit. "Dr. Bauer said I could stay with her for a bit."

"We're only supposed to admit immediate family, and only then for short periods of time," Emily briefly hesitated before noticing the stormy intensity of Olivia's glare.

Clenching her jaw to stem off a scathing retort as she realized this woman was going to be involved in Natalia's care and it wouldn't do well to piss off the nurses, Olivia responded tightly, "Natalia Rivera is my partner, and furthermore, I am also her medical power of attorney. That information is on her chart."

"Oh, heavens, I'm sorry, Ms. Spencer. I didn't know," Emily apologized. "We just got her in, and I haven't had time to go through all of her information yet." She sighed. "Look, let me just go check with her primary nurse."

As the younger woman headed down the hall toward Natalia's room, Olivia rolled her shoulders, feeling the tension that rested there. Pacing the floor near the nurse's station, she exhaled in frustration. The confrontation with Shayne Lewis had already added to what had been an absolutely shitty day, and so the politics of hospital administrative policies was not high on her list of things to fight tonight.

Piercing shrills of machines jolted Olivia out of her thoughts, as she looked up the hall to see several nurses and physicians running to the room Natalia was in. Olivia's anxiety notched up several levels. Screw hospital policies, she had to know what was happening with the woman who'd become her soul mate, and so she started her own head-run down the hall.

"You can't go in there!" one of the technicians yelled at her, as he came out and headed for the crash cart.

"Will someone just tell me what the hell is going on? What's wrong?" Olivia fired back.

Not knowing who the woman was, he ignored her and headed back into the room.

At the edge of Natalia's room she was met by Emily who ushered her back down the hall.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Spencer. You need to wait back here," the young nurse responded in as calming a tone as she could. Guiding her to some chairs, the nurse directed Olivia to sit, and then she sat down next to her.

"What happened?" Olivia demanded as she started to stand back up. "I need to see her..." her voice broke and the tears that had been held at bay for she didn't know how long returned.

"Her heart stopped, but they were able to restart it," Emily said gently. "Dr. Jordan is in with her now, checking everything over. She said there was a lot of blood loss, so they've ordered up some more packed blood cells to be infused." Glancing over at the other woman, she took in the near ashen appearance, and she doubted that Olivia would retain much of the information she gave her. Casually she put her hand over Olivia's wrist, her fingers reaching to check the woman's pulse. The bounding pulse worried her.

Her heart stopped. Oh, God. Olivia felt her own heart stop for a moment, as she felt her world falling apart. Then it kicked back in and seemed to go into overdrive as it added to the pressure already pounding against her temples. "When..." she stammered out.

Assuming the other woman was asking when she could see the patient, Emily responded, "I don't know when you can see Ms. Rivera." Realizing she'd gotten the question correctly, she smiled softly, "But I will go check with Dr. Jordan." Noting that this woman still did not look well and halfway to having her examined herself, she quietly stated, "This is not normal protocol for families, but we have a quiet room with some cots up by the nurse's station. Do you have someone to stay with you?"

Olivia yawned. Her body was so overwhelmed, she felt like she could sleep for hours. The adrenaline she'd been using up at alarming levels was wearing off and she could feel her eyelids drop over bloodshot eyes. "Doris," she whispered.

"Okay. I'll be back in a few minutes," Emily said as she stood and headed back to the nurse's station for a minute before heading to the unit's doors.

For Anna, getting official family identifications of a deceased member was one of the toughest parts of her job. Although Frank had technically identified her up at the

lighthouse, his state of mind at the time could not be counted on. Making her way upstairs, she met with Josh, Shayne and the others gathered.

"Shayne, can I borrow you for a bit?" Anna asked.

"Detective?" he asked, hesitantly. He was still reeling from the news of Marina's part in the kidnapping and her death.

"Sorry," Anna apologized. "I need an official identification."

Hunching his shoulders and letting out a long breath, the young man stood and stretched. Without saying a word, he gestured for Anna to lead him down to the hospital's mortuary.

Taking advantage of the quiet time, Phillip headed back downstairs to the cafeteria and opened his cell phone. Despite Olivia's wishes of wanting to know more about Natalia before calling her daughters, he realized the late hour and knew that the girls would be worried. The second ringtone had barely finished trilling when the phone had been picked up.

"Mom?!" Ava asked, anxiously.

"No, it's Phillip. How are you?" he asked, then winced as he realized how inane that question was."

"How do you think I am?" Ava responded sarcastically. "Where's Mom? Natalia?"

Phillip sighed, wondering how much she knew, which he had to admit probably wasn't much. There was a press block-out of the incident, which had been helped with the hindrance of the winter storm, until families were notified. "Natalia had to go into surgery to fix a gun shot wound. She's in the ICU. Olivia went in to see her a few minutes ago."

"Gunshot? What happened out there?" Ava asked, alarmed.

Phillip sighed. This wasn't something he wanted to tell her over the phone. Putting off answering that question, he instead took a different direction. "How are Emma and Francesca?"

"Sleeping. I took them up to Mom's suite a couple of hours ago. After supper, Em watched a movie before passing out cold." Ava sighed as she looked over to the bed where her sister had managed to sprawl herself diagonally on the bed. "Emma was asking about Mom and Natalia. I didn't know what to say, so I just told her Mom would call when she could."

"Okay. Thanks, Ava." Running his hands through his graying blonde hair. He blew out a deep breath. "Look, I'm just going to check in with Beth and then I'll be over. Do you need me to bring anything?"

Wistfully, Ava responded, "Mom and Natalia home safe and sound."

"I know," Phillip said, sympathetically. "I wish I could do that for you. I'll be there as soon as I can." He disconnected the phone and placed it in his pocket before glancing into the quiet cafeteria. With the late hour and the poor weather, the main food area was closed, so he headed over to the small cafe tucked into a corner. Digging some change, he ordered some cups of coffee and tea for everyone. Pouring some milk into his own coffee, he then pocketed some small milk and creamer containers and some sugar packets. He grabbed the tray and headed up to where everyone had gathered in the lounge area outside the OR, where everyone had gathered.

Leaning over to kiss his wife on the head, Phillip whispered, "I'm going to head over to the Beacon and let Ava know what's going on. Did you want me to drop you home first?"

"Thanks," said Josh as he turned around and picked one of the cups marked with a C. "I can drop her home later if she wants to stay a bit longer."

"Thanks, Josh, but I really should get home. I want to check on Peyton." Beth looked up at her husband and smiled. "After a day like today, I need that."

"Not a problem," Josh said. "It looks like it will be a long night. I don't know that we'll be able to do much for the time being."

The silence that permeated the Springfield Police Department was almost oppressive as Anna walked through the doors. It was if each officer on the floor stared at her, wanting to know how the chief was doing or if she had heard anything.

Every ounce of her body was tired. She stretched before taking her coat off, hanging it on the hanger behind her office door, and dropping her sling bag onto the floor. Booting up both her laptop and her work desktop, she sat down and pulled her notepad out of her bag, flipping through to find the information she needed. She groaned as she realized all that still needed to be done. But first she needed caffeine, and not the regular department sludge; and for that, she grabbed her thermos and headed down to Eleni's office. As long as she contributed to the supply, her friend had given her unfettered access to her beloved Kuerig coffee maker. Lately, she'd been supplying the stock with some heavenly flavored coffees and it made her caffeine cravings all that much greater when she worked long into the night.

Approaching Lt. Andros's office, she could hear two men's voices and when she got to the door, she noted that Remy was calling out the evidence tag identifications and the item descriptions as Mallet entered them into the computer. By the looks of it, she noted, they'd developed a system. Once entered, Remy placed them into individual bins, grabbing a label tag, scribbling the corresponding ID number on them and putting them on the shelf. They were into such a rhythm that they hadn't noticed her arrival.

"Hey, guys," Anna started. "You need a hand?"

"Ha!" Mallet responded, surprised when his heart rate returned to normal. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

The quip that came first to mind, *No, it would be too much paperwork*, died on her lips. After a day like today, it would be like a slap in the face. Shaking her head, she just apologized. "Sorry. I just came down for some coffee. How is it going?"

"Not bad. We've got these two logged. Onto the last one," Remy responded, as he pointed to the large Rubbermaid storage bins.

"Did the abandoned van get back here?" she asked.

Mallet looked up at her and nodded. "Jonathan and Officer Ramirez got back to the department garage a while ago. The techs are going over it now."

Anna winced slightly. As much as Jonathan had been working with the police department lately regarding Edmund, it was on the fringes - a civilian resource. As far as chains of evidence, it would not look good for a civilian to be handling evidence. She was going to have to track him down and deputize him, or order him to stay away from the case, and she was reluctant to do the latter as the young man had an uncanny knack for detection. She supposed his years with his daughter hiding out from Alan and Edmund was extremely useful.

"Hey, Anna," Mallet started, shaking his head. He still found it hard to believe that Marina had masterminded this whole kidnapping plan. He sighed as he looked around him. "Did we get a location on Edmund and your father? I want to bring them in and question them," he said gruffly. "This whole situation is fucked up. Edmund's got to be behind at least part of this."

Thinking back to her trip up to the cabin that morning, which they thought had been a Winslow holdout, she looked over at Mallett. "I agree that they're involved. But we need to do this carefully because he's not above playing dirty." Anna ran a hand through her hair in frustration. "And they're not going to come willingly."

Mallett nodded. "When I got back here, I put out a BOLO on Edmund and Hung Li."

"Great, thanks," Anna nodded, turned to the cabinet in the corner of Eleni's office, and snagged the water container, refilling it before selecting a couple of coffee packets. She put a cup underneath and waited for it to brew. Once done, she poured it into her thermos and restarted the process. *It was going to be a long night.* Turning around to the other detectives, she queried, "Did the evidence from the cabin get processed yet?"

"Eleni got it logged and stored before all hell broke loose," Mallett said, holding up a sticky note. "She left a self-reminder note on her desk to properly catalogue it when she got back."

"Thanks. Look, I've got to get up to my office. If you need anything, let me know," Anna said as she turned and headed back up the hall to the staircase.

The worst of the snowstorm having cleared, a lone twin engine plane stood on an airstrip on a private airfield, its identification numbers emblazoned on its side and wings. Aside from that, there were no other identifying company logos on it. The rear hatch was opened as a sole individual was tossing boxes and bags into the cargo hold.

"Hey! Watch it, you imbecile!" Edmund shouted at the unfortunate man.

"What?" the young man huffed back, as he picked up another duffle bag, preparing to heft it into the hold.

Annoyed with the man's attitude, Edmund sneered, "I paid you to load this stuff into the plane. I didn't pay you to throw it in."

"Whatever," the man replied. *You're not paying me that much.* The bag got tossed in, landing near two medium sized crates. He didn't see the butt of the gun coming as it knocked him to the ground in a heap.

"If you want a job done right, you've got to do it yourself," Edmund smirked as he straightened his jacket, putting the gun back in the leather holster on his belt. He would have liked to have disposed of the idiot, but at this point he just wanted to get the hell out of Springfield and it's tiny-minded citizens. Looking up, he saw Li coming out, talking with their hired pilot, and he made his way over to them.

"I need you to take care of something, Li," Edmund said, nodding his head in the direction of the slumped body.

"Is he...?" the pilot asked hesitantly, wondering what the hell he'd gotten himself involved in.

"No. Unfortunately, the idiot's still alive," Edmund said derisively, then guided the pilot to the front steps of the plane. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Li pick the

man up in a fireman's hold and head toward the hangar. He needed to run through the flight plans with the pilot, the official one that would be logged with Air Transportation and an unofficial one that would be taken to a private jet hangar in another state.

When he exited the plane, Edmund met up with Li, who had just finished loading their belongings into the cargo hold. "We all ready to go?"

"Yes, all loaded," Hung Li responded as he followed Edmund back into the plane. "Let's get moving."

As they headed back into the plane, a black SUV made it's way to the edge of the airstrip, its headlights off. Its occupant pulled out a cell phone and typed out a message: *Winslow & Li on plane. Old Murphy landing strip on old ring road. JON* . The SUV headed alongside the plane and attempted to head it off, but the plane reached it's take-off point and took flight. The only things remaining were the soundds of the plane's engines as it gained elevation and the prolonged horn of the SUV.

In a town the size of Springfield, Cedars Emergency Department usually wasn't typically very busy; the occasional heart attack, an injury from a fall, and this time of year, weather related motor-vehicle accidents. Tonight, however, had been different. The Chief of Police had been brought in and being treated for shock, his daughter killed and another lay in the SICU all as a result of one incident. For the time being, Dr. Bauer had ordered a media block out and there was increased police and hospital security presence. In mutual agreement between Rick and Detective Li, all inquiries by police and media concerning Chief Cooper were to be run through Detective Li.

The ER triage area had finally calmed down to its normal state of business later that evening when a bruised, anxious woman approached the Emergency Department's triage desk. She had a split lip and a blackened right eye; the lurid blue, red and purple bruises that spread over her cheek, and there was a laceration on her forehead. A young daughter stood next to her, partially burying her face into her mother's torn, bloodied coat.

"Can you help me?" she asked.

Ms. Gillis quickly stood and came around the desk. "Miss, what happened? Is this all your blood?" the nurse began to quickly assess the woman's appearance and demeanor. "My name is Kari. Can you tell me your name?"

"What? I don't..." She quickly shook her head, her right arm wrapping around her daughter's shoulders.

"Okay, we'll work on your name afterwards," the nurse spoke calmly. "What about your daughter? Is she hurt?"

"Dani?" the young woman responded, her voice breaking slightly as she looked down at her girl. "No, I don't think so."

"May I take a look at her?" Kari asked.

Nervously, the woman shook her head again.

"You need to say 'please'," the little girl spoke quietly. "She lets me do things sometimes if I say please."

Kari nodded and smiled at Dani's contribution to the conversation. "Thank you, Dani. Are you hurt anywhere, sweetie?"

"No, Miss Kari," Dani said.

"That's good," Kari said as she continued her assessment of the mother, who still wasn't talking much. "Dani, do you know what happened?"

"No, Miss Kari. Mommy told me to go hide in my bedroom." Dani seemed pleased with herself.

"Thank you, Dani. And you don't have to call me Miss Kari. Just Kari is fine," she smiled at the girl. "You know what? I'm going to take you to a new room, and there's another nurse that's going to help me. Her name is Lillian."

"But you're going to come, too, right?" Dani started to worry, looking up at her mother.

"Just for a little while. Then I have to come back here, okay," Kari started, resting a hand on the girl's shoulder. "Don't worry, though, okay? Nurse Lillian is going to take good care of you and your Mommy." Kari looked around to call over one of her colleagues to cover the triage desk for a few minutes, and then she guided the mother and daughter into a brightly lit, colorful room. Looking at the surprise on the mother's face, Kari smiled and shrugged a shoulder. "It's one of our pediatric rooms. I thought she might feel more comfortable than in one of the regular exam rooms."

"Thank you," the mother responded. Biting down on her lower lip, "Kathryn. My name is Kathryn."

"You're welcome, Kathryn," Kari smiled. "Will you be okay for a few moments while I go get my colleague, Lillian?"

Looking up to assess the veracity of the nurse's statement, the young woman nodded after a moment before turning her attention to her daughter.

Kari gently shut the door and headed back up the hall, grateful for the extra police presence, as she didn't know if the woman she'd attended to was still in danger. Coming toward her was just the person she was looking for.

"Lillian, are you busy?" Kari asked. "I need some help." She stopped and looked down at her watch. "Only, I know it's getting late and you're supposed to be off-duty soon."

"That's okay. I don't know that I want to go home just yet. I'd just worry," Lillian replied, saddened. Changing her focus, she smiled at her colleague and said, "What can I help you with?"

After a brief moment's confusion, the younger nurse replied, "Oh, God. I'm sorry. I can go get someone else if you want to stay with your family."

"No, that's okay. I just checked in with my husband. Nothing more I can do in there right now except just sit and wait until Frank wakes," Lillian said as she fidgeted with the pen in her hand. As she was family, she wasn't directly in her son-in-law's

care and just sitting around waiting for something to change was just going to drive her crazy. "Rick offered to let me finish my shift earlier, but I need to just keep busy. So, what do you need help with?"

Directing Lillian up the hall, Kari filled her in with what she had learned so far about the mother and daughter who had come to the ER.
