

OVS Finale: Darkness Reigns at the Foot of the Light

14th January 2011

“I know where Natalia is,” Anna said, looking around the full room. In the moment that it took for everyone to take in that bit of information, she swallowed audibly before the inevitable deluge of questions.

“Where?” Mallet asked.

Turning his attention to the newly arrived, detective, Frank started, “How did you -?”

“Tell me, NOW!” Olivia said, her body was tense with anxiety, fear and hope all rolled into one.

“Hang on a second,” Anna started. She understood Olivia’s desperate need to find Natalia, but it wouldn’t do anyone any good if they rushed head in without knowing the score. “I need to tell you what I found. I was following up a lead from a source who spotted a cabin in the middle of nowhere during an overhead flyby. There are overgrown trees and bushes; we wouldn’t have been able to find the place otherwise.” Anna stopped for a moment to recall the specific details of her search. “The cabin looked pretty run down and the first walk around didn’t reveal much at first; it looked long abandoned, until I got to the living area. There were supplies around: tape, ropes, batteries, maps, and a coffee cup. But that wasn’t what caught my eye. On a bulletin board on the wall were news clippings of kidnappings of kids in the town over the years. And then Natalia’s picture was there.” Anna continued briefly telling them about the other articles that were on the wall. “I took some pictures with my phone just in case. I’ve already sent them to print. They should be here in a minute.”

“Are you sure it’s not a trap or another false lead?” Mallet asked.

Anna bristled at the questioning, but realized that there was a possibility. “There’s no way to be certain.” Anna stopped for a second and shivered. “Maybe it’s just my imagination, but I had a feeling that I was being watched. I checked around the perimeter but didn’t see anyone, and the snow drifting was covering any tracks. But my instincts say that this lead is legitimate.”

“We need more than a hunch,” Frank responded. “Someone’s life is at risk.”

“You don’t think I know that?” Anna turned and glared at her chief.

“What’s the location of the cabin?” Frank demanded. He was furious that she hadn’t given that information to him earlier before she went off on her own to investigate. “I’ll need to send Eleni and her team out there.”

“You might need a helicopter unit. Maybe an ATV or snowmobile to get in there – it’s pretty remote,” Anna said as she quickly wrote down the co-ordinates and directions on a slip of paper and handed it over to him.

“How did you know about this place?” Mallet asked. They’d all been working diligently and were nearly at the point of exhausting all their resources.

“I got a tip off,” Anna responded; she was reluctant to say anything regarding the fact that Jeffrey was the source behind the information.

“A tip off?” Frank asked, as he paced the small area, annoyed. “And you didn’t call it in?”

“Chief, I didn’t know going out there that it wouldn’t be any more productive than any of our other efforts.” Anna stopped and ran a hand through her still damp hair. She’d been just as frustrated with the lack of progress in the case as the rest of the team. “We’re working as hard as we can on this. You did direct us to go on our own to follow up some leads. This one got us some results.”

Frank was persistent in getting all the information he could. “Who tipped you off?”

“A source I’ve trusted in the past,” Anna hedged.

“Really? A source? This isn’t the damned media, if I ask you to tell me who your source is, you tell me.”

“Chief, -” Mallet was about to respond when there was a knock on the door which startled everyone.

“Detective Li, these are the pictures you asked for,” Officer Hodgins said as she handed over the prints.

“Thank you,” Anna said and dismissed the young officer.

“Okay, here are the pictures from inside the cabin,” Anna said as she pinned them to the boardroom evidence board. She hoped that the distraction of the pictures would redirect Frank’s focus to more important things. “If you look here, you can see the newspaper clippings I was telling you about.”

Frank looked closer, seeing pictures of the kids, including Marina, Daisy, Dylan and the others and his face went ashen. Memories of his daughter and Harley’s kids being kidnapped flooded his thoughts. But then his eyes scanned each of the photos of the clippings as he got to Natalia’s.

Frustrated, Olivia interrupted, “You said you knew where Natalia was. Out with it!”

“I believe she’s being held out at the old Springfield lighthouse,” Anna said as calmly as she could.

“That makes sense,” Jonathan said, nodding his head in Anna’s direction. “The lighthouse is run automatically; it hasn’t been manned in probably ten years or more, so it could easily serve as a hiding spot.”

“Well then, what are we waiting for?” Olivia asked determinedly, even as she wrapped her jacket tighter around her.

Frank turned towards the anxious woman. “Olivia, you can’t go out there. Let the police handle it.”

Olivia turned and leveled a furious glare at the police chief. Lowering her voice, she all but growled, “You try and stop me.”

Seriously tempted to lock the woman in an interrogation room, Frank realized it would be a futile effort, not to mention an illegal act on his part since she hadn't done anything wrong. He sighed. "What about the kids? What happens if you get hurt trying to play hero?"

Olivia shook her head in disbelief. Raising her head to lock eyes with the older man, she raised an eyebrow. "Do you really want to go there, Frank?" She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "What if you weren't a cop and the kidnapers had Eleni or Marina, Daisy or Francesca held? What would you do – sit back and wait for someone else to go in?"

"That's not the point," Frank interjected. He knew that he'd want to be there just the same as Olivia wanted to be.

"God forbid anything happens to Natalia or me, but all our children know we love them and they'll be well taken care of. If you're really interested, Natalia and I redid our wills after Francesca was born. We made sure that everything was clearly spelled out. Mel, Doris and Beth have our documents on file." Olivia ran a tired hand through her hair. "Now, can we please get going?"

Looking over at her friend's anxious form, Doris put her hand on the other woman's arm. "Olivia, let me drive."

"I can drive," Olivia protested as she pushed Doris's hand off, though there wasn't much effort in it.

"I'm sure that you can, but right now you need to focus on being there for Natalia, whatever the outcome. So you do that, and let me take care of this," Doris paused as she waited for Olivia to concede. "Okay." She guided Olivia out of the police department to her car and sighed. Even though it was still morning, she felt the day was just going to get a whole lot more crazy.

The crunch of snow under his boots made the hooded figure pause, checking to see if his movements had been heard. He'd followed the detective for the last twenty minutes up to the old cabin. Once the woman had gone into the cabin, he moved as quietly as he could around the other side to check the windows. For a moment, he was afraid that he'd been spotted but he noticed the woman had returned to examining the interior.

He waited until he saw her close the door behind her, and made her way back through the wooded path before he took out his cell phone and dialed his boss as he moved up the wooden steps.

"Report," the voice on the other end snapped in his ear.

"The detective has been at the cabin. She just left," the man responded.

"Did she remove anything?"

He looked around the cabin, not seeing anything that had been disturbed since he'd left early that morning. "I don't think so. Everything looks the same."

"Good," the voice responded.

The man began to fidget. “Do you want me to do anything more, sir?” He was uncomfortable with the task of monitoring a property for a boss he’d never met, and for a reason in which he’d never been informed. He learned early on in his life that asking too many questions usually ended up with him in detention, jail or beaten up. He didn’t know how or why he’d been chosen for this job; his rap sheets consisted of break and enter jobs and drug possession and trafficking, nothing like this. But the pay-off was good and that’s what he cared about.

“No. Return to town. It will be better for you.”

Well, that was cryptic, the young man decided as he closed his cell phone and stuffed it in his jacket pocket. He wondered briefly if he should torch the place and get rid of any evidence, but he had enough self-preservation skills to realize that if one cop had been here to check out the cabin, more would probably soon follow and he didn’t want to get stuck out in the sticks in a winter storm when they arrived.

Sitting up at Leyla’s desk, Emma tried to focus on her homework as her sisters were on the floor playing; Ava had Francesca in her lap as they worked on building blocks. With everything going on with her Ma being gone, Leyla leaving for Chicago to tell her family about Natalia’s kidnapping, and her Mom being so worried, Emma wanted to stay close to her family; she didn’t want them to go away, too.

It scared her. She knew she was too young to do anything to help find her Ma but she wanted to do something. Looking down at her math homework, all she saw were blurred words and numbers through tears that had gathered in her eyes.

Rubbing at the tears with the back of her hand, she took out her diary that Anna had given her. It had helped her write down what she was feeling about what happened to Jane and at the wedding. While the martial arts had focused her anger in a positive way, writing in the journal helped focus her thoughts and feelings. She’d been trying to be more open in talking with her Mom; they’d both been working on not shutting each other out, but it was hard.

Emma had been working on her journal so intently that she hadn’t realized Sarah had asked her something until she felt the younger girl tugging on her shirt.

“Emma, can you help me? The zipper is stuck,” Sarah said as she was trying to pull up the toggle on her sweater.

Emma looked down at the younger girl and then over at her older sister; seeing that Ava was busy she smiled down at Sarah. “Sure,” Emma said, looking down at the problem zipper. She wiggled it a few times and when it wouldn’t budge, she noticed the toggle had caught on the fabric of the girl’s shirt. Pulling it gently apart like Natalia had shown her, she managed to get Sarah’s zipper fixed.

“Thank you,” Sarah said with a smile. She was so happy that she gave Emma a hug before heading back to play with her toys.

“You’re welcome.” Emma smiled to herself. She may not be able to help her Mom as much, but she could help out in other ways. With that thought she returned to writing in her journal but in a slightly better mood.

To say that the atmosphere in the small conference room off the courtroom was tense was an understatement. Legal pads were strewn around the table and both Mel and Beth were at their wits end. The judge had once again threatened them with contempt of court because their client couldn't seem to stop herself from making comments. They'd already been fined, which as far as Beth was concerned was being added to Dinah's legal bill. Never mind that Dinah's comments didn't have some merit; it just wasn't the time or place to make them. The judge had given them a twenty minute recess to get their 'client under control.'

Dinah took a sip of her water as she looked sheepishly over at her lawyers.

After looking over her notes on the pad in front of her, Beth looked over at Mel and then to Dinah. "I don't think we should put you up on the stand."

"What? Why not?" Dinah asked, curious and not a little annoyed at the change in plans. She wanted to tell her side of things.

"Right now, I think it might be more of a detriment to your case if we put you up there," Mel said bluntly.

"You don't think I can keep to what I rehearsed already?" Dinah said as she tapped her fingers rapidly on the wooden table.

Scratching some notes on her pad, Mel looked up at her. "I think you can answer our questions the way you have, but when we went over the questions the prosecution is likely to ask you... well, you went off on tangents."

"Well, the prosecution questions were a little annoying. I could have written better questions as a reporter at WSPR."

"I'll be sure to mention that to Doris," Beth said under her breath.

Mel snorted softly at the comment. "We're trying to get you exonerated on the merits – or lack thereof – of the prosecution's case and the mishandling of evidence. We're also going to try to get your confession as it stands thrown out or at least mitigate the weight of it against your case. If we put you up on that stand, you're likely to throw all that effort out the window."

"There's no way you can argue that it was done for the good of the town...kind of like a town self defense?" Dinah started to fidget with a piece of paper in front of her and then looked up to Mel. "Besides, won't it make me look guiltier if I don't get up on the stand?"

"Sometimes it can."

"Also, how can you verify that the confession was made under duress if you don't put me on the stand?"

"There are ways to get around it," Mel said with a wry grin. "I've done it several times and we've won the case."

"I'll behave myself," Dinah said. When she noticed the rise of Beth's eyebrow, she frowned. "Come on, I can be good when I need to be. And I really need to be. It's not that I don't think that I shouldn't be punished for killing David Andrews; it was wrong," she said exasperatedly. "I should have gotten the real bastard, then all the crap in the past two years would not have happened."

Beth sighed as she spoke, "See, it's comments like that that will get you in trouble on the stand."

There was a quick knock on the door before one of the bailiffs opened the door. "You are required to return to court."

"Thank you, officer," Mel responded, filing her legal pads into her briefcase before lifting the strap onto her shoulder. Turning to Beth and at then Dinah curiously, she asked, "Well?"

"I'll behave."

"Come on. Let's try and get this trial over with," Beth said.

"Counsel, are you ready to continue?" the judge asked both representatives on either side of the court. Upon confirmation from both prosecution and defense attorneys, he directed the defense to proceed.

Standing, Mel said, "Defense calls the defendant, Dinah Marler, to the stand."

After Dinah took her place, the court officer swore her in.

"Ms. Marler, can you tell the court about what happened the day David Andrews died?"

"I'd returned to Springfield with Detective Mallet from Bosnia with a baby for adoption. The child was to be adopted by Mallet and his then wife, Marina Cooper. We discovered that Shayne Lewis was the baby's biological father, and the mother was Lara Winslow." Dinah looked down at her hands where she was fidgeting with her skirt. "Edmund Winslow, her father, grieved by the news of her death, came to Springfield to presumably vow revenge on Shayne and anyone he saw that threatened him or his family. He was also threatening Jonathan Randall and his daughter; Jonathan and Shayne are brothers."

Mel nodded. "What happened then?"

"I had seen what I thought was Edmund Winslow down by the river. I wanted to go down and warn him to stay away from Henry and Shayne and the rest of his family."

"Why did you do that?" Mel asked.

"At the time, I was in love with Shayne. It was important to me that he and his family were safe. And Edmund Winslow was anything but safe," Dinah said as she looked over at her attorneys and then at the judge. "So, I went down to the river to talk to him; get him to see reason."

"How did you come to hit him with the piece of plastic from Henry's stroller?" Mel continued her line of questioning.

“I was taking the stroller over to the Cooper’s house.”

Nodding that all the questions were going as planned, she asked, “That wouldn’t have been odd, taking a walk in the park with an empty stroller?”

Dinah raised her eyebrows. “Yeah, it probably would be.” She cleared her throat before looking over at the judge and then back to her lawyers. “Anyway, I went up to him and was about to give him a piece of my mind and he just laughed. He said that Springfield would pay for all the hell he thought people had put him through. I lost it. It was the last straw – I couldn’t let him hurt any more people. I picked up the stroller and I swung. He just went down. I thought I just knocked him out at first, and I panicked; I didn’t really want him dead, I just wanted him to leave town.”

“You were aware that the police were initially looking at Shayne’s mother, Reva O’Neill, for the murder of Edmund Winslow?” Mel asked.

“Yes. And she had confessed to murdering Edmund, even though I told her not to confess to a crime she didn’t do.” Dinah was nervous even though the proceedings seemed to be going well enough. She looked down and realized that her fidgeting fingers had almost resulted in her skirt being indecently short. Quickly she smoothed it down.

“Why was that?”

“For one, she didn’t do it, as much as she wanted to have been the reason he died. But she also had a new baby, Colin – who Edmund had tried to kidnap. She had also just gotten through cancer treatment.”

The rest of the questions Mel had fired at her had gone according to plan and soon the prosecutor got up to address her.

“Good morning, Ms. Marler. I’m going to touch on a few things you mentioned, however, I did want to address the facts immediately following the death of David Andrews. Why did you not initially come forward when you learned that the man you thought was Edmund Winslow had died?”

“Like I said, I panicked. Then I learned that there were several other suspects in the case.”

“So you thought you’d get away with it?” the prosecutor pressed.

“That’s not what I said,” Dinah responded, frowning. She blew out an aggrieved sigh. “Jeffrey O’Neill had overheard a conversation I had had with his wife telling her not to confess to a murder she hadn’t committed; he thought I was trying to frame her. Then he learned that the real Edmund wasn’t dead after all. Jeffrey then tried to take the blame for ‘Edmund’s’ death, before fleeing the country to go look for him.” Dinah ran her hand through her hair, and swallowed. “I found out what he was doing, and wanted to help him draw the real Edmund out – pretending to be his late daughter, Lara. He and I ended up getting split up and when I returned to Springfield, I’d learned of the death of Jeffrey O’Neill in a plane crash as he was searching for Edmund.”

“So you immediately went to the police department upon your return?” the prosecutor asked.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I just couldn’t right away.” Dinah sighed. “I did go to see Frank Cooper to talk him into closing the case on the murder of the Edmund imposter. A friend of mine had overheard me telling Henry, Shayne’s son, that the reason I’d killed the imposter was because I was afraid that Edmund was going to take the infant. When I learned that Mallet was going to arrest his wife, Marina, for the murder, I confessed to Mallet that I’d killed the man to protect Henry.”

“Why weren’t you arrested at that time?”

“I nearly was. I was at the police station, demanding to be arrested for the murder. A friend urged that I leave town, start over.” Dinah looked up and seeing Shayne, they locked eyes. Tears began streaming down her cheeks. With regret, Dinah said softly, “So, on the day after I got married to Shayne Lewis, I left for Europe and didn’t look back. I will regret that as long as I live.”

The prosecutor looked from Dinah to the judge and then back at the woman on the stand. “But you stayed away for eighteen months, didn’t you?”

“Yes. I returned a couple of months ago, in November,” Dinah said.

“Why return now? Surely you knew that as soon as you returned you would be placed under arrest?”

Dinah nodded. “Yes, I knew that would happen. But it was time. I needed to come home. My step-father had just had a massive heart attack while attending the wedding that Edmund Winslow attacked.” She looked over at the judge before she continued with sincerity, “I just wanted to make sure my family and my friends were safe.”

The lunchtime rush was well underway when Phillip entered Company to grab some take-out sandwiches for Beth, Mel and Dinah for their lunch break at the courthouse. He hadn’t been able to get to the courthouse that morning as he’d been in meetings all morning. Shaking some of the snow off the shoulders of his jacket, he looked around the restaurant and he noticed some familiar faces.

“Hi, Phillip,” Shayne said as he came in behind the other man. Spotting Henry quietly playing over in the corner, he turned in his direction. “Hey Henry, how’s my little man?”

“Good, Daddy.” Henry grinned up at his father. Holding up a little monster truck for his dad to see, the boy exclaimed, “Look what Grandpa gave me!”

Shayne grinned at his son’s enthusiasm. “That was very nice of him. Did you tell him ‘thank you’?”

Henry nodded, and then went back to playing with his new toy.

Pulling himself up onto a stool at the bar, Phillip looked over at him. “Shayne, how’s Dinah’s trial going this morning?”

“Pretty good. Mel and Beth are pulling apart holes in the prosecution’s case. If Dinah could keep her thoughts to herself, they might be going faster.”

Phillip snorted. “That ought to be fun to watch anyway.”

Shayne nodded his head, well used to Dinah’s mannerisms. “I think Beth might string her up though, since the judge has already threatened them with contempt of court.”

“That sounds about right.” Phillip turned back to the front of the restaurant where Blake had just come out from the kitchen.

“Oh hey, Phillip,” Blake said cheerily. “What can I get you?”

“Some sandwiches to take over to the courthouse,” Phillip said and then he gave Blake his order. “Thanks, Blake.”

As Buzz came out with an order, he noticed Shayne at the bar. “Hey there, are you looking for Marina?” Buzz continued over to the bar, placing the plates of some customers.

Looking over at the older man, Shayne smiled. “Yeah. I told her I’d come by and take Henry for a little while this afternoon. See if I can keep him busy for a while.”

“I sent her out over to Oakdale this morning to get some things from one of our suppliers.” Buzz frowned, realizing that it had been some time since his granddaughter had left the restaurant. “If the weather continues like this, maybe she’ll decide to wait it out and come back once it’s cleared.”

Shayne moved up to the bar and said, “Okay, thanks, Buzz. I think I might take him over to the school gym to bounce some balls after lunch.”

“He had some macaroni and cheese a little while ago, so he’s all good to go whenever you’re ready,” Buzz said, as he dusted his hands off on his pants.

“Thanks.” Shayne placed an order for his own lunch and then sat with his son in one of the back booths.

The darkness of the room combined with the cold of the cement floor had made Natalia even more numb than the drugs were making her. The drugs at least gave her some distraction, even if they were hallucinations. However, the drugs that flowed through her system were wearing off. While that brought about some periods of lucidity, it also made her stomach nauseous. Shivering, she brought her knees closer to her chest and she pulled the scratchy woolen blanket tighter around her to ward off the cold drafts of air that came in through the vents. She was pretty sure she was developing pneumonia. Her nose was runny; she’d been heavily coughing off and on to the point where it was difficult to breathe the past couple of days, though her perception of time was certainly distorted.

She couldn’t remember the last time she’d eaten or drunk anything. Looking over towards the door, she noted a metal cup that still held some water and an empty plate. She debated the merits of using up the little energy and warmth she’d managed to create to go get the water, but her

parched lips and dry throat made her make that decision rather quickly. Crawling over to the wall near the door she reached out and brought the mug towards her. She wanted to drink as much as she could to alleviate the desperate thirst that seemed to pervade her system, but she knew that if she didn't slow down and conserve whatever fluids she had she'd have nothing left - especially since she didn't know when her kidnapper would provide her with more.

Crawling her way back against one of the wooden crates, she bundled herself back up and tried to pass away the time. It was sad that she looked forward to the next dosage of drugs because it would put her in a drug-induced oblivion. Sometimes, if she was lucky, she dreamed of her family, of Olivia, and their future together, and that could get her through the next day. She'd almost managed to get herself into a state of calm when the door was abruptly swung open.

The masked, hooded individual entered the room, and without saying anything placed a plate of food on top of the crate. When Natalia hadn't immediately moved to get the food, the figure moved closer, nudging her to get up.

Natalia tried to conserve most of her reserves by staying still, refusing to budge.

"Eat or don't. It doesn't make any difference to me, Rivera. I'll be back soon," the figure's gravelly voice spoke.

Waiting until the figure had left the room, Natalia sighed, and then slowly crawled over to get the sandwich and cup of black tea. Never before had Natalia been so grateful to get a ham and cheese. It wasn't her favorite but at the moment, she didn't care. She nearly wolfed it down then wrapped her hands around the warm mug. Shaking her head, she thought the voice seemed familiar but she couldn't place it, and she realized too late that the sandwich had to have been drugged. She shook her head; whatever recognition she might be able to come up with was lost again. She relished the heat of the tea; the mug warmed her hands even as the liquid warmed her insides. Finishing the tea not long after, she scooted back towards the crate. The wooden surface provided some additional warmth. Combined with the food, tea, drugs and woolen blanket, she was lulled back into an uneasy sleep.

ACT II

After securing some snowmobiles, Eleni and her forensics team headed out to the coordinates of the cabin. Given the terrain and the snow, they couldn't bring all their usual on-site equipment. Loading much of what they needed into backpacks, they headed into the brush. Coming up to the cabin, Eleni noted that it was exactly as Anna had described in her notes. Checking around the perimeter, verifying there had been no further tampering of the scene, Eleni unstrapped her camera from its case and took some pictures of the exterior before venturing up the stairs and into the cabin. The only other footprints noted in the snow had been Anna's; other than that, it looked like the snowfall they'd had earlier in the week had covered any sort of external evidence there may have been.

Turning the knob of the door, Eleni pushed it open, taking a moment for her eyes to adjust from the snowy brightness outside to the dark interior. She briefly went through and laid out evidence markers next to various items on the desk in the main area of the cabin. Then she laid specific markers on the bulletin board, letting out a gasp as she scanned over the pictures of Marina, Daisy and Harley's children. She let out an audible sigh before reinforcing her professional mask, in

order to get the evidence to help nail Natalia's kidnapper. Since she'd returned to Springfield, she'd gotten to know the younger woman because of Francesca, and she'd gotten to like her.

A couple of the forensics team were dusting for any sort of fingerprints they could lift, while Eleni took some detailed pictures of the bulletin board intact before they removed the board from the wall. They had to cut the board in half and wrap it in order to transport it out; it would be reassembled at the police station. It took them an hour or so to gather and bag all the items that possibly were evidence in the kidnapping of Natalia Rivera. They packed what they could into their kits and backpacks, and then tied down the board to the back of one of the ATVs. Closing up the cabin, they left to return back to the precinct.

Doris looked over to the passenger seat where Olivia was alternately checking her cell for the time or messages and bouncing one of her knees up and down repeatedly. Doris knew the other woman was not a patient sort of person; neither was she. She knew the other woman was beyond panicked. Thinking back to the last time she'd gone on a road trip with Olivia searching for Natalia, she remembered how desperately broken the other woman had been. She also recalled the self-destructive path her friend had gone through following that trip. Right now though, even through the panic, she could sense some hopeful optimism out of Olivia. She knew the other woman was realistic enough to know the outcome of finding Natalia could go many ways, but she couldn't help but hope that things would work out well for her friends.

"Are you going to call Ava to let her know what's going on?" Doris asked gently.

It took a moment for Olivia to catch on that her friend had asked her a question, and when she did respond, it was followed by a heavy sigh. "I don't know what to say just yet. We don't even know if Anna's assessment is accurate. Natalia could still be anywhere."

"No, but I still trust her instincts. She's thorough and if she believes the lighthouse is where Natalia is, then I'm inclined to believe her."

"I can't tell Em. I can't get her hopes up and have it all be for nothing," Olivia said tightly as she began rubbing her hands together, partially to generate some heat, and partially to keep her hands from fidgeting.

The tremor in her friend's voice told Doris that Olivia still feared the absolute worst. Reaching out a gloved hand, she covered Olivia's hands. "Then don't tell her just yet. But I think you probably should call Ava." Stopping for a moment at a traffic light, she came up with an idea. Pulling out her cell phone, she dialed Blake's cell phone. It took a moment for the other woman to answer.

"Hey, Blake, I need to ask you a big favor," Doris asked her girlfriend.

"Oh?" Blake asked curiously.

"Nothing like that – well, at least not yet. We have a strong lead on where Natalia is." Doris pulled the phone away from her ear when Blake's exclaimed 'what?' came through the line. "Blake, calm down a minute. I don't have long to talk and I need to give you some information."

"Okay. Let me get a pen and paper....all right, shoot."

“Not funny.” There was a very real possibility guns would play a role in today’s events, and she wasn’t up for any play on words. “Okay, who’s there in the restaurant with you?”

Curious as to her girlfriend’s questions, she responded, “Right now? Buzz, Phillip, and the usual lunch crowd. Why do you ask?”

“Okay. I need you to discreetly tell Buzz and Phillip this information after we’re done,” Doris breathed out a sigh and looked over at Olivia. A honk from a car behind her jostled her attention back to the road and she noticed that the light had turned color. Moving though the intersection, Doris pulled over once she’d found a free spot. It had earned her an anxious glare from Olivia, but she put the car into park as she tried to balance her cell between her ear and her shoulder. “We have a solid lead that Natalia is being held up at the old lighthouse on Fairbridge Road. The police are headed there now and Olivia and I are following behind. I was wondering if you could ask Buzz if he can keep Company as a base for information so that the police can focus on getting Natalia home safe and sound.”

“Sure thing. That won’t be a problem,” Blake responded, knowing the older man the way she did and his adoration for Natalia. We’ll keep things running here. Let us know what’s happening. Stay safe, you and Olivia. Bring Natalia home safely. Love you.”

“Love you, too. We’ll do our best,” Doris said, smiling as she closed her phone. She turned to Olivia. “Okay, Blake is going to let Buzz and Phillip know what’s going on and update them when she hears from us.” She sighed. “I really think you need to at least give Ava a heads up. She deserves to hear it from you before the media gets wind of it.”

Deflated, Olivia replied, “I know. Okay. I’ll call, you drive.”

Doris nodded, pulling back into traffic, and headed towards the lighthouse.

Though it took only a few seconds for the connection to be made, to Olivia it seemed to take forever before Ava picked up the phone. “Hey, Ava, baby. I need to tell you something important. Where are you?”

“In the daycare with Emma and Francesca.” Ava paused. “Mom, are you okay? You don’t sound so good.”

“Ava, I need you to page Greg and get him to come down and watch the girls. I can’t tell you this with Emma listening in.”

“Mom, you’re starting to scare me.”

“Ava, look, just do it and then call me back, okay?” Olivia’s voice was nearly an octave higher with her nervous energy.

“Okay, just give me a minute.” Ava hung up the phone and then called back after a minute. “Where are you?”

“On the way to the old lighthouse. The police have a very strong indication that Natalia is being held there.” Olivia was rapidly bouncing her knee up and down.

“Hang on, let me go out in the hallway to continue this; I can still see the girls until Greg arrives.” After a moment, Ava continued, “Wait, what’s this about Natalia and the lighthouse? And how did you find out about all of this?”

“Doris and I went over to the police station. I was about to give them hell for not getting anywhere with the investigation when Anna comes in blazing saying that she knows where Natalia is.” Olivia took a deep shuddering breath and tapped her chest in rhythm to her near erratic heart rate. “She gives this long winded explanation and I don’t remember all the details, but she found some evidence that highly suggested that the lighthouse was where Natalia was being held.”

“How’s this any different from any of the other leads they’ve come up with?” Ava asked pointedly. She knew that a lot of the information the police had been working on hadn’t led anywhere so far.

“It’s the best information they’ve come up with. And Doris trusts Anna’s instincts on this,” Olivia responded, though she conceded the point her daughter was trying to make. She sighed. “Look, I don’t want Emma to know about this until we know for sure what’s going on. Blake and Buzz are setting up a sort of informal information gathering place at Company for news of the kidnapping.”

“Do you want us to head over there?” Ava asked.

“I don’t want to worry her or get her hopes up.”

“Okay, I’ll keep her here for now, but we might just go over after we know more.”

“Fine. Just keep the girls safe. Listen, will you call Phillip and get him to text you regularly with updates when he gets them?”

“Always. Sure. Bye, Mom. Love you. Be careful for both of you. And tell Doris I’ll kick her ass if she lets anything happen to you.”

Olivia chuckled. “Will do.” She hung up the phone and turned to Doris. “Okay, Thelma, let’s go!”

Pacing the small office of the warehouse, Edmund smiled. The fact that Detective Li had located the small cabin in the woods hadn’t actually surprised him. Having kept tabs on her over the years meant learning exactly what she was capable of, and though he would have preferred the younger woman stay in the family business, sometimes it was useful to know what she was doing as a law enforcement officer. It was amazing what information on the internet could provide him with. “I thought you were reining her in,” Edmund said gruffly as he took a sip of his coffee. Detective Li could be a problem, but so far, he’d anticipated her movements. Trusting the younger woman’s intelligence, the well-placed clues he’d posted to the bulletin board in the cabin would lead the police towards Ms. Rivera’s final resting place. He grinned fiercely. Looking around the office, he glanced through the large windows at the storage containers being filled beneath them.

Hung Li growled, unaccustomed to his threats being ignored. He had left several warnings that he knew his daughter would understand, to try to get her to back off investigating Edmund Winslow. Under other circumstances, he might find her protectiveness, determination and focus admirable; he himself possessed those same traits. However, his daughter spent a lifetime defying him, especially when her sense of legal justice contravened his own sense of retributive and pre-emptive justice. Turning his attention to the automatic and machine gun supplies being loaded, he ignored Winslow's jab. He generally preferred using his own hands to apply brute force, especially when the subject had no idea their life was about to end, but he did understand that sometimes firepower was required for strategic targets. "When is the scheduled departure?"

"The containers will be loaded on the container ships this evening. Ships should reach international waters by tomorrow night. As for us? All in good time, my friend," Edmund said as he placed the mug of lukewarm coffee on the desk. He picked up his coat and headed towards the door. "But first, there are a few loose ends to tie up."

"I hope for everyone's sake that you're right about this information; Natalia doesn't deserve this kind of hell," Frank said.

"Olivia and her family have also been suffering throughout this ordeal, Chief," Anna said pointedly as she looked over at her boss. "You seem to forget to acknowledge how much this has been hurting Olivia."

Under his breath, Frank mumbled, "How can I forget? She's always there when there's trouble; she's usually the cause of it."

"Frank, I get that you have issues with Olivia, but it's getting old. Nobody deserves the pain that family is going through right now." Anna sighed audibly as she looked out at the swirling snow and freezing rain as it blew around. The skies were looking more ominous, darkening even though it was only just past mid-day. "Let's just focus on getting Natalia back to her family."

"Frank, how do you want to approach the situation when we get there?" Mallet asked from the back seat. Anna was right; they needed to focus their efforts on rescuing Natalia.

"Do we know if there's still an active phone line at the lighthouse?" Frank asked.

"I think so; maybe just an emergency line, but it should still be active," Mallet responded. "There are two buildings – the actual lighthouse and a supply house that used to house a keeper before the lighthouse went all automated. There may be a working phone in that building."

"Well, I think this situation counts as an emergency. Can you call the station and get the number?"

"No need," Anna said as she flicked her fingers over her phone quickly and brought up the information they needed. "Got it." She touched the connect button and it dialed through to the lighthouse. She shook her head with a wry, annoyed expression. "Automated message."

"Call the operator," Frank responded. "Tell them there's a hostage situation going on at the lighthouse and that the police need the message removed as we need access to contact."

“What are the exit points at the lighthouse itself?” Mallet asked as Anna made the call.

“There’s a main door on one side, and an emergency hatch on the other. There’s also a hatch up on the light deck,” Frank said.

“Was there ever a ransom demand?” Mallet asked, though ransom demands weren’t always necessary with kidnappings, depending on the purpose behind it. Also, this kidnapping seems to have stayed local.

“No, nothing,” Frank said. “It’s made getting leads extremely difficult to follow up on.” Running a hand through his hair, he sighed, grudgingly admitting, “This break that Anna found today is the most we’ve had since the kidnapping started.

“Frank, I think we need to call in the regional FBI field office,” Mallet said calmly, though he knew it would sting his friend’s pride to have someone take over the investigation. Normally the FBI would be all over this investigation, though they had been informed of the situation. Mallet wondered if it wouldn’t have been better to have the Feds running it from the beginning.

Indeed, Frank bristled at the mention. “There’s no need. We can handle things here.”

“Frank, this isn’t about a pissing contest between agencies,” Mallet said. “Nor is it about your abilities. They are trained much more extensively. And you’re right, until today we haven’t gotten much information. We’re still going to be right there, no matter what happens.”

“She’s going to come home safely. She has to,” Frank said, his voice sounded strong, but there was definitely a hint of hopeless desperation in his tone. “The nearest FBI field office is an hour away. They probably won’t be able to get here in time in this weather anyway. We need to move now,” Frank said as he continued driving.

Looking back and forth between the two men, reading the tension in their faces and their voices, Anna interrupted, “Okay, the operator has cleared the line. We need to formulate this plan and then let Remy and the officers know what the plan is.”

“First off, we need to keep Olivia, Doris and Jonathan as far back as we can; we don’t need any more civilian casualties,” Frank said.

Anna acknowledged his comment, but looked at him uncertainly. “That’s probably going to be harder than you think, Frank. Do you really think Olivia’s going to sit back once she knows where Natalia is?”

“If she makes a go for the lighthouse, handcuff her to the car,” Frank said, annoyed at the woman’s propensity to be in the middle of trouble.

She knew she should get Doris to convince Olivia to stay in her car, but it would likely be a futile effort. If it had been someone she loved that had been kidnapped, she wouldn’t want to be standing on the sidelines.

“Okay, Mallet,” Frank started, “I want you to tell Remy and the other officers to get a perimeter set up around the lighthouse when we get there. We’ll get another couple cruisers out to block off road entry out to the lighthouse.” He tapped his hands against the steering wheel before turning to Anna. “I want you to inform Olivia and Doris about what is going on. They deserve to at least

know that. Try to convince the two of them to stay put. I'm going to give the lighthouse a call, see if I can get a response."

As they pulled onto the snow and ice-covered road leading to the lighthouse, Frank breathed a sigh of relief that his car had studded tires as the vehicle threatened to slide on the slippery ground. Looking forward, the white building was partially obscured by the snow and fog. A shiver ran through him.

Ava looked through the glass of the daycare center door to see Emma playing with Sarah and Francesca. She worried about her mother and Natalia, and what would happen to her mother if Natalia ended up being gone forever. It would devastate her mother even more than Olivia had been when Natalia had left nearly two years earlier. Just as she was about to turn into the center, Greg came around the corner. Ava breathed a sigh of relief. There were few people Olivia entrusted with her children; her eldest, their fathers, and a few close friends, and Greg.

"Good, you're here," Ava said anxiously.

"Ms. Peralta?" Greg questioned.

A quick glance back through the window and back to Greg, Ava said, "I need you to look after the girls for a bit."

"What's going on?" Greg wondered. He didn't often see the younger Spencer woman rattled.

"You can't tell Emma." Ava waited until the banquet manager nodded. "The police have a lead on where Natalia is being held. They're on their way. There's no guarantee the information is correct or even if it is, if everything will turn out okay."

Greg blanched at the thought of the consequences. Ms. Rivera was someone he quite liked and respected highly. She got things done around the hotel with such ease and he admired that tremendously. Not that he didn't appreciate his boss, but Olivia Spencer was not ever one to be messed around with when it came to her hotel.

"Look, I've got to go try and call Leyla and let her know what's going on. She won't be able to get back from Chicago in time, but she should know what's going on with her sister."

"Okay. I'll stay with them until you get back."

"Thanks, Greg," Ava said before turning down the hall to the elevator.

When Greg entered the room, he was nearly bowled over by Emma; he had to balance himself before he lost his footing. "Hey, Emma; how are you?"

Emma looked down at the floor and then towards the door. "Where did Ava go?"

"She just needed to check on something up at your Mom's office. She should be back shortly." He hoped his steady voice was enough to reassure the girl.

Tilting her head slightly in thought, she asked, "Why didn't she just say that?" Something wasn't right; she could tell from the way the banquet manager fidgeted when he was nervous. Right about now, she noticed that he was tapping his fingers against the leather folder at his side.

Worried, Emma's voice was not much more than a whisper when she asked, "Did something bad happen again?"

"I don't know, Emma," Greg said, and truly he didn't know very much more. From what Ava said, the police were on their way and they would all have to wait for more information.

"I'm scared," Emma said.

"I know. But hopefully everything will be okay." It was his fervent hope at the moment; that and that Ava would return soon from the office. He didn't know how much longer he'd be able to hold off under Emma's questioning.

With the prosecution and defense summaries given, the judge dismissed the jury to determine their verdict. Beth and Mel had taken Dinah to the conference room to get some coffee, though how much Dinah needed some more caffeine was debatable; Mel was almost ready to handcuff the younger woman to the chair.

"So, what do you think the jury is going to decide?" Dinah asked the two of them. She was nervous that some of her commentary throughout the trial would have been detrimental to the judge's verdict.

"I think Mel's summation went very well," Beth said brightly. "All the key points were hit. The prosecution seems to realize that the case wasn't very strong, especially as evidence was handled so badly. And the original investigation was all over the map with regards to suspects."

"We're just going to have to wait and see. I've been in Judge Grayson's court many times. He's tough on crime but he is fair."

Tapping her fingers against the Formica table, Dinah said frustratingly, "I hate waiting."

"I've noticed," Beth said under her breath which earned a snicker from Mel.

"Anyone got a deck of cards?" Dinah said with a bright smile.

"No," Mel responded, though at the moment, she seriously wished she did.

Deflated, Dinah sighed. "Darn. I guess strip poker is out then." She thought for a moment. "Ya got a pen and paper?"

"Why do you ask?" Beth asked hesitantly.

"I just want to write a note, for my mother," Dinah said. "Just in case." She knew she'd been a disappointment to her mother over and over through the years. Since she'd come back to Springfield, she had begun mending fences with Vanessa again, but there was still the chance that

she could face some jail time for the death of David Andrews. She hated how she had left things before she left, even though she had a heartfelt talk with her mother at the time, realizing yet again how she'd screwed up things while trying to help her friends.

Taking a legal pad out of her briefcase, Beth lifted the cover and tore out a couple sheets of paper and handed it over to Dinah along with a pen. At least, Beth thought, it would keep her busy for a little while.

It seemed like a long time, but by the time the bailiff had come to request their presence back in the courtroom, not much more than an hour had passed. Dinah folded her letter and placed it in the pocket of her blazer. With a little bit of trepidation, she followed Beth and Mel as they took their places at the front of the court and sat at the long table.

"Please rise for the Honorable David Grayson," the bailiff called out as the judge entered the room.

As Dinah rose from her chair, she tried to read the judge's expression, trying to glean any sort of hint about the outcome but it was no use.

"Mr. Foreman, has the jury reached a verdict?" Judge Grayson asked.

"Yes, your Honor," the foreman responded. "On the count of second degree murder, we, the jury, find the defendant not guilty. On the charge of evading arrest, we find the defendant guilty."

"Thank you. The jury is dismissed." Turning his attention to the defendant, he continued, "Ms. Marler, you've been charged with the second degree murder of David Andrews and evading arrest." The judge paused as he looked down at his notes. "By your own admission, you acknowledged that you were responsible for the death of the man. Though it was not your intention to kill this man, who was by all intent and purpose an imposter of a man who'd been tormenting your friends, the fact remains that he is dead. However, there is insufficient evidence, that hasn't been tainted or tampered with, to support the charges. There are as many pieces of evidence and police statements to tie others to the crime as you." Judge Grayson pressed the glasses higher up on his nose as he glanced down at the notes again. Looking back up, he continued, "However, on the charge of evading arrest by leaving the country. On that charge, you are to surrender your passport forthwith and will be prohibited from applying for or receiving a passport to leave the country for a period of two years, and you will be under probation for a period not exceeding twelve months."

Finally releasing the breath she'd been holding for it seemed most of his deliberation, Dinah nodded. "Thank you, Your Honor."

"Just don't show up in this courtroom again, Ms. Marler," the judge responded, "Or that sentence will be revoked and you will be spending the rest of your probation in a jail cell."

"Yes, your Honor."

"This session is now concluded," the bailiff spoke.

Dinah turned to both Beth and Mel and gave them each a hug. Looking back into the gallery, she noticed tears rolling down her mother's cheeks. She touched her pocket where she'd earlier

placed the letter and raised her head in a little prayer that she would at least be able to talk with her mother in person and tell her what she'd written.

Now that the court had been dismissed, Mel pulled out her Blackberry and turned it on. A priority notification email from Doris had popped up in her inbox. Scrolling through to the email, she clicked on it and began to read. "Oh, God."

Just as Mel was reading her email, there was a text message on Beth's phone from Phillip. "Oh, no."

"What? Will somebody please tell me what's going on?" Dinah asked, looking back and forth at the anxious faces of both women.

"Natalia," Mel and Beth responded.

"They've found her," Beth added.

"How is she?" Vanessa asked, after overhearing the conversation.

Looking back at her cell, she reread the message to see if Phillip mentioned it. "Sorry, they haven't seen her yet. But they know where she is. The police are headed out to the old lighthouse on Fairbridge Road."

"Olivia and Doris are following them out there," Mel added. "Doris said the weather is deteriorating considerably, but that Buzz will be keeping Company open if people want to gather there to wait for more information."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Dinah said anxiously.

Looking over at Dinah, Mel said, "First we need to get the papers signed for your release, and to arrange to have your passport transferred from the police evidence locker to the courthouse."

"Okay, let's get going," Dinah responded.

"Get up!" When Natalia struggled to move, the hooded form prodded her with a long wooden stick. "I said, get up!"

Groaning from the ache in one side and near numbness on her other, Natalia attempted to get herself into a sitting position. A wave of vertigo passed over her and Natalia nearly toppled forward. The dizziness and the accompanying nausea threatened to overwhelm her. If that wasn't bad enough, she was wracked by another round of a deep, near barking cough. She was weak and she felt feverish even as she shivered. The medication her captor had given her was adding to her distorted reality, and though she thought at times she recognized the voice she now couldn't tell if it belonged to a male or female. Another wave of dizziness came, and Natalia violently retched onto the floor.

"Move!" the figure moved closer, prepared to grab the woman's arm but was a little reluctant that Natalia wouldn't throw up again. The captor was ready to carry Natalia out but preferred if she could walk on her own.

“Why are we moving?” Natalia coarsely asked.

“Do you really want to stay in that stench?” the captor asked derisively.

“What are you going to do with me?”

“Stop asking so many questions!” the figure demanded. “Just move!” When Natalia had a hard time standing and remaining upright, the captor went behind her and pushed her ahead with one hand while trying to keep her steady with the other. They shoved a blanket at her. “Wrap this around you; it’s cold out there.” When the captor opened the door, a gust of wind and snow blew through the opening and the whiteness was near blinding.

As they approached the steps leading up to the lighthouse proper, the captor continued to prod her. “Up!”

Only a few short steps into their ascent, Natalia’s weakened balance wavered and she grazed her shin. “Please, let me stop for a moment.” Natalia’s breathing sounded wet and crackly. “Hard to breathe.”

The captor waited a few minutes before growing restless again. One way or another, Natalia Rivera had to pay, did it really matter how? “Come on, that’s enough time. Once we’re inside, then you can rest.”

“Okay,” Natalia spoke quietly. Not particularly caring about her own dignity at the moment, she crawled up the remaining steps on her hands and knees, needing the extra support of having her hands on the surface of the stairs to help guide her. Keeping her eyes closed kept some of the nausea at bay. She felt her captor pass by her as she reached the top and then return after a moment.

“The door on the right, go in,” the captor demanded.

Wishing that everything would just come to a stop until she could get her bearings, Natalia did as she was told, crawling over against the wall. She felt around and came on a thin, plastic-covered mat on the floor. Pathetically grateful, she moved over to it and collapsed down, willing her body to stop moving until the dizziness passed.

The captor placed a cup of water on the floor near Natalia, telling the woman of its placement before backing up to the door. “I’ll be back soon.”

Despite the increasing bad weather outside, people had begun to arrive at Company, waiting for any kind of news about Natalia’s rescue. Buzz and Blake had put on a big pot of chili and heated up loaves of bread and rolls.

Phillip had made himself useful pulling some of the tables together and set places for people to sit together. Thus far there hadn’t been any media coverage, and for that he had to be grateful. It meant that the television and radio reporters were kept away from the scene, potentially putting the operation in jeopardy, but it also meant that it was less likely that Emma would accidentally hear about it on the radio or TV before he or Olivia had a chance to talk with her. He realized he

probably needed to do that sooner than later. Emma was an intelligent girl; she had to know something was wrong. However, right now, he knew she and Francesca were in the safe care of Ava at the Beacon. He'd been in contact with Ava once already and informed her he would be updating her by text message when he heard anything.

When Beth arrived with Mel, Dinah and Vanessa, he waited for them to remove their coats and then he stepped forward and hugged his wife first and then Dinah. "I assume this means the charges were dropped?"

"For the second degree murder charge, yes. On probation for leaving the country, evading arrest."

"All things considered, it could have been much worse. Edmund is still a menace to society and should be dead. If I ever get my hands on him, he will be," Phillip said sternly.

Turning towards her husband, Beth leaned into him after the exhausting day of the trial. "Phillip, I'd prefer if you were nowhere near that bastard when he gets his due." She shivered as if the cold wetness from the snow and freezing rain had seeped through her. "I need some nice hot tea. God, it's getting bad out there. If it weren't for the fact that we were waiting for information on Olivia and Natalia and it's easier to do it with everyone in one spot, I'd rather everyone be home and safe."

"If you're looking for something hot, the chili is ready," Blake said as she started to bring out bowls.

"Do you need any help, Blake?" Beth asked.

"There's more bowls to come out and the bread rolls are also ready." Setting bowls and cutlery on the long counter, she turned just as Buzz was coming out with the large crockpot.

Narrowly missing the entire contents being sent to the floor, Phillip stepped in and steadied the pot.

"Thank you!" Buzz said.

"No problem," Phillip responded just as the door chimed. Looking over, he noted Josh Lewis entering with Reva and Colin.

"Ugh, what a day," Josh said. "Any news?"

"No, nothing more yet," Phillip said. "They should be getting there about now. It will probably take some time for the police to get things set up out there in this weather. The plus side is that there shouldn't be anyone else out there besides the police and Olivia and Doris."

"Hey," Buzz called out as he came out with an old transistor radio. "This thing picks up the police scanner. Just let me get it set up on the counter and we should be able to get information as it comes in.

"Good idea," Josh said. "Here, Buzz, I'll give you a hand in the kitchen. See if we can get all this food going."

“Buzz, whatever expenses you have for tonight, I’ll reimburse you. Thank you for doing this,” Phillip said.

“There’s no need, but thank you for the offer. Olivia and Natalia are family and we all care about them. Thank you for coming.” Buzz nodded and then went into the kitchen with Josh close behind.

***** ACT III *****

Tucked in next to a dumpster in an alley behind a row of businesses, a young man tried to keep the cold and snow from blasting him as he waited payment for a job done. Really, it hadn’t been all that difficult to just watch an abandoned cabin, but he was expecting five hundred dollars, which could go a long way for him if he was careful. Shivering, he huddled tightly to keep warm, and thus he didn’t see the non-descript white van pull up on the other side of the building.

The last thing he remembered was being hit with something and then he collapsed to the ground, feeling the life slip from his body.

Slipping past the door to his daughter’s apartment after disengaging the security code, Hung Li moved through the rooms, looking at the personalization that his daughter had placed throughout. He nodded sadly at the slightly worn photograph in an old silver frame of Anna and her mother. He remembered taking that photo the year before his wife passed away of cancer when Anna was just a child. He missed his belated wife. He remembered being happy at one point in his life, when life was much simpler.

After Jing-Mei died, he turned his focus to working for the Winslow family, keeping an eye on his young daughter through school, but not really engaging with her. He wondered if he had placed closer attention and more discipline on her that Xing Lung may not have gone the route she has. His daughter was an independent spirit, and she was fiercely protective of those she loved. He sighed, noting that he had not fallen in that category for many, many years.

Taking a knife out, he pierced the glass, shattering it, and then slicing his wife’s image out, pocketing the partial picture. Placing the remainder of the photo and frame back on the mantle, he turned and glanced at another photograph, one of his daughter and the Spencer middle child. He could see the affectionate glance Xing shared with the girl as she was teaching her the motions of Tai-Chi. Grabbing his boot-knife, he etched into the glass. “Who’s next?” Quickly, he left the apartment and headed back to meet up with Edmund. There was still much to do before they left Springfield.

“Time to move!” the masked hooded figure shouted as they came into the room and forcefully grabbed Natalia by the upper arm. “You’ve had your rest.”

Shaking her head, trying to throw off the drug-induced fog in her brain, Natalia asked, “Where are we going?”

“Out.” The figure tried to move Natalia again but was surprised that even in the other woman’s weakened state she was still difficult to maneuver. “Now get up!”

Trying to stand up, she was once again overcome with a coughing fit, which rendered her already labored breathing worse. Natalia tried to focus what reserves she had to bring her breathing back under control. “Why are we moving again?”

“Shut up! Do you have to ask so many damned questions?”

Due to the darkened room, the large hoodie, mask, and the drugs still running through her system, Natalia still couldn’t figure out the sex of her captor. But she could tell by the tone that the person was getting more frustrated and anxious and that made her even further terrified for her own outcome. She had just managed to get standing again when she felt a hand close around her arm again. She tried to shrug away but couldn’t manage; the captor was too strong.

“Just move. I’ll tell you when you can stop.”

The captor had come around behind her, keeping a firm grasp on her arm while the other pushed at her lower back. Licking her lips against the cold dryness, Natalia asked, “Where are we?” She could feel the draft seeping through her as they ascended the stairs and she shivered. Despite the cold hardness of the floor where she was earlier, she would rather be down there right now. She tried to summon up prayers she knew by rote and started reciting them in her head. As she moved from one prayer to the next she hadn’t realized that she’d started to verbalize them.

“Prayer isn’t going to help you now,” the captor spoke with contempt. As the door was thrown open, the figure pushed Natalia through the entrance.

Turning the ignition off, Frank looked out at the obscured lighthouse; the beacon at the top rotated its beam of light through the heavy fog and snow. He looked for places his team could set up and then ordered his team out. Two cruisers were set up at the entrance to the driveway behind them.

The Search and Rescue truck and an ambulance pulled up alongside the police vehicles, then the Search and Rescue officers quickly set up a heavy tent for the mobile unit to confer and get further prepared with bulletproof vests, radios, and flashlights.

Frank directed Remy first up to the lighthouse storage building to check the doors to see if they were locked or otherwise blocked from entrance, however, when the detective reached the door to pull it open a gunshot rang out loudly, startling everyone.

“Shit!” Remy yelled. He hadn’t been hit but he had jumped significantly back and he fell into the snow. When he got up and looked closer, he could see where the bullet had exited the partially closed door. He took several deep breaths to calm himself before double checking the door. Standing slightly back and to the left of the door he waited a moment before turning and shining a light into the darkened interior. Not finding anyone in the immediate vicinity, he took a deep

breath and a cautious step around the door, shining the light around to find a rigged mechanism connected to a 12-gauge rifle. A further examination of the room showed no further booby-traps.

He went over to the rigged device and disarmed it to prevent anyone else from being a potential or actual victim.

“What’s going on?” Frank’s voice came over the radio.

“I’m not hurt,” Remy responded reassuringly. “The door was booby-trapped with a rifle.”

“Get back to base, Remy,” Frank ordered, not wanting any of his officers to be hurt.

“I’m okay, Frank. I’ve disarmed the gun and rigging. There don’t seem to be any more traps.” Remy was determined to be there to help Natalia. She’d been there as a friend to him when he needed it. “Let me stay and keep looking.”

Frank sighed. He knew it was futile to stop Remy, but he wanted to have someone with the younger detective. Noting that Anna had finished zipping up her coat, he nodded. “Okay, but I’m sending Anna in with you. Mallet, hold off going into the lighthouse until we know if Natalia’s in there. We don’t want anyone else hurt if that’s rigged up as well.”

“Alright. I’ll keep looking,” Remy replied.

The gunshot had startled Olivia out of her thoughts and sent her heart racing; her first thought immediately going to Natalia. She tapped her fingers against her chest as she tried to bring her heart rate back under control. Looking over at Doris she could tell from the other woman’s expression that her friend’s thoughts likely paralleled her own. It only took a moment though and Olivia had pulled her coat together, fumbling over the buttons in an effort to get them done up before she flung the car door open.

Despite the increasing amount of snow on the ground, Olivia’s pure determination got her to the lighthouse before any of the police could get there to restrain her from entering the lighthouse. She had no way of knowing what had caused the gun to go off, but at the moment she didn’t care. She put her hand into her pocket, cursing the fact that she hadn’t thought to take her gun, but there hadn’t been any time to retrieve it from the farmhouse. So singularly focused on getting Natalia back, she hadn’t even looked back to see if Doris had followed her.

If the captor or captors hadn’t known they were here when the vehicles were pulling up to the lighthouse, Olivia was certain the gunshot would have alerted them, and she knew that Natalia’s life was even further at risk. She’d kill the bastard with her own hands if she had to. Her stomach churned at the thought of losing Natalia permanently.

“What are you doing here, Olivia?” Anna yelled above the heavy winds that were battering the lighthouse buildings. Thinking back to the police perimeter, she looked over at the other woman who was out of breath. “How did you get here?”

“Do you really have to ask that question?” Olivia asked, raising an eyebrow. “As for how I managed to get to the lighthouse, Frank’s officers out there must be on the donut diet, because I got here faster than they could get me.”

Anna snickered slightly. She knew Olivia's desperation and panic was fueling her adrenaline. And the other woman's attempt at humor only barely masked her fear. Turning to Remy, she asked, "What have you found so far?"

"Aside from disarming the gun, just some supplies that you would expect to find: marine and road maps of the area, ropes, tools, padlocks, emergency flashlights," Remy replied. Just as he was headed into another section of the front counter, he noted a garbage bucket behind it that held several food containers; several of them, and empty water bottles. "Anna, I think you should take a look at this," he said, pulling the garbage bucket out for them to see.

Reaching in to pick up one of the containers, Anna opened it and sniffed at the remnants of a salad with dressing. "This hasn't been here very long; it's not spoiled." Picking at another, she could see some slightly congealed tomato soup, but this as well was recently eaten and discarded. She looked up as Remy headed down a small hall to what she thought might be a storage area.

The other man backed up from the area, coughing. "Whoa. Someone was sick in here." The small area smelled more, but he could tell from the blankets on the floor and the positioning of crates that this most likely where Natalia had been held. Looking further into the room with the flashlight, he could see a thin foam mat on the floor near the cement wall. So intent on his search of the room he barely heard the uneasy expelled gasp behind him. He looked back to see Anna place a supporting arm around Olivia's waist as the hotelier's face went ashen. "Get her back in the front," Remy told Anna quickly.

"Oh God," Olivia said between sucking in deep lung-fulls of air. What she saw of that small enclosed area was worse than what she'd ever imagined of Natalia's holding place. But what was worse was that she feared every time she closed her eyes from now on this would be the scene she faced. "Where is she?" She asked to no one in particular. There hadn't been any signs of tire tracks leading from the lighthouse, though she realized the drifting snow would have obscured some of the tracks.

Looking at her friend, Anna turned and uncapped a bottle of water she had in her pack and handed it to Olivia. "Drink," she ordered the other woman. Waiting until Olivia had taken several good swallows of water, Anna reached out and placed a hand on Olivia's arm. Gently, she said, "We'll find her."

Olivia nodded, still partially in a state of shock. As Frank showed up at the door, she acknowledged his presence.

Looking over at Olivia first, he then turned to Anna. "What happened to her?" he asked, looking concerned.

"We found an area where the captor or captors have been hiding Natalia," Anna responded softly as she took another look over at Olivia.

Remy left the storage area and moved further back through the narrow hallway. After further investigation through the rooms, Remy was disheartened to not find Natalia. However, he realized that the captor may have taken Natalia over to the lighthouse. Getting back to the main room he informed the others of his findings. They opened up the door and headed over to the main structure.

“Stay to the side when you open the door. I don’t want to take a chance that this one isn’t rigged as well,” Frank said as they approached it.

Apprehensively he checked Olivia’s position, to see that Anna had pulled the other woman back to the side of the lighthouse. It was one thing to have one of his officer’s injured in the line of duty, but if Olivia was injured or killed, he knew there would be a lot more problems to deal with. But he did understand the desire and the drive to protect one’s family no matter what the personal cost.

Shining his flashlight against the cement stairs Remy noticed some dark spots against the snow. He leaned closer with the light to get a better look. Blood. It wasn’t a lot, but it lead up the stairs. “Chief, Anna, you need to see this,” Remy spoke quickly. Looking up, he wasn’t surprised to see Olivia arrive there first.

When Doris stepped out of the car, she frowned at how much snow she’d have to wade through and the fact that her designer coat was trailing in the white shit. She never used to care what she wore – at least until she started dating Blake – as long as it fit properly and was good enough to add to her attitude in order to get things done. However, after finding out one day that Blake had burned her red, black and white jacket, she decided perhaps change wasn’t always so bad.

For the time being, a little power outfit would come in handy as she headed directly into the emergency responder’s tent. She grinned at the fact that there were no senior officers in the tent and she headed for the closest officer there. “What is going on out there? I heard a gunshot.”

“Excuse me, Mayor Wolfe, you shouldn’t be in here,” one of the younger officers told her.

Doris leveled a glare at the young man, figuring that he wasn’t long out of the police academy. “Officer... what’s your name?” Doris asked as she looked for his name tag.

“Morris, Ma’am,” the officer said nervously.

“Well, Officer Morris, my friends are in that lighthouse. I need information.”

“I know ma’am. But they’re Chief Cooper’s orders.”

“Bloody hell, I’m not going up there myself, I just want to know what is going on!” Doris was frustrated and annoyed.

The officer backed up a step, nervous at what the mayor might do to him. “I know. But I have my orders.”

“Do I have to remind you that Chief Cooper answers to me, so in effect, I am a higher authority? Which means you tell me what is going on,” Doris continued to glare at the man until his stance changed. Even though he did stand half a foot taller than her, there was something to be said for an authoritative glare.

Officer Morris sighed. “I don’t really know that much right now. Chief Cooper just went up there. The door was rigged with a shot-gun but no one was hurt. Nothing more has been relayed back to us. When I get more information I will let you know. Until then, we just have to wait.”

“Eejit!” Doris muttered leaving the tent. She shook her head. Apparently she’d picked up more colloquialisms watching some DVDs of “Bad Girls” that Blake had...um...acquired from someone she’d been talking to online. She didn’t think she really wanted to know how Blake had gotten the discs, but watching the Scottish wing governor definitely had its merits...and perhaps more than a few fantasies.

Speaking of Blake, Doris figured she owed her girlfriend a call, at least so that everyone’s not in the dark about what was happening. Hitting the short-key connection to Blake’s phone, she raised her cell to her ear. She could hear quite a noise going on in the background at Company as the call was answered. “Hey, Blake, sounds noisy. Are there a lot of people there?”

“Probably about twenty or so, which isn’t too bad when you consider the weather out there.” Blake paused a moment. “How is everything out there? Buzz has the police scanner tuned into the radio but it’s still not saying very much.”

“I know, they don’t really have much to say at the moment,” Doris growled. “There was a gunshot but no one was hurt. Apparently the door was rigged with a rifle. They still haven’t found Natalia, yet.”

“Oh, no,” Blake said worriedly. “I’m glad no one was injured. Where are people located?”

“Police have barricades up at the end of the road to prevent curious onlookers and media from approaching.” Doris fidgeted with a pen she found in her pocket. She’d been trying to quit smoking and so far it had been working, but in tense moments like this she needed something to play with. “Remy, Anna, Olivia and Frank are up at the lighthouse. There are other officers around the property as well.” A motion caught Doris’s attention and she turned in its direction. The police officer she’d been talking with was trying to call her over. “Sorry, Blake. Something just came up. I’ll let you know what’s going on as soon as I can.” She pressed the disconnect button and put the phone into her pocket as she followed the officer back in the tent to find Jonathan also there.

“What’s going on?” Doris asked, as she noticed Jonathan dusting the snow off his hat. He was more covered in snow than his police counterpart.

“There’s a dark green van about a hundred yards to the northeast. It looks like it might be on an unused utility road. I had to trek up the road a minute before I spotted it. With the snow cover in the trees, you can’t see it from here,” Jonathan said calmly. “I suspect that whoever the kidnapper is has been here since at least mid-morning as there are no fresh tire tracks. There looks to be some snowshoe prints out there, but nothing that would determine the size, especially with the drift. The door was unlocked so I checked inside. You’ll need to get a forensics team out there.”

As there were no senior police officers present, Doris gave Officer Morris the direction to place the call to the dispatch for the forensics team to respond. After a moment, they were informed that Eleni’s team was still out; they hadn’t returned from their last call, but should return soon. The message would be passed along. She wished there was a large pot of coffee handy; her nerves felt raw and she needed a fix of caffeine.

Picking up one of the two-way radios, Doris checked the channel. “Chief Cooper, come in, this is Mayor Wolfe.”

“Chief Cooper here.”

Doris could almost hear him roll his eyes by the tone in his voice. “Jonathan Randall just returned to base. Found an abandoned van just up an old utility road. Looks like the transport vehicle to get Natalia here.” She looked over to Jonathan who was getting the officer to call in the vehicle license number and VIN. “They’re calling the information to dispatch.”

“Good,” Frank said, sounding a little relieved. At least something seemed to be going right. “Get Eleni on it.”

“She’s not back yet, but they’ll give her the message when she gets in.”

“Have her call for a tow truck to get the van back to the station.” Frank paused. “Oh, and since you’re the mayor, see if you can commandeer someone to bring a plow out here. This is insane.”

“I’ll get right on that,” Doris quipped in return, scrunching her face up in annoyance, though it wasn’t a bad idea. “Wolfe out.” She returned the radio to its holder and sighed, wondering if the day would ever end.

Eleni stomped the snow off the bottom of her boots as she entered the front door of the police station. Lowering one of the evidence bags off her shoulder, she pulled off her coat before the dispatch officer called over to her.

“Lt. Andros?”

“Yes?” Eleni responded.

“There’s a message for you from the Emergency Response Team out at the lighthouse. Forensics has been requested out there. You need to contact Chief Cooper as soon as possible.”

“Thank you, Officer Mendez.” Eleni reloaded her pack over her shoulder and headed down to her office, needing to get the evidence logged and in the security safe in her office until she could properly catalogue it and examine it. After getting everything organized and settled, she picked up her cell and dialed Frank’s number. It took several moments, but the line was eventually answered.

“Cooper,” Frank responded.

“Hey, it’s Eleni. You need me out there?” she turned to head towards the coffee maker in the hallway and touched it, finding the half empty pot cold. “Ugh.”

“Sorry, what was that?” Frank asked.

“Cold coffee.”

“Oh. Yeah, anyway, Jonathan Randall found an abandoned van that looks like it could be the vehicle that transported Natalia from the farmhouse. He only took a brief look through.” Frank sighed. “I got Doris to contact the town’s road works department to have a plow brought out to clear the roads out here. You’ll need to have a tow truck come take the van back.”

“Alright. I’ll get the truck loaded up and I’ll see you soon. What’s the news on Natalia?”

“She’s here; we’re still looking for -” Frank’s voice was cut off by a loud bang.

“Frank!” Eleni called out through the line. No response. “Frank, what’s going on?”

“Gotta go!” Frank replied then the line went dead.

ACT IV

The catch door to the upper deck was flung open, banging heavily against the deck plating and Natalia was pushed out through the opening. With the lingering drugs in her system, her balance was off and she felt her back hit the railing hard. Without a coat on, the icy winds chilled her to the bone.

“Why are you doing this?” Natalia asked, trying to figure out some semblance of reason as to why she had been taken. The hallucinations she’d been experiencing had terrified her and she was still trying to figure out what was real and what was in her head. Visions of her family, of Edmund, of Jeffrey, of her father all swarmed her thoughts and nightmares.

“You’ve ruined everything, bitch!” her captor yelled.

“I don’t understand,” Natalia said as she shook her head. “What did I ever do to you?”

“Just shut up and move!” The captor pushed Natalia forward.

Frustrated with Frank’s posturing, Olivia pushed her way past the police to head up the narrow steps to the upper deck of the lighthouse. Slipping through the hatch, Olivia’s eyes widened when she saw a hooded figure pressing Natalia against the railing. As the heavy winds battered the side of the lighthouse, her approach behind the kidnapper went unheard. She looked at Natalia’s frightened eyes and shook her head, not wanting her partner to acknowledge her presence. She watched as the younger woman shivered and it took everything in her not to throw the captor over the side so she could just wrap Natalia in her arms and keep her safe. Taking a moment to bring her scattered emotions under control and into focus, Olivia moved closer to Natalia’s captor even as the hooded figure pushed forward trying to unbalance her partner. In a clear but strong tone, Olivia spoke, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

Not expecting anyone to have come up so quickly behind, the kidnapper spun around, suddenly aware that the situation was spinning out of control rapidly. Angrily the masked figure spoke, “Well, you’re not me.”

“No, I’m not,” Olivia glowered. “You drugged my partner, kidnapped her on our wedding day and put me through hell. Not to mention what you probably did to her. And when I do find out exactly what you did, I will gladly return the favor. With interest.” Inwardly, Olivia was actually praying that Frank or Anna would make it up the stairs quickly enough to take care of the kidnapper so that she could look after Natalia. “Do you really think you’d get away with this? That we wouldn’t keep searching for her?”

“She ran away before. It was only a matter of time before she would do it again,” the captor spoke, taunting Olivia. “She’s a coward.”

“True,” Olivia responded, her tone of voice icy. “She did run away once before.” Shrewdly, Olivia looked at the captor. Although the voice was distorted by the mask, it sparked some recognition. “You will not ever call her a coward again.”

“Why didn’t you just take your little bitch and get your perverted family out of Springfield?”

“Wrong thing to say,” Olivia said as she glared at the captor.

The hooded figure turned from Olivia and back to Natalia, hesitating slightly, unsure of which course of action to take. Realizing the better bet was trying to use the lingering effect of Natalia’s weakened state, the captor rushed at her trying to unbalance her enough so that she would fall over the railing.

Natalia panicked as the blanket that she’d wrapped around herself to keep warm might end up hastening her death as it caught around her legs, further unbalancing her. She crashed against the railing again and her foot slipped over the side of the deck. She felt herself fall and grabbed hold of the rail as tightly as she could.

“Natalia!” Olivia yelled. Shoving the kidnapper out of the way against the glass enclosure of the lighthouse beacon, she ran to Natalia’s aid. She nearly lost her footing on the icy promenade as she reached her partner and leaned over.

As the captor was busy watching, hoping to see Natalia meet her death, she neglected to notice another figure on the promenade.

“Springfield Police. Put your hands over your head and get on the ground,” Frank yelled loudly enough to be heard above the winds. Raising his service weapon, he pulled a pair of handcuffs from his jacket pocket. He glared at the hooded figure in front of him when there was no movement. “Get down!”

Detective Li had just come through the upper hatch and noticed how fast everything had spun out of control. She sprinted to Olivia, got a grasp on Natalia’s other upper arm, and with Olivia’s help, they pulled the younger woman back onto the surface of the promenade.

With nothing left to lose, the captor made a run at the three women. If death was inevitable, taking Natalia or Olivia along for the ride would make it all worth it.

A shot was fired, and the noise echoed off the building.

Remy briefly contemplated going up onto the small promenade, but with five people up there already, it would be too crowded. Having gone through the watch room beneath the lantern room enclosure, Remy quickly bagged and catalogued the evidence he’d collected. It wasn’t much as the quarters were small and he shivered at the thought of what Natalia must have gone through. Moving towards the steps heading up to the deck, ready to be called if needed, he picked up his two-way radio and called out to the base tent asking if Lt. Andros had arrived.

As he stood and waited as there was nothing more he could do until they were able to bag the mat to take it back to the lab for testing.

“No, she hasn’t yet,” the base officer called back.

There was a brief pause, and then he heard the gunshot through the opening above.

Doris Wolfe paced back and forth in the command and control tent; a mix of fear, anxiety and worry crossed her features. The longer this situation continued, the worse it could end up. The fact that she hadn’t heard much about where Natalia had been held or what the police had found only further fueled her panic. Very little information had come over the radios after they’d found where Natalia had been held. What she did know was that Olivia had gotten past Frank to get into the lighthouse. Doris smiled at her friend’s absolute protectiveness of Natalia. Not that she’d particularly believed in some superior being out there, but she sent out a prayer for the safe rescue of Natalia, whom she’d come to think of as a good friend.

She’d been sorely tempted to just grab a two-way radio and head out to the site, but she took one look at the armed police officers and Mallet told her she wouldn’t get far and she fumed. She wasn’t used to not getting her way. She understood they had a job to do, but that didn’t mean she had to like it.

Taking her cell phone from her pocket, she quickly dialed Company.

“Company, Blake speaking.”

“Hey, you,” Doris said gently. “How are things on your end?” For just a couple of moments, Doris wanted to believe in some normalcy, but the present situation didn’t allow for that.

“Nervous, scared,” Blake responded. “You?”

“I don’t know if I know much more than you do at the moment. I’m here at the Emergency Responders tent, but there’s such chaos with everything going on.” Doris had started pacing again. She hated waiting, but that was all she could do for the time being.

Getting to the heart of the matter, Blake asked, “Where’s Olivia? Has she gotten to Natalia yet?”

“I don’t know. Maybe,” Doris responded, her frustrated tone seemed to increase an octave. “Hang on, there’s something coming over the radio,” Doris said. There was a flurry of movement as the EMTs and Search and Rescue teams gathered supplies and rushed out of the tent.

“I’ve got to go, Blake,” Doris said quickly. Hitting the disconnect button on her phone, she shoved it into her pocket as she moved toward the entrance of the tent. One of the officers shifted to block her exit and she leveled a glare at him. “If you ever want a promotion, you’ll get out of my way, now.”

The officer stood his ground.

When they heard the shot of a gun, both fled the tent.

As the sound of a gun being fired was heard over the police radio, the noise at Company suddenly ground to a halt. People looked at each other in complete disbelief. They weren't quite sure what to say or do as they waited for more information. All of a sudden there was movement as Shayne entered the restaurant with Henry in tow. Everyone looked to the new entrants, as they collectively drew in nervous breaths.

When Shayne spotted his parents, he made a beeline for them, placing Henry on the floor. Seeing everyone's anxious faces, he asked, "What's going on?"

"A shot was fired at the lighthouse. Frank, Olivia, Natalia and Anna are all up on the top. No word yet as to who's been shot," Josh said, the worry in his tone audible.

"Damn," Shayne said and then turned and caught Dinah's glance. He looked back at his parents then back at his friend. "Be back in a minute," he said, smiling as his mother rubbed his arm. Approaching Dinah, he enveloped her in a hug. "Hey, glad to see you free. How did it go?"

"Second-degree murder charges dropped, probation for skipping the country." Dinah smiled wryly at him before sighing sadly. Tilting her head toward the police radio, she said quietly, "It could have been much worse. I swear if I find out who did this to Olivia and Natalia, it will be more than second-degree murder; I'll kill the bastard myself – and it will be for real this time."

Turning to face his friend, he asked. "You're sure Edmund's behind this?"

"He has to be. Who else would have the motive to hurt them like this?" Dinah asked. "I mean, Natalia did try to kill him. She just happened to be a bad shot. Besides, it's not like Edmund doesn't have bad history with Olivia."

"True," Shayne acknowledged.

"If it were me up there, I'd have the sonofabitch strung up by the balls, naked over the rails," Dinah said angrily. She clenched her fists at her side, wanting to strike out at something. "Arrrrgh!"

She was frustrated as she looked around the restaurant. Not seeing an appropriate outlet, she turned back to Shayne, pinned him against the wall and kissed him soundly. It only lasted a moment before both of them pulled out of the kiss, but they were stunned.

"Sorry?" Dinah finally responded.

"Ah, okay." Shayne looked around the restaurant and noted that several pairs of eyes had turned in their direction. "Don't worry about it."

"I need to go see Ava," Phillip said quietly to his wife as he turned to grab his jacket. "She needs to know what's going on."

"Phillip, we don't know much about what's happening," Beth responded, though she knew his motivation was less about seeing Ava and more to do with seeing his daughter and trying to

protect her in case anything happened to either Olivia or Natalia. She knew that he wanted, or rather needed, to be with his daughter when the news finally came.

“I know. I just...I’ve got to do something,” Phillip said.

Beth nodded. She knew very well about her husband’s protective nature when it came to his family well. “Go on, I’ll stay here and get a ride home later. Just...be careful. The roads were getting worse.”

“The Beacon’s just up the road a little. I’ll walk,” Phillip said. In fact, he hoped that the blustering winter walk would clear his mind from the sheer panic he had felt when he heard the gunshot on the radio. “Call me as soon as you hear anything.” He leaned to kiss his wife as he pulled his jacket around him and then he left.

When the sound of the gunshot ricocheted off the building there was a flurry of movement as the kidnapper fell facedown on the deck. Frank ran over to the kidnapper to check for vital signs. Not finding a pulse, Frank shook his head.

There was blood pooling along the back of the hooded sweatshirt and as Anna moved her hand down to the deck plating she noticed that blood was also seeping from underneath the deceased figure. Turning the body over onto its front, she noted there was an exit wound.

Olivia held onto Natalia as the woman collapsed against her. She looked down and saw blood starting to seep down her partner’s front. “No!” Olivia said loudly and panicked. “You can’t leave me now!” The weakened form of her partner’s body now sagged against her chest and she pulled her tighter to her pressing in to stop the flow of blood.

Hearing the shot, Remy quickly climbed the stairs with a med-kit and checked the situation. Quickly noting his boss and Anna attending to the captor, he went to Olivia and Natalia. Rapidly assessing the young woman’s vitals as best he could, he grabbed some abdominal pads from the kit and quickly pressed them to Natalia’s chest to try to stave the flow of blood.

As Anna updated the other officers over the radio, Frank focused on watching Olivia and Remy care for Natalia. He felt like he should be helping, somehow, but there was nothing he could do. The sight of so much blood, combined with seeing the bruises on Natalia’s face, left him shaken and he fought to take a deep breath, to gather his wits.

Olivia held Natalia as close as she could, while letting Remy put pressure on the wound. She petted Natalia’s hair and told her over and over to hang in there, that it would be okay.

Angrily, Anna lifted the mask covering the kidnapper’s face, wanting to see who was responsible for causing her friends so much pain. “Oh, God.”

See you all for Season 3 of OVS Winter 2012.