



Watch Over Me

By

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Triskelion Publishing

www.triskelionpublishing.net

Triskelion Publishing
15327 W. Becker Lane
Surprise, AZ 85379

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ISBN 1-933874-28-7

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Dedication

To Chuck and Joanne.

In a business where so many authors can't depend on the support of their families and loved ones, your support and 'creative promoting' means more to me than I can put into words--and for a writer, that's saying a lot. Thank you.

Chapter One

"Don't step in that blood."

The deputy stopped short, his foot in mid-air, and looked down at the crimson-black pool of congealed fluid on the hardwood floor.

"Oh. Oops," the incompetent moron that barely passed as a county deputy mumbled with a guttural chuckle.

Donovan clenched his jaw, fighting the urge to haul the idiot back off his feet and fling him out the door. He looked around at the crowded room with local law enforcement practically tripping over each other. The coppery stank of gore and decay clung to the back of his throat and tingled in his nostrils.

Keeping his annoyance in check, he fished his ID wallet from his overcoat pocket and stepped to the nearest uniform. "Special Agent Greer, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Who's in charge?"

The officer pointed across the room with the end of his pen, and returned to the scribbling he made on his clipboard. "Chief Hastings is over there," he said from behind the paper mask he wore.

"Good. Get out."

The man looked up again from his notes. "What?"

"I said get out of here. I want nothing touched. With this many people stumbling around, the crime scene has probably already been compromised."

Donovan saw the argument flash across the deputy's face, his mouth falling open, but just as quickly, he retracted it as Donovan glared at him. Instead, he looked to the other officers in the room and motioned them out with a jerk of his head.

Camera flashes lit the dark house like strobe lights, distorting the gruesome image of the middle-aged woman now lying prone on the floor, her throat sliced open and her larynx pulled out to rest on her chest. Aged, varicose-veined legs extended from beneath a floral-print muumuu and ended abruptly in ragged stumps where her feet should have been. Heavy stage make-up covered her face in violent slashes and smears of color, making her death mask one of a sadistic clown. Blank eyes stared wide at the ceiling, and stiff fingers curled out as if to grab at the final moments of life.

It wasn't the worst he had seen in the last eighteen years, but it ranked pretty high on the worst-case scenario scale.

He walked around Mrs. Eleanor Routhier's head as a coroner's assistant draped a white sheet over her body. More flashes went off, leaving spots in his vision until he finally turned his head and blinked against them.

"Chief Hastings," he said as he approached the balding, aging Sheriff. "Special Agent Donovan Greer, FBI."

Hastings cleared his throat and set his hands at his waist, effectively jutting his gut forward. He made no attempt to disguise the grimace on his face. The smell was pretty powerful. "What can I do for you, Special Agent Greer?"

"I'm taking over this investigation."

"What's the FBI want with a homicide in Kentucky?" he asked, dragging out the

acronym like each letter was its own drawled word.

"Mrs. Routhier's murder is part of an ongoing serial killer case."

One grayed and bushy brow popped up. "Serial killin', you say? Well, that's something all together different, ain't it?"

"I've ordered your men out of here. I want nothing touched until the FBI Crime Scene Investigators arrive," Donovan stated, folding his wallet and shoving it back in his pocket.

"They don't teach you fellas much in the way of manners, do they?"

Donovan didn't even look at the Sheriff as he took in the details of the room, around the sheriff's staff that still mulled around on their way out the door. Annoyance and disappointment sat in his chest like a weight, overshadowing the slight sense of satisfaction at getting one step closer to the killer.

"A Bureau coroner will be here tomorrow to examine the body. I'm sure we can expect full cooperation from your office," he said as he pulled his overcoat around his body. The front door was wide open, letting a whole variety of contaminants ride in on the cold breeze.

"She look anything like that Scully on tee-vee?" Chief Hastings asked with a bob of his bushy, graying eyebrows.

Same joke, different town. Still not funny.

The Chief's voice faded as Donovan walked away, brushing past the hoard of incompetents that apparently passed for law enforcement in this podunk town.

"I want everyone out now," he shouted, pushing the nearest deputy towards the door. Everyone jumped at his booming voice, and moved to action, filing out of the house. With a scathing look at Donovan, Chief Hastings followed.

With the house empty, Donovan turned back on the crime scene, pulling a white handkerchief from his pocket. The stench started to get to him. Donovan crouched beside her, clear of any evidence on the floor, and lifted the sheet back. The backs of her arms and legs were dark purple from the blood lividity. Taking a pen from his pocket, he pushed against the inside curl of her fingers. No give. Rigor Mortis was deep set. He was no forensics specialist, but with a preliminary and cursory view, he'd estimate the victim had been dead four, maybe five days.

Still squatting near the floor, he dug into another pocket and removed a small yet bright flashlight. From his low position, he flashed the beam around the perimeter of the room. Maybe this time the killer slipped up and left something behind. Of course, the CSI guys would go over the house with magnifying glasses and evidence tape, but he always had to look himself.

Not even a dust bunny.

Either Mrs. Routhier was an exceptional housekeeper, or the killer did a damn good job cleaning up after himself. Leaving behind only what he wanted to leave.

Donovan focused back on the body. Without disturbing her position, he tried to see if the same telltale bruises marked her neck. But there was too much blood and damage from the slice that spread ear to ear, nearly decapitating her. The coroner would be able to determine whether strangulation occurred.

He really didn't need the report to know this was the same man. The same sociopath who had eluded the Bureau for over a year. Seven killings in all. What bothered him was the frequency. There was six months between the first two. Four months between the second and

third. With each slaying, they grew closer and closer together. He grew braver and more arrogant. As long as this guy thought he was free of suspicion, they would continue to happen.

Donovan stood and clicked off the flashlight. With one more perfunctory glance around the room, he made his way outside, sucking in a deep breath once the cold evening air hit his face. Rotating, flashing lights on the tops of the haphazardly scattered police vehicles lit up the night sky. A quick glance at his watch told him it was nearly one in the morning. An involuntary yawn hit him as he tried to remember which part of Kentucky he was in. Was he in the same time zone as Virginia? Or was it an hour earlier?

What the hell. Tired is tired and late is late.

A dark, unmarked van pulled into the driveway and steered around the Sheriff's cruiser. Donovan stopped half way down the lawn and watched as three people emerged. As they approached, he recognized the front walker to be Jodie Gatlinburg, a Bureau CSI out of Louisville.

"How'd you manage to get here so quick, Donovan?" she asked, stopping down the slope from him.

"Dumb luck."

She motioned her team on into the house, and glanced around at the herd of police cars. "How much of a mess did they make?"

"I don't think it's too bad. I kicked everyone out when I got here."

She looked past him to the house. "This the case you're working on? The Broadway Killer?"

Donovan nodded, squinting his eyes up at the stars. "Unfortunately, yes. See what you can find for me."

"Sure thing," she promised and walked by him, her hand touching the bend of his elbow as she went by.

Gatlinburg was a good CSI. If anyone could find him a clue, it'd be her. He walked to his rented car and climbed in, reaching for his cell phone as he settled behind the wheel. Donovan caught a glimpse of himself in the rear view mirror as he held the phone to his ear.

"Christ, when did you get so damn old," he said to his reflection, grimacing at the new peppering of gray hair that seemed to have popped up overnight.

After two rings, the line picked up.

"Jackman," came his Deputy Director's grumbled voice.

"I'm in Kentucky," Donovan said. "I was right, but too late."

"Too late?"

"I arrived to a horde of local police. The killings are getting closer together."

"Eleanore Routhier is dead?"

"Yes. Feet amputated. Larynx ripped out. Make-up death mask. And after the autopsy, I'm sure we'll find all the same M.O. as the other six."

"Well, at least this confirms your suspicions. We know who the targets are."

"We would have known before if Fourier and McKinney weren't such morons."

Jackman practically growled. "Which is exactly why I pulled them off the case and assigned it to you. I need your brain, Greer, not your wise ass commentary."

"Yeah, well, get used to it. We might have had a chance at saving some of these

women."

"There's nothing we can do about that now. What's your next move?"

Donovan slouched down in the driver's seat, leaning his head into the back and pinching the bridge of his nose. He knew Jackman was grooming him to eventually take over as Executive Assistant Director in the Criminal Investigations Division, but the guy got no points for subtlety.

"I need to contact each of the three remaining women and explain the situation."

"You can't do all three, Greer."

"Send Jabrosky and Miller, and Hemmingway," he said, running a list of agents through his head he felt to be competent enough to work on their own.

"That's two teams."

"I'm taking the last one. I'm flying to Manhattan as soon as the main investigation is done here."

"This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard in my entire life. I want you to leave now, Mr. Greer."

"Not until I speak with your daughter," Donovan stated.

"That's not going to happen."

"Do you not understand the gravity of this situation, Mr. Weston?" This guy was an ass and an idiot, and Donovan had been trying to get past him for the last five minutes.

Piano music drifted through the cavernous theater from the stage, and Donovan glanced in that direction to see a young girl dance through several ballet-like steps in front of the bright stage lights. She was dressed in a dark blue leotard with her honey-blond hair pulled back in a ponytail at her crown. Donovan scanned the rest of the stage, trying to spot Miss Olivia Weston. If he could get past her thickheaded father and manager, he might have a chance at getting someone to listen.

"Do you not know who my daughter is? She's the Sweetheart of Broadway."

"Yes, I know who your daughter is. But I assure you, this killer doesn't *care* who she is. He only cares about what she does. It's not personal, but she is very much at risk."

The young girl stopped dancing, stepping to the edge of the stage.

"What's wrong?" she called out.

"Go back to rehearsal, Olivia."

Donovan pushed past Mr. Weston and marched down the aisle to the stage. "Miss Olivia Weston?"

She squinted against the bright lights that shined up into her face. As Donovan approached, he realized she was older than he originally thought, but still didn't look the twenty-five years he knew Olivia Weston to be.

"Yes."

"Miss Weston, I'm Special Agent Donovan Greer with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It's very important I speak with you."

She walked towards them, approaching the small flight of steps that came down to seat level, and patted her cheeks with a small towel. Mr. Weston again protested, but Donovan moved around him to the bottom of the steps. As she descended, he saw her squint her eyes, probably trying to adjust to the change in light. Her hand came out and she stumbled slightly.

Donovan reached for the extended hand and steadied her. Her fingers curled around his as she took the last two steps, stopping beside him.

"Thank you," she said, her voice soft.

"This is a waste of time and a cruel joke," Mr. Weston said. "Olivia, go prepare for full dress rehearsal."

She dropped her gaze, and started to turn. But Donovan still had her hand and he pulled back.

"Miss Weston, five minutes of your time."

"Oh, for the love of God. If I allow you five minutes, will you leave so she can continue with her rehearsal?"

Donovan didn't look at him, instead keeping his eyes on Olivia Weston. She tilted her head back towards him and looked up at him through her lashes. He dropped his hand, releasing her.

"Five minutes, Miss Weston," he said again.

"Follow me," her father snapped and turned away to march towards a nearby backstage door.

Donovan motioned with his left hand for her to precede him, setting his other palm against her back. She glanced up at him before moving away.

They walked through the backstage area of the theater, the smell of dusty clothing and stage make-up heavy in the air. Donovan watched her walk in front of him, and admitted that she definitely was a full-grown woman, despite her diminutive stature. He knew the specifics from her file. Twenty-five. Five-foot-six. One-hundred-four pounds. Blonde hair and blue eyes. She had been an actress on stage since the age of seven, when she played an orphan in *Annie*. But the file didn't mention how well a leotard would show off the gentle curve of her hips and backside, or accentuate the defined muscles of her arms and legs. Or how her small breasts still filled the lycra suit and left a wealth of room for a man's imagination.

Christ, Greer. She's barely legal.

Mr. Weston opened a door and motioned them inside with an insistent, annoyed flourish. "Let's get this over with, Mr. Greer, so my daughter can get back to what's important."

The man's words irked Donovan. Stupid people annoyed him. People who couldn't see what was important when it was right in front of their face. And usually ended losing it because of their stupidity, or just damn fate. Luck of the draw. Flip of a switch. Tick of a clock. He shook off the dark, distracting thoughts.

Once inside the dressing room, she turned slowly, each of her movements a study in the human form, graceful and silent. She looked up at him, her head tilted down ever so slightly, giving her a demure and reticent demeanor. Her gaze leveled with his, and held for several moments before dropping again.

"Miss Weston, my intention isn't to frighten you, but I am here because I believe you may soon be an intended target of a serial killer."

Her dark blue eyes rounded, and he heard the soft catch of her breath. Her gaze darted from him, to her father, and back to him.

"And I don't believe a word of it," her father ground out.

"Perhaps if you explain why you doubt it, I can explain why you shouldn't."

"Because I won't believe someone intends to do her harm. If anything, this is a ploy to get her off stage so some other talentless wannabe can step in."

Donovan focused on Olivia Weston. Obviously, if he were going to get through to anyone, it would be her. Manager-father-whatever, if she wanted protection, Phillip Weston would have to let her have it.

She stared at him, and he had the unnerving sensation that she looked right through him. It sent a chill up the back of his neck, the way she didn't waver, didn't flinch. Just watched. Stared into his soul. Course, if she could see that deep, she wouldn't look again. Not a good place to see.

With her lithe arms crossed over her body, she stepped towards him. "Why?"

It was such a simply spoken question, but carried on it the weight of a thousand more. Donovan had to drop his chin to maintain the eye contact, and as he drew in a breath to speak, the delicate scent of baby oil and gardenia filled his senses.

Damn distracting.

"He has been systematically killing every woman who has played the role of Molly in *Molly Make Believe* since 1966. Seven women have been killed. Right now, I have two teams of agents contacting the other women who have played the role and are still alive. You are the final possibility."

She tilted her head to the side, just slightly, and her eyes dropped to his mouth as he spoke. Miss Weston nodded slightly, her eyes coming back to his.

Heat flared from his gut and out to his extremities. *Well, damn. That hadn't happened in a long time.*

"If all the victims performed off-Broadway, why the hell would you think they'd come after Olivia?"

Donovan closed his eyes and clenched his jaw. The man raked on his last surviving nerve. Phillip Weston was the kind of man who'd argue that one plus one made three if that was the way he wanted it, right or wrong. When he opened his eyes, she still watched him.

"The particular theater the other victims worked for ceased production on *Molly Make Believe* in 1982. If he follows the path I suspect, he will move on to the Broadway actors beginning in 1996."

"That's illogical."

Donovan had finally had enough. Did this guy really think he was just yanking his chain? That he had flown from Virginia, to Kentucky, and back to Manhattan in less than twenty-four hours just to see if he could rile some young girl? *Stupid people, damn it.* He turned abruptly, taking the two strides it took to close in on Mr. Weston. The man took a surprised step back.

"Mr. Weston, we are dealing with a psychopathic, sociopathic killer. While he is probably of great intelligence, logic and morality is not part of his mental capacity. He sees one thing, one sect of society, and he feels the need to rid the world of it. Right or wrong. If he sees your daughter as part of that group, he will come after her until he kills her, is caught, or dead himself."

"My daughter has no enemies..."

"Your daughter may not," Donovan snapped, cutting him off. "What you do not understand is that he's not after your daughter. He wasn't after Georgianne Sylvaine, Lana

Leighton, Penelope Paige or Eleanor Routhier. He was after Molly. And in his eyes, Olivia Weston *is* Molly." As he spoke, he pointed back over his shoulder at the woman who he wanted to save.

He looked back to her, and the stark paleness of her cheeks caught him off guard. Good. Maybe a good old-fashioned shock was what she needed to understand the risk. His cell phone rang.

"Excuse me," he said as he snapped it from his belt and flipped it open. "Greer."

He listened to the voice on the other end of the line. Agent Mulroney informed him of the newest development in the case with a grave tone, and a knot formed in the pit of Donovan's stomach. *Damn it.* Too late again. He closed the phone and turned back to the Weston's, hands at his hips.

"Well?" Mr. Weston demanded.

Donovan looked to Miss Weston. She watched him, a slender hand at the base of her throat.

"That was one of the teams I sent out. My suspicion that he would move to the Broadway performers was correct, but unfortunately not in time. Mrs. Brittany Callahan, the first actress to play Molly in 1996, was discovered murdered in her home."

"Damn," Mr. Weston mumbled behind him.

If at all possible, Miss Weston paled further and her arm reached out. Donovan stepped to her and gripped her elbow in one hand, steadying her, and moved his other hand to her side. She swayed against him, her fingers curling into the lapel of his suit jacket.

"Brittany," she said softly. "Oh, God."

Donovan eased her back until her calves bumped the edge of a couch and she sat. He moved with her, squatting in front of her. A half-empty bottle of water sat on a table at the end of the couch, he reached for it and handed it to her after removing the cap. She took a sip, and lowered the bottle with trembling hands.

"I regret that I upset you, Miss Weston," he said, leaning closer without touching her. "As much as I would like to be able to tell you you're not in danger, it would be a lie."

She stared at him for several moments before looking up to her father. Donovan followed her gaze. Mr. Weston stood nearby, his arms crossed over his chest and a scowl on his face.

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

"I would prefer the show be closed —"

"Absolutely not."

Donovan leaned back on his haunches, resting his elbow on his bent knee to pinch the bridge of his nose. "Well, Mr. Weston, if you won't allow her to take a leave until the danger passes, I want to put someone on her twenty-four-seven. We don't know how the killer gets to his victims, but the profile indicates he isn't a stranger. He could be anyone. Until we know more, I want her guarded. This is the same protection we're giving all the potential targets."

"What do you mean? Someone watching the penthouse?"

"No. Someone in the penthouse."

"Move in?"

"It's the best way to insure her safety." Donovan looked to her when he spoke of her, and once again found her watching him. When their eyes met, she didn't look away, but she

dipped her chin in an almost indiscernible nod.

“One of your agents, then?”

Donovan stood, pushing off the balls of his feet. “No. Me.”

Chapter Two

"So, who's Mr. Tall, Dark and Ruggedly Handsome?"

Olivia smiled and met Lara's inquisitive stare in the dressing table mirror. Besides being her stylist and personal assistant, Lara was one of the only close friends she had, despite their age difference of over fifteen years.

Lara arched her eyebrows, partially hidden by her brunette bangs, silently asking the whispered question again. Olivia glanced sideways to where Special Agent Greer stood nearby. With hands clasped behind his back, and his feet spread apart slightly, he looked dark and powerful in his charcoal suit. Strength, confidence and power shrouded him. He filled the room with his presence, making her always aware of where he was.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Olivia answered.

Lara brushed her hair, the soft bristles of the brush massaging Olivia's scalp and calming her nerves. She always loved it when Lara did her hair. It reminded her of being small, when her mother still sat her on the bed and combed her hair into pigtails.

She caught Lara in the mirror watching Donovan, and looked back to him herself. Donovan. What an ancient, powerful name. It fit him. His features were square, chiseled and rugged. Dark, straight brows shadowed hazel eyes that led to a straight nose and perfectly sculpted lips. She noted how his lower lip was just slightly fuller than the top. His short, dark hair slightly peppered with the first signs of gray, but it took nothing away from the virile magnetism that emanated from him.

Yet, the word 'untouchable' could have been tattooed across his forehead and not be any less obvious.

"Has your father finally hired you a body guard?" Lara asked, forcing Olivia back from her musing.

She looked up at her friend. "Something like that."

"I'd let him guard my body any time."

Olivia smiled, but it quickly disappeared when her father came through the door, a phone pressed to his ear and a scowl on his face.

"Well, who the hell *do* I have to talk to?"

Her body tensed, followed by the familiar clenching of her insides into tight knots. She dropped her chin and looked down at her hands.

"I don't *want* you to reveal the location of one of your agents. I *know* where he is. He's standing ten feet away from me. I *want* someone to verify he is who he says he is."

Olivia darted her eyes toward Donovan. He hadn't shifted, didn't seem the least bit put off by her father's doubt. With slow confidence, he turned his head slightly at met her gaze. Warm bubbles popped in her stomach, moving out into her limbs and she took in a breath. One corner of his lips twitched, not quite a smile but more than an involuntary movement.

"Once again, *who* do I need to talk to?" her father snapped.

Donovan took three long strides across the room, and Olivia turned in her chair to watch him take the phone from her father. Phillip Weston looked shocked and pissed, his forehead turning a deep shade of red.

"Who's this?" Donovan asked, and paused as he heard the response.

Olivia watched, with wide eyes and held breath.

"This is Special Agent in Charge Donovan Greer," he stated, and rattled off some code that Olivia assumed identified him to the person on the phone. "Transfer me to Deputy Director Bill Jackman in the DC office."

No one moved as he waited.

After what seemed like an eternity, he handed the phone to her father, with no preamble or greeting to whomever was on the line. Her father took it, glared at Donovan and spoke. Apparently, he heard from the Deputy Director whatever it was he needed to hear, and after several curt responses, hung up the phone.

"I guess you are who you say you are," he said to Donovan.

Olivia watched them both, her eyes darting from the face of one to the other. Donovan said nothing, just stared back at her father with an unwavering, unemotional expression. Phillip Weston crossed his arms over his chest.

"You can move into the penthouse while we're at the party."

Donovan shook his head once. "One of my men will drop off my luggage, and then take post outside the building. I'm attending the party."

"I am not going to have you hovering around her twenty-four hours a day," her father snapped. "This is a private affair."

"When you agreed to Bureau protection, you agreed to my terms. There is no negotiation."

"Then perhaps I'll find my own protection!"

"That wouldn't be wise, Mr. Weston."

Olivia stood and walked towards them. "Daddy, I don't think it will be a problem if Agent Greer attends with us. I'm sure Mr. Sturbridge won't mind."

Her father twisted towards her, his lips drawn tight over his teeth. She didn't step back, but looked away, her gaze meeting Donovan's hazel eyes.

"How many times have I told you not to call me that? I am your manager. Do you really expect to be taken seriously when someone hears you call me 'daddy'," he condemned, twisting the name with sarcasm. "And keep out of this discussion. I will decide what is best for you."

Her first instinct was to back down, like she always did, and bow to his better judgment. She took one step back and crossed her arms over her body. Almost as real as a touch, Olivia felt Donovan's gaze on her and she glanced in his direction. One muscle along his jaw jumped as he clenched his teeth, and his chin dipped in a small nod. One meant only for her.

"How can I not be part of this discussion? He's here because of me," she said in a low voice, hating the slight quiver in it.

Her father stared at her, his nostrils flaring with each breath. "How the hell are we supposed to explain him? You know the press will be there."

"He could be a friend of the family," Lara offered from the background.

"Or we could just say he's my date."

She didn't dare look at Donovan now, didn't want to know what kind of reaction her suggestion spurred, if any at all. And if she looked at him, and saw any kind of shock or revulsion, her bravado would deflate like a balloon with a fast leak.

"Your date?" her father spouted loudly. "Olivia, you haven't been seen publicly with a man in two years. The press will have a field day if you show up with him." He turned and motioned towards Donovan.

"Why?"

"Because I'm considerably older than you, Miss Weston," Donovan said, finally speaking. "But the idea has merit."

"I wouldn't say considerably..." she started, then stopped herself. "You think I'm right?"

He looked at her for a long moment, his eyes dropping a fraction. "The profile on this killer implies that he is making acquaintances with the victims. They know him before he kills them. Until I can rule out who it is, it could be anyone. The murders also do not appear to be sexually perverse in nature. If he believes you are intimately involved with someone, it might dissuade him briefly. I don't think it will stop him, but it might slow him down and give us the chance we need to nail him."

She liked the way he spoke to *her*, not to her father *about* her, or at her *through* her father. But to her. He left the decision to her, something that hadn't been done in a long time. If ever. Then some of his words really sank in. Donovan wanted someone to believe they were *intimately involved*. Warmth shifted through her, rising to her cheeks, and she had to look away.

"I like that. I mean—I—" she took a deep breath. "Is that what you want to do?"

He dipped his head once, an abbreviated nod.

"So, what? You want to convince everyone that you're her lover?" her father said, sarcasm making his words ugly.

Olivia couldn't help the catch in her breath. Donovan's expression didn't change, except the slight lowering of his eyelids. But he didn't look away.

"It would be best if as few people as possible know the true reason I'm here. We don't know who this man is."

Involuntarily, Olivia looked back to Lara. Lara looked from her, to Donovan, to Phillip Weston, and back to Donovan. "Hey, my lips are sealed. I'm not quite sure what it is I'm not telling, but you've got my word."

"Fine," her father nearly snorted. "Do whatever the hell you want. But when this comes back to bite you in the ass, don't come crying to me."

He spun on his heels and stormed from the room, slamming the door behind him. Olivia flinched and Lara jumped. Lara looked at her from the dressing table, brush in hand, and eyes rounded. Embarrassment burned hot in Olivia's cheeks.

Lara cleared her throat. "Well, I guess I'll go get your dress so you can finish getting ready."

"Thank you, Lara."

Lara set the brush down and exited out the same door her father had moments before. Leaving her alone with Donovan. Olivia's heart sped up, and she wrung her hands together, finally crossing her arms over her body to stop the fidgeting.

"I'm sorry about my father," she said softly. "He really does have my best interest at heart."

He half growled, half chuckled and she looked up at him. A storm swirled behind his

eyes, almost as plain to see as thunderclouds when they rolled over the city on a hot summer afternoon. She found herself staring, but couldn't look away. He had her mesmerized. Only when she felt her body sway, in his direction, did she snap her gaze away.

"How many times has he said that to you?"

"What?"

"He has your best interest at heart."

Olivia sighed and shrugged. "Enough, I guess. He just comes across —"

"Like an ass?"

She smiled, but tried to hide it by curling her lips between her teeth. "Abrasive."

Silence settled on the room, and she looked up at him again through her lashes, standing only an arm's length away. He watched her, just like she had been watching him. A nervous skitter went over her skin.

"I'll leave so you can dress. But I'll only be outside."

He moved past her, his shoulder almost brushing hers, but not quite. Olivia turned.

"Donovan?"

He stopped and looked back to her. "Yes?"

She stammered for a moment. "I—I'm sorry. Is it all right if I call you Donovan? You can call me Olivia."

One corner of his mouth tipped up, more than a twitch and definitely approaching a smile. "Donovan is fine. If I'm to be your escort for the evening, it wouldn't work if you called me Agent Greer."

She chuckled. "You're right."

"Did you need something?"

It took a moment for her to remember why she called after him in the first place. "I wanted to apologize."

"For what?" he said, turning back to face her.

Those hazel eyes, stormy gray-green eyes, looked at her. She kept getting lost in them.

"For earlier today. When you told me about Brittany. I'm usually not the swooning type."

"It was surprising news, and not good. You had every right to be upset."

She smiled, and didn't try to hide it. "Thank you."

He dipped his chin once, and opened the door to leave. Lara brushed past him as she came in, Olivia's midnight blue dress draped over her arm.

"Honey, you're going to knock 'em dead in this dress," Lara said enthusiastically. "If I were ten years younger, and had your figure..." She trailed off with a sigh. "Mr. Greer, I'd watch her tonight if I were you. You'd better make it real clear tonight that she's on *your* arm."

With his hand on the knob, he looked first at Lara then to Olivia. She tried to keep her composure, but felt the heat in her cheeks so strong she was afraid she glowed.

"I'll be right outside," he said again, and shut the door.

Chapter Three

The conversation at the dinner party stayed at a low hum through the meal, but Olivia remained silent for the most part, only speaking when someone singled her out. Her father sat on her left, as loud and in charge of the conversation as ever and Donovan on her right.

Several times, her father leaned over and whispered to her about so-and-so who was looking to produce a new play in the spring. Someone-or-another gave her a favorable review last week, and she should thank them. Each time, Olivia nodded and promised she would do what he asked, hoping she wouldn't actually have to. Schmoozing was as enjoyable to her as falling into the orchestra pit.

So, instead she focused on carefully piercing each asparagus spear with her fork. Donovan was left handed, and all through dinner, the fabric of his jacket sleeve brushed against her arm. She had to fight the shiver that shot up her spine each time.

It had been a long time since the presence of a man had any effect on her. Two years, in fact. But even then, looking back, she couldn't remember feeling a thrill when Brad's arm brushed hers. Maybe when he kissed her. Maybe. It was hard to remember now, especially with Donovan so near.

More than once, she found herself wondering just what it was about him that captured and held her attention so completely. It had to be more than just his handsomeness, because the Good Lord knew he could fill out a tuxedo quite nicely, but she had seen attractive men before. The Industry was full of them.

"And who is your friend, Olivia?"

She looked up from her lemon-crustad salmon, across the table to Ashleigh Morgan. Ashleigh looked absolutely stunning tonight, dressed in an emerald green gown and her auburn hair twisted into an intricate coiffure.

Donovan shifted back, bringing his arm behind her to rest on the chair. His hand brushed along her skin until he curled his fingers around her shoulder. Heat rushed over her body, rising quickly to her cheeks, and she darted a quick look in his direction. Donovan watched her, a small, slow grin on his lips. It was the first time she had really seen him smile. Not a tease, or the threat of a grin, but an actual smile.

She cleared her throat and managed to finally speak. "This is Donovan Greer," she said. Donovan winked at her and turned to look at Ashleigh. "Donovan, Ashleigh Morgan. Ashleigh is performing in *The Producers*."

Donovan nodded, his fingers caressing her shoulder blade. "Mel Brooks is a very funny man."

The other actress grinned, looking like a sultry mountain cat, and leaned her chin into her hands. She hummed, her eyes dropping as she perused him from across the table. "Donovan. What a distinguished name," she said, speaking the words over a throaty hum. "Have the two of you been an item for long?"

"Long enough to know Liv is a very special woman," Donovan said, his voice like black velvet.

Olivia stared at him, her insides shaking. His palm slid to the side of her throat and he leaned towards her, pressing a soft kiss to her cheek. The scent of his aftershave and soap

drifted around her, and her eyes fluttered closed for a moment.

"Well, isn't that the sweetest thing I've ever heard," Ashleigh said before being drawn into another conversation by the man beside her.

Her father cleared his throat loudly, and Olivia dropped her chin to give him a sidelong glance. Phillip Weston eyed them angrily, his eyes squinted at the corners. He swiped his mouth with his napkin and jerked it across his lap. He didn't like the façade, and while most in attendance might not see it, the anger in his eyes sparked as clear to her as the crystal chandeliers overhead.

Donovan's hand slid down her arm, and he gently squeezed her fingers before going back to his meal. Olivia had a hard time eating anything after that, her stomach in jumbles and her mind racing. She told herself over and over again that it was an act, he was playing the part, but he was pretty darn convincing. And she wasn't sure how long she could handle it. Or how long her father would allow it to continue.

After the meal was complete, everyone moved en masse to the parlor, which was half the size of a football field. Olivia retreated to her usual spot for these affairs, ensconced between the grand piano and the potted plants, and Donovan remained at her side. As a waiter walked past with a tray of champagne flutes, he grabbed two, offering her one.

"Thank you," she said softly as she lifted the flute to her lips.

"You're welcome. Perhaps it will help you relax."

Olivia looked up from the clear, effervescent liquid. His hazel eyes watched her intently. "I'm relaxed," she stated, looking back to the champagne.

"I feel the tension in your body, and I'm not even touching you."

Olivia closed her eyes, clenching her fingers around the stem of the crystal glass. *That voice! God help her, that voice.*

"You don't enjoy these parties?"

Forcing herself to open her eyes again, she looked up at him. He stood so close, she needed to lift her chin to meet his stare. She could smell the scent of his shaving cream, still clinging to his skin, but already the dark specks of whiskers flecked his chin and cheeks. "No, I don't."

"Why not? Aren't these your friends?"

Olivia glanced around the room, full of men and women dressed in black tuxedos and beautiful cocktail gowns. The occasional sound of forced laughter drifted through the air just above the cords of the music that played in the background. A handful of couples danced on the marble floor, and while she knew all their names, not one could be considered a friend.

"No."

"So, why are you here?"

She wanted to sigh, deep and long, but the hundreds of lessons her father drilled into her head about decorum and what a woman of her position did or didn't do kept her from doing it. Sometimes she felt like some duchess or marchioness in the romance novels she read, whose only duties were to look pretty and speak when spoken to, like a child.

Olivia looked out across the floor again as she tried to decide how to answer him. This time she didn't fight the groan in her chest when Brad's eyes met hers through the crowd. His smug smirk raked her nerves, and he handed his champagne glass to a passing waiter as he moved towards them.

She reached up to rest her hand on Donovan's upper arm, trying not to think about how hard it felt beneath the fine material of his tuxedo. "Donovan, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"How far will you go to protect me?"

If possible, his eyes darkened in intensity. A muscle jumped along his jaw before he parted his lips to speak. "I'll do anything."

She had to blink several times, and swallow against the dry desert in her throat. "Will you dance with me?"

Donovan took her champagne glass and set both flutes on the piano beside them. Offering his hand, he led her onto the dance floor. She did well to control the sparks that electrified her skin when he put his arm around her waist and pulled her close. His right hand wrapped around her left, and he turned it to hold her palm against his jacket lapel. More self-conscious than she could ever remember, she slipped her arm up to rest on his shoulder, her fingers just brushing the short ends of his brown hair.

Her heart thumped erratically in her chest, and she feared he could feel it, as close as he held her. His strong hand spanned her back, hot against her exposed skin, as they moved around the floor. Donovan was a wonderful dancer, and Olivia fell easily into step with him.

"Are you going to tell me what I'm saving you from?" he asked, his lips close to her ear and his voice whispering over the skin of her neck.

"Do you need to know?"

He chuckled, the sound reverberating through her as he tightened his embrace just slightly. His cheek brushed hers, slightly rough, and her fingers curled into his collar in an uncontrollable response.

"I think I should know."

Olivia pulled back just enough so she could look up at him. "Do you see the man standing at the piano? Where we were before."

Donovan looked in the direction she indicated. Brad stood with one hand deep in his pocket, the other leaning into the grand piano. He watched her dance with Donovan, an annoying smirk on his lips. His long, blonde hair swept back from his face was Brad's attempt at looking like Fabio.

"Brad Everhardt," Donovan said, without a hint of surprise in his voice.

She looked back to him. "You know who he is?"

Donovan looked down at her with a slight tip of his chin. "He's in your file."

Olivia pulled back, arching one eyebrow. "I have an FBI file?"

"Everyone has an FBI file, Liv."

A smile tugged her lips at the nickname. It warmed her blood and sent a shiver up her spine.

"Are you cold?"

Olivia shook her head. "No. I'm fine."

He pulled her close again, and on instinct, she rested her cheek against his chest. She couldn't hear his heartbeat over the chamber music, but she could feel its soft thump-thump near her ear.

"So, what else is in my *file*?" she asked after several sways to the music.

"Everything I need to know about you."

"Like what?"

His palm shifted against her hand, his fingertips sending sparks up her arm. When he spoke, his breath softly stirred her hair, warming her scalp.

"I know you're twenty-five, born April 2nd. You've been performing on-stage since you were seven, and started on Broadway at thirteen. Your father, Phillip Weston, is also your manager. And your mother, Andrea Paige-Weston, lives in Upstate New York. She was an upcoming star when, at nineteen, she met your father, ten years her senior, and married."

Olivia stifled her sigh. "All the gory details."

His hand slipped up her back to curl around her shoulder, warm and comforting. He didn't elaborate any further on what dark and sordid details might be hidden in her past, documented somewhere by a bespectacled rookie.

"Do you think he's convinced?"

"Who?" she asked.

"Everhardt."

Olivia shook her head, her cheeks brushing the satin lapel of his tuxedo, and the delicate pleats of his shirt beneath. "I don't know."

"If you don't think we have, we can always make sure he, and everyone else, is convinced."

She jerked back, staring at him again. "What do you mean?"

They stopped swaying, standing still among the dancing partygoers. "I could kiss you."

"Kiss me?"

He nodded once, barely moving his head, and his gaze dropped to her mouth. Instinctually, Olivia licked her lips.

"I-I- do you think that's necessary?"

Donovan shifted, bringing her against him again, and resumed the dance. "I won't do anything to make you uncomfortable, as long as I feel I'm acting in your best interest."

Olivia nodded against his chest, letting out a long breath. "That's good to know."

Donovan tossed his tuxedo jacket on the queen bed in the Weston's spare bedroom. As he walked around the end of the large, four-poster bed, he yanked his tie loose and released the onyx buttons of his shirt.

His unopened suitcase sat on the bed, waiting to be unpacked, the lock still looped through the zipper to keep out prying eyes. Donovan looked to the digital alarm clock beside the bed. After midnight. At this rate, it would take him six months to catch up on his sleep once this case was over. Even now, he couldn't go to bed. He hadn't had an opportunity to look over the penthouse. Leery and Jenkins were posted outside the building, and had given him a brief report, but he didn't rely on the work of others to cover his own ass.

He decided the unpacking would wait. With a flip of his wrists, he snapped his black braces off his shoulders and left them hanging off his waist. One quick walk around the penthouse tonight, then he'd hit the sack and catch some sleep before morning. Tomorrow, he'd take a full tour of the place, including Olivia's bedroom and its proximity to his own. If it wasn't close enough, he'd have to move.

Weston would love that.

Idiot.

Not only did the man have more concern for his daughter's career than her well-being, but he treated her like a child. It irked Donovan.

Olivia was most definitely not a child. A fact he was immensely aware of after dancing with her at the party. The memory of her silky skin beneath his fingertips had Donovan shaking his head.

Don't go there!

Donovan walked down the dark hall towards the soft glow of a light at the end. The penthouse was silent. Everyone had immediately gone to bed after returning from the dinner party. That was fine with him. At least this way he didn't have some self-important civilian watching his every move.

The hall opened into a living room. The largest big-screen television he had ever seen sat at the far end, and three leather sofas sat in a 'u' shape, facing it. In the dark room, the amber display of the DVD player glowed softly.

He walked to the far wall, a bank of large windows looked out over the city. Pushing the drapes aside, he looked out into the darkness, sprinkled with lights from other windows. The skyline was altered now from the one he had known years before, but the city at night was still breathtaking.

There was no balcony or fire escape at these windows, which could prove to be both help and hindrance. Fire escapes gave unwanted elements a way in, but not having one gave him one less way to get out. He'd have to find out which side of the thirty-seventh floor penthouse had the escapes.

Donovan doubled back. The soft light he had seen from the hall came from an expansive kitchen tucked in the back of the penthouse. The overhead light at the sink lit the room enough to keep anyone from stubbing their toes.

He was on the other side of the kitchen, heading for what looked like a patio with French doors, when he heard the soft click of a door closing. Donovan quickly rounded the counter and headed for the archway leading to the next room, flattening his body against the wall.

Moments later, a small figure moved into the kitchen through the same door he had entered. He watched around the corner as the person moved silently across the linoleum. Donovan smiled when he realized it was Olivia, apparently seeking a midnight snack.

He held his breath as he watched her climb up onto the granite countertop and open one of the tall cabinet doors. She stretched to reach back into the top shelf, the hem of her oversized tee shirt rising up her muscular dancer's legs. A swatch of white cotton panties winked at him, and Donovan quickly turned away, flattening his back against the wall as a heated rush of blood moved south of his belt line.

Saints preserve us.

She looked like a teenager at a slumber party, and Heaven help him, his professional ethics weren't strong enough to convince his thirty-nine year old libido that getting hard at the site of her perfect ass was just plain wrong. As wrong as it had been of him to tease her with the thought of a kiss while dancing, just to see the rise of pretty pink color in her cheeks.

The sound of the cabinet closing and the rustle of cellophane filled the quiet room. Donovan ran his palm over his face and let out a long breath before peeking around the corner

again.

Olivia sat Indian-style on the counter, her stocking feet tucked beneath her and a package nestled in the valley between her knees. Donovan watched, unable to look away, as she took one chocolate sandwich cookie from the package, stared at it with half-closed eyelids, and bit into the confection. Heat bubbled and rolled through him as her eyes fluttered closed and she moaned in obvious ecstasy.

Donovan shifted, trying to ease the discomfort between his thighs caused by the tailored tuxedo slacks. What kind of agent was he to let a good-okay-incredible pair of legs distract him? Especially when they belonged to the woman he was here to protect.

The cellophane rustled again and she pulled out another cookie, eating it with the same abandon and enjoyment as the first. When she groaned softly, running her tongue over her lips to capture every bit of cream filling, Donovan thought he was going to lose it. He had to ignore her, or find some way back to his room without her seeing him.

But he didn't look away.

She set the package of cookies on the counter and drew her knees up to her chest, stacking two cookies on each exposed knee. But it wasn't the cookies that had Donovan's attention. It was the view of her backside, barely covered by the white panties he had caught a glimpse of before, that had him sweating.

You damn pervert. Tell her you're here.

No, he couldn't do that. She'd know he'd been watching her.

Olivia took a cookie from her knee and carefully pried the two halves apart. With calculated care, she smeared the white cream from inside the cookie, licking it off her fingers.

Donovan's heart seized and his blood ran cold as the painfully real memory of a little brown haired girl, with Shirley Temple curls and big green eyes, rushed his thoughts. She sat at a kitchen table, the sunlight from the windows behind her lighting on her hair like little fairies.

"Would you like some cookies with me, Daddy?"

"Of course, darlin'. What kind are you having?"

"Oh, my favorite kind in the whole world. Chocolate with frosting in the middle."

"That sounds delicious."

"You're eating them wrong, Daddy! You have to open 'em up and eat the cream first. Then you dunk the chocolate part in milk. And if you're a good boy, Mama will let you have chocolate milk to dunk it. That's twice as good."

Donovan curled his fingers against his chest, pain jabbing through him, and yanked back from the doorway. His hip bumped a small table and a picture frame toppled over.

Damn it!

"Is there somebody there?" Olivia called out from the other room, her voice wavering slightly.

Donovan pushed away from the wall and quickly rubbed his face with his palms, trying to drive back the demons. Pulling in a deep breath, he stood straight and walked around the corner into the kitchen.

Olivia now stood on the floor, her hands braced beside her on the counter edge. He imagined she had hopped down as soon as he so elegantly knocked over half the furniture in the breakfast nook.

"It's only me," he said.

"Donovan? What are you doing up?" She glanced over her shoulder quickly at the package of cookies hidden behind her back.

"Making sure everything is locked down." His voice cracked and he gritted his teeth against the angry frustration that stormed in his chest.

She stared at him, and even in the semi-darkness of the kitchen, he felt her eyes on him. They were as tangible as a touch, a gentle caress on his cheek. Donovan shook his head and strode across the room towards the exit.

"I'll see you in the morning," he snapped before taking off down the hall.

Her faint "Good night, Donovan," followed him.

Chapter Four

"I just don't understand how your father can let you carry on with such foolishness. And why haven't I heard about this before? Why did I have to learn about this from some trashy gossip rag?"

Olivia sat cross-legged on her bed, her phone propped between her ear and shoulder, a magazine open in her lap. "Mother, *People Magazine* isn't a trashy gossip rag. And it's not what you think."

"Olivia, I am your mother, and while you may not think I know what I'm talking about, I'm speaking from experience. Men don't like successful women. He will steal your career right out from under you when you're not looking."

But Olivia was looking, long and hard, and the photo her mother ranted and raved about. And the caption beneath.

MANHATTAN, NY... *Sweetheart of Broadway has a new Sweetheart.* Olivia Weston was spotted recently dining at La Grenouille with her now ever-present beau, Donovan Greer. Their relationship remains a mystery to most, but those close to Olivia report that Donovan never strays far from her side.

In a candid moment, the photographer captured Olivia looking into the crowd, her hand nestled in the crook of Donovan's arm. She remembered how his hand resting on hers had sent shockwaves of warmth up her arm. But had she seen the look on his face, the one captured on film, her heart probably would have stopped. His gaze was intense, possessive and dark when he looked down at her. Even now, Olivia's breath caught and her pulse jumped.

"Olivia. Olivia, are you even listening to me?"

"Mother, you really don't need to worry. Didn't Daddy call you and tell you what was going on?"

As she spoke, she slowly tore the page from the magazine, careful not to come too close to the edge of the photograph. She held it up, staring at it, as her mother rambled on. Olivia shifted, taking the phone from the bend in her neck.

"Since when does your father tell me anything?" Andrea Paige-Weston harrumphed.

Olivia closed the mangled magazine and tossed it to the end of the bed. Her mother's sensibilities were easily damaged, so she decided the whole truth might not be wise. Donovan's warnings that as few people as possible should know why he was really there rang in her head, but after all, this was her mother.

"Mother, Donovan isn't really my..." She stumbled over the words. *Boyfriend* sounded so juvenile, and nothing juvenile could ever be associated with Donovan. *Lover? Beau? Companion?* She sighed. "Consider him a bodyguard."

"Well, it's about time your father wised up and realized you needed one. I've been telling him that for years. But he certainly doesn't act like a bodyguard. Not by some of the photos I've seen."

Olivia climbed from the bed, still holding the phone to her ear, and walked to her

adjoining bathroom for a hair clip.

"He wants it that way. He's not seen as a threat this way, I guess. If anyone were to try anything, he'd have the element of surprise."

Her mother grumbled at Olivia's explanation, but she wasn't really listening. The photo lingered in her mind, and she wondered why he had looked so intense at that moment. What had he been thinking?

"Olivia, is there something you're not telling me?"

The forceful question snapped her back to reality. "What do you mean?"

"Why is your father suddenly hiring a bodyguard? Has something happened? Has someone threatened you? Have you received sick letters? Is someone stalking you?"

"No, Mother. Nothing like that. Nothing specific," she lied. *Why worry her?* "Daddy just wants to be safe."

After hearing yet another excuse why her mother wouldn't be coming to the performance, and a five-minute lecture on the folly of dating older men—even though she fully understood Donovan was not in that category—Olivia finished with her mother and sank down onto the edge of her bed.

She was tired. Physically tired. And talking to her mother always left her emotionally exhausted. She was, as she once heard another actor say, bone tired. But there was no work break in sight. The play was doing very well, nearly selling out most nights, and her father was already talking to other producers and directors about whatever her next project would be.

Twenty-five years old and she would do just about anything to retire.

Her stomach grumbled, reminding Olivia that she had skipped lunch. Daddy had been in a foul mood, and when she reached for the package of cold cuts in the refrigerator, he made a comment about the fat and sodium levels in baked ham. Hungry or not, she had put the ham back. Now, she was just too ravenous to care.

The penthouse was relatively quiet. With the anticipation of eating a meal in peace, Olivia moved quickly down the hall to the kitchen. Deciding it was best to act quickly, she opened the refrigerator and started taking out the ingredients for a sandwich. She opened the mayonnaise and spread a big glob on a slice of whole wheat bread.

"Would you mind making two?"

She jumped and gasped, twisting with the mayo-smeared butter knife in her hand. Donovan sat on the other side of the kitchen at the small table, an open laptop computer in front of him. He looked at her over the top of his pewter-tone wire-rimmed glasses.

It was the first time she had seen him in glasses.

Wow.

He tipped his chin up and stared at her. She realized she hadn't answered, and wondered if he could see the glow from her cheeks across the room.

"Sure. Do you like ham? I've got bologna, roast beef and turkey breast."

"Roast beef. Cheese?"

She opened the fridge and looked inside. "I've got American, Muenster and Swiss."

"Muenster. Mayo. Lettuce. No tomato."

Olivia smiled and tilted her head. "Yes, sir," she said and saluted with her knife. "Wheat?"

"That's fine."

He went back to typing, and she finished the sandwiches. This was the first time she could ever recall making food for someone else. So, to make it a memorable occasion, she put her full effort into it. The sandwiches were carefully sliced into four triangles, and she heaped a good portion of potato chips into the center of the plates, finishing off with some sweet pickles and a can of soda for each of them. With great satisfaction, Olivia carried their plates to the table and set his down beside his computer.

"Thank you," he said with a quick glance at the sandwich. "Looks good."

Olivia sat down in the chair beside him, tucking one foot up on the seat so she could rest her arm on her bent knee. Donovan typed with one hand, a speedy hunt and peck method, and picked up a wedge of sandwich with the other. He bit into it, and Olivia smiled when he arched one eyebrow and licked some mayonnaise off his lip.

"That's good," he said, his voice a deep rumble, before taking another bite.

"Thank you."

He took another large bite before turning back to his computer. Olivia ate, watching him from the corner of her eye. Two weeks ago, when he first arrived, she never would have sat at the table with him, let alone in silence. But they had spent so much time together, or at least in close proximity, the butterflies in her stomach didn't fly nearly as fiercely anymore. At least, not the nervous kind.

"What are you doing?" she asked before popping a piece of pickle in her mouth.

"Background checks. Correlating data."

"On the Broadway Killer?"

He looked up, the soft light from his computer screen reflecting off his glasses. "You are the only case I'm working on."

"Really? They don't have you work on more than one at a time?" she asked.

He slipped his glasses off, dropping them on the table, and pinched the bridge of his nose as he stretched out. "It depends."

She liked being able to talk to him. Not once had Donovan ever treated her like a child, or a simpleton, or someone to be managed and directed. And he liked her sandwiches.

"On what?"

"On the importance or the intricacy of the case."

Olivia took a bite of sandwich, mayonnaise squirting out the side and onto her finger. Donovan's gaze dropped to her mouth as she sucked the condiment from her knuckle. For the second time in fifteen minutes, heat rushed to her cheeks and she reached for a napkin.

"I'm such a slob," she mumbled, wiping her mouth.

He still watched her, the corners of his eyes squinting slightly, and she watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed. Donovan shook his head. That was it. Didn't say a word. Olivia looked down and shifted in the chair to put both feet on the floor again. She poked at the remaining chips on her plate with one finger.

"So, your boss considers this an important case?"

"I consider you important. That's enough," he said, his voice sounding forced, almost strangled.

You.

She had to lift her chin, to look at him, nothing in the world could have stopped it. Not

willpower. Not even one of her father's scathing glares.

His sculpted lips formed a straight line, and heavy lids partially hooded his eyes, but the awareness of his stare sent a rush of fiery sensation over her, and all she could do was hold her breath.

Then he sat forward, breaking the visual contact, and jabbed a couple of keys on the laptop before slapping it shut. Olivia sucked air into burning lungs and blinked rapidly.

"We leave for the theater soon," he said, not wording it as a question.

Olivia nodded and stood with him, picking up the plates as he tucked his computer under his arm. "Half an hour."

Donovan nodded and headed for the door. She watched his retreating back, a strange emotion she didn't understand bubbling in her chest. Urging her forward. Forcing her to act.

She called out his name, jogging down the hall after him. Donovan stopped at the door to his bedroom, his hand on the knob. He turned and watched her as she closed the space between them. His brows pulled together and the corners of his lips turned down in a slight frown.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. I..." She stared up at him, trying to figure out just what it was she ran after him to say. When she didn't speak, he reached out and wrapped his hand around her upper arm, his eyes asking the question again.

Olivia swallowed hard before she took hold of his blue silk tie and pulled him down towards her, pushing up on her toes to kiss his cheek. She held her lips against his rough skin and inhaled the scent of his shaving cream. He didn't pull back, the way she expected him to, but the grip on her arm tightened just slightly.

"Thank you," she whispered.

He didn't say anything until she stepped away, her fingers still curled around his tie.

"For what?"

Olivia swallowed and licked her lips, the sensation of his afternoon stubble still alive on her mouth. "More than you'll ever know."

While her wobbly legs would still carry her, Olivia moved down the hall to her bedroom. At her door, she glanced back, and saw him still standing where she had left him. He stared at her for several moments before opening his door and going into his room. She did the same, and once inside sank down onto her bed.

Her reflection faced her from the dressing table mirror, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked.

"Oh, my God," she said to the empty room. "What did you just do?"

Donovan's phone rang as he shut the door, giving him no time to deal with his reaction to Olivia's chaste kiss. He snapped the phone off its bracket at his waist and flipped it open, still staring at the closed door.

"Greer," he snapped out.

"It's Jackman."

"Yeah, what?"

"Have you come up with anything?"

"If I had, you'd know."

"What the hell is your problem?"

He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Nothing."

Jackman grunted. "Sounds to me like something crawled up your ass."

"Did you call for a reason, Bill?"

"Just to let you know Brittany Callahan's body has been released for burial. We finally managed to track down her parents in Staffordshire, and they've claimed the body."

Donovan nodded to his empty bedroom. "When is the service?"

"Day after tomorrow. Right there in the city."

"Have you spoken to Jabrosky?"

"Yeah. Apparently, there was a deep-set rivalry between Halliwell and Callahan. Halliwell has no interest in attending the ceremony."

"That's probably a good thing. I have a feeling Liv will want to go."

Bill cleared his throat. "I don't like the stagnation of this case. We're too dependent on the killer to screw up."

"I'm running checks on a few on Ms. Weston's staff. See if anyone matches the profile. It's something."

Bill snorted. "Yeah, well, let's keep on this."

"Fine," Donovan answered. He didn't appreciate being checked up on, but understood all the same. "I'll call you with anything I get."

He moved the phone from his face to flip it closed, but heard Bill call his name. Donovan put the phone back to his ear. "Yeah?"

"Your god-daughter has been asking about you."

Donovan smiled, despite his dark mood. "Tell Tamara I'll bring her something home from the Big Apple."

"She wants you to know that she's twelve now. She wants something better than a teddy bear."

Donovan chuckled. "I'll see what I can do."

He flipped the phone closed and tossed it on the bed beside his laptop. His fingers came up to touch the spot on his cheek where Olivia had pressed her lips. It still felt warm, from the inside out. Donovan shook his head.

Well, hell.

Chapter Five

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," spoke the black-robed reverend as he stood at the head of Brittany Callahan's coffin.

Olivia stared at the pale oak box, with white orchids and lilies draped the length of it, and clenched her fists together in front of her. The black mesh veil on her hat distorted her vision, but it did nothing to lessen the effect of the scene around her. The reality of it all sat on her chest with the weight of ten grown men, making it hard to breathe, and her heart skittered and pounded against her chest.

Her father sighed heavily beside her, and when she glanced in his direction, she caught him checking the time on his wristwatch. Olivia held her breath.

Could he be more obvious?

Two days ago, when Donovan told her Brittany would finally be buried, her father had been adamant she didn't have the time to attend the funeral. It wasn't until her publicist pointed out it would look better if she went that he consented. Through it all, he made it quite clear he was not pleased.

When the hell was he ever pleased?

Olivia closed her eyes for several moments, clenching and releasing her fists several times until the tips of her nails dug into her palm. She had the nearly overwhelming urge to shout at the sky and stomp her feet into the soft earth beneath her.

But such displays of emotion were not acceptable, no matter how much it ate at her insides and pounded in her temples for release. Decorum in public at all times. A lady, a performer, must after all—perform. A good actor can create emotion when there is none, but a great actor can show now emotion when it twists and storms inside.

For two days, two incredibly long days, the tension building inside her had become so intense it only allowed her an hour or two of sleep a night and had kept her stomach in such tight knots she had been unable to eat. Suddenly, it seemed like she was being attacked on all sides and couldn't fight it all off.

The reality of Brittany's death hit her when Donovan told her 'the body had been released'. Brittany was no longer the slightly older actress who took the time to speak to the terrified pre-teen in her first Broadway production. She was no longer the woman who sent Olivia flowers on opening night of *Phantom*. Now, she was just a body being released. A body empty after some psychopath stole her life.

Her back muscles spasmed, shooting pain up her neck, and she jerked against it. Donovan touched her arm, just above the wrist, with firm fingers. She turned her head and tilted her chin up to look at him, the tight muscles of her neck fighting the movement. His gaze was intense. But then again, when wasn't it? His lips formed a straight line, and the tanned skin between his brows formed a slight 'v' as he asked her with his eyes if she was all right.

She wasn't, but that was her problem. Not his. Not anyone's.

Olivia looked away, back to the coffin, and turned her hand to link her fingers with his. The palm of his hand was warm, soothing against her skin. She felt his strength as his fingers curled to grip hers. His rough fingertips ran over the indents her nails had left in her own

skin.

This was the first time he'd touched her, or let her touch him, since she made a fool of herself by kissing his cheek three nights before. Maybe she just imagined it. Donovan didn't present himself as the type of man who was very touchy-feely. Maybe it was just her raw nerves and stressed mind making more of his actions than it really was.

Who the hell knows anymore?

Olivia shifted her neck inside the scratchy collar of her suit. The heat was oppressive today, and the air was heavy with humidity. Her skin prickled beneath the long sleeves, and the hat that covered her fair hair seemed to just trap the heat like an oven. With the steady beat of a giant bongo drum, her temples pounded behind her eyes.

She didn't realize her body swayed until Donovan's arm circled her shoulders, halting her momentum. Her head fell back against his arm, forcing her to look up at him from beneath the brim of her hat. The sudden change in position had her staring into his face, trying to figure out how she got there.

"Are you okay?" he whispered, leaning closer to her.

She tried to nod and stand again, but he kept his arm around her. "Just lean into me until it's over."

Olivia found she had neither the will nor the desire to argue. She let him pull her against his side, and rested her head against his shoulder. His hand moved up and down her arm, slowly, offering some soothing comfort to her raw nerves.

The reverend finished the service, and the crowd dissipated. Her father mumbled something under his breath, gave one last scathing glance to his wristwatch, and turned to head back to the waiting limousine. Donovan moved his hand from her shoulder down her arm to again join their fingers. But as he stepped away, she found she couldn't move yet. The coffin wouldn't let her go.

What if Donovan couldn't stop this psychopath? What if that were her?

"I won't let it happen," Donovan said, his rough velvet voice near her ear.

She snapped her head around to look at him, his face close to her own as he leaned towards her. His eyes skimmed over her face, settling on her mouth that she realized, with a rush of heat, hung open with shock.

"Th-that's not what—I wasn't thinking that—" she stuttered. "Why do you assume I'd be thinking something like that?"

"Because that's what *I'd* be thinking were I in your position," he said. "And your eyes. I can see it in your eyes."

Olivia stepped back from him, his close proximity messing with her thought process and adding yet one more level of pandemonium to her already colliding train of thought.

"Olivia," her father called loudly from the limousine. It was his get-your-money-making-ass-over-here tone.

She looked past the limousine to the crowd of paparazzi gathered with flashing cameras and tape recorders, waiting for the perfect picture or printable quote. At the head of the line of cars, she watched as a young man helped Brittany's mother into her car. Flash bulbs strobed the air around her, and Olivia suddenly had the urge to grab one of the cameras and slam it into the ground.

Donovan walked beside her, his hand at the small of her back, as they approached her

father. Phillip Weston drummed his fingers against his hip and scowled until they reached him.

"I have an appointment that there is no way in hell I'm going to get to on time because of this damn funeral. Be at the theater in an hour. I want you to run through the entire performance before tonight's show. You've got to show the press you're not effected by all this garbage."

Olivia stared at her father. Her stomach knotted and pain shot up the back of her head from the tight bunch at the base of her skull.

Damn him!

"Make that three hours," Donovan said, drawing her attention. "I have some things I need to discuss with Olivia."

She barely suppressed her groan. All she needed was some lecture from Donovan about what she was inadvertently doing wrong, on top of everything else she supposedly did wrong.

"If that's acceptable to you, of course."

Olivia realized Donovan was talking to her, and she blinked rapidly to bring him into focus.

"She needs to run through the performance," her father growled.

"With all due respect, Mr. Weston. I've watched her performance every night for nearly three weeks. She does an amazing job. And this is important," he added, bringing her focus back to her again.

Both men watched her expectantly, her father's face twisted in an annoyed scowl, and Donovan just waited. Olivia pressed her hand to her forehead, feeling the clamminess left by the heat. "Fine. I'll be at the theater well before anyone needs to worry."

"Olivia," her father started.

"We'll be there by two-thirty," Donovan cut him off, his hand again at the small of her back, leading her away from the car.

As they walked away from the crowd of well-wishers and paparazzi, along the landscaped path through the cemetery, Olivia pulled the small veiled cap from her head and sighed as a slight breeze came through the trees. It offered a brief reprieve to the heat, and carried the scent of early summer blossoms. They walked in silence out of the graveyard and turned towards Central Park.

Olivia crossed her arms over her body, holding her hat between her fingers, and didn't bother focusing on anything around her. Instead, her thoughts shot off in multiple directions, and with each step, her stomach churned and burned more and more. Her head pounded.

They stopped walking, but Olivia was too lost in her own thoughts to register what they were doing until Donovan pushed a large, overflowing waffle cone into her hands. She started, staring at the vanilla ice cream with chunks of toffee and caramel swirled through it.

"What is this?" she asked.

He took from the sidewalk vendor an equally large cone, loaded with bright pink ice cream engorged with nearly whole red strawberries. She stared, mesmerized, as he handed the seller a ten dollar bill and ran his tongue over the quickly melting cream.

"Most people call it ice cream," he said, retrieving his change and a pile of napkins.

"But I can't eat this."

Donovan cupped her elbow with his free hand and led her away from the cart, making room for the people in line behind them. "I asked you if you wanted some. You didn't say no, so I assumed that meant yes. You'd better get licking, or you're going to have Ben and Jerry running down your wrist."

Olivia saw what he meant as a large rivulet of melted cream ran down the outside of the cone. She quickly put it to her mouth and ran her tongue over the scoop. Immediately, she moaned in ecstasy. With her eyes closed, she licked it again, feeling her mouth chill and her taste buds come alive with sugar and cream and buttery toffee. It had been years since she had eaten ice cream, right around the time puberty hit and her mother preached to her about the sin of fat and calories.

At that moment, she didn't give a damn.

She licked again, filling her mouth with it and sucking a big lump through her lips.

Donovan watched. Mesmerized.

Finally, she partially opened her eyes, leaving them heavily lidded, and wiped a napkin across her glistening lips. She looked at him, and he watched color flush her cheeks. He was staring, and when he realized it, he turned his attention to his own cone and motioned her down the sidewalk.

"I probably look foolish," she said, continuing to eat at the treat. "I just haven't eaten ice cream in a long time."

"You didn't look foolish," he said, not trusting himself to say much more. *You looked sexy as hell. And that mouth...*

They walked in the general direction of Central Park, which was Donovan's ultimate destination. After a couple of blocks, Olivia groaned and stopped, putting her hand to her stomach.

"I can't eat any more of this. Honestly. What size is this? Gargantuan?"

"It's a medium."

She looked up at him, and held his stare much like she did the first day he met her. As if she scanned his face for the answers to the secrets of the universe. He licked his lower lip, tasting the sweetness of the strawberry ice cream, and stared back. The need to reach out and touch her, to cover her mouth and taste for himself how cold it was, snuck up on him like a breeze through the trees. Donovan didn't even realize he wanted to until he had to stop his hand, which was already half way to her cheek, and lower it again.

Then she looked away. "Do you want it? I just can't eat it."

Donovan took the cone from her, and finding a nearby trash can, threw the remains of both away. He didn't think he could eat much more himself. She followed, and easily fell into step with him again, her arms crossed over her body just like when they left the cemetery. The momentary sparkle in her eyes again gone.

He felt a little better, knowing he had gotten some food in her. Even if it was ice cream. Better than a chilidog with onions. Donovan would be willing to bet a hundred bucks Liv was on her way to one hell of an ulcer. He saw exhaustion in her eyes, frustration in her brows, and discomfort on her lips.

They crossed the street, and another block later, reached one of the entrances to Central Park. Stepping through the gate was like stepping into another world. Immediately, the street

sounds were muffled and replaced by playing children. The ground beneath them changed from hard concrete to soft grass as he led her off the path.

"Well," Olivia finally said, her tone leaving the statement open.

"Well, what?"

"When are you going to tell me what I'm doing wrong?"

Donovan squinted one eye and looked down at her. "What makes you think I'm going to tell you that?"

She walked on, face forward, swinging her black hat back and forth. "Because, you at least would have the decency to chastise me alone. I don't see you as the type to lecture me in front of a crowd. And since I can't imagine any other reason why you'd want to be alone with me, that's what I figure is going to happen. But I'll give you credit for softening the blow with the ice cream."

Donovan slowed, letting her get slightly ahead of him. "I have no intention of lecturing you about anything."

"Lecture. Preach. Point out the obvious. Call it whatever you like. So, what have I done wrong?"

He caught her arm at the elbow, stopping her stride and she turned to face him. "Liv, I'm not going to do any of that."

Her eyes flashed, and softly glossed lips straightened. "Disguise it any way that makes you feel better. I don't mind. Just get on with it."

Donovan stared into her face, liking how the anger that boiled beneath the surface gave her cheeks a healthy glow and her eyes more life than he had ever seen. He figured there was a great deal going on in that beautiful mind of hers, things she never let anyone see.

"Fine. You want a lecture? I'll give you a lecture. What have you eaten in the last two days?"

Her lips parted as her mouth fell open. "What? Is this some kind of a set up? You shove ice cream down my throat, then tell me I'm eating too much?"

She was just cruisin' for a fight. Didn't matter about what, apparently.

"Why on God's Green Earth would I tell you you're eating too much? Tell me. When was the last time you ate before the ice cream?"

She crossed her arms over her body, her chin set. "Yesterday afternoon."

"And what did you eat?"

"A banana."

"And before that?"

Her fingers drummed on her folded arms. "A sandwich."

Heat shot up Donovan's spine, and anger flashed. Not at Olivia, but at the people who were supposed to be watching out for her. Taking care of her. And not just keeping her alive. "Are you telling me the last meal you ate was the sandwich you ate with me three nights ago?"

She stared at him. Not answering.

"God damn it, Liv," he nearly shouted. "No wonder you look so pale. Are you sleeping?"

She still stared. Her jaw was clenched so tight he saw one delicate muscle spasm near her ear.

"Liv," he said, demanding an answer.

"No," she finally said. "Maybe an hour or two a night."

"Let me get this straight. You rehearse three to four hours a day, perform six out of seven nights a week, sleep two out of every twenty-four hours and eat every three days. What the hell are you doing?"

He saw the tears well in her eyes, but just as quickly, he saw her blink them back, not letting a single one fall. "I'm Olivia Weston. I'm being me."

Pure control.

Donovan didn't have that kind of control.

"You keep up that kind of crap, and you're going to be dead. That's what you're going to be. And not because of a psychopath hunting you down. It's because you're going to work yourself into an early grave," he shouted, pointing at her, wanting to shake her.

Lightning flashed behind her blue eyes, like a storm rolling over the sea. "You do your job, Special Agent Greer," she said in a low voice, emphasizing his formal name. "And I'll do mine. Is that all you wanted?"

"Just what do you think your job is, Liv?" he asked, ignoring her question.

She turned and stormed away, and Donovan fell easily into step beside her, his long strides taking up the same amount of space as several of her shorter ones.

"I thought you knew everything there was to know about me," she said, not looking at him.

"I know the things they put on paper. Not the things going on in your head."

"What? I'm crazy now?"

Donovan wanted to groan. God, he should have remembered how impossible it is to reason with a woman once she decides a fight is what she wants. "I never said that. Never even implied it." He grabbed her arm. "Liv, I didn't get you out here because I wanted to lecture you. Or because I wanted to interrogate you. I thought you could use a couple hours off."

"Are you my new manager, Donovan?" she asked, shaking off his hand. "Are you going to co-dictate my life with my father? Tell me where I can go? What I can do? Who I can see? Who I should or shouldn't talk to?"

The tension in her body had her standing ramrod straight, and he bet he could play a fiddle with her spine.

"Who are you mad at, Liv?"

"Who do you think I'm mad at?" she asked incredulously. "I'm yelling at you, aren't I?"

"So, you're mad at me for giving you three whole hours off, and for buying you an ice cream cone."

She stared at him, her body shaking with the pent up fury that swirled behind her eyes. "I'm angry that I've got one more person in my life *managing* it for me," she ground out.

"You think I *manage* you? Liv, there's a world of difference between managing and caring."

His goal had been to push her just enough to let her get some of that brewing frustration out, it hadn't been to tell her he cared about her. But once the words left his lips, there wasn't a damn thing he could do to get them back. And it was obvious the statement

hadn't gone unnoticed as she stared at him with rounded blue eyes.

Instead of trying to explain it away, or convince her he meant something different, Donovan remained silent. After several long moments of gazing back at her, Olivia turned on her heels and strode away. Several feet from him, she stopped only long enough to pull her conservative black pumps off to walk barefoot over the grass. He heard her mumble something as she yanked off the last shoe and fought to keep her balance. With his hands shoved in his pockets, he watched her reach a spot of shade beneath a large Maple tree and sink down onto the ground.

From where he stood, he saw her lips moving as she apparently argued with herself. She shoved delicate fingers through her blonde hair, working it free from the old-fashioned French bun at the nap of her neck. Her shoulders rose and fell as she took in a deep breath, laying her fingers across her forehead and resting her elbows on her raised knees.

When the private conversation seemed to wind down, Donovan started towards her, unbuttoning his suit jacket as he neared her. Her eyes were closed when he reached the tree, and she didn't acknowledge his arrival when he sat down beside her, leaning his back into the rough trunk behind him. With one knee bent, Donovan rested his arm on it and toyed with a blade of grass, and waited.

With another sigh, she finally spoke. "I'm mad because I haven't made a decision on my own since I was nine and chose to read 'Black Beauty' over 'Superfudge' with my private tutor. I'm mad because I love Hawaiian pizza with extra pineapple, but I haven't been allowed to eat one in years because I need to maintain a perfect size four. I'm mad because Brittany Callahan was a mentor and friend to me, and I'm not supposed to let anyone know it broke my heart when you told me she was dead." Her voice faltered with the last statement, and she turned away from him before wiping her cheeks with her fingers.

Women and tears, damn it.

Donovan rested his palm on her back, slowly working it up and down her tense spine as she quietly cried. After several silent minutes, Olivia sat up straight, apparently having reined in her emotions once again. Before he could move his arm, she sat back against him, using his side as support. He circled her shoulder with his arm and let her settle against him. The scent of her shampoo drifted up to him, and he inhaled deeply.

"I'm sorry," she said in a low voice, turning into him so her bent knees rested nearly in his lap.

"For what?"

"For yelling. For being so..." She trailed off.

"Human?"

She sighed softly, and he tightened his hold on her, pulling her closer. A voice in the back of his mind told him to push her away, get off the grass and head back to Manhattan. But, after all, if they happened to be recognized, he needed to maintain the role of lover, just as he had for the last three weeks. And it was in his best interest to have a protectee functioning on an even keel. An overly emotional potential victim made his job harder. They didn't tend to listen as well when it came down to the wire.

"Do you think I'm a wimp?"

The question surprised him, and he tilted his head to look down at her, seeing only her golden hair. "A wimp? No, I don't think you're a wimp. You have a routine that would kill

half the agents I know."

"But do you think I let people walk all over me?"

"Do you want an honest answer?"

She sat up and twisted just enough that they looked into each other's faces, but still so close that her hip brushed his and her scent filled his senses. "I don't think you've ever given me anything but the honest truth. I don't think you could," Olivia said, staring at him like she often did when they talked. Like she looked for the answer in his eyes as much as in his words.

"It would do me no good to lie."

"So, you do think I let people walk all over me."

A soft breeze came through the park, stirring her blonde hair. Donovan thought to himself that he hadn't seen a woman as beautiful as her since...well, since Janie. The realization burned in his chest, but now wasn't the time to dwell on it. There was never a time to dwell on Janie.

"I doubt you've ever known anything else. It's natural."

Her gaze dropped away, and she sighed. Probably without even thinking about what she was doing, she reached out her hand, toyed with the buttons of his shirt and stroked his silk tie. Donovan's stomach clenched, but he didn't let it show.

"I feel like a puppet."

"So, cut your strings."

Blue eyes snapped up to look at him again from beneath long lashes. "I don't think I know how. Or what I would do if I did."

"Have you ever thought of what you would do if you weren't on stage?"

She shook her head, golden locks of hair caressing her shoulders. "I love performing. I don't think I want to leave acting. Maybe just take a break."

"What would you do?"

Olivia tipped her head back and looked up into the leaves of the tree, exposing her neck to him so he could see her pulse jump at its base. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I'd sleep in. I'd take long baths. I'd go jogging. And if I didn't feel like any of those things, I'd just sit in the sun and vegetate."

He touched her cheek before his brain could scream not to. Her skin was warm, soft and smooth, and when he cupped his palm along her jaw, she turned into his hand and her eyes closed.

Don't!

Don't what? Don't touch her? Don't pull away? Don't think about it? Donovan didn't know.

"If you could do anything, without consequence, what would you do?" he asked.

She opened her eyes again and tilted her chin to look at him. The way she stared at him, he wondered if she could see his soul. His black and useless soul. Their eyes held as she shifted up to her knees, bringing her eye level above his so he had to lift his chin to watch her. Donovan nearly choked when she leaned towards him and with one graceful move, slipped her skirt up her thigh and straddled his lap. Instinctively, his hands moved to her hips as she settled against him.

Her hands held his head, fingernails pushing into his hair, and warm palms pressed his

ears. She shifted in his lap, rocking her hips, and Donovan slammed down the air in his lungs to keep silent the groan. But he couldn't look away from her eyes.

She leaned into his chest, and his hands moved up her back to pull her against him, as she covered his mouth with her own.

Olivia still tasted sweet from the ice cream. It clung to her lips as she tentatively kissed him. He felt the tension in her body and her mouth as she drove him crazy.

Donovan parted his lips, and she matched him. When she let him slide his tongue inside her mouth, he had to curl his fingers into her jacket to keep from crushing her to him. He was hard with one intense flash of heat through his body, and when she moved, this time he couldn't control the moan.

In one easy motion, he flipped her onto her back in the grass and covered her body with his own. The pantyhose that covered her toned legs rubbed his hips and the backs of his thighs as she wrapped her legs around him. Her tongue stroked his, still tentatively, but eager all the same. When she hummed softly against his lips, the tremor moved through his whole body.

He supported his weight on his elbows and held her head to deepen the kiss. Her hands moved over his back.

With a jolt, Donovan jerked away. She looked up at him with languid eyes and flushed cheeks. Olivia shifted beneath him, sending shock waves through his body, but he forced himself to enlarge the space between them.

"No," he said through a constricted throat. It was the only word he could find. "No."

Chapter Six

The melodic strains of Olivia's voice carried through the theater, echoing back to Donovan where he stood just off stage left. She danced around the stage with grace and elegance, but he did his damndest not to notice, instead he focused on the middle-aged man working backstage.

Mike Solomon was a sound and light technician and had been with *Molly Make Believe* since its move to Broadway in the 1980's. He was Caucasian, in his late-forties, and had proven to have a higher than average intelligence. According to other stagehands and actors in the play, he was a quiet man and kept mostly to himself.

In the last two years he had taken more than the average amount of leaves and vacations, claiming his mother was ill and frequent visits were necessary. Every documented murder coincided within twenty-four hours of his trips.

On the list of tentative suspects Donovan had compiled, Mike Solomon was at the top. And Donovan was going to keep Solomon away from Olivia until he had enough proof to either arrest the guy, or cross him off the list.

The act ended, and as the curtain closed for intermission, the group of actors came off stage. Donovan stepped out of the way as they brushed by, noticing the brief, cold glance gifted on him by Olivia. He watched her walk away, in her low cut silk dress, and felt the chill in the air. The same chill that had shrouded her for three days.

"Trouble in paradise?" asked a nearby voice.

Donovan turned to look at David Nguyen, a minor actor in the play. It took him a moment to realize what Nguyen referred to, and glanced back the way Olivia had disappeared.

"You do something to piss her off?"

Donovan pushed his hands into his slacks' pockets to hide his clenched fists. "Yes," he answered simply.

"Well, it must have been something pretty damn bad, 'cause I can't think of a time I've ever seen Molly that ticked at someone."

Donovan turned back to Nguyen. "You called her Molly."

The man shrugged one shoulder. "I guess when you work with someone as long as I have, their stage name and real person get kind of muddled. Interchangeable."

"You've worked with Liv a long time?"

"Well, I was with the show when Yaz was still here, so I've known Olivia since she joined us."

"Yaz? Yasmine Halliwell?"

Nguyen nodded. His almond-shaped eyes, indicative of his partially Asian heritage, squinted slightly as he focused on Donovan. "So, you gonna tell me what you did to piss her off? I wouldn't want to do it myself."

A flash of... jealousy? -hit Donovan when he thought about the events leading to her pissed off state. "You sure as hell better not," Donovan said, hoping he was able to interject some level of wry humor into his voice.

"Got it, man. In that case, I recommend flowers. Lots and lots of flowers," Nguyen said

as he walked away to the veritable closet that served as dressing room for the secondary cast members.

Donovan looked in the direction Olivia had gone. She would be resting for the brief intermission. Rehydrating. Stewing. Ignoring him. Just like she had for the last three days.

Apparently, it was obvious to everyone around them that something wasn't right. He could march into her dressing room, explain to her the importance of giving the impression of a strong relationship. That, whatever did or didn't happen between them, had to be forgotten.

He could. But he wouldn't.

Probably because he knew she had every right to be pissed as hell at him.

He quickly scanned the backstage, pinpointed Solomon, and headed for her room. He opened the door to see Lara working diligently on repairing smudged stage make-up. Weston stood beside Olivia's chair, ranting and raving about her stumbling over a line in the second scene. Donovan had noticed, but hell, after listening to her perform the same play for nearly a month, he could practically do the entire script himself. After months of doing it, a person should be allowed a slip here and there. And more than likely, no one in the audience noticed.

Olivia looked up when he shut the door. Their gazes met in the mirror. From across the room, he saw the flash of anger and hurt in her eyes.

Weston paused briefly, looked to Donovan, and turned his attention away from Olivia.

"You did this. You've got her head going so many places, telling her some useless crap to scare her, and she can't focus on her job," Weston snapped.

Donovan didn't argue, couldn't really. Instead, he sidestepped the man and moved behind her chair, looking at her in the mirror.

"I'd like to talk to you."

"So, talk," she said, reaching for a bottle of water on the table in front of her.

"Alone."

Lara paused, her make-up sponge half way to Olivia's face. She looked at Donovan, then at Olivia, then at Weston.

"Haven't you said enough? Your job is to protect her, not mess with her head," Weston bitched.

"Fine," Olivia answered through her father's objection. "Could everyone leave us alone, please?"

"I'll finish your hair before you go back on," Lara said, dropping the sponge on the table.

"No," Weston argued. "This guy should be keeping his mouth shut. I still don't know what the hell he's told you —"

"Please," she shouted. "Just leave us alone for three minutes."

Weston's jaw fell open and snapped shut again with an audible click of teeth against teeth. He pointed at Donovan, flushed color rising in his face.

"You fix this," he spat before leaving the room.

Donovan stood behind her chair for several moments, watching her in the mirror as she tried to meet his eyes. Finally, he walked around to face her, leaning his back against the high dressing table. With ankles crossed and arms over his chest, to keep from reaching out and touching her, he watched her.

"We only have a few minutes before intermission is over. What do you have to say to

me, Donovan?"

"We need to clear the air."

She looked up then, fiery blue eyes sparking with anger. Hell, it was those sparks that got him into this situation in the first place. But just as quickly, the spark was gone, snuffed out, and she looked away, staring down at her hands.

"Don't worry about it, Special Agent Greer. It's over. I concede."

Donovan preferred the spark.

"Don't do that, Liv."

She looked up, her expression blank, suppressed. "Do you expect me to argue with you? It's an argument I can't win, so why try? I made a fool of myself. Let's just drop it."

Hell, there was a big part of him that really wanted her to argue. To fight. To convince him.

He closed his eyes and hunched his shoulders, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"You told me you had nothing to gain by lying to me," she said in a small voice.

Donovan opened his eyes and met her gaze, that steady sole-baring gaze. "Yes."

"Is that true for everything?"

"The only time I'll keep the truth from you is if the truth puts you in danger. I'll do whatever it takes to protect you."

She took in a shuddered breath and toyed nervously with the cording on her skirt, still watching him. His eyes dropped to her mouth as she licked her lips.

"Did you stop the kiss because..." Her voice faltered, and she cleared her throat. "Because you didn't want to kiss me?"

Donovan swallowed. He was stuck now. The only danger in telling her the truth was his own admission. God, she was beautiful. Even made up with three times the normal make-up, he saw her beauty through it. The forties-retro dress, with a low square collar, showed off a lot of creamy skin and swelling breasts. *Damn! How did men back then keep their hands off women?*

"No," he said, his own voice sounding rough to him.

"So, you *do* want to kiss me?"

Donovan raked his hair with his fingers, bracing his palm against the back of his neck. He couldn't look at her anymore. Too damn dangerous.

"It's not a matter of what I want. It's a matter of what is. I'm here to protect you. I have a job to do."

"You can't protect me and kiss me?"

Her voice was like silk on velvet, so soft and soothing, it distracted him. Pulled his thoughts to places they shouldn't be. When he dared look at her, she speared him straight to the soul with the openness of her gaze.

"No, Liv. I can't."

The dressing room door opened, and Lara stuck her head in. "Sorry to interrupt, hun. Curtain is going up in forty-five seconds."

Olivia looked away and moved to climb down from the tall chair. Donovan didn't think of the consequences before he reached out and grasped her waist, helping her down. Her ribcage pressed against his palms through the pale green silk and she looked up at him. Small, delicate hands covered his, pulled them away from her body and squeezed his fingers

before she walked across the room.

"Knock 'em dead, hun," Lara said as the door closed.

Donovan turned and braced his hands against the dressing table, leaning heavily into his arms. What the hell was he doing? He was a seasoned agent, for Christ's sake. In eighteen years with the Bureau, never once had he let himself be personally compromised like this.

Of course, in eighteen years he had never wanted someone the way he wanted Olivia Weston.

And eight of those years he had been a married man.

Ten years. He hadn't wanted to even touch a woman in ten years. Christ, had it really been that long? Now, young little Olivia Weston slips into his life and bowls him over.

Young. Key word. Young. As opposed to old.

He looked in the mirror. The gray seemed more prominent today. Maybe because he felt older today than he had in a long time. Squint lines spread from the corners of his eyes. Donovan would like to think they were laugh lines, but laughter hadn't been a part of his life in a long time.

"She didn't tell me what happened, but whatever it was, it shook her up pretty bad."

Lara's voice startled him, and Donovan turned away from the mirror to face her. The middle-aged woman stood half way across the room, make-up brush in one hand and her arms crossed over her chest.

With one final and rough rub of his palms over his face, Donovan started towards the door.

Lara stepped in his way. Not truly blocking him, but he knew her intention. "Olivia is very good. She's more than good. She's amazing. You've seen her perform. She has a chance to be on Broadway for a long time. Be one of the best ever. She has a destiny. Don't do anything to stop it."

"You sound like a protective hen," Donovan said with a chuckle, hoping it would dissuade her concern and interest. He just didn't feel like fielding questions.

"I'm a friend. She means more to me than I can say."

"Then you have nothing to worry about. I want Olivia to fulfill her destiny as much as you do. That's why I'm here."

He returned to his usual spot, just off stage left, to watch the remaining acts of the play. After several moments, the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Donovan instinctively knew he was being watched. With practiced ease, he raised his wrist to check the time and did a subversive scan of the backstage area.

Several hands, including Solomon, were busy at work doing their jobs. None seemed particularly interested in him. He had made himself common place around the theater, so most didn't think twice about his presence. But someone did. Someone with curious eyes.

He coughed under the pretense of turning his head from the stage, giving himself a larger view. Still, no one person stood out as suspect. Donovan looked back to Solomon. Their eyes met briefly, but it was fleeting as Solomon went back to his control board.

His skin crawled. Instinctively, Donovan mentally checked that his weapon was in place, nestled against his side beneath his right arm.

As quickly as the sensation hit him, it was gone. His shoulders relaxed and he released his breath. But his mind still churned. Someone watched him. That someone could be the

killer.

And he'd only get Liv over Donovan's dead body.

Olivia flipped from her stomach to her back, staring up at the sheer mesh canopy of her bed. She turned her head and glared at the glowing red LCD screen of her alarm clock. Almost two in the morning. And she hadn't slept yet.

She thought about the sleeping pills her father had given her, saying she looked haggard and if she kept it up, no make up in the world would cover the circles under her eyes. His concern had been overwhelming.

With a huff, she sat up. Her bedroom was stuffy, despite the central air conditioning, and her nerves were restless. Ever since earlier in the evening, when Donovan touched her to help her from her chair. When he didn't deny he wanted to kiss her. Even further back. Her skin had been sparking since she kissed him in the park.

Just remembering sent a warm flush over her body and a flutter in her stomach. Lower than her stomach. Much lower.

She rolled off the bed, onto her feet, and went into the bathroom, did her business, and stared into the mirror after washing her hands. The bright fluorescent lights only succeeded in accentuating the Samsonites under her eyes. Olivia pushed her fingers through her hair, fluffing it haphazardly away from her head so some fell forward across her brows.

After several minutes of staring at herself, Olivia picked up a case of lipstick from the counter. It was a deep red. Her father told her it made her look glamorous. Younger. Without looking away from the mirror, she removed the cap and raised the phallic mass of wax and color as far out from the tube as it would go. She wrote on the mirror, and when the lipstick broke, she left it crumbled on the countertop.

Olivia returned to her bedroom and paced the floor several times until she thought she'd go crazy in the darkness. Without bothering with a robe to cover her long tee shirt, she opened her door and headed down the hall. She wasn't in the mood for a midnight snack of cookies. Just needed to move, to get out of that room. Too bad she couldn't get away from herself.

She wandered into the living room, a place she spent very little time. Because, after all, this was a room of relaxation. For about ten seconds, she contemplated turning on the television. But what would she watch? Besides, the television was likely to bring unwanted company.

So, she moved on. Through the kitchen to the small breakfast nook beyond with the beautifully decorated patio. Everything in her penthouse was beautifully decorated. Sterile. Tasteful. With a slight huff, she slid open the patio doors. The air outside was warmer than inside, and heavier with humidity, but still seemed fresher. Olivia drew in a long breath through her nose, and sighed.

"You're up late."

Even though she hadn't seen him sitting on the cushioned lounge, his voice didn't surprise her. Olivia stepped out onto the dark patio and shut the door behind her. The buildings of Manhattan sat black against a black-blue night sky, with the stars numbering almost as many lights that winked at her.

"Why is it, Donovan Greer, that whenever I take a walk in the middle of the night I

seem to stumble upon you?"

"I'm not much of a sleeper."

His voice carried on the night breeze, and brushed over her skin with the same gentle caress. "Neither am I these days."

"But I'm accustomed to not sleeping. You aren't."

"Worrying about me again?"

"Always."

She had to close her eyes against the deepness and heaviness of his voice. It was like honey over gravel. Olivia walked onto the cool Venetian tile towards where he sat. His outline was a shadow against the night sky, keeping his features completely hidden. When she stopped near his knee, she heard a soft groan in the darkness.

"Why the hell do you walk around in nothing but a damn tee shirt?"

"I didn't know I'd be entertaining. Does it bother you?"

"Just sit down," he said, and she heard him shift to make room for her beside him.

Olivia put one knee on the cushion, and then the other so she knelt beside him, and slowly lowered herself down. What she wouldn't do to see his face. His arm draped across the back of the seat, and when she leaned into the cushions, she laid her cheek against his upper arm. She felt his muscle tense and relax at the contact and his masculine scent, sandalwood and soap, drifted on the breeze.

Silence settled around them, with only the sounds of the city at night reaching them. Within minutes of curling beside him on the couch, she felt the gentle tug of sleep on her limbs, making her eyelids heavy. She shifted closer to him, resting her head against his shoulder. Her bent knees, bare where they peaked from beneath the hem of her tee shirt, leaned into his side and chest. Each breath he took shifted the cotton of his shirt against her skin.

"Are we okay, Donovan?" she asked, wanting to talk just to stay awake.

His arm came off the back cushion to wrap around her shoulder and he turned to rest his cheek against her forehead. "We're fine."

Olivia chuckled softly. "This was our first fight."

"I guess it was," he answered, his voice deliciously slow and deep.

She sighed, feeling sleep creep up on her. Part of her welcomed it, but just as badly, she wanted to enjoy being with Donovan like this. "Too bad we're not really lovers. I bet the make up sex would be phenomenal."

He drew in a long, slow breath that pushed his chest out against her legs, and released it just as slowly.

"Do you sing, Donovan?"

She felt his gaze on her as he turned his head in her direction. Warmth spread over her skin, and she wanted the heat to sink all the way to her bones.

"A little. I haven't in a long time."

She tried to imagine him with a microphone in his hand, or standing on a stage, belting out a song, but her imagination couldn't decide what he would sing.

"Why not?"

"I've had no reason to."

Olivia snuggled closer, and smiled in the darkness when she felt his breath on her

cheek. He was so close. The stubble on his face rubbed her skin, not roughly, just a gentle caress.

"Sing me to sleep?" His hold tightened and she felt his whole body tense. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No," he said, his voice sounding strangled and tight. Then he cleared his voice, and when he began to sing, softly near her ear, Olivia knew she had never heard anything so wonderful. A perfect tenor, with just the slight undertones of a bass thrown in to whisper over her like black velvet. *"Over in Killarny, many years ago, me mither sang a song to me in tones so sweet and low. Just a simply little ditty in her good ould Irish way, and I'd give the world if she could sing that song to me today."*

She was asleep before he got to the second 'too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral', her steady breath warm against his neck. He waited several minutes to make sure she was truly out before standing from the couch, lifting her with him. Olivia was so slight and small, it was like carrying a sack of pillows. Donovan slid open the patio door with his fingertips and managed to get her through the opening without bumping anything. Not an easy feat in the dark.

As he carried her down the hall, Olivia hummed softly, her fingers curling into his shirt. Donovan only hoped he could get her to her bedroom, into bed, and back to his own room without being seen. He had a good suspicion Weston wouldn't like the whole scene, and Donovan didn't want to compromise Olivia's integrity by misinterpretation. Luckily, she had left her bedroom door partially open so one light tap with his knee gained him entrance.

He laid her down on the bed and she rolled away, curling her knees up to her body, giving him an all too enticing view of her long legs. Right up to her cute little ass. Before he let himself turn into a pervert, Donovan pulled the coverlet over her.

The light in her adjoining bathroom was on, and he went to shut it off before leaving. But when he stepped through the door to find the light switch, he was surprised at what he saw.

Written in red lipstick across the glass was the question *'Who is Olivia Weston'*. He recognized the handwriting. It was hers. Donovan looked back to the bed. A ray of moonlight peeked through her curtains and fell across her face. She looked peaceful in sleep.

Everyone has demons. Donovan wondered what demons Olivia fought. He pulled a length of bathroom tissue off the roll on the wall and wiped away the words.

Chapter Seven

Donovan scanned the crowded audience of Radio City Music Hall. In the mass of tuxedos and evening gowns, he picked out the half-dozen or so Bureau agents he and Jackman had melded into the Tony Awards attendees. Another dozen agents were backstage and at the exits.

Even with all the precautions and added security, his senses were on overdrive and a heavy dread pressed on his chest. Had he gotten his choice, they wouldn't be there at all. But with Olivia being a nominee, her father's argument that attendance was necessary had eventually won out. It was like waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop.

Six weeks. There hadn't been a murder in six weeks.

Despite their protection, the murderer couldn't wait much longer to strike. Some deep part of his psychopathic mind cried for blood.

Donovan looked forward several rows to the brunette head of Yasmine Halliwell. Jabrosky sat beside her, and from here, Donovan could see the communication piece in his left ear. A spiraled cord extended from the hearing-aid-like device and disappeared into his jacket. The equipment was bulky and obvious, but Jabrosky wasn't posing as anything more than Halliwell's bodyguard, so obscurity wasn't necessary.

"Everyone is in place and ready, Agent Greer," said a familiar voice in Donovan's ear.

"Fine. Keep me posted."

"What?" Olivia asked, looking up at him.

Donovan smiled at her and pointed towards the nearly invisible communication radio in his ear.

"Oh," she said and lifted her fingers to her lips. "Sorry."

He hit the remote button on his watch to mute his end of the conversation. "Don't worry about it. The backstage agents were just checking in."

She nodded, but her eyes were trained on his ear. He had shown her the stealth observation device before they left the penthouse, and since slipping it into place, she had seemed intrigued. If someone didn't know it was there, wasn't looking for it, they wouldn't realize the tiny bit of technology was present. Even if they did, it would probably be assumed to be a hearing aid.

She lifted her hand, reaching one finger toward his ear, but stopped hesitantly. Olivia's eyes shifted to meet his gaze, and for a moment she reminded him of a little girl, curious with eyes full of wonder.

"It's okay," he said. "Go ahead."

She touched his skin, just beside his earlobe, and warmth spread from the point of contact. He leaned towards her and her fingers traced a delicate pattern around the curve of his ear.

"I can barely see it," she said softly

"That's the point."

"How does it work? I mean, I get the you-hearing-them part, but how can they hear you?"

"It picks up the vibration my voice creates through the small bones of my ear canal and

translates them into speech patterns and transmits to the other radios on the same frequency.”

Her lips rounded in a silent ‘oh’.

She discreetly examined his *spy toys*, as she had called them earlier, and he studied her. She was stunning in the haute couture evening gown. It was simple and elegant in black silk. He thought he heard Lara say it was a Vera Wang, but the designer wasn’t important to him. It was the deep, square neckline that held his attention, showing more cleavage than anything he had ever seen her in before, yet remaining completely demure. A short necklace of diamonds and onyx on a platinum chain circled her throat, accentuating her creamy skin exposed by her upswept hair.

Tempting as sin. And just as fun.

He found himself slipping more easily each time into the roll of lover to Olivia Weston. Donovan wasn’t blind to his own motivation. A big part of being a good agent was understanding how the human mind worked, including your own. When in public, he could act on the desire to be closer to her, to feel her small hand in the bend of his arm, and to whisper things in her ear without anyone thinking anything of it. Yet, he was forced to be restrained, which was a quality he wasn’t sure he could maintain in private much longer.

Olivia shifted back onto her chair, her fascination with his ear apparently satisfied, and nervously wrung her hands together in her lap. *Molly Make Believe* was up for a total of five Tony Awards, and Olivia had been nominated in the Leading Female Actor category. For two days, she had been a ball of nervous energy, building until tonight. But Donovan was under the distinct impression that her nervousness didn’t stem from the possibility of winning. She had done that before, at least four times if he remembered correctly. Liv hadn’t been the only one to be increasingly tense. Her father was even more unbearable than usual.

Donovan reached across and covered her hands with his own. She turned one over so their palms were against each other, the grip of her fingers strong. He leaned closer to her, turning his head to whisper so close to her ear that his lips brushed her skin.

“Have I mentioned you look stunning tonight?”

He felt her shiver. She turned her head slightly, just enough so he could see her lips as they tipped up in a small smile.

“No,” she said softly.

Donovan was in the mood for a little self-indulgence. He drew in a long, deep breath through his nose and hummed.

“And you smell incredible.”

Color rushed her cheeks, and she lowered her lashes to look up at him through them. “Thank you,” she said, barely above a whisper. Her breath moved over his skin, brushing his lips.

If he moved two inches closer...

“You’re in the way,” Weston said gruffly from where he stood in the aisle.

Donovan didn’t afford the man a glance as he stood and let the chair fold up so he could move out of Weston’s way. He offered Olivia his hand to help her stand. Olivia’s father moved past them with no visible regard for her gown to sit on the other side of Olivia. Donovan sat on the aisle, a physical barrier to anyone who might try to reach her, although he doubted any act against her would be that blatant. Weston eventually settled again in his chair with a huff, tugging the legs of his tuxedo slacks down to make things more comfortable.

Olivia reached for his hand again as soon as they both sat down. Donovan draped his near arm across the back of her seat, and held her hand with the other. Olivia still clung to his hand with a death grip. Her free hand pressed against her stomach.

"Are you okay?"

Olivia looked up at him with stunning blue eyes. He had seen her in various stages of make-up, from none at all to the theatrical make up she wore for performances. Tonight fell somewhere in the middle, but she looked beautiful in an old-fashioned-Hollywood kind of glamorous.

"I'm just nervous."

"That's natural."

She nodded, but he knew his simple statement did nothing to calm her nerves. The theater lights dimmed, a sign that the ceremony would begin soon. Donovan brought his arm forward again and switched hands, so their fingers were linked and rested on the armrest between them. For the next two hours, as the more obscure awards like Best Lighting and Best Costume were given out, she never let him go.

Finally, two theatrically-known celebrities stepped to the podium. The woman, a rail-thin blonde in a gold-lame gown that cut to her naval and barely covered her miniscule breasts, leaned over the microphone.

"Our next award is in the category Leading Actress in a Musical, and the nominees are..."

She alternated speaking with the spike-haired young man in a bad, burgundy seventies retro tuxedo with ruffled peasant shirt beneath. They listed off five names, among them Yasmine Halliwell and Olivia. When the Twiggy-impersonator said her name, Olivia's grasp on his hand tightened.

Mr. Bad Tux held up a white envelope. "And the winner is..." He paused to break the seal and unfold the gold-paper lined announcement. "Yasmine Halliwell for *Broadway Nights*."

Olivia released his hand and joined everyone in attendance as they clapped for Yasmine Halliwell. Yasmine stood, kissed the man who sat on the aisle, and made her way to the front.

"Baby One is on the move. Repeat. Baby One is on the move," whispered in Donovan's ear.

His senses tingled as adrenaline surged through him. This moment could have gone either way. It could have been Olivia on the stage right now, and despite the fact that it meant she had lost, he was glad she hadn't won. While he knew there were several agents off stage, anticipating that either Halliwell or Olivia would win, she was his responsibility and he didn't want her out of his sight. It was as if a countdown chimed off in his head.

Soon.

It would happen again soon.

He stole a glance at Olivia. She sat ramrod straight, with her hands now folded in her lap. Her chin was hitched up, and a wide smile spread her lips. But Donovan knew it was forced. Olivia was drawing from that inner well of strength and control he had seen tapped many times in the last month and a half.

The clapping quieted as Ms. Halliwell reached the stage and took her award. She gave a short speech, thanking everyone from her parents to her director. Then she leaned into the

microphone, and with one triumphant lift of the award, said "Baby, this is for you."

The announcers led her from the stage. Donovan tapped the mute button on his wrist remote. "Keep on her. Don't let her out of your sight until she's back in her seat."

"We're on her."

He pushed the button again and looked to Olivia. After watching her several moments, she glanced at him. Donovan arched one eyebrow.

"I'm fine," she whispered. "Yasmine deserves it. She's doing a wonderful job."

The rest of the ceremony, Olivia sat perfectly still, her hands folded in her lap. On the other side of her, Weston leaned heavily into the armrest, his fingers working vigorously over his upper lip, silently broadcasting his annoyance and frustration to the world. He leaned over once, and spoke against Olivia's ear. Donovan watched her close her eyes and catch her breath, pressing her lips tightly together until her father leaned back again. Her face blanched, and bright color flashed in her cheeks.

Son of a bitch.

Donovan checked his watch before he sank onto the edge of his bed and yanked his black tie loose. Nearly midnight. *Damn.* He was almost too late. After shucking his jacket, he unsnapped his gun holster and retrieved his cell phone. Without needing to look up the number he dialed, Donovan gave another look at his watch, and hoped it wasn't too late.

"Hello?" said a soft, feminine voice on the other end of the line.

Good. She didn't sound like he woke her up.

"Hello, Mama Sanders. It's Donovan."

"Donovan, oh, it's so good to hear your voice," she cried, and he could hear the smile in her words. "I was beginning to wonder if you had forgotten about me."

Regret, like a small yet powerful fist, squeezed in his chest. "Of course I haven't forgotten you. I'm sorry to call so late. I was-detained," he explained, stumbling over his excuse.

"Oh, I knew midnight wouldn't come without your call."

"I'm sorry it's been so long since I called. I know I say that every time."

"Precious, I know you're a busy man. Don't you worry about me. Papa Sanders and I are gettin' along just fine." Her soft-spoken southern drawl brought back thousands of memories, one bitter and the rest sweet.

He rubbed his forehead with his fingers and leaned his elbow into his knee. "Is there anything you need? Anything I can do for you?"

"No, honey. We're just fine. We'd love to see you for a visit, though."

"I'm planning some vacation time in October. I could come to Louisiana then."

"Oh, Precious, that would jus' be fine," Mama Sanders said, drawing out the last word until it dripped with her pleasure. "We can't wait to see you."

"I'll call with more details later," he said.

"Will you be bringin' a friend?"

The question surprised him, and sounded ridiculous to his ears, but Donovan would never disrespect Mama Sanders by letting her know.

"No. It will just be me. Like always."

"She wouldn't like that kind of always, Donovan."

The conversation was too heavy for him to breathe. It pushed down on him, making it hard for his heart to pump blood to his limbs. "I just wanted you to know —"

"That you're thinkin' of me. Of us. Today of all days. I know, Donovan. Our precious Donovan. And we think of you."

He swallowed against the lump in his throat. There was no woman on Earth like Mama Sanders, no woman but one, and she was gone.

Weston's booming voice came through the walls, a muffled thunder, but not loud enough for Donovan to make out his words. He sat up straighter, still holding the phone to his ear.

Mama Sanders continued to speak, and he brought his focus back to her. She deserved his full attention, but it was still hard not to try and listen to the shouting down the hall. His gut told him to go find Olivia, to make sure she wasn't receiving the brunt of Weston's anger. And he would, as soon as he could.

"We love you, Donovan," she said, her southern voice soft and sweet. "And you know Janie would want you to be happy."

Donovan sighed. Mama Sanders had breeched the subject of him moving on, finding someone new, two years before. And for two years he had fielded her questions without problem, because in the ten years since Janie's death, no woman had even tempted his thoughts in that direction. This year, for the first time, a single face filled his mind when she asked him if there would be anyone.

Olivia.

Another round of shouting brought his head around to look at the door. This time he thought he might have actually heard Olivia's voice. He smiled.

Good for you, sweetheart.

He talked more with Mama Sanders, telling her what he could of his life, and listening as she told him about the family he had gained eighteen years ago, and should have lost eight years later. But despite their mutual loss, and the reasons behind it, Bonnie Leigh and Mickey Sanders never let him separate himself from the family he had come to love like his own.

"I saw your picture in the magazines," Mama Sanders said, pride ringing in her tone. "I had Mickey pick up some extra copies and we mailed them to the boys."

Donovan smiled. "I'm sure they loved that."

"Well, I don't know about that, but I know my grandbabies were excited to see Uncle Donovan in a magazine."

Donovan chuckled, thinking of the horde of nephews and nieces at the family reunion two years before. Mama Sanders then began a story about Raelene and Joseph and Donovan laid back on the bed to listen.

Olivia sat on the edge of her bed, her body hunched forward over her knees and her fingers linked behind her neck. She felt like she was in a medieval torture chamber and someone had begun crushing her spine about six hours ago.

But no physical torture equaled the verbal one her father let loose on her half an hour before. And he was still at it.

"Winners get the next part. Winners make the money. Winners get their names in lights. Not losers. Not runner-ups. Not nominees."

She pressed her eyelids closed with all the strength she had, desperate to hold in the tears and not let him see what his words did to her. When they announced Yasmine's name, Olivia's gut hadn't clenched because she lost. Every muscle in her body didn't seize painfully because someone else had won. Olivia had nearly been ill because she knew, just as she had known for twenty years, that once again she hadn't been good enough.

And that it would come to this.

"Are you even listening to me, Olivia?" he demanded to know.

She nodded, her chin rubbing her bare legs with the movement. Her father had barely given her time to change from the beautiful gown into a pair of shorts and a tee shirt before he banged his fist on her door.

"Yes, I'm listening," she choked out.

"Well, crying isn't going to do a damn bit of good."

Olivia didn't move.

"Look at me!"

She released the clenched fingers that held her head down, pain shooting through her hands from the sustained strain, and slowly sat up. Her father stood two feet away, his fists planted at his hips, and glared at her.

"Do you think I have invested the last twenty years to lose?"

Anger boiled beneath her skin, popping and sizzling in her blood, when she stared at him. "*You* didn't lose," she said through gritted teeth.

He stopped mid-rant and glared at her. "What did you say?"

Her stomach burned and pressure pulsed at her temples. Olivia wanted to scream at her father every thought and every argument that ever shot through her mind when he made her feel this way. She clenched her fists at her side until her nails dug into her palms.

"I said you are not the one that lost. I lost. And I'm fine with it. I am proud of my performance. I am proud of being acknowledged for my work. And I know that Yasmine deserved that award. I've dealt with it. You need to deal with it."

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I'm the person whose name appears on the marquee. And who gets paid. And who pays you."

"And I'm the man who made you."

"Biologically, or professionally?" she shot back.

He stared at her, and Olivia stood her ground. Her father stepped closer, pointing his finger just inches from her nose. "It's that son of a bitch Greer. He's done something to you. Screwed with your head."

"If anyone has been screwing with my head, it's you."

With one final parting shot of "Sometimes I wonder if you're even my blood", he stormed out her door.

Olivia stepped back and collapsed onto the bed. She curled in on herself again, rocking her body on the edge of the mattress. Her emotions tumbled and battled inside her, panic and anger and disappointment and need. She needed to be held. To have someone tell her they were proud of her. She waited, curled in on herself like a baby in the womb and waited for the penthouse to fall silent. It didn't take long. Her father had been pretty far-gone before he ever came into her room, so it wouldn't take much for him to pass out on his bed. And everyone

else had gone to bed hours ago.

Everyone but Donovan.

The thought of him slipped over the raw edges of her nerves like a silk blanket, soothing and cool. Her hand tingled at the memory of how he held it before, during and after the ceremony. How he had whispered in her ear and never made her feel small.

Olivia sat up, feeling the muscles kink and protest along her spine. She looked at herself in the mirror of her bureau. Not a tear had fallen to mar the perfect make-up job Lara had applied earlier to her face. With stiff and sore movements, Olivia rose and went to her bathroom, spending several minutes vigorously scrubbing every trace away, leaving her cheeks bright and rosy.

In all the jumbled mess in her head, only one thing seemed clear.

Donovan.

She left her room and took the few, short steps to his bedroom door. With one glance in each direction, Olivia knocked. Movement inside had her held to her spot. Moments later, his door opened.

Olivia caught her breath at the sight of him. His white tuxedo shirt was unbuttoned and hung loose around his hips. His leather braces hung as long loops where he had let them fall. In the open space of his shirt, she saw the dark, straight hair of his chest. It wasn't thick, wasn't sparse, but just right. She wanted to reach out and touch him. In his hand was a cell phone, which he held a few inches from his ear.

"What's wrong, Liv?" he asked, and she heard the genuine concern in his voice. She hadn't heard true concern from anyone in a long time.

No one but Donovan.

"Can I come in?" she asked before she could decide it wasn't the smart, responsible thing to do.

He stared at her several seconds, and Olivia wondered if he would turn her away. Donovan hadn't denied there was something between them, something that drew them together, but she hoped that just for tonight he wouldn't be the stronger of the two of them. Then he opened the door further and moved so she could walk in.

"I'm sorry but I need to go," he said into the phone. "I'll talk to you soon." Then he closed the phone and set it on his bureau.

The room smelled of him. A musky, earthy cologne and spicy soap. Masculine. Donovan. Olivia walked to the bed, a large four-poster in dark mahogany. She ran her finger along the slightly rumbled duvet, as if he might have been lying down when she knocked. His black tie lay dark against the cream spread. With two fingers, she lifted the bit of silk and lifted it to her cheek.

"Liv," he said close behind her.

She turned slowly, her eyes settling first on his exposed chest before moving up to his face. He watched her with a dark expression, his jaw clenched so tight a muscle below his right temple jumped.

"You want to know why I'm here," she said, stating fact more than asking for a response.

He didn't answer. Didn't need to. Speaking would be a waste of silence. Not wanting to ignore her desire anymore, she reached out both hands and slipped them beneath the open

edges of his shirt. Her palms touched his skin. It was warm and soft, but the muscles beneath were hard and strong.

She moved her hands up his chest, covering the dark nipples hidden beneath darker hair and feeling his heart thumping against her palm. The air was electric, sparking and charging them both. Olivia didn't dare look up at him, afraid of the intensity she might see there, because she felt it in his body. His hands remained at his side, but when she glanced down, she saw his hands clenched in tight fists.

But he hadn't stopped her. He hadn't pushed her away.

"Have I told you how good you look?" she said in a low voice, saying back to him the words that had sent her stomach flipping before the awards ceremony.

Olivia closed her eyes and stepped closer to him, drawing her hands down closer to his waist. His abs responded, jumping at her touch, and his breath was short and fast, stirring her hair as she barely touched his chest with her cheek. She drew in a long, slow breath.

"You smell incredible."

"Liv —"

"Shhhh," she said, slowly shaking her head and rubbing his chest with her cheek. "Don't speak."

His hands gripped her arms, just below the shoulders, and his fingers kneaded her muscles. She tipped her head up when his cheek brushed her hair and his lips pressed to her temple, not in a kiss but a touch nonetheless.

She was hot and achy, but not from the heat of summer. From *his* heat. His touch. The need she felt in him as real as she felt in herself.

"Liv, I'm not strong enough tonight to say no."

A shudder moved through her body and she opened her eyes to look up at him. In the semi-darkness of the room, his eyes burned with intensity as he stared down at her, his sculpted lips parted with each quick breath.

His hands moved from her shoulders to cup her face. The tenderness of his touch, as his thumb ran along her lower lip, almost brought tears to her eyes. His mouth covered hers, tasting faintly of toothpaste and mouthwash, and the wave of arousal that washed over her nearly knocked her knees out from beneath her. Olivia leaned into him, snaking her hands beneath the shirt to press against his back. Donovan's thumb tugged gently at the corner of her mouth, urging her to part her lips. She did, and his tongue slipped inside to rub against her own.

She moaned, unable to control it.

The pitch of the kiss changed, intensified, and Olivia let it take her for the ride. Her fingers fumbled with the double buttons of his pants, needing to feel more, to be more, to be everything to Donovan.

The obnoxious twittering beep of his cell phone broke through her aroused haze. Over and over again, it went off, until with a groan that clearly sounded his displeasure, Donovan released her and picked the phone up from the high boy beside them.

He turned his back to her, raking his hair with his fingers as he flipped the phone open. She stepped back to lean against the edge of his bed, her blood humming with need. Donovan's conversation didn't register until he let go a long string of particularly angry expletives. Then she paid attention.

"How the *hell* did he get past you?" Donovan demanded. He cursed again, slamming the heel of his palm against the edge of the bureau.

Olivia jumped, a cold rush of fear slamming into her.

Oh, God.

"Dammit! Have you called Jackman yet?" A pause. "Fine, I'll call him on my way over. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

He slapped the phone closed and tossed it across the top of the bureau. Olivia stared, mesmerized as it spun on its back several times before falling over the edge and hitting the carpet.

When he turned around, his lips were drawn in a tight line, and muscles on both sides of his face clenched and jumped. Olivia lifted her hand to her lips.

"Oh, God."

Donovan nodded.

"Yasmine Halliwell was just murdered," he confirmed.

Chapter Eight

"This murder is different," Jodie Gatlinburg stated.

Donovan looked down at her where she squatted beside the mangled body of Yasmine Halliwell. Jodie wore latex gloves and held a camera in one hand. She shook her head and glanced up at him.

"This is more gruesome. As if he were rushed, or maybe enraged, when he killed her," she continued.

Donovan didn't need Jodie to tell him this murder was different. The sitting room of Halliwell's suite was a disaster, lamps knocked over and furniture shoved out of place. The glass coffee table was shattered beneath her body, which was clad only in an open silk robe, and blood splattered everything. The body was even more mutilated than usual, hacked at and sliced until parts were almost indiscernible from each other.

"He knows we're on his tail," Donovan said to no one in particular. "He's pissed off."

Jodie snapped a picture, moved, and took another. The flash left spots in front of Donovan's tired eyes.

"Here's another new spin," Jodie said, crouched near Halliwell's spread knees. "The coroner will have to confirm, but I'd say she had sex near the time of the murder."

"Before or after?" Jackman asked.

Jodie shrugged. "I can't say. If I had to guess, I'd say before, just because the body isn't positioned to indicate post mortem. We'll have to take a smear, and if there are any swimmers, we can better pinpoint times."

Donovan had remained silent through her analysis, a lead weight settling in his gut. He didn't like this, didn't like it at all. As long as a serial killer kept to his M.O., some level of expectancy was an element in the investigation. But once they changed, everything changed. Targets could change. The killer could grow more desperate, more willing to take risks to get to the next victim.

And Olivia was the next victim.

"Donovan," Jackman said loudly, snapping him from his dark thoughts. "Have you talked with Jabrosky yet?"

He shook his head. "Not much. The doc is checking him out, trying to determine what was used to knock him out. All he remembers is coming back to the suite after the post-award party. He thinks he remembers having a glass of champagne, so Jodie is taking the bottle back to the lab for testing."

One of Jodie's assistants came out of the attached bedroom, holding up a plastic evidence bag. "I found something," he said.

The three of them stepped towards him. When they were close enough, Donovan recognized the contents of the bag. A used condom. Jodie took the bag and held it in front of her face, examining the condom through the plastic.

"Well, this makes things easier. All the little guys are contained."

"I still want a full exam on Halliwell. Cross match any DNA left behind to see if they match," Donovan said.

Jodie nodded and handed the evidence bag back to her assistant. He went back into the

bedroom and Jodie went back to her photographs. Donovan turned to take in the full effect of the murder scene. The rage that had to have driven the killer still hung in the air like a fog, tangible against Donovan's nerves. It stank like the gore and blood left behind.

"Agent Greer?" called a younger CSI, a petite brunette, from the bedroom doorway. In her gloved hand she held a framed photograph. "I found this in the bedside drawer. Thought it might help."

Donovan took the wooden frame, and did his best to smile reassuringly at the rookie trainee. She smiled back, color flushing her cheeks, and went back into the bedroom.

"You're as prickly as a box of ten penny nails, and the woman practically fall on their knees in front of you." Bill's voice was a near growl.

Donovan chose to ignore Bill's wise ass comment and turned the frame over. He drew in a long breath through his nose. The photo was of Yasmine Halliwell and a middle-aged, blonde man with a face he remembered.

"My long list of suspects just got short," he said, handing the frame to Bill. "Mark Solomon. Light Tech on Olivia's production. The one we discussed last week."

Bill turned and motioned to Agent Joe Carmichael, who crossed the room to them. He handed Carmichael the frame.

"Get this out to the local agencies and police. Mark Solomon. Top suspect. Use that photo, plus any we have on file. This is a top priority man hunt."

Carmichael nodded, and left the suite at a solid jog.

"This changes things," Jackman said and Donovan nodded. "What's the plan?"

Donovan pushed his fingers through his hair and rubbed the back of his neck. Since the moment he answered the phone and heard the news, he knew he had to make a decision. What the best way would be to protect Liv? His head, his training, his gut told him what he should do. But several other parts of his body informed him, without the chance of misunderstanding, that doing what he planned would put him in a very dangerous place. Not life or death—but dangerous all the same.

"Status quo isn't good enough any more. The killer is on to what's happening. He knows who we are." Donovan looked around the room again. "Something doesn't sit right, Bill. He was calm enough to drug Jabrosky, but this murder has a definite element of rage. As if he wasn't thinking things through. The two don't mesh."

"We'll know more when the lab guys are done."

Donovan stayed silent for several moments, gathering his thoughts and deciding what to do. He watched Jodie and her team moved around the room, documenting and photographing every drop of blood and every broken piece of furniture. A sickening image, of Olivia's face frozen and painted in a death mask, her beautiful body mutilated beyond recognition, haunted his thoughts.

Donovan looked at Bill. "I'm changing the deal, whether Phillip Weston likes it or not. I need you to arrange some things for me."

"Whatever you need."

Donovan pulled his leather-bound notebook from his jacket pocket and began writing. For now, time was his biggest enemy.

Olivia's stomach twisted, and a brief wave of nausea hit her before she could force it

down again. She stared across the sunlit living room to the black television screen, trying to push back the raging thoughts and emotions in her head. Despite her effort, they ended up being this jumbled mass of hot and cold, dark and light, swirling and struggling for center stage. Guilt fought its way to the front. Guilt at seeking comfort in Donovan's arms while Yasmine was being murdered. Guilt at even thinking of the feel of his touch, the tenderness of his kiss, the aching need in her blood, when she should only be mourning Yasmine's death.

"Olivia! Olivia, are you with me?"

With a start, she turned her head and looked up at Brad. He stood over her, fists planted at his waist. His trimmed, shaped eyebrows dug in over his eyes as he glared at her.

"Are you even listening to a word I've said?" His annoyed voice grated on Olivia's frazzled nerves.

"No," she answered, then realized the brevity of her reply when Brad's scowl deepened. "I'm sorry, Brad. I'm just very-distracted-right now."

"Where is your head?" he asked. "I swear, Olivia, lately I've really wondered where your common sense and focus have gone. I've noticed it. And I doubt it will be long before the critics notice, as well." He wagged a finger at her, and gave his blonde hair a dramatic flip.

Olivia stood off the couch and walked away from him. "Last time I checked, you no longer held a position of dictatorship in my life."

"Olivia, you need to get your focus back. You need to free your life of any extraneous distractions."

Anger flared inside her, and she immediately knew the entire purpose behind Brad Everhardt's impromptu visit. She crossed her arms over her breasts and cocked her hip. "How can you be so cold? Yasmine was killed last night. You may not have considered her a friend, but she was one to me."

"Granted, it's a terrible thing. But you can't let things like this destroy your focus. Don't let yourself be distracted."

Find a new word, Brad. "This extraneous distraction of mine, would his name be Donovan Greer?"

"Now, I wasn't going to go down that road, Olivia. But if you want to, we will. Yes, this Greer guy is no good for you."

Olivia bit back the dozen or so remarks she could make about Brad's proficiency in diverting any and all blame off himself. "And you were better for me, Brad?"

He lifted his hands and looked down in a dramatic show of concession. *Ever the performer.* "Again, Olivia, that's not a place I intended to go. But yes, I am better for you. You and I—we're poured from the same mold. We're theater people. The stage is our life. We both know it. We understand it. And we compliment each other."

"The only person that compliments you is you." The jab was out before she even thought of holding it back. And she had to suppress the smile tugging at her lips.

Brad's eyes rounded and he stepped back, hands planted at his waist. "I didn't come here to be insulted, Olivia. I came here as a friend. And you know you mean more than that to me."

Olivia huffed. "I was never more to you than a great PR opportunity. Up and coming actor Brad Everhardt was seen today with Olivia Weston, the Sweetheart of Broadway," she said, mocking a television reporter in her tone.

Brad lunged forward, grabbing her upper arms, and Olivia gasped as he pulled her against him. "Olivia, that isn't true! You broke my heart when you ended our affair. Can you blame me for being concerned—and yes, damn it, jealous—when I see you with another man? A man who doesn't and can't ever understand you the way I do. He will never be enough for you. Not like me. Not like us."

Olivia shoved him away. Hard. Brad stared at her, his nostrils flaring with sharp breaths.

"Don't you ever, *ever* touch me again," she hissed at him, trying to control the anger that surged in her blood. "I want you to leave. Now."

"No, not until I've told you what I came here to tell you."

"You've said all you're going to say."

"Olivia, he's old." The whine in Brad's voice went through her like fingernails on a chalkboard.

"Get out, Brad."

"No."

"Yes," boomed Donovan's voice from the doorway.

Olivia spun around to face him, and heat rushed over her like a warm ocean wave.

"Liv asked you to leave."

"I have business to discuss with Olivia," Brad said with a waver in his voice. "I'm sure she would prefer I stay and continue the discussion."

"You won't like the way *I* ask," Donovan said, his voice dropping dangerously low.

From several feet away, Olivia could see the dark cloud behind his features. Nervousness skittered over her skin, and she watched him as he stood, unmoving, glaring at Brad.

"F-fine," Brad stuttered. "I'll see myself out."

Olivia didn't turn to look at him, but felt him brush by her as he made his way down the hall. She watched Donovan, and once she heard the front door open and close, stepped towards him.

"Donovan," she said on a quick breath. "What's wrong?"

He strode across the room towards her, and the air around her became heavy and charged with his presence. Donovan took her hand, and she had to fight the gasp at her body's intense reaction. When she glanced up at him, and met his stare, her breath caught. He looked at her with blatant heat, a dark erotic stare that couldn't be faked for the sake of a cover story. It was real and obvious, and in a single blink, it disappeared as his features relaxed.

"Just come with me, please."

Still holding her hand, Donovan led her from the room and through the penthouse. He walked with such focused power, she nearly had to run to keep up with the long strides. They reached her bedroom, and without pause, he pulled her inside and shut the door. Olivia's heartbeat jumped erratically.

"Donovan," she said, unable to form any further question.

He didn't pause, but pulled her towards the bed, where she saw a small leather satchel. "I want you to pack only what you absolutely need, and it has to fit in this bag."

"Pack? Why? For how long?"

"Just trust me. Pack simple. Make sure to bring a pair of jeans, preferably straight or

pegged leg. Do you have any?"

Olivia nodded, feeling overwhelmed by the swirl of his instructions and what they could mean.

"Don't put them on. Wear something different, shorts or something. Don't worry much about the clothing you pack otherwise. Just one or two changes. I mean it, Liv. It needs to fit in this bag. Where is your father?"

"He had a meeting this morning," she said with a nod. "Where are we going?"

He paused and stared down at her, his eyes skimming over her face. She held her breath when he moved closer to her, bringing their bodies within a breath of touching. "I'm taking you somewhere I can keep you safe." His voice was deep and soft, yet his words frightened her.

She couldn't control the shiver that shot up her spine and she felt herself lean towards him, as if a magnet pulled them together. Donovan touched her face, cupping his palm to her cheek. His thumb brushed her lip.

"I *am* going to keep you safe, Liv. I promise you."

She wanted to completely lean into him, but even with his closeness, there was a distance. A veil of reserve around him that acted like a force field. She only nodded against his palm, and he dropped his hand, moving away.

"I'll be back in ten minutes. Don't tell *anyone* you're leaving. *No one.*"

Then he was gone, leaving her confused and short of breath. Olivia was stuck to the same spot, her feet unwilling to move, for several moments. Finally, she forced herself into action and did exactly as he had told her. First, she changed from her workout clothing to a pair of khaki short, a tee shirt and sneakers. Then, with attention to only grabbing exactly what she might need for an unexpected trip to some unknown destination for an undetermined length of time, Olivia filled the bag. Clothing, underwear, toothbrush, shampoo, hairbrush. Even that short list of items filled the bag quickly, and she zipped it up as he knocked and opened the door.

"Ready?"

She nodded. "I think so."

He grabbed her hand, carrying both their small bags on the other shoulder, and led her from the room.

She instinctively knew now was not the time to ask questions. They left the penthouse and rode the elevator down to the lobby. Donovan nodded to the doorman as they walked out into the summer heat. His car sat at the curb, waiting for them. He opened her door and Olivia slipped inside as he tossed their bags in the backseat.

They drove through Manhattan in what seemed to Olivia to be a random pattern. Turning left, then right, then staying straight for several blocks only to turn again. After twenty minutes of driving and silence, she turned and looked at him. He was intently focused on the street, fingers gripping the wheel, and the muscle along his jaw jumping every few moments.

"Donovan," she said softly.

He glanced in her direction before looking back to the light they sat at. "What?"

"I trust you."

When he looked at her again, something swirled behind his eyes, making the golden-

green color vibrant yet clouded. He nodded, and looked away as they pulled through the light. Several intersections later, they pulled into the lower level of a parking garage, darkness slamming down on them as the sun disappeared. Donovan drove up three levels and pulled into an empty spot.

His determination and single-mindedness kept her silent as he retrieved the bags from the back seat and opened her door, offering his hand to help her out. With their fingers still linked, they walked quickly away from the car, Donovan's eyes darting in all directions.

They boarded the elevator, the stench of stale cigarette smoke making her eyes water, and Donovan hit the button for three levels up.

"Take off your shorts."

Olivia spun her head to look at him, not sure she heard him correctly. But when she saw him unbuckling his own belt and unfastening his slacks, she froze. Heat rushed to her face so fast she thought her eyeballs were going to boil.

He pulled the black suit pants off over his feet. She tried not to stare at the way his white dress shirt hung down past his narrow hips, ending just short of the bottom of black boxer briefs. Donovan stopped and looked at her, a pair of black jeans in his hand that he had pulled from his bag.

"Liv, don't get modest on me right now. Take off your shorts and put on the jeans you packed."

She blinked fiercely, finally able to move to unbutton her shorts. The elevator stopped as she pulled the faded jeans over her hips. Olivia gasped when the doors started to open, and without a word, Donovan moved to put his body between her and the doors. She wasn't sure what made her body flush hotter, the thought of being so close to Donovan's now bare chest, or that someone might see them in their state of near-undress in a public elevator.

A man and a woman stepped inside the small car, and before Olivia could pray the floor would open and swallow her whole, she realized they seemed completely unfazed by what they saw. Donovan nodded to the man, who was about Donovan's height, and said hello to the woman, who was blonde and several inches shorter.

Confused, Olivia finished buttoning her jeans and surreptitiously watched Donovan shed his shirt to pull a white tee shirt over his head. Before he did, she let her gaze skim over his chest and shoulders, remembering the feel of them beneath her hands the night before.

The unknown man handed Donovan a set of leather motorcycle saddlebags, and while Olivia stood shocked and silent, Donovan emptied the contents of their satchels into the saddlebags. She glanced quickly at the man and woman when he came out of her luggage with a handful of cotton panties and bras, only to transfer them to the new bags. They didn't notice because they were now undressing themselves, putting on the clothing she and Donovan had just discarded.

Her mind finally began to put the pieces together, pushing past the fog Donovan's closeness and bare body had created. She remained silent, taking one step closer to Donovan once they both were dressed again. Without looking back to her, his right arm moved back and his hand rested protectively against her hip, as if he knew she needed his touch to reassure her. Immediately, her jangled nerves calmed some.

"The car is on level three, fifteen spaces from the elevator. Gray Dodge Intrepid. You know what to do after that," Donovan said, instructing the other agent, because that was who

Olivia assumed he had to be.

He nodded and handed to the woman agent the bag that had previously held Olivia's clothing. She pushed the button for level three, and the elevator moved into action again to descend back down. Olivia wrapped her fingers around Donovan's upper arm, taking comfort in the hard strength of the muscles beneath her hand.

The elevator stopped and the agents exited, dressed just as she and Donovan had been when they arrived. Donovan stepped away from her to kneel beside a bag the other agents had left behind.

"Could you push the button for the second level?" Donovan asked as he unzipped the bag and emptied the contents.

She did with a slightly trembling hand, and he handed her a black leather jacket.

"Put this on," he told her as he put on a similar jacket. Olivia noticed the cut of his was a little bit less snug, hiding the shoulder holster he had put back on over his tee shirt.

"I look like a biker chick," Olivia said as she fumbled with the belt that wrapped from the front placard to a buckle at her side.

Donovan stepped to her and helped her, his fingers confident as they fastened the strap. "That's the point."

The elevator lurched as it stopped and she stumbled towards him. His hands immediately held her hips, keeping her steady and close to him. She looked up at him. "It is?"

He was actually smiling when he met her gaze. "Liv Weston, Sweetheart of Broadway and Harley Girl."

With the metal-studded saddlebag slung over one shoulder, Donovan led her into the garage again. He scanned the array of parked vehicles until he seemed to see what he wanted, and they walked across the concrete floor, his newly donned black boots echoing through the space.

By the time they reached the black Harley Davidson, with orange and red flames painted on the front tank and chrome handlebars, Olivia wasn't the least bit surprised to see it. She now completely understood what he was doing, and despite the reasons behind it, she found herself excited.

"Have you ever ridden a bike?" he asked as he fastened the saddlebags beneath the raised back portion of the leather seat.

"No," she answered truthfully.

"Well, you've got the easy part," he said as he handed her a metallic pink helmet. "You just have to hang on."

Donovan helped her with the helmet, tucking her hair into it and making sure it was properly in place. He then straddled the bike, swinging his leg over the machine with ease. After he looked over the dash and checked the gas level he twisted and patted the slightly raised seat behind him.

"Climb on, baby," he said with a wicked grin and a chuckle beneath his voice.

Olivia smiled, and did just as he said, settling onto the seat with her legs on each side of his hips. With a gentle, guiding hand he showed her where to rest her feet.

"Scoot closer to me," he instructed, his hand wrapped around her lower thigh, urging her closer. "Get as close to me as you can and get your legs right against my sides."

She wondered if the flush she felt in her cheeks burned as bright over her whole body.

"It's going to be a long ride, so if you need anything just tap my shoulder. When we make a turn, lean into it with me. Okay?"

She nodded. "You trust me to do this right?" she asked, her voice muffled by the helmet.

"Of course, I do," he said, meeting her eyes for several moments before twisting to face the front of the bike. "Now, wrap your arms right around me and don't be afraid to hang on tight until you feel comfortable."

Olivia smiled. "You know, Donovan, if I didn't know better I'd think this was an attempt at seducing me," she said as she leaned into his back and wrapped her arms around his body.

He put on his own helmet, not saying a thing, and she figured that was a better sign than if he tried to refute her claim. Her breath caught when he brought the big machine to life beneath them, the powerful engine sending surges of vibration through her body. Minutes later, they rode through the streets of New York City, hopefully anonymous to anyone who saw them.

Twenty miles off Interstate 95 in Virginia, they stopped for gas and a quick break. Donovan could tell the way Olivia looked around the rural landscape, she wondered where they were and where they were going. At this point, it probably didn't matter if he told her, but she hadn't asked, so he let it go.

He paid the station attendant and walked back to the bike, watching her sip from the bottle of cold soda he'd brought her. As he reached her, she turned and looked up at him, the breeze pulling several strands of blonde hair across her face. She used a long finger to brush them behind her ear, offering him the bottle of soda.

"Want some?" she asked, her blue eyes steady and alive as she gazed up at him.

Donovan took the bottle and guzzled most of what was left, thankful for the cool rush at it hit his throat. It had been a very long five hours on the bike, not just because it was a long drive, but having her arms and legs wrapped around him was a torture he hadn't adequately anticipated. He debated with himself whether the slight brushes of her hands at the top of his thigh had been inadvertent, or whether she knew exactly what it did to him every single time.

He hadn't said a word about the night before; the kiss, and where that kiss had been undeniably heading. And until he knew what to say, and how to say it, he had no intention on bringing it up.

"Are we almost there?" she asked as he handed the bottle back to her. Her eyes still held his as she lifted the opening to her mouth and parted her lips. Donovan saw a slight peek of her tongue as she finished the contents.

He cursed the hot rush to his groin.

"About an hour. We'll be there around nightfall."

She just nodded, not asking any more about their destination. For more times than he could count, he again questioned the wisdom to taking her to the cabin. It certainly was out of the line of fire, and he was confident that the switch in the city would throw off anyone who might have been interested in their destination, but he wasn't sure *this* cabin was the place to take her. So many memories. And it would create so many questions.

But his personal discomfort, or unwillingness to answer questions, was inconsequential to her safety.

He finally forced himself to look away, picking his helmet up from the handlebars where he had hung it. Before he could swing his leg over the bike, Olivia touched his arm. Donovan looked down at her, and the nervous cloud that had appeared in just a split moment surprised him.

"What's wrong?" he asked, covering her hand with his. Her fingers curled into the leather of his jacket.

"Where we're going--will there be anyone else there? Other agents, other people?"

He held her gaze and turned to sit sideways on the bike's seat, drawing her closer to him so she stood between his spread legs. Probably not the wisest, most prudent move – but then again, he had done several things as of late that were neither wise nor prudent. Donovan took her hands in his, holding them between them, and being seated on the big bike, their eyes were level.

"No," he answered. "There will be no one there but you and I. Only one person knows where we'll be and that's my department head. Not even your father knows."

She took in a short, quick breath, but her eyes never left him. His basest instinct wanted to pull her against him, lay her down over the motorcycle seat, and bury himself so deep inside her that he'd never come back. But somehow, at some point and soon, he was going to have to tell her the events of the night before would not happen again. They couldn't, for more reasons than he wanted to list. More reasons than he could make her understand, beyond the most obvious ethical ramifications and what it could potentially do to his career.

Avoiding the conversation for now, Donovan stood and straddled the bike. Olivia silently climbed on, settling against him, her arms around his waist. He put on his helmet, and once again, they were on the road.

Just under an hour later, he guided the bike onto an old dirt and gravel road he had traveled many times in the last thirty-nine years. He slowed the bike for safety, and to keep from kicking up too many rocks and dust in Olivia's face. Five miles down the road, after passing half a dozen small houses and camps along Lake Anna, he turned down a driveway heavily shrouded with thick, overhanging tree branches.

The Greer family cabin sat a hundred feet down the drive, with the shore of Lake Anna another fifty feet down the hill. He hadn't been to the cabin in at least four years, but it still felt like coming home despite the heaviness that immediately settled into his chest. He dropped his feet to the ground and eased the bike along the gravel and grass until it came to rest beneath the overhang of the wrap-around patio above them, the tall stilt supports creating a natural shelter.

The sun had set half an hour before, casting the lake in a silvery-blue light with the moon overhead, partially hidden by long clouds. As soon as they were off the bike, Olivia pulled off her helmet, freeing her long hair, and looked around. The air was warm, but only slightly humid, and hung heavy with the scents of the forest around them. The only noise was the sound of the water lapping against the dock and the pebbled shore, and tree frogs chirped in the distance. Somewhere, very far away, classical music played in one of their neighbor's cabins.

"Donovan," she said in a soft whisper that carried easily with the lack of much other

sound. "This is beautiful."

He put his palm against her back and guided her towards the steps that led up to the cabin door. His boots echoed loudly on the aged wood. On the upper patio, Donovan walked to the side entrance to the cabin.

"I hope they haven't moved where they hide the key," he said, needing to fill the silence with something. He stuck his hand into the hanging terra cotta planter near the door and his fingers found the key hidden inside. Moments later, they stood in the main room of the cabin. The kitchen was to their left, with its basic sink, gas stove and half-size refrigerator. He instinctively looked to the right through the large bank of windows that faced out over the lake. The two couches and three easy chairs sat just where his mother had placed them forty years before, so everyone seated could see out over the lake from any piece of furniture.

He moved to the end table nearest them and turned on the bear lamp, a gift Donovan had given his father one year for his birthday. The base was a chunk of wood roughly carved to look like a black bear. It was cheap, completely designed for the tourists who visited Lake Anna in the summer, but his father had loved it.

Donovan heard Olivia unzip her jacket, followed by the smooth sound of shifting leather as she took it off. A familiar feeling, yet one he hadn't felt in a very long time, slowly grew inside his chest. Hundreds of childhood memories, and adult memories, swirled around in his mind as he looked around the never-changing cabin.

He turned to find Olivia, his throat tightened when he saw her standing at the wall, looking at the plethora of family photographs his mother had hung there over the years. His eyes immediately snapped to the very one she looked at.

Him. Janie. Sarah.

"Who is this with you?" Olivia asked, staring at the photograph of Donovan, a beautiful young blonde beside him and a curly-haired toddler in his lap.

Something about the smile on his face in the picture captured her, held her prisoner and warmed her with both the joy she saw there and a slight twinge of jealousy. When he didn't answer her, she turned to look at him. Any trace of the smiling man in the photo was gone, replaced by a hard, disarming wall as he stared at himself from some other time.

Before she could call his name again, a sound outside the cabin snapped her attention around to the door. Even as she turned, Donovan had his arms around her and sandwiched her between his body and the wall. The room fell into darkness as he turned off the light. He held a single finger to his lips, demanding her silence. She nodded again as another banging sound reached them.

Olivia heard voices outside. Two. They were deep, definitively male, but too muffled for her to make out any of the words. Donovan yanked open his jacket and pulled his silver gun from the holster beneath his right arm. The moonlight coming through the large windows shined off the weapon. Another noise made her jump, and she curled her fingers into the warm leather of Donovan's jacket. He moved closer, his big, broad chest shielding her from whatever came.

The door right beside them opened, momentarily hiding them behind the rough wood. Olivia saw the shadowed form of a large man wearing a baseball cap. She gasped when Donovan kicked the door closed behind the intruder. The man turned, and Donovan lunged

at him, both of them falling to the floor with a loud crash.

Her lungs burned as she held her breath, her hands pressed against the wall behind her as she watched them struggle against each other. She couldn't separate one man from the other in the semi-darkness. Both were dressed in dark clothing, and both were about the same size. They rolled together, the momentum of their fight knocking over two bar stools at the counter.

Olivia's heart jumped when the door swung open again and another man came through the door.

"What the hell?" the new intruder shouted.

She didn't think about what she did, she only knew she had to do something. Olivia grabbed the carved wood lamp on the table near her and swung around, aiming for the second man. The lights came on again as she lifted the lamp over her head.

Olivia froze, staring into a face that, if she looked quick enough, she would have thought was Donovan's.

"Liv, no," Donovan shouted.

The Donovan-clone stared at her from beneath the rim of his beige fishing hat, a variety of lures and hooks dangling from it. Olivia turned to Donovan's voice, and once again stared in shock.

Three Donovan's stared back.

Chapter Nine

Donovan watched Olivia cross the room, back to where he and his brothers sat and hand a small baggie of crushed ice to Devlin. His older brother gingerly touched the ice to the corner of his mouth, shooting a dirty look in Donovan's direction. Donovan ignored it, holding his smile in check as Olivia sat on the arm of his chair and gently ran her fingertip over the sore spot left where his temple collided with the bar stool.

"Does it hurt?" She leaned close enough to him that her scent filled his head.

"No." He hid his wince at the sting.

He felt his brothers' glares on him and shifted to look where they both sat on the couch. Devlin arched one eyebrow, the scar that divided it giving him a near sinister appearance.

Olivia pressed the second bag of ice she had prepared to the side of his head. Donovan flinched away, looking up at her again.

"Liar," she said softly. "It does hurt."

"That's what you get for jumping your brother in the dark," Devlin grumbled.

Donovan smirked and shifted in the oversized chair, making room beside him for Olivia to sink into the seat. He rested his arm across the back, enjoying her body pressed against his. *Enjoying it too much.*

"Speaking of which. What are the two of you doing here? Aren't you still performing?" David asked, nodding his chin towards Olivia.

Donovan turned a quick glance on his brother. David shrugged.

"Don't look so surprised," David said with a wag of his eyebrows. "You know April buys all those entertainment magazines. She saw your pictures. In fact, she called the night before last, going on about seeing the two of you at the Tony's."

"April is David's wife," Donovan said, tilting his head towards Olivia, but still looking at his brother. "How are the kids?"

"Davey is a freshman this year. He's going to try out for track and wrestling, and is at camp right now. Abby is giving me a heart attack just about every day. She just keeps getting prettier and prettier. And Janie, well, Janie is the wild child. At eight, she thinks she knows it all."

Donovan's chest tightened at the mention of David's youngest, Janie's namesake. But he pushed it down, and did his best to smile genuinely.

"You didn't answer the question," Devlin said, his words slightly slurred as he spoke around the swollen corner of his mouth. "What brings you out here?"

Donovan squeezed Olivia's shoulder. "We just needed to get out of the city for awhile."

Both brothers nodded in unison, looking like a mirror image of each other. Proving once again why they were the identical siblings, and he was the fraternal third wheel.

Olivia looked at him, turning her head so her hair brushed his arm. He glanced down at her, seeing the unspoken question in her eyes, and just smiled. She immediately smiled back, and Donovan winked. Donovan looked to Devlin, who still had a sour mug on his face.

"How about you? Vicki. The kids."

"Vicki just sold another short story to a magazine," Devlin answered, touching his lip for one more silent complaint. "Peter is excited about going into first grade, and Kimberly

learned how to ride her bike this summer. She talks a mile a minute and asks a hundred questions a day. You remember how that is," he added, but his words trailed off as he met Donovan's stare.

Donovan didn't have to hear the word "sorry" to know Devlin thought it. He dropped his chin, just slightly, to let Devlin know it was all right.

"We came up here for a week of fishing. Would have called, but as usual, you left no forwarding number. And we figured you were otherwise occupied," David explained.

Olivia put her hand on his knee, immediately shooting heat up his leg and grabbing his full attention. "Where is the little girl's room?"

Donovan pointed in the direction of the modest cabin bathroom, and once she was gone, he leaned forward to clasp his hands between his spread knees. Without needing to speak, both Devlin and David scooted forward to lean in as well.

"Does the groundskeeper know the two of you are here?" Donovan asked.

They both nodded. "He aired the cabin out before we got here," David supplied.

"When are you leaving?"

"Christ, trying to get rid of us already?" Devlin said with an annoyed grunt. Donovan shot him a look. "Day after tomorrow."

"Good. This works better than I thought. If you see Mr. Trapiliano, don't tell him we're here. If he comes after you're gone, he'll just assume I'm one of you. He never could tell us apart."

"What's going on?" David asked.

"I brought Olivia here to protect her."

Devlin elbowed David. "You owe me twenty bucks."

David ignored him. "What are you protecting her from?"

"A killer."

"The Broadway Killer?" David asked.

Donovan nodded. His brothers knew well enough not to share any information he gave them, and it felt good to have people he could trust. Explicitly. "We defined his M.O," he explained, not going into too much detail. "His next victim is Liv, unless he's caught."

"Liv?" Devlin said with another arch of his eyebrow.

The bathroom door opened, and Olivia came out. Her smile nearly lit up the room. Immediately, the three of them sat back. Donovan stood up when she reached him, and his hand naturally reached for hers. It had been a decade since his body reached for another person's body without thinking about it, except in defense or protection.

"I don't want to be anti-social," she said softly, and he saw a deep-set apprehension in her eyes. As if she were worried to upset him. "But I'm awfully tired."

Donovan smiled and looked to his brothers. "Where are you two sleeping?"

"Well, I had the big room, but I'll move into the bunk room so Olivia can have the good bed," David offered. "You can sleep in with me, but I call top bunk."

Donovan scowled. He hadn't really thought through the sleeping arrangements before they arrived at the cabin, but sharing the 'bunk room' with David wasn't in his plans. Before he could argue, David left to clear out his stuff from the bedroom their parents had always used on family get-aways. David switched rooms while Donovan went out to the bike to retrieve the saddlebags.

He came back in the cabin to see his two brothers standing near the refrigerator, each with a beer, and troublemaker grins on their faces. Donovan just walked on past to join Olivia in the bedroom.

As he went through the door, he heard David say to Devlin, "I think you owe *me* twenty bucks."

Donovan walked into Liv's bedroom, seeing her standing near the front window that faced out over the lake, her arms crossed over her body. He dropped the bag on the bed and went to her. When he reached her, she turned and looked up at him, the moonlight brightening her features.

"Hi," she said softly.

Donovan smiled. "I left your bag on the bed. I'll be in the back bedroom with David. Devlin is in the third bedroom, but the bathroom is between his room and this one. If you need anything, we'll be up for awhile, but don't worry about coming in and getting me. David sleeps like a rock."

She stared up at him, and it reminded him of the first day they met. Olivia had done more than just look at him that day. It was more like she studied him, and she did the same now.

"You're not identical," she said simply.

He shook his head. "No. David and Devlin are identical. I'm their fraternal multiple."

She nodded, her eyes settling on his mouth and heat spread through him. "I could tell. Except for the scar over Devlin's eye, the two of them are almost indiscernible. But you're different."

"Not many people can tell."

"I can," she said, her hand coming up so her fingertips brushed his lower lip. "Your mouth is different. Wider. More refined." Her eyes came up to meet his stare. They were deep, so deep, and so blue. "And your eyes. They're darker. Deeper."

Donovan fought the urge to cup her face in his hands and cover her mouth. He could taste her, just thinking about the kisses they'd shared. Drawing a long breath in through his nostrils, he clenched his jaw.

"They're harder," she continued. Olivia swayed closer to him, the cotton covering her breasts brushing his tee shirt. "Sometimes, when you look at me, your eyes are so gentle. And sometimes they're so hard."

Donovan looked away and turned toward the window. Her hand rested on his arm.

"Donovan, why are your eyes so hard sometimes?"

He didn't answer her, bracing his hands against the windowsill. The smell of the lake and the forest came through the screen, the soft breeze cool against his cheeks. But inside, his blood was hot.

"Why didn't you ever tell me you were a triplet?"

Her voice had changed, lighter now. But the bowling ball had already landed in his gut. He had to stop this. Stop torturing himself. Get off whatever path the two of them walked on.

"It never came up."

"I know nothing more about you than your name, and that you're a triplet and a perfect tenor."

"It's not your job to know about me," he justified.

"If the position is open, I'd like to apply."

Her hand stroked up his arm and across his shoulders, slipping down his spine in a gentle, yet amazingly arousing touch. Everything she did was arousing. Exciting. Distracting. He dropped his chin, his hair brushing the old screen and he leaned forward. Olivia pressed her lips to the skin of his upper arm. Donovan sucked in a sharp breath and lifted his head.

"I know I let things go too far last night, Liv," he said, turning to her. "But I meant what I said before. Nothing is going to happen between us."

"Because you're here to protect me," she stated.

"That's only one of the reasons."

"Why else?"

Her voice wasn't demanding, wasn't short. Just gentle and inquisitive and low. Donovan clenched his jaw and fisted his hands to keep from touching her. His thoughts snapped to the large bed only feet away. If he picked her up, and laid her down on the old homespun quilt, nothing would matter but her.

Until it was over. Then all the reasons would still be there and he'd end up hurting her.

"Too many reasons."

"Because of what you do?"

"What I do. Who I am. Who you are," he said, frustration making it hard to keep his voice level.

"That's not enough of an explanation." This time, he heard a slight wavering in the calm levelness of her voice.

He turned away, leaning back against the windowsill with his hands shoved in his pockets to keep from touching her. "It's the only explanation I can give."

Olivia stepped around in front of him, standing in the small space between his feet, and leaned into him to run her hands up his arms. His muscles involuntarily jerked at her touch, the contact of skin on skin sending electrical charges beneath the surface. Because he perched on the edge of the sill, his legs out away from him, she was able to almost look him straight in the eye. The light of the moon behind him lit her face, so he could see every detail of her expression.

"I know you want to be with me," she said in a low voice, sweet with seduction.

"Irrelevant."

Her lips turned up slightly and she looked at him through her lashes. "So formal, Mr. Greer."

Olivia moved her hands up to his shoulders, her fingers caressing around his ears and jaw, brushing the ends of his hair. He wanted to close his eyes, to live in the sensation, but kept his gaze on her. Her thumb ran along his lower lip.

"Just tell me, Donovan."

He swallowed against the dry desert in his throat. "Tell you what?"

"Tell me you want me."

Donovan shook his head slowly, but the tip of her thumb separated his lips, running along the edge of his mouth, and he stopped. She moved closer, her body pressing along his, until her breath warmed his cheek. He was keenly aware of her breasts pressed against his

chest and he took his hands from his pocket, only allowing himself to touch her at the waist.

"Tell me, Donovan. You told me you'd never lie to me. Tell me. Do you want me?"

Her lips hovered near his, the sound of her voice making his skin hum. Donovan opened his mouth and shifted closer to her. The tip of her tongue brushed the inside of his lip, and he couldn't suppress his groan.

"Do you want me?"

"Yes," he said, admitting the truth, and brought her against him with his hands on her back. He tried to kiss her, but she moved just out of reach.

"Then what else really matters?"

Donovan closed his eyes and cupped a hand on the back of her head, but instead of kissing her mouth, he pressed his lips to her forehead. Tension pulled every muscle of his body tight. Blood pounded in his temples and rushed to his groin. He curled the fingers of his other hand against the loose waist of her jeans, the denim folding in his grip.

"Everything else matters. What I want doesn't," he said against her soft, honeysuckle-scented skin.

Then, because he knew his own strength and knew it was at its breaking point, Donovan gently pushed her away and walked out of the room. He closed the door behind him, and would have done just about anything to just get a beer and sit in the dark until sunrise.

But there would be no such luck, because David sat in the living room, obviously waiting for him. He had a beer in his hand, and another one sat open on the coffee table. Donovan bit down hard until pain shot up the side of his skull, and walked across the cabin's main room to sink into the chair he and Olivia had occupied together. He picked up the amber bottle, damp with condensation and swallowed half the contents before resting the bottom on the armrest.

"Where is Devlin?" he asked once his throat was once again cooled.

"He went to call Vicki. Devlin likes to put up a good front, but he misses her and the kids."

"Sounds typical of him."

"What? Putting on a good face and hiding what's really going on? Sounds like you, just as much as it sounds like Devlin."

Donovan looked away from his younger brother and focused on the drops of moisture on his bottle. One large drop ran from the top of the neck down to side to leave a wet spot on the armrest. His brother watched him, and just as it had always been, he knew the question without hearing the words. It wasn't ESP, nothing so far out there as that, but just the ability to read his only siblings better than anyone he had ever known. Including Janie. And they knew him.

"My job is to protect her. That is it," he said, forcing himself to sound stern, confident in his words.

"Was presenting yourself as her lover part of the cover?" David asked.

Donovan looked up and focused on David. The question alone could have been construed as sarcasm, but not coming from David. From David, it was just a question.

"It seemed prudent."

"It seems more than an act."

Donovan drew in a deep, long breath and involuntarily looked towards her closed bedroom door. Even if he did somehow manage to hide from the world in general the effect Olivia had on him, he couldn't hide it from David and Devlin.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-five," Donovan said without pausing.

"Just a kid. Hell, Donovan, do you even remember twenty-five?"

Donovan chuckled, but not in humor. He shook his head. "Barely. I had been with the Bureau for three years. Sarah was just a baby." His voice trailed off as memories of his bright-eyed and curly-haired daughter wrapped around him. For some reason, here at the cabin it didn't hurt as much to remember her. "I saw everything in black and white."

"Nothing is black and white."

He shook his head and involuntarily looked towards Olivia's closed bedroom door. Black and white. Be with Olivia. Don't be with Olivia. Too bad it wasn't that easy.

"Is it just an act?" David asked.

Donovan set his elbow on the chair arm and ran the pad of his thumb over his lower lip. "Why do you ask questions you already know the answers to?"

He heard David sigh. The leather of the couch rustled when he moved. "I wanted to see if you'd admit it."

"Don't turn psychologist on me, David."

"That's what I do. But before I'm a psychologist, I'm your brother."

Donovan closed his eyes and curled the hand at his mouth into a fist. He ground his teeth together, feeling the tension build until it shot up the back of his neck.

"Has anything happened between you?"

"No," Donovan answered, choosing not to elaborate.

"Why not?"

He snapped his head around to stare at David. "Why not? You're asking another question you know the answer to."

"I'm pretty sure I know what *you* think the answers are."

David stood and went to the kitchen, retrieving another beer for each of them from the refrigerator. He came back and set Donovan's on the table beside his chair. Donovan waited in silence, staring past his brother to the empty space beyond. Finally, David sat again facing him.

"Have you told her your reasons?" David asked. Donovan shook his head. "Why?"

Donovan shot up to his feet and strode away to the bank of windows. The moon made the water look like liquid silver as it lapped gently on the shore. A calm that belied the battle in his gut.

"Afraid that if you say the reasons out loud they won't make any sense?"

"That's enough, David," Donovan snapped.

The cabin door opened and Devlin came in, cell phone in hand and a smile on his face. Donovan turned away so his older brother wouldn't see his face, knowing he probably looked pissed as hell. Fitting, since he was.

"How are Vicki and the kids?" David asked, his tone giving away nothing of their previous conversation.

Donovan brushed past his brother into the cool, fresh air outside.

Chapter Ten

"Tell Weston to take his kidnapping charges and shove 'em up his ass."

Donovan's angry rumble came through the open window from where he stood on the front patio. Olivia stopped in the doorway of her bedroom and watched him. He strode the length of the porch, one hand planted on his hip, the other holding a cell phone to his ear.

He looked amazing. Faded blue jeans fit his hips and backside perfectly, even more than the suits and tuxedos he had worn in New York. His red tee shirt spread over his chest and formed to the muscles of his upper arm. Olivia drew in a long, shaky breath.

It wasn't fair. She was supposed to be angry with him, woke up with every intention of hunting him down and demanding answers, but just seeing him set butterflies to flight in her stomach and goose bumps dancing over her arms and legs.

He spoke lower now, so Olivia couldn't hear what he said. But she clearly saw his face, the privacy glass allowing her to watch him without him realizing she was there. His eyes squinted slightly at the corners, forming small wrinkles that spread back towards his hairline, and his brows pulled down to hood his eyes. When he wasn't speaking, his lips formed a straight line.

Donovan sank into one of the deep wooden patio chairs, his back to her. She took in a deep breath and leaned her shoulder on the doorjamb, and looked around the cabin. Other than her, it seemed empty, and she wondered where Devlin and David had gone. Of course, it was nearly noon so they could have left hours ago and she wouldn't have known.

She couldn't remember ever sleeping past seven in the morning, let alone nearly mid-day. With no alarm to shock her from her sleep, the warm bed and silent forest had lulled her into deep dreams.

Olivia walked across the cabin to the door, took a blueberry muffin from the plate on the counter, and stepped out into the warmth of the day. The air hung heavy with the smell of evergreens, fallen leaves, and soil. She inhaled slowly, savoring the way the scents energized her blood.

"Fine, Bill. The next time he calls, transfer him here. I'll deal with him."

She turned to Donovan's voice, and took several steps towards the corner of the cabin.

"No," he said simply, but his voice was hard and unwavering. "No, I don't think he needs to talk to her."

Olivia reached the corner and stepped around, resting against the wall. Donovan turned and saw her, his eyes locking on her for several moments before looking away. She wasn't sure, but she thought she saw a shift in his eyes and maybe the slightest upturn of his lips. Just as quickly as it skimmed his features, it disappeared.

"Where does the search for Mike Solomon stand?" Donovan asked.

At the name, Olivia stood again and walked onto the front patio. The muscle along Donovan's jaw, just in front of his left ear, jumped in quick spasms as he clenched his teeth.

"It doesn't feel right to me, Bill. If he's our killer, why would he leave such obvious evidence behind as a used condom?" Donovan shook his head. "Keep me posted. And fax me the crime scene photos as soon as they're ready. I want to review them."

He slapped the phone closed and clipped it to his belt before turning his attention back

to her. Olivia crossed her arms over her body and did her best to look annoyed, but it was so hard with his eyes smoldering on her. She knew the heat was probably anger, and not arousal, but it had the same effect on her.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked.

Olivia blinked rapidly, surprised by the question. Not the first thing she expected him to say to her after his abrupt exit the night before.

"I did, once I was able to fall asleep," she answered. "My mind wanted to sleep, but my body was very much awake."

His gaze dropped, skimming from her lips to her breasts, and she felt some small bit of satisfaction knowing his thoughts were in the same place as hers.

"Why did you let me sleep so late?"

"You obviously needed it," he said, meeting her stare again. "There was no reason for you to be up."

"Where are your brothers?"

"They went to the store to pick up some things. They didn't have much more here than beer and pasta. And muffin mix."

Olivia looked down at the uneaten muffin in her hand. Suddenly, she wasn't the least bit hungry. Since their first meeting, what seemed like months ago now, she had felt completely comfortable around Donovan. Until now, when her tongue didn't want to cooperate and her mind broke off in a dozen tangents without focus. Before she could organize her thoughts enough to speak, Donovan turned away and walked to the railing, his hands shoved in his front pockets.

"There isn't much to do here. No television, and the radio only comes in half the time. But there are books on the shelves in the living room. My mother leaves them here."

"I think I like the idea of doing nothing." Before she could talk herself out of it, Olivia bolstered her courage. "Except maybe making love to you."

He looked at her over his shoulder, his jaw set and his eyes intense. Olivia's knees felt weak, but she forced herself to stand strong. She stared back, holding her breath.

Go ahead. Deny it.

His eyes slipped closed before he dropped his chin and turned back to face the lake. Frustration churned in her stomach and made her chest tight. How many times had he told her she had the right to make her own decisions? How many times had he pushed her until she stood up for herself? Well, damn it, this time she was pushing back!

"Don't do this, Liv."

"I want to know why," she said sharply. But she kept her voice low, steady. "You say you've been honest with me. But I think the honesty only goes as far as you're comfortable with. I want more. I want more of you. I want more *from* you."

"Liv," he said slowly, dragging her name out.

"Tell me. Tell me your reasons. You claim to have these ironclad reasons. Tell me." With each sentence, her voice grew louder, but she didn't care.

Donovan turned in her direction, reaching out one hand, palm up. "Liv, can't you just trust me on this? You've trusted me on everything else. Trust me now."

She shook her head. "I have trusted you. I've believed everything you've said. That you would protect me. I've followed you blindly." Olivia walked towards him until only the

length of his arm separated them. "I trust and believe you when you say you want me."

His eyes followed her, staying level with her gaze as she looked at him. The hazel of his eyes darkened, and his features relaxed a degree when they stood close. Olivia took one more step, close enough that she had to lift her chin to look at him.

"Tell me again you want me, Donovan."

He drew in two short, quick breaths. His nostrils flared slightly with each. His hand came up and he nearly touched her arm, but stopped short and curled his fingers into his palm. What he wouldn't do, Olivia decided she would. She pressed her palm against his chest and felt his heart pound beneath it.

"I want you, Liv," he said, his voice tight and strained and so heavy it sat between them. "I just can't have you."

"Why not?" He turned away, but she touched her fingertips to his chin and made him look back to her. "Donovan, why not?"

"I told you. I can't protect you and..." He paused, as if searching for what to say. "and think of you in any other way than an assignment."

"I think it's too late for that. Don't you?"

He didn't answer, just stared down at her with eyes so intense her skin flushed beneath the gaze. She wanted so much to feel his lips on hers, his tongue filling her mouth, his hands on her body. A quiver moved up her spine and through her body.

"And I won't be your responsibility to protect forever. Soon, you'll have this killer and I'll be safe again. What will your excuse be then?"

He turned away from her touch and walked away several strides. Olivia felt bereft instantly, and her body swayed towards the spot where he had stood.

"Do you really want to argue about this?"

"I'm not looking for an argument. I'm looking for justification. Do you really expect me to just walk away? Would you if you were me?"

He stopped walking and planted his hands at his waist, his elbows pointing out away from his body. They stood in silence for several minutes, only the sound of the water lapping the pebbled shore and the distant song of wild birds filling the space. Olivia waited, her lungs burning as she forced her breath to remain slow.

"Do you have any concept of what I do?" he finally asked, his voice gritty.

"Of course I do," she said, amazed he would ask such a ridiculous question.

"No, Liv. Do you *really*?" he snapped, turning back to face her again. "My job is to make enemies."

His eyes were intense and hard as he stared down at her. She knew his intent was to intimidate her into backing down, but he had no idea how persistent she planned on being. Fighting for what she wanted was something new to her, and if she was going to take on a battle, it might as well be for something big. Over six feet big.

"You're not going to scare me away, Donovan."

"I'm not trying to scare you. I'm trying to make you see reality."

She closed the space between them with three long strides, bringing her body within a breath of his. He drew up, preventing them from touching, but didn't step away.

"I see the reality," she said, dropping her voice. "I see the way your eyes darken when I'm close to you. I see the way you hold yourself back from touching me too much, because I

know that if you didn't, this argument would have been over a long time ago. We would have been in each other's arms weeks ago. I see it because I feel it."

Olivia moved closer, ignoring the look in his eyes that told her to stay away, and ran her hands up his body to his chest. His muscles tensed and bunched beneath her touch, and as she slid her palm towards his shoulders, he covered her hands with his own, stilling her over his heart where she felt the erratic beat through his skin.

"Don't do that, Liv," he said in a voice so deep, so strained, it sent waves of awareness over her body.

"Why, Donovan?" she whispered, leaning into him until her breasts brushed his chest. "Is it hard to remember the wisdom of your reasons when I'm this close? When my hands are on your body. When it's impossible to think of anything but your skin against mine."

He shoved her hands away and stepped back, his stare hard on her.

"Am I wrong, Donovan?"

He shook his head in a silent, but cursory concession before walking to the railing. Donovan shoved his hands in the front pockets of his jeans and stared out at the water.

"I still haven't heard anything to convince me," she said to his back.

"I'm nearly fifteen years older than you," he said abruptly, turning back around.

"So?"

"Damn it, Liv! I've been with the Bureau longer than you've been shaving your legs."

She blinked, staring at him as the reality of what he said sank in. The truth of him being older wasn't lost on her, but it just didn't seem important. It was obviously important to him. Olivia remembered his mention of it that first day they met, when the decision of his cover was made. He said then the age difference would be obvious, but she had passed it off. Now, as he said it, the words stung more than she wanted to accept.

"I see. To you, I'm a child. Someone to be coddled and guided, just the way everyone else sees me." *The way my father sees me.*

"No," he said emphatically, marching back towards her with such intent, she actually took a step backwards. "No, Liv. I don't see you as a child. Never."

Before she could say anything, he turned again and walked to the wall of the cabin. He stood in front of a bank of privacy glass, and stared at his own reflection. From where she stood, Olivia could see her own outline in the mirror-like surface. She crossed her arms over her body and walked slowly to him.

"Is that the last reason? Because of our ages?"

His head dropped further forward and he shifted on his feet. He forced out a long breath. "Can you honestly say none of these things would bother you?"

"Yes, I can," she answered, internally cursing the quake in her own voice. "Are you telling me all these reasons are really strong enough, daunting enough, to keep us from acting on what we both want?"

He shook his head, but didn't say anything, didn't clarify one way or another. The silence sat on her chest like a boulder. Olivia swallowed against the lump in her throat, and the all-to-familiar sensation of insecurity choked her. Maybe she was just making a fool of herself. Maybe she read everything all wrong.

"Donovan, if you just really don't want me, please, say it. Don't make weak excuses." Her words came out in a strangled whisper and tears blurred her vision. "If you think it's

better to let me believe there's something here that just isn't, if you think that is in some way kinder than being honest with me, you're wrong."

He stared at her several moments before stepping to her. Olivia held her breath as he reached up and touched his curled knuckles to her cheek, brushing at the moisture left by her tears. She gasped, unable to restrain her reaction to his touch. Donovan unfurled his fingers and laid his palm against her jaw.

"I'm sorry," he said in a rustling whisper. "I wish I could make you understand. If I could..." he said, but his voice trailed off.

She reached for him, wanting to wrap her arms around him, but before she could, he was gone. Olivia looked to the corner of the patio, around which he had disappeared, and took in a shuddering breath. With a rough swipe of her fingers over her cheeks, she moved to one of the chairs and sank down with her back to the lake, suddenly incredibly tired.

"Don't waste too much time trying to figure my brother out. It's useless."

Olivia looked up, Devlin's voice jolting her out of her musings. The oldest of the Greer brothers stood at the corner, the same corner that Donovan had retreated around, his shoulder braced against the wood and his arms crossed over his chest.

"David's the psychologist, so he's probably closer to figuring Donovan out than the rest of us. I'm a financial advisor. The only thing I analyze is stock. I gave up on understanding Donovan years ago."

Olivia sighed and sat back in the chair, sinking into its deep wooden seat. "Well, then, I have no hope. I barely know him."

Devlin walked to her and perched on the edge of the round table beside her, his hands clenched together in his lap. "I heard some of the discussion between the two of you."

Heat rushed to her face, and she silently wondered just what parts he'd heard. The shameless way she threw herself at him? Or the smooth way he turned her down?

"I thought you and David weren't here," she said in excuse.

He gave her a lopsided grin and shrug, offering no explanation. "Let me see if I have the general gist of the situation. You're attracted to him, and you know he's attracted to you. But whenever you get close, he backs off. He offers lame excuses, but can't quite look you in the eye when he does it."

Olivia stared at Devlin, amazed at the numerous similarities between him and David, yet the obvious differences as well. She drew in a long, deep breath and raised one shoulder in a half shrug.

"Something like that, yes."

"And all the time he's talking, you're thinking that there has to be more."

"For someone who says they don't understand him, it sounds to me like you've got a pretty strong hold on things."

Devlin sighed and looked past her to the lake. "I know what makes him the way he is, what I don't understand is why he won't let go."

"Let go of what?"

He blinked at the sun. "His guilt." Devlin stood off the table and sat down in the chair beside her. "And her name is Janie."

Olivia squinted her eyes in thought. "That name. I heard it last night. She's David's daughter."

Devlin nodded. "David does have a daughter named Janie, named after Donovan's Janie. She was his wife."

She stared at Devlin, pretty sure the shock registered wide on her face. "Donovan is married?"

"Was married," he said and met her stare. His features were kinder than she remembered from the night before. In fact, Olivia had sensed some tension between Devlin and Donovan then. But now, Devlin seemed more concerned for his brother. "Janie died just over ten years ago. She and Sarah, Donovan's daughter."

Olivia pressed her hand to her chest. "Oh, God. How old was Sarah?"

"Five."

She drew her legs up into the chair, hugging her knees. A deep ache settled into her chest. Olivia didn't need to know any more to realize that the loss of his wife and child must have been devastating. Her heart ached for him. She looked away from Devlin and took a deep breath, wiping her cheeks with her fingers.

"How did they die?" she asked, hearing the quiver in her own voice.

"Car bomb."

Olivia pressed her eyes closed, and Donovan's words rang in her head. *My job is to make enemies.*

"He won't bring this up first, but if you go to him and tell him you know, he might talk some about it. Course, he's going to be mad as hell at me for telling you, but I'm used to being on Donovan's bad side."

"Was the bomb meant for him?"

"Yes. But Janie's car wouldn't start that morning, so he rode to work with his partner and left her his car. She was on her way to take Sarah to pre-school."

"Oh, God," she whispered. It was all she could seem to say.

The setting sun reflected in the waters of Lake Anne, sending out fingers of orange and pink to ripple to the shore. Donovan sat in a folding aluminum lawn chair on the dock, slouched down low with his elbows on the armrests and his fingertips pressed together in front of him. He stared out over the water, listening to the sound of lapping water and chirping crickets.

He wanted peace, and had sought it out down by the water, but didn't find it.

Instead, he was assailed by memories. When he closed his eyes, he could almost hear Sarah splashing in the shallow water along the shore. Her squeals of laughter used to echo all the way up to the cabin.

"Daddy! Daddy! Take me out in the deep water. Please?"

"Of course. But you have to hang on tight."

"Can I sit on your shoulders again?"

Donovan swallowed against the thick lump in his throat and blinked his eyes. He realized, with a sharp pain through his chest, that he couldn't clearly recall his daughter's face. She was unclear, blurred around the edges. Even Janie's features weren't as clear as they had been. How could he forget them? In the settling dusk, he could remember Janie sitting on the edge of the dock, her feet dangling in the lake. She looked at him over her shoulder, her back nearly bare in the string bikini she wore. Her blonde hair blew in the breeze as she smiled at

him the way only she knew how.

"Have I told you today how much I love you?"

He used to shake his head and run his fingers along her back, feeling the softness of her skin beneath his fingertips. When he leaned in to press a kiss to her shoulder, her skin always tasted like fresh water and sunshine. Even that, the tang on his tongue, the memory of her taste, didn't come to him as quickly and sharply as it once did. Offering him solace in the dark, sweet recollections to push back the devastation.

Donovan leaned forward and covered his face with his hands. All it accomplished was to bring his argument with Olivia to mind. David had been right. When he actually tried to argue his reasons, they sounded weak and unfounded. Olivia even said so.

Olivia.

Beautiful Olivia.

What in hell was he going to do?

He heard the soft footsteps on the pebbled shore behind him, and knew instinctively it wasn't David or Devlin. Were it not for the loose stones, he probably wouldn't have heard her at all. She walked past him, slowly, and continued to the edge of the dock ten feet away.

Donovan watched her as she lowered herself onto the dock and hung her sneaker-clad feet over the edge, hovering inches above the surface of the water. She wore one of his white shirts, stolen from his closet, with the sleeves rolled to her elbows and knotted high enough to bare her mid drift and back. From where he sat, he could see several vertebra of her spine, like a string of pearls up her back. Several wisps of her blonde hair fell loose, even though a clip held twisted strands to the back of her head.

God, she's beautiful.

"I have some things I want to tell you," she said, her voice soft and slightly less than steady. "And I'd really appreciate it if you would just let me say them and not interrupt. I don't want you to respond until you've had some time to think about it."

Donovan took a deep, long breath and leaned back in his chair to watch her back. A heavy dread sat in his gut, wondering what he would hear.

"All this is very new to me," she began again on a sigh. "I don't know for sure, and maybe later you can tell me if I'm right, or wrong, but I think I'm falling in love with you."

Donovan sucked in his breath, and clenched his teeth to keep from speaking. Something that had long lain dormant expanded in his chest and pressed out against his ribs. It was instant, powerful and devastating.

"When you're close to me, my skin tingles with anticipation that you might touch me. I know when you come into a room, without seeing you. And I know when your eyes watch me, just like they are now.

"I think about making love to you, and waking up in your arms. Seeing your face first every morning for the rest of my life. I want to know everything there is to know about you. I want to know who taught you to sing, and who taught you to be a man."

She paused, and dropped her head forward, appearing to look down into the water. Donovan watched the final remnants of sunlight dance off the highlights of her hair and reflect on the water like fireflies. Warmth spread through him, but not the heat of arousal that had tormented him since first touching Olivia.

Happiness.

Was this what it felt like to be happy?

"I know about Janie. And Sarah."

The warmth was lost, shattered in an ice cold wave. Donovan's stomach clenched and he shot forward, nearly coming out of his seat. But when she didn't move, he reined in his reaction and sat back again. She didn't continue until he had reclaimed his position.

"I don't know all of it. But I know you lost them, and that you loved them both very much. And I know you well enough to know that it hurt, deeper than I can ever truly understand.

"I'm not Janie. I can never be Janie. I don't *want* to be Janie. But I want to love you. As me. I want to heal your heart." Her voice cracked as she spoke. "I want to make you happy again. I don't know if I can be enough for you, but I'm willing to try. I will give everything. Do anything. For you."

Donovan closed eyes, his heart a throbbing, clenching mass in his chest.

Then she was done. She stood, dusted off her shorts and turned to him. Donovan looked up at her, meeting her eyes that looked almost black in the encroaching moonlight, and watched her walk towards him.

Olivia didn't stop until she stood beside his chair. He turned his head towards her, now unable to look into her face. She didn't move for several moments, and when she did, she gently stroked his hair with her fingertips.

He leaned over to rest his cheek against her hip, wrapping his arm around her legs to pull her closer. She held him, arms wrapped around his shoulders and head and fingers stroking his hair, then leaned over and pressed her lips to his crown.

Then she left, stepping free of his hold, and walked back to the cabin. His arms fell limp in his lap, useless without her to hold onto. He held his eyes closed, because he couldn't stand to see her walk away as much as he needed to hold back the burning wave, and listened to her footsteps as she walked back up the slope to the cabin. The small stones slipped and clicked in soft sounds with each step, growing faint as she moved further away.

She stood at the window when he eased open the bedroom door. Moonlight streamed through the glass to brighten her face, making her hair look almost silver. He carefully shut the door behind him, wanting to avoid the intrusion of sound, and moved slowly towards her, his heart pounding in his chest. It was hard to steady his breathing and not resort to actual panting. She wore only a gray tee shirt, one that barely hit the top of her thighs, her long legs-defined and sexy-drawing his eyes.

She didn't look at him until he reached her, tipping her head back just enough to stare through her lashes. In the moonlight, her blue eyes were nearly black. When those eyes looked up into his face, Donovan had to swallow against the swell of need in his chest. Her lips parted, but he gently pressed his finger to her mouth. He felt her eyes on him, her gaze skimming over his face, as he reached up and released the clip that held her hair in place. Her blonde hair tumbled down around her shoulders, curling against her cheeks, her eyes fluttered closed.

His blood ran hot, pounding in his temples and his groin as he looked down at her. Every muscle of his body clenched and tightened, wanting to pull her to him and devour her. Donovan cupped his palms against her jaw and ran his thumbs over her lips, gently parting

them in sharp contrast to the war raging inside him. He felt her breath catch, and she turned her head into his touch. Her eyes fluttered for a moment before she looked up at him again.

Donovan lowered his head and covered her mouth.

Chapter Eleven

Donovan moved his hands over Olivia's back and along her sides, reveling in the soft curves and swells. He deftly found the hem of her tee shirt with his fingertips, and raised it above the elastic of her panties to touch her skin. Olivia felt hot, silky and incredible. He sucked a sharp breath through his teeth as his fingertips skimmed the pearly strand of her spine. She gasped and hung on tighter to him.

He pushed her shirt higher, unwilling to take his hands from her body long enough to just pull the clothing off. She was amazing, so small and delicate, yet nothing could argue just how much of a woman she was. His hands traveled the slight camber of her hips, the flat plane of her stomach, and the defined notch of her waist. He buried his face against the curve of her throat, feeling the vibration of her soft, throaty moans against his lips.

I need you. I need this.

The words hung in the air, unspoken, yet heard all the same.

He pulled back and looked into her face. Heavy eyelids hooded her blue eyes, and her lips glistened in the silvery light. With their gazes locked, his breath ragged and fast, Donovan took the hem of her shirt and raised it up. Olivia put her arms over her head and let him slip it up her arms.

Donovan tossed the barrier aside and memorized every detail of her body. She was beautiful. Perfect. His body throbbed and ached, and he fought the impulse to just drop his jeans and bury himself in heaven. Slowly, she lowered her arms again, bringing them to her side, coyly looking at him through her lashes. Beautiful breasts gave way to creamy skin and a tapered waist, and white cotton panties hugged her hips.

Donovan reached for her, dragging his fingertips down the slope of her breasts. She shivered, her lips falling open in a soft moan when his thumbs brushed across her nipples. They tightened and beaded. Olivia covered his hands with her own, urging him to knead and caress them and Donovan followed her lead, rolling the nipples between his fingers and testing the weight of her breasts in his hands. He leaned forward and drew one nipple into his mouth, suckling until she hissed and gasped, her body swaying.

His blood boiled and his muscles tensed with need. Olivia slipped her hands beneath his shirt, pushing it up his torso with the heels of her hands leaving a hot trail over his skin. The torture was too intense, he took his hands from her to yank the cotton over his head.

Their gazes locked, and Olivia took his hand, walking backwards as she led him to the bed. When the edge of the mattress bumped her thighs, she pushed up on her tiptoes to sit on the bed, bringing her eyes level with his chest. She tugged at his waistband, pulling him between her thighs. Olivia leaned forward and pressed her lips against his stomach, and he sucked in a sharp breath, pushing his fingers into her hair. Her fingertips ran inside the waistband of his jeans, releasing the top button, relieving some of the intense pressure. Then she looked up at him, through the tousled mass of blonde hair around her face, and laid back on the bed, one arm draped over her head.

He leaned into her, his knuckles pressed down the mattress on each side, and with her arm behind his neck, she pulled him onto the bed. He kissed her shoulder, arms and the swell of her breasts, and Olivia's body arched. She shifted and wiggled beneath him, her hitched

breath the only sound between them.

As he moved down her body, Donovan hooked his fingers in the narrow sides of her bikini panties and slipped them down over her hips. He kissed the indentation of one hip, and she bucked with a soft cry, so he moved to the other. Her fingers pushed into his hair, holding his head as she gasped for air, silently letting him know what she wanted. And he gave it. Willingly. Donovan loved her with his tongue, paid homage with his lips and savored every sweet drop of her heat. She tasted like champagne, and her scent filled him like a drug. No woman had ever tasted so good.

Her body trembled under his touch, thrashing and pressing against his mouth, and his own cried for relief. Donovan moved up her body again, kissing, kneading and sucking. Heated skin scorched against heated skin.

He kissed her shoulders, her throat, more parts of her body than he could keep track of, before coming back to her mouth. She worked at his zipper, pushing his pants past his hips. With their lips on each other, against shoulders, necks, throats, Donovan shed the jeans.

Olivia's fingertips dug into his backside, her throaty moans a cry to his ears that she needed him as much as he needed her. Donovan groaned, pressing his face against her throat, feeling her erratic pulse against his lips. Unable to control himself any longer, he climbed onto the bed and gripped Olivia's thighs, urging her to wrap her legs around him.

When he entered her, his entire body reacted, pulling tight to rein in the intense flood of fire and ice. He couldn't breathe, couldn't see, could only drown in the heat. For several beats of his own erratic heart, he couldn't move. The connection was too intense, the heat searing, and the wet fire surrounding him too alive. She cried out, her body arching off the bed and her hips moved against him. With a phenomenal level of restraint, Donovan slowly drew from her, opening his eyes to look down at their joined bodies. His arms trembled as he lived the sweetest torture. Donovan could no more hold back the low murmured grunt in his throat as he drove back into her body, than he could prevent his own heart from beating. Olivia held him with her arms and legs, burying her face against the curve of his neck as he made love to her. Each thrust made the blood pound harder in his temples, each withdrawal leaving him bereft until he filled her again.

When she came, it shook her body and reverberated through him as she dug her nails into his shoulders. Olivia cried out, arching against him, holding him still with her strong thighs. He moaned against her skin, and the muscles of his back and shoulders knotted as he lifted her hips and thrust himself into her heat one last time as her body clenched and pulsed around him.

It had been so long, so damn long.

Drained yet nearly euphoric, Donovan kissed her shoulder and rolled to his side to face her. Olivia's skin glowed, her cheeks flushed and her breasts shifting as she fought to steady her own breath. Lying beside her, he reached his hand out to lay it on her damp skin.

He was spent, but never felt more alive than he did at that moment.

"Olivia," he said, testing her name to make sure she wasn't some wild fantasy created by his tortured mind.

She stroked his forehead, brushing back the hair that clung to his skin. Her touch was gentle, and he felt the tremble in her fingertips. A soft smile bowed her lips as she raised up on one elbow to look down at him. Olivia pressed a kiss to his forehead.

"I'm here..."

"Jean-Paul Pinard."

Donovan cocked one eyebrow, reaching up to push a strand of hair behind her ear. She leaned into her elbow to look down on him, holding the blanket to her bare chest.

"You lost your virginity to a French teenager named Jean-Paul Pinard?"

Olivia pressed her lips to his chest, the crinkly hair tickling her nose. "I was seventeen, and he was a poet. What girl could resist?"

Donovan groaned, and she wasn't sure if it was from her story or from her kiss. He stroked her hair, running his thumb along her forehead.

"Is that the trick? Speak with an accent and write sappy poetry?"

Olivia scooted up so she could kiss him, immediately drawing a reaction from him as he cupped her head and held her closer. She pulled back and rested her folded hands on his chest, her chin on her hands, and looked into his eyes.

"I'm older now. More mature. I like the strong, silent type."

Sunlight streamed through her bedroom window, falling across the bed and warming her feet through the quilt. Olivia bent her leg and drew it up across Donovan's thigh, wiggling her toes against his calf. Donovan shifted deeper into the bed and drew her with him. She sighed, deeply content, and rested her cheek on his chest. His fingertips ran back and forth across her bare shoulders, sending shivers over her skin.

"Your turn to confess," she said.

Donovan chuckled, and it sounded like rolling thunder against her cheek. "What am I confessing?"

"Whatever you want to confess. Whatever you think I need to know," she explained, tracing the swirls of his chest hair with her finger to where they disappeared beneath the edge of the blanket.

His hand caressed her back, moving down her spine and up to the nape of her neck, and then crossed her shoulders, repeating the movement again and again with a teasingly gentle touch. It was hypnotic. She inhaled deeply, letting her senses fill with the masculine scent that clung to his skin. The scent of *them*. The rhythmic beating of his heart, with the soft sound of his breaths, lulled her until she realized he hadn't answered.

Olivia lifted her head and rested her chin on his breastbone, staring up the plane of his chest into his face. He looked serious again, his hazel eyes dark and intent as he looked at her. But they lacked the hardness she had become so accustomed to seeing there over the past weeks. Donovan toyed with a bit of her hair that had fallen over her eye, his fingers incredibly gentle and reverent.

"You don't have to tell anything if you don't want to," she said softly.

One side of his mouth, a mouth that had so exquisitely loved her through the night, tipped up in a slow smile. Then, just as slowly, the smile straightened. Not to a frown, just a relaxation of his features. She wondered what kinds of thoughts caused such swift changes in his expression.

"What is it?" she asked, scooting up to move closer to his face.

"You're the first woman I've been with since my wife," he said, his tone so deep it rumbled through her hands where they sat on his chest.

Intense emotion hit her, pushing out and grew until she felt she might explode. Tears welled in her eyes, but all she could do was look at him. His thumb stroked her cheek, and as they stared at each other, he curled forward and cupped her face in his hands until their lips came together. Donovan's tongue delved into her mouth, and the intimate contact sent shards of electricity through her.

His hands slid down her body, cupping her backside, and pulled her on top of him. Olivia leaned on her arms and her head fell back as he filled her again.

The tires of Devlin's Range Rover kicked up a cloud of dust and tiny pebbles as it ascended the hill to the road and away from the cabin. Donovan raised his hand in a still farewell, and smiled at the rapidly lessening honks as his brothers drove away.

Once the sounds of the departing SUV were gone, Donovan turned and looked down the slope towards the dock. The mid-afternoon sun was high and warm, making the greens of the trees more vibrant and the blue of the lake deeper. The air was crisp and fresh, heavy with the smell of summer. Everything was so alive the breeze nearly hummed.

Or maybe it was just his perspective.

Donovan smiled wider. So wide his cheeks hurt.

He pushed his hands into the pockets of his jeans and focused on the dock. Crouched at the end, with a stick in her hand that she used to create ripples in the water, was the source of his smile.

Maybe his soul wasn't as black and dead as he believed.

Donovan walked down the slope, dried foliage crunching beneath his feet. She was beautiful in the sunshine. It lit up her hair and shined off the bare skin of her shoulders and back. Olivia was the making of a wet dream in cut-off jean shorts and a bikini top. Her lithe body brought back memories of the night before.

He took a deep breath, his blood immediately hot.

Two steps closer and his cell phone rang, piercing the calm. Olivia turned and looked up at him, their eyes meeting as he took the phone from his waist and opened it to his ear. He held up one finger, letting her know he'd be done soon.

"Greer," he said, turning to face back up the hill.

"Donovan?" said a moderately familiar female voice.

He tipped his head to try and better hear her, turning away from the lapping water down the hill. "This is Donovan Greer. Who am I speaking to?"

"This is Lara Whitman."

Donovan paused, processing the fact that Olivia's hairdresser was on his private line.

"I'm sorry if I surprised you," she said. "I'm calling on behalf of Mrs. Weston, Olivia's mother. She contacted me yesterday in hysterics over Olivia's sudden disappearance, and I promised I would try and reach you. Just to make sure Olivia is okay."

"Lara, how did you get this phone number?"

"I wasn't sure if it was your number or not," she explained. "I found it written in Olivia's address book, with no name or anything, and went on a hunch. Should I not have used it?"

Donovan pressed his eyes closed and dropped his chin to his chest. He gave Olivia the number should there ever be a time he wasn't with her, for whatever reason, and she needed

to reach him. She had been smart not to list it as his number, but obviously Lara was intelligent enough, or resourceful enough, to play the hunch that it was his. Either that, or she called every number she found in the hopes of eventually stumbling on them.

"It's fine, Lara. But I ask that you not give it to anyone else."

She promised she wouldn't with a mumbled agreement. "Where are you? Is Olivia okay?" she asked. "We all were very shocked and concerned to have her suddenly disappear, especially so soon after... well, what happened."

"Olivia is fine," he said, looking over his shoulder to where she now sat at the end of the dock. "But you'll need to understand I can't tell you where we are."

"Mr. and Mrs. Weston are very upset. Mr. Weston has been in a foul mood since you took off."

Donovan was sure they were, but what they were really upset *about* was debatable. He assumed that, if Olivia wasn't performing, she wasn't getting paid. Course, he could be wrong. The way the theater worked was a mystery to him.

"Can you tell me why you took her? Was it because of Miss Halliwell's death? Is there something I can tell them? When will you return?" She fired the questions quickly, her voice rising in tempo and pitch with each word.

"The Bureau has informed Olivia's father all the information I've deemed necessary for him to know," he said slowly, making sure she heard his decisiveness.

"But what about Mrs. Weston? No one called her, and she has no idea who you are and what you're really doing. Don't you think she deserves to know?"

Donovan paused, taking a breath. "Lara, is there a reason you are shouting at me?"

Silence from the other end. Donovan looked up to the treetops, waiting for her next statement, question or demand. He heard her take a deep breath.

"I'm sorry," she finally said, sounding much calmer. "It's just—Olivia has been a good friend to me, and I worry about her. And to be honest with you, her father has been a bear to live with since you took her."

Why doesn't that surprise me?

"She's fine. And as soon as I am assured of her safety, we'll return to New York. Pass on to the Westons that their daughter is fine," he said before snapping the phone closed.

He clipped it back to his belt and turned on his heels to face down the hill again. Olivia still sat on the dock, her bare feet on the wood in front of her and her knees hugged to her chest. As he walked down the slope, he watched her rock on her bottom, wiggling her toes, and stare out over the lake.

When he reached her, he sat down with his legs on both sides of her, hanging over the dock edge, with her sandwiched between his thighs. He pushed aside the folded towels she had brought with her, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her back against his chest, settling his chin into the curve of her neck as she sighed.

"Who was on the phone?" she asked.

Donovan contemplated lying for about two seconds, but remembered his promise. "Lara Whitman."

She twisted in his hold to look up at him. The wind caught her hair and brushed his cheek with the silky ends. "Lara? What did she want? How did she find you?"

He pulled her close again, folding Olivia into his arms, and recited a brief run down of

the conversation. She listened silently, tracing small designs on his forearm as he spoke. When he was done, he pressed a kiss to the lobe of her ear.

She didn't speak for a while, just reclined against him and stared out over the water.

"You're thinking of something," he said. "What is it?"

"I could stay here forever," she said on a sigh. "I've been wanting to take a vacation, a long vacation. I didn't know where I wanted to go, but I knew I wanted to just sit and relax and enjoy the quiet. It's perfect here. I could sit on this dock for a year and never tire of it."

"It might get cold around January."

She chuckled softly. "You know what I mean. This cabin is just so *not* Manhattan."

"Why haven't you taken a vacation?"

She made a sarcastic huff. "Donovan, look at my life. Why do *you* think I haven't taken a vacation?"

"Is that the only thing on your mind?"

She shrugged and turned her head to press a kiss to his arm. It was a small, simple act but it shot through his body like a surging wave.

"I feel like I've been in a dream for the last few weeks, and I keep waiting for everything to finally hit me. It frightens me."

"What feels like a dream?"

"All of it," she said, tossing her hand out towards the lake, as if Lake Anne represented everything that haunted her. "Learning I'm the target of a serial killer. The murders of two of my friends and colleagues. The frightening reality of what could happen. That it could be me. I don't think I've let myself really feel any of it."

He didn't interrupt her, letting Olivia voice whatever thoughts were in her head.

"I find myself caught up in this whirlwind of moments and events, and almost before I can process it all, I'm here. On this beautiful, serene lake hundreds of miles from... everything. I was amazed when I realized a good twenty-four hours went by before the show even crossed my mind."

"Are you worried about it?"

She shook her head. "No. My understudy would have taken over, and she'll do just fine. I surprised myself again when I realized I didn't have knots in my stomach and break out in cold sweats when I thought about the show going on without me."

"And this is a good thing." He voiced his own opinion, and what he hoped was hers.

She nodded, her hair brushing his cheek. "I think maybe it is."

They settled into silence again, and Donovan looked out over the water, stroking her skin wherever he could touch her without releasing his hold.

"Yet, mixed with all of this... chaos and uproar... is you," she ended on a sigh.

He brushed her hair back, revealing her slender throat, and leaned in to nip at the soft curve. She moaned softly, her hand coming up to stroke the side of his head, holding him closer.

"I'll bring you back here," he said against her skin. "For as long as you want. Don't think I can swing a year, but—"

She cut him off by turning her head and kissed him. He cradled her chin in his hand and held her still, enjoying the feeling of their lips against each other. When he opened his mouth, she matched his initiation, and their tongues stroked each other like electric conduits.

Olivia purred softly, the sound of pleasure spurring him onward until hunger clawed at his insides and pounded in his veins. Olivia's hands tugged at his tee shirt as he shifted and guided them both down onto the dock.

Donovan had no idea how long they lay together on their makeshift pallet of beach towels, their heads resting on a faded orange life jacket. Olivia had her eyes closed, one slender arm draped demurely over her exposed breasts. He leaned up on his elbow, his knuckles bracing his chin, to look down on her.

"If someone told me six months ago that I'd be lying on a lakeside dock, naked as the day I was born after making love to an FBI agent, I would have told them they were crazy," Olivia said, her voice sleepy.

Donovan smiled, using his other hand to circle her navel with his fingertip. "This wasn't exactly in my plans, either."

She opened her eyes and looked at him, her face shadowed by him to block the sinking sun. "You strike me as the kind of man who likes to know the future. You make a plan, and stick to it."

He expanded his area of contact to include the gentle point of her hipbone and the ridge of her lower ribs. "Not so much that I make plans, I just don't often make changes."

She lifted her arm, giving him an unobstructed view of her pink nipples. Olivia pressed her palm to his chest, circling her hand over his heart. Her nails gently scraped his skin.

"Is change good?" she asked, her voice soft and tentative.

He leaned forward and kissed her, cupping his hand over her breast. "Change is very good," he said against her lips.

"Good," she said, and he could feel the smile on her lips.

Donovan pulled back, stroking her hair back from her forehead. "I can think of something else you didn't think you'd be doing."

"What's that?"

"Skinny dipping."

Her eyes widened, and she tried to sit up and get away. But Donovan was too quick for her, and with arms flailing and feet kicking, he swept her up off the dock and tossed her, unceremoniously, into the lake. She came back up through the surface of the water, sluicing her wet hair back from her face. Before she could curse him out, Donovan dived in.

Chapter Twelve

Olivia nearly choked on her mouthful of red wine. She sputtered, covering her mouth, and managed to swallow before finally letting go with her laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" Donovan said, staring at her indignantly.

"I'm sorry," she said, patting his bare shoulder. "You just caught me off guard. You and your brothers really sang barber shop?"

He nodded and tapped a snapshot in the photo album that sat open on his lap. "We performed at the American Legion, the Kiwanis Club, the Policeman's Charity Fair. Even some weddings."

She leaned against him, trying to get a better view of the photos on the page. Course, any excuse to be closer to Donovan and his shirtless body was a good excuse. The picture was of the three brothers, perhaps ten or eleven years old, in matching suits with microphones in their hands. They all faced to the left, synchronized with one arm behind them and over their heads, and the other arm extended in front of them.

"I knew someone taught you to sing," she said softly, stroking the hair around his ear with her fingertips.

"Our mother. I can remember being maybe two years old, and the three of us stood around her at the piano while she played. We 'went on the road' when we were five. Billed as the Greer Triplets."

Olivia smiled, mostly because of Donovan's smile. He chuckled at some secret memory, and she enjoyed watching the play of emotions over his features.

"You enjoyed it?"

He nodded and reached for his own glass of wine, sipping from it before setting it back on the end table. "We all did."

"Why did you stop? You could have been performing on Broadway now."

Even in his profile, she saw his smile relax. His body tensed slightly beside her. Olivia watched him, sensing an almost-tangible change in the air around him.

"Donovan?" she asked.

He turned the page of the album. This page had an assortment of photos that looked like they were taken at a birthday party. Balloons filled many of the shots, and one had the three Greer Boys blowing out the candles on a large birthday cake. Behind them stood a big man, broad in shoulder, tall in height, and slightly wide in girth. He smiled down on the boys, and in his face, she recognized Donovan's eyes.

"Our thirteenth birthday," he said. "Our dad was a beat cop in Arlington. He died before we turned fourteen. Had a heart attack chasing a purse snatcher."

Although she never could have known the man, he was gone before she was born, Olivia's heart immediately ached for the loss. What a wonderful man he must have been, to raise a son like Donovan. To raise three sons who grew up to be good men. She leaned forward and pressed her lips to his temple.

"I'm sorry, Donovan," she said, meaning it with everything in her heart.

He looked at her, gave her a smile and shook his head. "Don't be. I figure we had almost fourteen great years with our father. There are a lot of kids that don't even get that."

She smiled, and Donovan must have seen something different in it, because his gaze fell on her lips. "What are you thinking?"

"When you talk about your childhood, you speak in plural. Our birthday. Our father. We did this and that."

"When you're a triplet, there aren't a whole lot of things you do alone. Everything is plural. Sometimes I hated it, but usually it was as natural to me as I suppose thinking singularly is to non-multiples."

"Is that what I am? A non-multiple? Sounds like a very unsavory thing."

He leaned to her and kissed her soundly. "Liv, there is absolutely nothing about you that's unsavory."

They flipped through the album pages, and Olivia loved hearing some of the stories from his childhood. The trouble he and his brothers would get into. After each story, Olivia usually found herself laughing, or trying to swallow her wine before she spewed it all over Donovan.

Near the back of the album, the pictures became more recent. Pictures of each brother with his wife and children at a variety of family events. Christmas. Cook-outs at the cabin. When they came to a page that had several pictures of Donovan and Janie, he moved to quickly turn the page.

Olivia stopped him, resting her hand on top of his. He looked at her, and she held his stare for several moments before looking down at the photos.

"Don't ever feel like you need to hide her from me," she said gently.

He released the album page and turned his hand over to link his fingers with hers. "After ten years, you'd think I'd be able to look at the pictures without it getting to me."

"It would amaze me if, even after ten years, it *didn't* affect you," she said, pressing a kiss to his shoulder. "I don't pretend to know everything about you, Donovan. Not sure I ever will. But I think I have learned one thing."

"What's that?" he asked, his lips against her hair.

Olivia curled closer to him, wrapping her hands around his upper arm. "I think when you love, you love completely. And when you love like that, you don't just get over it." She reached out and touched the edge of one of the photographs. "Janie was a very lucky woman."

"I was a very lucky man."

"I bet you were a great daddy, too."

He sighed, deep and heavy and it moved like a tremor through his body. Even though she meant what she said, Olivia wished she could pull the words back. They may have caused more pain than comfort.

"Will you tell me about them someday?" she asked, lifting her head from his shoulder to look at him.

Her body warmed as Donovan stared at her. His gaze moved over her face, settling for several moments on her mouth, before coming back up to connect with her eyes.

"Most women don't want to know about their lover's past relationships."

She ran her fingers through his hair, stroking back from his temple to the nap of his neck. She sensed the coiling of his body, the tensing of his muscles that told her the effect her touch had on him. Never before had she felt a man react to her the way Donovan did. Of

course, never before had she reacted to a man the way she reacted to Donovan. It was empowering. Olivia leaned forward until her lips brushed his ear.

"Haven't you learned by now, Donovan darling? I'm not most women, and you're not most men."

In one motion, he pushed aside the album and pulled her into his lap. With her head held firmly in his hands, his fingertips applying firm pressure to her scalp, he kissed her. Long. And Deep. And hard. Leaving her breathless and aching. Olivia ran her hands over his bare torso, his skin warm from the humid evening, and felt his muscles bunch and jerk beneath her touch.

Just as her fingers found the button of his jeans, the buzzer on the oven went off, long and annoying. Olivia groaned, and feigned a faint as she fell sideways onto the couch. Donovan laughed as he stood, the leather protesting beneath him, and walked to the kitchen.

She lay on her back, one arm over her eyes, and listened to the sounds of Donovan in the kitchen. Once she confessed to having never cooked a hot meal in her life, not even hard-boiled eggs, he had taken over the cooking. Tonight, it was roasted chicken and some vegetable-pasta medley thing he said he created during his years of living alone. He opened the stove, and closed it again with a clang of the old door.

"How much longer until dinner?" she called out.

"I'd give it ten minutes," he answered, following up with the sound of a squeaky cabinet door hinge.

Olivia sat up and moved the photo album to the coffee table. She picked up her glass of wine and stood, strolling slowly around the room while Donovan did his thing in the kitchen. Her stomach rumbled at the delicious scents of roasted chicken and garlic that filled the cabin.

"Don't splash any of that hot water on you," she said as he lifted the pot of pasta off the stove.

"Thanks for the warning," he came back sarcastically.

Olivia smiled and sipped her wine, watching him from the corner of her eye. He stood at the sink, dressed only in his faded blue jean, looking sexy as hell. Who would have guessed bare feet could be so damn appealing? Hiding her heated cheeks by turning away, she walked to the small table they used for eating.

Donovan's laptop sat open, the soft light from the screensaver illuminating the dark corner of the room. The FBI logo sat in the center of a dark blue screen.

"Do you want me to move your computer and set the table?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Sure."

Olivia set her wine down to fold up the laptop and moved it to another nearby table. She switched the computer for a pair of candlesticks and moved back to set them up. On the table, where the computer had been, was a thin manila folder. Olivia assumed it had been beneath the computer. Retrieving her wine with one hand, she picked up the folder with the other.

Several pages fell to the floor.

"Dang," she mumbled, and crouched down to pick them up before Donovan saw she had dropped them.

She picked up the nearest one, and glanced at the photo before slipping it into the file.

Her throat suddenly restricted, cutting off all air to her lungs, and she shot up.

The sound of shattering glass spun Donovan around. He dropped his pot and colander in the sink, searching for the source of the noise. And for Olivia.

She stood at the kitchen table, her hand over her mouth, and a piece of paper in her hand. At her feet were the broken remains of her wine glass, the red liquid staining the wooden floor and running down her legs like droplets of blood. The paper shook in her trembling hand.

He moved to her, saying her name as he took the three steps to close the space, but she didn't answer. Didn't look away from the paper.

A lead weight dropped in his gut.

The crime scene photos.

Donovan reached for her, putting his hand on her arm. Her entire body shook, like a house of cards about to tumble, and tears shined bright in her eyes.

"Liv," he said gently.

She didn't answer, staring at the photo. Donovan looked down at the page. The color quality and sharpness was less than clear on the faxed copy, but it was detailed enough to clearly display the gory horror of the murders. Brittany Callahan's painted face, blood slicked hair, and slit throat glared up from the paper. Her vacant, open eyes stared back from the grotesque death mask.

Careful to avoid the broken glass, Donovan stepped closer to her. With his arm behind her shoulder, he used his other hand to pull the photo from her clenched fingers. She wouldn't release it, and he had to yank the paper free. As soon as it left her grip, she gasped, sucking air into her lungs. Her entire body jerked.

"Liv, look at me," he said sternly.

Her eyes dropped, staring down at the wine-stained pictures that still littered the floor. Donovan didn't look away from her face. He reached out and touched her cheek, urging her to turn to him.

"Liv, look at me," he said louder.

Her lips moved slowly, with silent words, and her eyes finally shifted to look at him. He turned her to face him, holding her upper arms with his hands. Large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Liv." He needed to get her back from wherever the horror of the pictures sent her.

Her mouth worked on speaking his name before it actually came past her lips. "D-Donovan?" she stuttered. "Oh, God. Donovan, she-I knew it was terrible, but-I never-I-why-why did he do this to her? To any of them?" she finally forced out.

"I didn't want you to see those."

"He wants to-he's going to--"

"No!" He shook her, just once, until she looked him in the eye. "No, Liv. He is *not* going to do this to you."

"How do you know?" she asked, her voice so small it almost didn't reach him.

Donovan swallowed against the rage in his throat. Rage against the terror in her eyes, the fear he had hoped to keep away. He bent his knees and swept her up into his arms, carrying her away from the broken glass and wine-stained evidence of reality. Olivia clasped

her hands behind his neck, pressing her face against his shoulder as he took her to the bedroom, somewhere he could talk to her and she wouldn't see the horror. Her tears fell hot on his skin. Beside the bed, he set her on her feet and made sure she faced him.

"Liv, I swear to you, on my life, that he will not hurt you. He will not win. I will die before I let it happen."

He saw it in her eyes. The reality and truth of the last several weeks crashed down on her in one terrifyingly real moment. Her knees buckled under the weight of it, and he helped her sit on the bed. Olivia's fingers curled around his arms, holding on with strength he never imagined from such small hands. She still shook from head to toe. Her lips trembled and tears rolled down her cheeks, but she never looked away from him.

"I wasn't afraid before now," she said in a choked voice. "I understood the danger. Losing Brittany and Yasmine broke my heart. But I was never afraid. The moment you told me you were here to protect me—I didn't even know you—but I wasn't afraid. Was I being stupid?"

Donovan crouched in front of her, taking her hands in his and resting them on her thighs. He looked up at her, wishing he knew what to say. Comforting the people he was in charge of protecting never fell into his job description. If he said anything at all, he usually told them to shut up and get over it—or something similar.

It had been a very long time since he wanted, *needed* to make someone feel safe.

"No, you weren't being stupid. You did exactly what I told you to. You trusted me." He picked up her hands, pushing his lips to her knuckles. "I know those pictures drove home the severity of the situation, but don't stop trusting me."

She stared at him, and he felt some of the tension ease in her body. Her grip on his hands lessened, and her breathing deepened. And while that should have eased his concern, the distant look in her eyes worried him. Olivia looked at, yet through him, at the same time.

Rapid pounding at the cabin door jolted him from her gaze. Donovan shot up to stand, reaching at his side for the gun he hadn't worn in two days. He lifted a finger to his lips and retrieved his Glock from the holster where it hung on the back of the bedroom door.

He motioned for her to move to the far corner of the room, out of the line of sight of the front door and beneath the window. She slipped off the bed and moved behind him. Donovan slowly released the safety and engaged his weapon, keeping the telltale clicks as quiet as possible.

The pounding came again, four rapid beats, and he heard Olivia gasp, but didn't dare look away long enough to check on her. He needed to believe she trusted him enough to stay where he said, and remain quiet.

Donovan crouched low, and keeping close to the wall, left the bedroom and moved around the perimeter of the room. With his back braced against the wall, he inched towards the door. As he reached for the knob, the knocking came again.

"Agent Greer, if you're in this cabin, I strongly suggest you open the door before I break it in!"

She hovered inside her own skin, existing in the same place but in two different moments. Sounds repeated like echoes in a tunnel, muffled and hollow when they reached her ears. Olivia blinked, drawing in a deep breath of hot, humid air and looked around the

dark bedroom.

Shadows slanted across the floor, created by the silvery moon outside. She looked to the bed, the covers still rumpled by their mid-afternoon lovemaking. Donovan's blue camp shirt, made of a cotton so soft it was almost like silk, was draped at the foot of the bed. Olivia tried to remember the way the fabric had felt beneath her fingers as she released the buttons and pushed the shirt down off his shoulders.

The memory was hazy. Clouded on the edges. Like a dream. She wanted to reach out and touch the shirt, to try and remember. But Donovan told her to stay where she was.

Trust Donovan.

Why was it so damn quiet?

The silence in the cabin did more damage to her wounded nerves than if she actually heard something. Anything. She looked down at her bent legs, and noticed the dried red spots of wine on her skin. With trembling fingers, she wiped at the spots, only lightening the color but not cleaning it away.

Olivia brushed at another stain, and winced when the tiny fleck of broken glass imbedded in her skin dug in deeper. A rivulet of crimson blood ran down her leg. It mesmerized her, trailing over the arch of her foot to disappear in the space between her toes.

So much blood.

Her stomach churned, and she felt the wine ferment and burn its way through her body. She swallowed and took a deep breath. Her head felt light, yet heavy, at the same moment.

The bedroom door opened and she looking up at Donovan, a scream lodging in her throat. Choking her. His image wavered in front of her, like a dancing clown in a fun house mirror. Distorted. Olivia blinked, trying to make it stop.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing. Everything is fine," he said, his voice tight. His lips looked like two tight strings pulled across his face, and his eyebrows pulled down to hood his eyes. "It's Bill Jackman, my Deputy Director."

Olivia stood, pushing her palms against the wall for leverage. She watched him sit on the bed and put on his socks and sneakers. His movements were sharp, hard, almost angry as he tugged at the shoelaces.

"Why is he here?" she asked, but her voice echoed back to her own ears as if it were someone else's.

"I don't know yet. I'm about to find out."

She crossed her arms over her body. "Do you think it's bad?"

"I don't know," he said again, a sharp edge to his voice.

Olivia swallowed and drew in a long, slow breath. She blinked hard and looked away as he stood.

"I'm sorry," Donovan said, his voice low as if he didn't want it to carry to the next room. "I shouldn't have snapped. Bad timing. I'm going to go talk to him."

She nodded. "I'll be out in a minute or two. I need to find a first aid kit."

"Why?"

Olivia looked down at the trail of blood on her leg. She lifted her foot, leaving a small spot of crimson on the hardwood floor.

"Christ," Donovan ground out. "Liv, why didn't you say something?"

She lifted her chin and looked into his angry face. "It doesn't hurt," she said, but her words sounded like they belonged to someone else.

The room tilted, and then Donovan was beside her, his hands holding her up. She saw her name on his lips, but the sounds didn't reach her ears.

So heavy.

Donovan's face blurred and disappeared into blackness.

Chapter Thirteen

"She okay?"

Donovan looked towards the bedroom doorway where Bill Jackman stood. He ground his teeth together, biting back the acid response that immediately came to mind. With forced calm, he looked down at Olivia's bare legs and dabbed at a bloody cut with a medicated cotton ball. She hadn't moved since he had laid her down on the rumpled bed.

"She'll be fine," he forced out. "You've got lousy timing, Bill."

"Just what the hell was going on here when I arrived?"

Donovan didn't answer immediately, taking several moments to compose his thoughts and decide just what to tell and how to tell it. He tossed aside the used cotton balls and busied himself with cleaning the blood and wine stains from her skin. The wine had splattered as high as her thigh, and Donovan focused hard to appear unaffected as he ran the damp washcloth above her knee.

"Liv stumbled on the crime scene photos just before you started banging on the door," Donovan finally said. "She was already shaken up, and you didn't help. We weren't exactly expecting visitors."

"Yeah, I got that from the wine and candles."

Donovan shot Bill a hard glance, and stood to move to the head of the bed. His fingers itched to smooth back her hair and brush her cheek, but he forced himself just to lay his palm on her forehead. Her skin was cold and damp. With forced professionalism, Donovan pressed his fingertips to her throat. Her pulse was still fast, but had slowed over the last few minutes.

"I think she's in shock," he said as he pulled her pillows from the other side of the bed and slipped them beneath her knees. "She'll be fine after some rest."

He pulled the blanket over her, and when there was no further excuse to stay beside her, other than his personal need to be close, Donovan brushed past Bill and went into the main room. Without looking back to see if Bill followed, he went to work on cleaning up the broken glass and spilled wine. He fisted his hands so tightly around the dustpan handle, his knuckles whitened and cramped. Donovan's own heart pounded fiercely against chest, and his insides churned.

Bill said nothing, just walking the perimeter of the room with slow, calculated ease. Donovan watched his boss stop at the sink, take a carrot from the strainer and look at the nearly empty glass of wine as he popped the vegetable in his mouth. With the glass swept up, Donovan emptied the dustpan and stood near the stove, his hands shoved in his pockets.

"Why are you here, Bill?"

His boss turned from the now cold dinner that sat on the counter. "We arrested Mark Solomon about forty-five miles north of here. He's being taken back to Manhattan as we speak."

Donovan took a deep breath. Released it. Swallowed. "Where was he heading?"

"He says just south. Trying to get away from the city."

"Has he admitted to anything?"

Bill shook his head. "He's denying the murder. Has an interesting story to tell, but I

figure I'd leave you to find out when you interrogate him."

Donovan nodded. "Then it's time to head back to the city." He didn't want to admit it, but knew Bill would expect it of him.

Back to reality.

"We'll leave as soon as you feel Ms. Weston is ready to travel."

"Why don't you go on ahead? I'll just let her sleep until morning, and we'll head back then."

Bill looked straight at him, and their glares locked. Several moments passed. A dozen things went unsaid between them, and Donovan knew it.

"Tell me what I think is happening really isn't happening," Bill finally said, his voice a harsh yell forced to a whisper.

Donovan clenched his fists in his pockets. "I'm doing my job, Bill. Keeping her alive."

Bill glared harder at him, his lips pressed together so hard they were white. "We'll go as soon as she's awake. Mr. Weston has been calling my office every day. I want her back in Manhattan, and him off my back."

Donovan started to give his opinion of Weston, but Olivia softly calling his name from the bedroom stopped him. He pointed at Bill, wordlessly telling him to stay put, and crossed the room to the bedroom door.

Liv rolled her head on the pillow towards him as he came through the door. Her hand rested, palm up, near her cheek on the pillow and heavy lids slipped over her eyes. Donovan pulled the door shut behind him, but not completely, and took her outstretched hand as he sat beside her on the bed.

"How're you feeling, baby," he asked, running his free hand over her face. She was warmer. Not as clammy.

"Lightheaded," she mumbled. Her eyes were still half-closed, but her hand found his leg, curling her fingers into the inside of his thigh.

"That will pass."

She looked towards the partially closed door. "Is he still here?"

"I wasn't sure you'd remember what I said before you passed out," Donovan said. "Yes, he's here."

Her blue eyes moved back to him, and she searched his face. She studied him, and he knew she read his thoughts on his face. Donovan realized, holding back his smile, that he never had a chance with her. Olivia probably knew him, and what he wanted, from the first moment.

"Why is he here?"

"They arrested our suspect not far from here. I'm assuming he just came here instead of calling."

She scooted to sit up, and closed her eyes for a moment. Donovan put his hand on her shoulder, holding her in place. "Give it a few more minutes before you try that again."

Olivia nodded, settling down again into the pillows. He ran his thumb along her skin, watching her face, as she found her bearings. When she opened her eyes again, they fixed immediately on his.

"What does this mean?"

"We're going back to Manhattan."

"When?"

"Tonight. As soon as you can stand."

Her hand tightened on his thigh, and he knew she was thinking the same thing he was. He didn't want to leave this cabin any more than he wanted to shoot himself in the foot. Donovan tried to smile encouragingly, but was pretty sure he failed.

"The danger has passed. We have Solomon in custody, and you can go back to your life."

Moisture welled in her eyes, and one tear escaped to run straight back to her hair. Donovan moved his hand from her shoulder to stroke the damp trail away. With a quick glance at the door, Donovan leaned over and pressed a kiss to her mouth. He intended it to be brief, and as much an assurance for himself as her, but when she parted her lips he nearly lost the final remnants of control he possessed.

He broke the kiss and rested his forehead against hers, keeping their faces so close his nose brushed hers and he could feel her breath on his skin.

"Don't cry, Liv. The worst is over."

"I don't want to leave here."

He kissed her again, keeping it quick and sweet. "I know, sweetheart. But I need to talk to you about going back."

She nodded against him, her hand holding his cheek and her thumb brushing his lips. "You don't have to say it. I know. But how long do we have to hide...us?" she asked.

"Only until I know for sure the case is done. Can you do that for me?"

She answered him with a kiss. Reluctantly, Donovan sat up, squeezing her hand. "You're feeling better?"

Olivia nodded. "I feel foolish for fainting like that."

"Don't. You had to accept something pretty horrifying tonight. I've seen men, agents, react worse."

He hadn't, but if it made her feel better...

"Agent Greer, we need to get moving," Bill said from the living room.

Donovan looked down at Olivia and smiled. Olivia tried to smile back, but she didn't convince him any more than he figured he convinced her. He stood off the bed, and offered her his hand to help her stand. She was still shaky, but her color had returned and she wasn't clammy any longer. He gave her hand one last squeeze before going to the door.

"I'll meet you at the district office in one hour," Mr. Jackman said as Donovan opened the car door and offered Olivia his hand.

She slipped from the back seat, taking Donovan's hand. The tense knot in her stomach had grown more painful with each mile and hour that brought them closer to Manhattan and further away from the cabin. As soon as she was outside the car, he let go of her hand, and she immediately felt bereft.

"I'll be there," Donovan said through the open car window.

Mr. Jackman pulled away from the curb and disappeared into the early morning traffic. Donovan hoisted their bags onto his shoulder, holding the same meager clothes she had taken with her. He motioned towards her building and she walked ahead of him, dread making her legs heavy and uncooperative.

"Good morning, Ms. Weston," greeted the doorman as he held open the large glass doors for them. "I'm glad to see you're feeling better."

Olivia nodded and smiled. "Thank you."

Donovan remained silent as they crossed the lobby to the bank of elevators on the other side of the marble expanse. She stole a glance at him as they waited for the stainless steel doors to open. His jaw was set and hard, a tight muscle in front of his ear jerking sporadically. Without speaking, he lifted a hand behind her and rested it against the small of her back. Olivia couldn't help the slight sway of her body towards his.

The doors opened, and they stepped inside. The small space was empty. A tremble worked through her insides, and she heard Donovan take a deep breath. As soon as the doors closed, Donovan dropped the bags and Olivia turned to him.

They were in each other's arms, hunger and need taking over in an uncontrollable moment.

Donovan pulled her hard against him, and she moaned softly as he sandwiched her against his chest and the wall. His mouth was strong and hard as it covered hers, and his heart thundered against her palm as she pushed it beneath his shirt.

"I want you," he said against her throat, his hips pushed hard against her as he lifted her off the floor.

She couldn't breath, couldn't think of anything but his hands and his mouth and the heat of his breath. The elevator jolted when his palm slammed against the red stop button. With hurried hands, Olivia unbuttoned his jeans and he pushed her shorts past her hips.

Donovan lifted her off the floor again, and she wrapped her legs around his waist as he filled her. Olivia tilted her head back, clinging to him as he pressed his lips to her throat and drove himself into her, quick and deep. Fast. Hard. Hungry. His grunts of exertion and pleasure filled the space, mingling with her own gasps each time he rammed into her.

Olivia couldn't contain the groan that forced its way from her throat, and the molten heat that spread through her body as she climaxed in a riotous clamor. Donovan's fingers curled almost painfully into her hips as he pushed inside one last time, his throaty moan making her skin hum.

She fought to calm her uneven breathing, feeling Donovan's chest rise and fall beneath her hand as he did the same. Her skin nearly glowed with heat as he set her down again and they quickly righted their clothes. The elevator alarm pierced through their silence, and as she refastened her shorts, Donovan pushed the button again to send the car into motion.

The slow cruise to the thirty-seventh floor gave her the moments she needed to compose herself and steady her rioting heartbeat. Just before they reached the penthouse floor, Donovan pulled her against him and kissed her, deeply and with great care, awaking immediately the sparking nerves that hadn't had time to calm down.

When the doors opened to the hall outside her penthouse, they had both again assumed the appearance of decorum. But Olivia's insides still bubbled and twirled with a disconcerting mix of arousal and avoidance. Her thighs and sex spasmed with the lingering tremors of her orgasm, and her clothes were clammy and damp against her.

They walked into the penthouse, and Olivia wanted nothing more than to feel Donovan's hand wrapped around hers. Before they left Manhattan, she had looked for excuses to be in public with Donovan. Because where others might see, she was free to give in

to some of her fantasies of being close to him. Now, all she wanted was to be alone with him.

As the door clicked shut behind them, her father rounded the corner, fury in his eyes. But to Olivia's surprise, he actually pulled her into a rough, abrupt embrace. He hugged her so tight, she couldn't breathe, then just as quick, released her.

Holding her at arm's length, her father looked her over. Olivia stared at him, wondering who this stranger was.

"I have been worried out of my *mind*," he said loudly. Then he shot a burning glance at Donovan. "No one would tell me where the hell you were."

"I'm fine," she said, regaining her composure in small increments. "I was perfectly safe with Donovan."

"That's still to be determined," her father mumbled as he steered her away from the door. "All that matters is that you're back and things can get back to normal."

Olivia glanced over her shoulder to where Donovan still stood, and before they disappeared around the corner, she caught his quick wink. A small sense of relief soothed her. Quickly replaced by her father's barrage of questions as he led her to the living room. She leaned her hip against the back of the couch while he talked.

He wanted to know where she had been, if anyone had been there besides Donovan, and to each question Olivia sidestepped the answer. She explained the location was secret, and wasn't sure how much information she could share.

"I'm really tired," she said, swiping her fingers across her tight forehead. "I think I'm going to go lie down for awhile."

"Not for too long. You should go through a full rehearsal before the performance tonight."

Olivia's head shot up and she stared, shocked, at her father. "What? You want me to perform *tonight*?"

"Of course. You're back, there's no reason not to. We've covered the last few nights by saying you were ill. That excuse can only work for so long."

"I can't," she said, shaking her head.

"Why not?"

"I'm exhausted," she nearly shouted. "I have been in a car for the last several hours. I've been up all night. And I haven't been sleeping that much."

"Why haven't you been sleeping?"

Panic throbbed in her throat when Olivia realized she had nearly said too much. She hadn't slept the last couple of days because she spent her nights making love to Donovan. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them again, she had managed to rein in her emotions.

"I've been through quite a bit lately. Is it any wonder I can't sleep?"

Her father pressed his lips together, forming two straight, white lines. "Fine. But you go back to the theater tomorrow."

Olivia sighed, fatigue at her limbs. "Fine. I'm going to bed."

She turned away, but stopped at the entrance to the hall when her father called her name. A tired headache worked its way to her temples, and the waning effects of their lovemaking in the elevator no longer held back the tide of anxiety about being back in Manhattan.

Her father stared at her, his hands set at his waist. "What happened while you were alone with Greer?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, hoping her father wasn't going down the road she thought he was.

"Did he touch you?"

Olivia stared at her father, biting her tongue to keep from saying something she'd regret.

Oh, yes, he touched me. He touched me in ways and places I haven't even dreamed of. He kissed me, and tasted me, and adored me.

Instead, she crossed her arms over her body. She inhaled deeply, and could smell Donovan on her clothes and her skin. The traces of his scent left behind.

"I'm a grown woman and can take care of myself."

"So, he tried something?"

"I didn't *say* that."

"What are you saying?"

Olivia dropped her arms, clenching her fists at her side. "I'm saying I'm tired and I'm going to bed."

Before he could ask another question that she'd have to get around, without looking like she was getting around it, she turned on her heels and walked down the hall to her bedroom. Olivia couldn't help glancing towards Donovan's bedroom door. It was open. With a quick look back towards the living room, she took the last steps to reach his bedroom and pushed open the door.

"Donovan?" she called out.

But the room was empty and he was gone. His shirt draped across the bed and his jeans were in a clump on the floor. He must have changed in a hurry to get back out the door and meet his boss. Olivia walked to the bed and touched his shirt. The soft cotton slipped against itself beneath her touch.

Unlike the night before, the memory of unbuttoning the shirt and pushing it down his shoulders came back to her now in an erotically vivid rush. Warmth spread out from her abdomen, down her legs and through her body. She had been with two other men in her life, and while she had thought at the time, the experience had been pleasant, Olivia never remembered this kind of lingering need.

And the emptiness when he wasn't there.

So, this is love?

Olivia smiled, remembering a song from one of her favorite movies when she was a child. She picked up the shirt, pressed it to her nose to inhale his scent that clung to the fabric, and turned to leave the room.

In her room, she slipped out of her clothes and into a warm shower. As the steam wrapped around her, soothing tired muscles, she couldn't help but sing the lyrics dancing in her mind.

"So, this is love. So, this is love. So, this is what makes life divine. I'm all aglow. And now I know. The key to all heaven is mine."

"Okay, what do we know so far?" Donovan slipped into one of the faux leather chairs

that surrounded the large conference room table.

Jodi, and several forensic investigators, sat around the perimeter, along with Bill and some other agents he recognized. He threw Jabrosky a scathing glare. The agent dropped his gaze and looked down at his folded hands. Jabrosky knew he had screwed up.

"We've matched Mark Solomon's DNA with the swimmers found in the used condom," Jodi explained.

"There was no evidence of semen internally on Yasmine Halliwell, so we've concluded the evidence of sexual contact occurred prior to death and with the use of prophylactics. And approximately an hour and fifteen minutes before her murder."

Donovan arched one eyebrow. "Approximately?"

Jodi smiled. "What can I say? I'm good."

"So, the sexual contact does not appear to be related to the slaying," Donovan clarified, and Jodi nodded.

Donovan looked at Dr. Kelford. "What about the drug used to knock out Jabrosky?" This time, he didn't even spare a glance in the man's direction.

"We found traces of Zolpedim and Diazepam in one of the three champagne flutes in the suite. The two clean glasses were in the bedroom, and the one apparently used to drug Agent Jabrosky was out in the main sitting area. Based on the traces obtained, we assume there was approximately twice the prescription-level dose of both drugs," Dr. Kelford explained.

"Prescription-level. They were prescription drugs?"

Dr. Kelford nodded. "Ambien and Valium."

Donovan shifted through the stack of manila folders in front of him, pulling out Yasmine Halliwell's personal file. He flipped it open and quickly scanned the pages of her medical records. With a mumbled breath, he took his glasses from his breast pocket and slipped them on, bringing the slanted, scratchy penmanship into focus.

"Halliwell had prescriptions for both from her general practitioner," he said more to himself than anyone else. He looked over the rim of his glass. "Was there any in Solomon's or Halliwell's system?"

"Ms. Halliwell's levels of Zolpedim and Diazepam were low, but fully expected for an individual using the medications. We have no way of confirming with Solomon. He was taken into custody days after he might have consumed them."

Donovan gritted his teeth and took off his glasses, tossing them on the table. "Was there any physical evidence on the body? Did the coroner turn up anything?"

"All evidence on the body matched Solomon, but seem consistent with sexual intercourse. Much of it was destroyed or contaminated beyond usefulness in the slaying," Jodi told him.

"What changed—specifically—in this killing?"

Kevin Harmon, psychiatrist and profiler for the Bureau, leaned forward on the table, linking his fingers together over the yellow notepad in front of him. "The brutality. The level of mutilation. In the previous killings, the body was maimed, but with a sense of purpose. The throat was slit from base of ear to base of ear, and the larynx pulled out in the other killings. In this case, the head was nearly decapitated with the depth of the slice. The larynx was completely severed, yet left on the chest in display. The feet were cut off post mortem in

the other cases, clean and with little blood loss. Here, we found them not completely unattached. It's as if he felt he didn't have time to do it properly... cutting too swiftly at the throat, and not taking sufficient time at the feet to remove them completely. And the victim was still alive, probably near death, but alive."

Donovan listened, flipping through the glossy photographs he had procured after arriving at the New York office. He fought the shudder at the thought that Yasmine Halliwell might have been conscious enough to feel that bastard... no, it was too disturbing to dwell on. For the first time in many years, Donovan acknowledged he had more than a professional detachment to a murder investigation. Somehow, he needed to get his focus back.

"The body appears to have been hacked at," he said.

"Yes, this is the biggest difference of all. The other bodies were not destroyed the way this one was. With the depth and force of the stabs, I would venture the guess that he was enraged by something when he killed this time."

Donovan nodded. He had thought that when he arrived at the scene. Nothing new there. But they weren't telling him what he wanted to hear, and what they were telling him, he didn't like. They knew Solomon was there. They knew the killer was there. But thus far, there was nothing that could—without the shadow of a doubt—pin Solomon as the killer.

"Has Solomon been interrogated?" he asked Bill.

Bill shook his head. "No. He's been hard to deal with since we brought him in."

"How?"

Bill looked to Dr. Harmon, who bobbed one eyebrow. "He's highly emotional."

"Angry?"

"No. He's been crying. Refuses to eat. Hasn't slept. When we try to talk to him, he is inconsolable."

"Do you want to do the interrogation today, Agent Greer?" Bill asked.

Donovan shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was exhausted. The last few nights hadn't exactly been eight solid hours of sleep. Last night had been spent on the road, driving home from Virginia. And the nights before that had been brief periods of sleep mingled with long bouts of lovemaking. It was hard to suppress the smile that threatened to spread his lips at the memory of loving Liv. Heat spread through him in a flash—like standing five feet from a bonfire.

"No. If he's that out of control, I don't have the patience to talk to him today. I'll be here tomorrow at nine o'clock."

"We'll sedate him tonight, see if it puts him in a more talkative mood tomorrow," Dr. Kelford said as everyone around the table moved to their feet.

The team of agents and doctors working on the Broadway Killer case filed out of the room, leaving Donovan behind to pull together his stack of files and reports and photos. He heard the door click closed behind him, but didn't need to turn around to know Bill Jackman was still in the room.

"Something else, Bill?" he asked, putting the last of the files in his attaché.

"This is the first chance I've had to talk to you alone since I picked you up at that cabin."

The hairs on the back of Donovan's neck bristled, but he maintained his calm as he turned and looked at his boss, and the best friend he had besides his brothers in the months

after he lost Janie and Sarah.

"What do you need to talk to me about?"

Bill's stare was steady and hard, and while it had many less experienced agents shaking in their shoes, Donovan had seen the look enough that it didn't faze him. After several seconds, Bill looked away and walked back to the table.

"About what I found at that cabin."

Donovan didn't say anything. What could he do? Launch into some long, convoluted explanation about it not being what Bill thought? He wasn't going to deny it, but he wasn't about to offer up any information, either.

"I'm not going to ask you the question, Donovan," Bill said, his fingers tapping a steady beat on the black tabletop. "I'm not going to put us in that position. All I'm going to say is this: you are one of the best agents I've had work for me in the thirty years I've been with Bureau. I would hate to see you lose it all over some stupid infraction."

Donovan ground his teeth together and drew deep breaths through his nostrils. He knew Bill was looking out for him, and not being forthright with his friend didn't sit right in his gut. But until this was over, there was nothing he could do. And he knew there was no walking away from Liv now. She was too deep, too far under his skin.

Bill gave the table one final, hard tap and turned towards the door. Donovan watched him, his fingers curled around the handle of his case. At the door, Bill stopped and spoke, keeping his head down and away from Donovan.

"There's nothing I'd like to hear more than you've found yourself a woman. The two of you could come for dinner. Susan would love it. In three or four months."

Then Bill opened the door and left, letting in the sounds of the busy office beyond. Clicking computer keys and mumbled conversations drifted into the room, and Donovan stood in his spot.

Well Hell.

Chapter Fourteen

The only sound in the penthouse dining room was the clink of utensils and the occasional crystal against china dishes. Phillip Weston devoured his dinner with quick swipes of his knife and jabs of his fork. Olivia did her best to feign devout interest in the baked chicken breast and steamed broccoli on her plate, but the heat that she kept pent up beneath her skin was far too distracting. She pushed a cube of chicken around in figure eights, and dared a glance through her lashes across the table.

Donovan slipped a fork full of potatoes in his mouth, and she watched—mesmerized—as he licked a small amount of gravy from his lips. He looked to her left, where Lara sat, and Olivia realized the woman was talking about something. Taking a long sip of her wine, Olivia did her best to appear interested in Lara’s story.

“So, I’m watching television last night and I hear this ‘drip drip drip’, and before I can get off the couch to go check the faucets, I hear this *woosh* sound. I run into the bedroom, and this waterfall of bath water is pouring from the ceiling, all over my bed. I guess one of the kids upstairs turned the tub on to wash their dolls, and then forgot about it.”

Donovan chuckled, and tingles of awareness danced over Olivia’s skin. She drew a deep breath, and reveled in the fluttering sensation in her stomach, and pooling heat just slightly lower. She ran her tongue over her lips before speaking.

“How bad is the damage?”

“Well, my whole ceiling is destroyed, and my mattress is pretty much shot. The landlord is taking care of the repairs on the apartment, and my renter’s insurance is buying a new bed. I’m just thankful you’re letting me stay here for two or three days, while they do the work.”

Olivia touched Lara’s arm. “You’re always welcome here, Lara. You know that.”

Lara smiled, and looked at Donovan. “How was your day, Donovan?”

Olivia turned her attention to the man she loved, resting her elbow on the table and her chin in her hand. Her steamed broccoli and dry chicken all but forgotten. His gray silk tie had been loosened from around his neck, and the top button of his white shirt was open, giving her a glimpse of the hollow beneath his Adam’s apple, a spot she knew made him groan when she nipped at it.

Her body hummed with arousal, and she crossed her legs, shifting in the chair.

“My day was long. Very long,” Donovan answered, his eyes shifting from Lara to meet Olivia’s gaze.

Olivia couldn’t help it. She winked. Donovan’s lips tipped up in a small smile, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

“They’ve got the guy, right?” her father asked from the head of the table, the first words he had said all evening.

“We have a suspect in custody,” Donovan answered, looking away from her to her father. “As of yet, we don’t have sufficient evidence to name him as the killer.”

Her father huffed, and jabbed his last piece of chicken with his fork. Beneath the table, Olivia slipped off her sneaker, and while keeping her eyes on Donovan’s face, she shifted in her chair and reached across the space beneath the tablecloth with her leg extended. Her bare

foot settling into the warm space between his thighs, and Olivia smiled at the almost indiscernible lowering of his eyelids and heated glance in her direction.

She was thankful for the long, white tablecloth that easily hid her covert activity, and pleased at the shift in his eyes that told her Donovan was aroused. Course, the physical evidence was now hard and prominent against her foot as she moved side to side, occasionally wiggling her toes.

"Will you be leaving soon, Donovan?" Lara asked.

His eyes darted to look at Olivia, and she tried to hide the momentary rush of disappointment at Lara's question. It was a balancing act. The end of the case meant he would be leaving the penthouse. But the end of the case also meant no more hiding.

"This case isn't officially closed," Donovan explained. "Until it is, I intend to stick close."

Olivia smiled. *And I intend to stick closer.*

Donovan gritted his teeth against the water that battered his chest and stomach like little shards of ice. The cold sucked all air from his lungs, and had his hands clenched in tight fists, but did absolutely nothing to ease his need.

After several seconds of futile torture, he turned off the shower and stepped out into the bathroom, snagging a towel off the heated rack. With one towel wrapped around his waist, he ran another over his hair. Even as he foamed his face and shaved, he couldn't stop thinking of Olivia.

She had been a charge of energy to his tired body when he walked into the dining room and saw her sitting there. Her blonde hair fell around her cheeks in no style in particular, which made it all the sexier. Dressed in shorts and a tight tee shirt, she had tantalized and tempted him all through dinner. And when he felt that small little foot slip between his thighs beneath the table, it was all he could do not to moan and take her right there.

Olivia had to know she drove him crazy. And he was pretty sure she was using that fact to her advantage, and right now, he didn't really care. He was hard, and hot, and wanted her.

He finished shaving, with only minor nicks from his lack of attention and went into the adjoining bedroom. Files of paperwork were stacked on the bed, with his laptop open and on in the middle. But he had no mind to focus on correlations and interviews.

The sooner this is over, the sooner she's mine. All mine. Only mine.

With a heavy sigh, he tossed his last towel into the bathroom and pulled on a pair of flannel lounge pants. Uninterested in what was on the computer, he closed it and set it on the bureau. In uncomfortable frustration, he fluffed the pillows and stacked them against the padded headboard. He glanced at the clock on the bedside table before settling against the pillows. It was only nine, but felt like midnight.

He picked up the nearest folder and slipped on his glasses to study the comments he had made on various sticky notes on each page. Fatigue made his eyelids into lead weights and tightened the muscles of his neck. After awhile, he glanced at the clock again. Quarter 'til ten. Donovan slipped his fingers beneath his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose.

The dots were all there, he just couldn't see the damn order he needed to connect them in. One clue. Just one missed detail, and he knew in his blood it would all fall into place. It

was here. Somewhere.

He rested his head against the cushion behind him and closed his eyes. *Five minutes. Just five minutes.*

"So, are you going to tell me what happened wherever it was Donovan took you?"

Olivia looked up from painting her toenails, the brush of crimson polish poised over her foot. Lara sat at the end of Olivia's bed, her legs crossed beneath her, as she buffed her fingernails. She had come by Olivia's bedroom shortly after eight, and hadn't left in two hours. As much as Olivia liked spending time with Lara, it wasn't the woman's company she wanted right now.

"What do you mean?" Olivia asked.

Lara raised one eyebrow and blew filing dust off her fingernails. "What do you think I mean? What *happened*. The two of you were gone for days, all alone I'm assuming, and you're telling me nothing happened?"

Heat rushed over Olivia's skin, and she was thankful for the dim light in the room. She recapped her nail polish and set it on the bedside table.

"You're avoiding an answer. I must have hit pretty close to the mark." Olivia bobbed one brunette eyebrow.

Not telling Lara was killing her. She wanted so much to tell someone. Anyone! Donovan just made her so happy, and although she knew the secrecy wasn't forever, sometimes the realization and joy of him in her life was just more than she could keep bottled up.

"That's quite the interesting smile. Come on, Olivia. Tell me. If you can't tell me, who can you tell?"

Olivia sighed. "Can we just kinda put a pin in this conversation for now?"

"Don't you trust me?"

She leaned back on the bed, supporting herself on her hands, and looked at Lara. In the two years since Lara joined their staff, she and Olivia had become very good friends. Even though there were several years between them, Lara was in her forties, they seemed to connect on the same level. Lara wasn't only the first woman Olivia could spend the evening painting nails and doing hair with, but she was Olivia's confidant. She had listened to Olivia rant and rave about her father, grumble and groan about Brad and his inability to let her go after their break up, and just be there when Olivia needed someone.

"I trust you, Lara. And it's not that I don't want to talk about this, I just can't right now."

Lara laughed and shrugged. "Well, if there *is* something you can't talk about, then there's obviously something I want to wait to hear. And I can't wait to hear it."

"Thank you."

She nodded and straightened her legs, scooting off the bed. "Well, it's getting late and I know you need to catch up on your sleep. We're back to the theater tomorrow night, right?"

Olivia nodded. "Back to the old grind."

"You'll knock 'em dead, like you always do. Without missing a beat. I'll see you in the morning."

Olivia pulled her knees up and hugged them to her chest as she watched Lara leave the

room. As soon as the door closed, she collapsed back on the bed with a deep huff. The last two hours with Lara had let her get her mind off the constant hum of her skin and ache in her core, but as soon as she was alone again, it came creeping back. She reached beneath her pillow and pulled out the blue shirt she had snuck from Donovan's room earlier.

Holding it to her nose, Olivia inhaled the scent of Donovan that clung to the fabric. She was suddenly overwhelmed with an all-consuming need to feel his arms around her, his hands on her, his lips against her skin. With a soft moan, Olivia sat up and moved off the bed, slowly undoing the buttons of her pajamas.

The soft click of his door propelled Donovan from his doze. His head snapped around, instincts on high, until he saw her.

Olivia stood at the door, her hands behind her back and her body against the wood. She held her head to one side, her mussed blonde hair falling gently over her cheek, and a sultry look in her blue eyes. The only thing covering her amazingly sexy body was his own blue silk shirt.

"Liv," he said softly, but stopped speaking when she pressed one finger to her pursed lips.

"Shhh," she said softly, stepping away from the door. "We wouldn't want anyone to hear."

Donovan shifted, his body already making him prominently aware of Liv's arrival. He watched as she walked towards him, a slow sashay in her hips, as she opened the buttons of the shirt. With each release, she exposed more creamy skin from the base of her throat to the top of her thighs. With just the two-inch gap between the fabric edges, Donovan saw the soft curve of her breasts and indent of her belly button.

He didn't move, mesmerized by her sensuality.

She reached him and put her arm over her head, resting it on the large post at the foot of the bed. The stance let the shirt fall open, exposing the indent of her waist, and that spot right at her hip that drove her crazy when he kissed it.

"I missed you," she said in a husky whisper.

Donovan smiled and set aside the file that had rested on his stomach. "I missed you, too."

Heat pulsed through him. He reached his hand out to her, and she took it, allowing him to pull her onto the bed. Olivia crawled towards him across the coverlet, brushing her body along the length of his as she straddled his hips. Only the warm flannel of his pants separated their bodies, but he pushed his hips up against her anyways. She smiled.

Donovan brushed his hands beneath the shirt, moving up her body and to her shoulders to slip the material down her arms. She hummed and let her head fall back as his thumbs moved over the sides of her breasts. He sat forward, coming off the pillows, to hold her face in his hands and cover her mouth with his own.

Olivia moved against him as he kissed her, delving his tongue into her mouth again and again. Her hands moved over his chest and stomach, and each touch made him burn hotter. She leaned forward, giving his mouth access to her throat and breasts as he slipped his hand between her thighs. Olivia gasped, her inner muscles clenching as he slipped two fingers inside her heat. He sucked hard on her nipple as his thumb worried her clitoris. Delicate

hands clenched his shoulders as she moved against him.

A frenzied need energized him, driving him insane, and with force as gentle as he could manage, he maneuvered their bodies until he was free of the flannel pants. Donovan looked up and their gazes locked as she lowered herself down onto him. He sucked in a sharp breath as his penis filled her deeper than ever before.

They moved together, the soft sounds of their lovemaking suppressed by the need to be silent. Donovan leaned back against the headboard, adjusting the pillows with a quick jerk to support his back, so he could watch Olivia move. He held her hips in his hands, gently guiding her body, but letting her do what she wanted.

Her hands pressed against his stomach, using his body as leverage. Donovan grit his teeth against the building tide in his body. Each move she made, each groan she suppressed to a hum, drove him more and more crazy. Olivia's eyes were closed, and her hair shifted over her face as she tilted her head back. Donovan reached out to touch her face with one hand, holding his palm against her cheek as his other hand slipped between them to massage her clit. She groaned deep, the reverberation moving through both of them.

"Look at me, Liv," Donovan said in a low voice.

Her eyes open, heavy lids partially hiding them, she continued to move over him. Her damp lips parted, shining from their kisses, and she met his gaze.

"I love you."

She gasped softly and stopped moving. "What?"

"I love you."

Tears glistened in her eyes and her lower lip trembled. "I love you," she whispered, and he devoured the words on her lips.

Then she began again to move over him, pushing him deep inside her heat over and over, and he held her face to stare into her eyes. His body shuddered as he came, feeling Olivia's body clench around him as she moaned his name.

Donovan opened his bedroom door, tightening his tie as he did. He glanced down the hallway, in both directions, and saw no one. It was still early, and he heard no sounds indicating anyone else was up.

Olivia's arms slipped around his waist and her nimble fingers freed a single button to let her hands slip inside his shirt. He quickly stepped back into the room and turned to wrap her in his arms, kissing her deeply.

"You've got to get out of here," he said against her mouth. "I need to go to the office, and you need to get to your room and *dressed* before anyone sees you."

She moaned softly, wrapping her arms around him with her cheek against his chest. "I know. I just don't want to let go."

"I know, darlin'."

"You'll be at the theater tonight?"

"Have I missed a performance yet?" he asked, and she shook her head against him. "I'll be at my usual spot right off stage, watching you dance."

"I like knowing you're watching me."

Donovan kissed her hair and rubbed his hand over her back. The silk shirt shifted against her skin. "Now, get back to your room. It's a good thing your bedroom isn't on the

other side of the penthouse."

She leaned back and looked up at him. He recognized the thoughtful, searching look in her eyes, and touched her cheek with his fingertip.

"What is it? What are you thinking?"

"I love you, Donovan," she said in a soft, strained voice and he caught the slight waver.

He smiled, and the bubble of joy that had settled into his chest the night before expanded further. Pressing out until he thought he'd burst.

"I love you, Liv." He pressed his lips to her forehead and cupped the back of her head with his hand. "It's been a very long time since I said that to anyone."

She nodded. "I know."

With one more kiss, he opened the door again and did another search. No one in sight. With a slap on her barely covered backside, Donovan ushered her from the bedroom and watched her bolt down the hall. She blew him a kiss before disappearing into her room.

Olivia walked into the kitchen twenty minutes later, the smile on her face so wide it made her cheeks hurt. But she made no effort to hide it from Lara and her father, where they sat at the smile dinette near the patio door.

"Good morning," she called cheerfully as she went to the refrigerator for a glass of juice.

Lara looked up from her plate of eggs and toast. "Good morning. You must have slept well. You look bright eyed and bushy tailed this morning."

Oh, yeah, I slept. The sleep of a well-satisfied woman.

Olivia lifted the glass to her lips and enjoyed the sweet tang on her tongue. "I did sleep well."

"We're going to the theater early today. You're going to run through the performance at least twice before tonight," her father said, not even looking up from his breakfast.

She felt the slight sinking in her stomach, usually brought on by her father's gruff voice, but immediately decided he would not spoil her good mood. Right now, the aroma of bacon, eggs and toast tantalized her. She was ravenous.

Gee, wonder why?

"Susan," she said, turning to the young girl who now stood at the stove. "Would you mind terribly making me a plate?"

"Certainly, Ms. Weston. What would you like?"

"Whatever you've got. No, wait. Can you make me a ham and cheese omelet?"

Simultaneously, Susan nodded and her father choked.

"Olivia, what the hell are you doing? Do you have any idea the calorie and fat content of a breakfast like that?"

"Probably no worse than the breakfast in front of you, Phillip. I'm hungry."

Olivia walked around the counter to sit in the chair beside Lara, who sat silent, watching the exchange between father and daughter. She saw the anger pass over his face, like a red wave, and he lifted his fork to point the tines at her in lieu of his finger.

"When all this is over, and that son of a bitch Greer is out of our lives, you're going to drop this little attitude of yours and get back to business."

With a moment of satisfaction, Olivia realized it didn't bother her. She felt no need to back down, or give in to his demands. Susan came from the kitchen and set the omelet in front

of Olivia. Without even glancing at her father, she inhaled the delicious aroma and picked up her fork.

"Thank you very much, Susan. Has Mr. Greer left yet?"

"Yes, ma'am. About five minutes ago."

"Oh, that's a shame. He would have enjoyed on of these."

"How the hell would you know what Greer likes for breakfast?" her father huffed.

Olivia cut a piece of omelet, picked it up with her fork, looked at her father, smiled widely, and put the eggs in her mouth. Phillip Weston glared at her, his face so flushed she thought his eyeballs might boil out of their sockets, then threw down his fork and stormed from the room.

"I think your father is right about something."

Olivia looked to Lara. "What?"

"I think this change in you has something to do with Donovan Greer. But unlike your father, I think it might just be a good change."

Olivia smiled and took another bite of the omelet.

"Oh, one more thing."

"What's that?" she asked.

"Remind me when we get to the theater to dig out my heavy duty concealing make up."

"Why?"

"That's one hell of a hickie just below your ear."

Chapter Fifteen

"I swear to God I didn't kill her. I didn't!" Mark Solomon's face was red, puffed and damp.

"Where were you on the afternoon of April 29th, this year?"

Solomon curled in on his own body, his forehead nearly resting on the metal table in the interrogation room. His shoulders shook with sobs, and trembling fingers curled into his thinning hair.

"I don't know."

"Can you verify your whereabouts for the dates between May 4th and May 7th?" Donovan tried not to look at the man, keeping his head down and his eyes on the notes.

"I don't know. I don't remember!"

Donovan listed several more dates, and to each Solomon gave the same near-incoherent answers. He didn't know. He couldn't remember. He didn't kill her.

The interrogation room smelled of stale cigarette smoke, old coffee and eau de body odor. Mid-day sun streamed in through the small window, lighting on his shoulders and making him uncomfortably warm. But as uncomfortable as he was, his distress wasn't nearly as bad as Solomon's, who hadn't stopped crying since the guards brought in him the room.

"We know you were with Yasmine Halliwell the night she was murdered," Donovan said, looking at Solomon over the top rim of his glasses. "You left more than enough damning evidence to put you away for the rest of your life."

Solomon dropped his head on the table with a loud thump that made Donovan wince. As if his headache wasn't bad enough. The other man cried so loudly as he spoke, Donovan couldn't understand a word he said. In frustration, Donovan yanked his glasses off and tossed them on the table, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. He knew no more now about the killer and his motivation than when he walked into the interrogation room, hours before.

"Chrissake, Solomon. Knock off the damn blubbering and answer the questions."

Solomon lifted his head, his cheeks wet and his nose running. With a huff, Donovan pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and tossed it across the table.

"I didn't kill her. I swear to God and on my mother's life, I didn't kill her. I loved her," he said through the cloth just before loudly blowing his nose. "Haven't you ever lost someone you loved?"

Donovan gritted his teeth until pain shot down his neck. He clutched the pencil in his hand so tight, he heard the wood crack, and stopped short of snapping it in two. Instead, he tossed the writing utensil and it bounced, end over end, off the far edge of the table.

"What happened the night Yasmine Halliwell was murdered?" Donovan could barely force the words through his clenched teeth.

Solomon wiped his cheeks, only to have them wet a moment later from the constant flow of tears. "We wanted to celebrate her Tony. She told me to come to the suite, that she would make sure we wouldn't be disturbed."

"Who might have disturbed you?"

Solomon held his hand out, palm up, and waved it as if indicating someone who wasn't

in the room. "You. The FBI. The guy, whatever his name was, that was assigned to watch her."

The hackles on the back of Donovan's neck stood on end, and he drew in a long breath through his nose. "Did you know about her protection before that night?"

"Yes."

"How did you know?"

"She told me. Told me the whole thing, and how you were really here to protect Ms. Weston."

Damn it!

"You drugged our agent?"

Solomon shook his head, his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed. "No. He was asleep when I got there. Passed out in his bedroom on the other side of the suite."

"So, you got to the suite, Agent Jabrosky was unconscious. Then what?"

Solomon dropped his gaze, his fingers tapping nervously on the tabletop.

"Then you killed her?"

"No!"

"If you don't want me to think you killed her, tell me what happened."

Solomon picked up the glass of water left on the table for him. The water sloshed out and onto his hand as he lifted it to his lips. After draining three-quarters of the glass, he set it down and wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"We went in the bedroom," he finally said.

"You had sex."

Solomon nodded.

"Then what happened?"

Donovan saw the torment build behind the man's expression, and his features contort just before another loud sob burst out of him. If Solomon told the truth, that he loved Yasmine Halliwell, the Donovan could understand the pain. But he wouldn't, couldn't, allow Solomon to see any kind of emotion except anger and contempt from him. He waited until Solomon's cries had lessened before pursuing the questioning.

"Then what happened, Solomon?"

The man didn't answer, just kept shaking his head and crying. Donovan slapped his palm down on the desk, the impact forcing drops of water and coffee from their cups to spatter on the metal. Solomon jumped and winced.

"Then what happened," Donovan said again, forcing each word with deadly weight.

"I fell asleep. When I woke up, Yasmine wasn't in the room, and I went back to sleep."

Then Donovan saw the flash in Solomon's eyes, a shift of terror and panic, and his hands curled into fists in the tabletop as he sucked in a breath. Donovan leaned forward, coming up out of his chair. Somewhere in the past few hours, he couldn't pinpoint when, Donovan had accepted that Mark Solomon wasn't the Broadway Killer. The exact moment eluded him. He only knew that when he walked into the room, he fought the urge to kill the man for even contemplating harm to Olivia. And somewhere between then and now, he knew this man might hold the key to finding the real threat.

"What do you remember, Solomon?" he demanded.

The man's eyes rounded further and he stared to some distant spot beyond Donovan,

not even seeing him. He started to pant, and his hand went to his chest.

"Oh, God. I -I heard her and-I -oh, God-I just rolled over and went back to sleep."

Donovan grabbed the front of Solomon's shirt, yanking him out of the chair. With his fingers curled into the fabric and Solomon's terrified eyes on him, Donovan moved to bring them to the same side of the table.

"Then fix it, Solomon. Fix your screw up by telling me what you heard. Who did you hear? What did they say?"

"I heard Yasmine ask them why they were there. She said it was late, and asked if she could call them the next day," Solomon answered, the words coming in burst as he seemed to remember each one. "I think I thought she was on the phone."

"Did you hear another voice? A man's voice? Someone threatening her? Saying anything to her?"

Solomon's gaze darted side to side, searching his memories. A typical, common physical reaction when trying to remember. Donovan released his grip, letting the man sink down onto his feet again.

"Her voice was soft, low, and I don't remember anything other than the mumbled sounds."

"There has to be something else. She was murdered in the next room from where you were sleeping."

He knew the statement was harsh, and he intended it to be. If Solomon felt enough guilt at not doing anything to save the woman he loved, he might fight twice as hard to remember and avenge her death.

Pain shimmered over Solomon's features and he leaned his hands into the table. "I think I dozed off again, and a noise woke me up. You know how it is, when you're half awake but mostly asleep and your brain doesn't know if you're hearing something real or not. Or if you're dreaming it."

"I don't need the psycho-babble. What the hell do you remember?"

"Knock 'em dead, gorgeous."

Donovan's blood ran cold.

"What did he sound like? Was his voice deep? Did he have any kind of accent?"

Confusion crossed Solomon's face, pulling his brows down, squinting. "No- I-that doesn't - it makes no sense."

"What doesn't make sense?"

"It wasn't a man's voice."

The interrogation room door opened, and Donovan turned to see Bill standing in the doorway, a black storm brewing in his features. With a sharp jerk of his head, he motioned Donovan from the room. Solomon sank down into his chair, his head in his hands, as Donovan closed the door. His brain churned and battled with the things Solomon had said, turning and twisting the bits of information like puzzle pieces trying to find the outside edges so he could fill in the middle.

Once in the hall, Donovan paced back and forth outside the interrogation room door, tapping his fingertips against his lips. Bill said something, but Donovan raised his hand, waving it in a request for silence.

"I'm close, Bill. So damn close I can almost reach out and touch it."

Knock 'em dead, gorgeous. Knock 'em dead, gorgeous.

"Yeah, well, that seems to be a problem of yours. Reaching out and touching."

The heavy sarcasm snapped Donovan from his thoughts, and he stopped to look at his boss. Bill stood near the door, his arms crossed over his chest, and a dark expression on his face.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? Bill, I'm in the middle of an interrogation —"

"Not anymore."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"You're off this case."

"What?" Donovan bellowed.

"Look, I don't appreciate being put in this position to begin with, Donovan. But this came down from the Regional Director himself. You're off the case."

"Why?"

Bill glared at him, his brown eyes nearly hidden by the angry squint. His lips pulled together until the edges whitened. Donovan took in a deep breath. The question didn't need to be answered. A lead weight fell in his gut at his acceptance of the truth.

"How did this happen?"

"You mean, who snitched on you and your girlfriend?" Bill's tone pulled 'girlfriend' out to a sardonic singsong. "All I know is that Director Ackerly received a phone call this morning, apprising him of the *situation*, and you're off the case."

"It was Weston. That son of a bitch."

"Doesn't matter who. Donovan, you're damn lucky he's just pulling you off the case. This is ethical misconduct, and it will go on your permanent record with the Bureau if proven."

"And just how the hell are you going to prove anything, Bill? Huh? It's her word, my word, against his."

"Do you want her to lie for you?"

Anger and frustration forced his hands into fists, and he stared back at his friend. Bill pressed his lips together again, his face flushed red from the anger that had to simmer just below the surface. Donovan raked his hair with his fingers and paced the hall, frustration knotting the muscles of his neck and shoulders.

Damn it all to hell!

"You can't pull me off now, Bill. I'm close. Solomon is going to give me everything I need to nail the killer."

"Solomon *is* the killer."

Donovan stopped. "No, Bill, he's not. Have you watched any of this interrogation? Solomon is distraught, inconsolable. Serial Killers, when caught, are typically arrogant and egotistical. They're proud of what they've done. They may not admit to the crimes, but they're usually smug, at the least. They figure they've gone this long without getting caught. They've been too damn careful they won't be convicted. It's a God complex. Do you see any signs of that in Solomon?"

"It doesn't matter, Donovan. Someone else is taking over the interrogation. And the investigation. You're done. An agent is at the penthouse now, cleaning out your personals for you."

Donovan's spine straightened. "Does Liv know about this?"

"I don't know what she knows, or what she doesn't know. Hell, for all I know, *she's* the one who called Ackerly."

Donovan shook his head, not verbally responding to Bill's accusation. No, it was Weston. Had to be. Somehow he had his suspicions confirmed.

A realization flowed over him like ice cold water from a bucket. *Shit damn!*

Knock 'em dead, gorgeous.

He was halfway down the hall before Bill caught up with him, his grip firm on Donovan's arm. Donovan spun around, jerking away from Bill's hold.

"Where are you going?" Bill demanded.

"I have to go to Liv."

"Damn it, Donovan. Start using the head on your shoulders, not the one in your pants!"

Donovan shoved Bill away, gleaning glances from the office help seated in cubicles all around them. Bill pushed his hands away and stepped close, so their words didn't carry through the office space.

"I'm not dropping this case."

"You don't have a choice," Bill hissed.

They glared at each other for several moments before Donovan turned and marched away again.

"Agent Greer!"

Donovan didn't pause, heading for the elevator.

"You're suspended. Leave your weapon and your badge here."

At that, Donovan stopped and turned slowly, staring at his friend and superior over the space between them. Holding his stare on Bill, he reached into the inside breast pocket of his suit jacket and removed the leather wallet that held his Federal Bureau of Investigation identification badge. He dropped it with a loud slap on the nearby desk of a stunned-looking intern.

Then he reached his left hand beneath his jacket and slipped his Glock free of the shoulder holster that held it against his side. The metal was warm from his body heat, and felt comfortable and familiar against his palm. With smooth intent, he checked the weapon for ammunition, releasing and re-securing the safety with an audible click. Then, with just as much ease, he slipped it back into the holster and turned away.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Bill called after him.

"To catch a killer."

"What time do you have?"

"It's three-thirty-seven. Four minutes later than the last time you asked me. What's on your mind, hun?"

Olivia looked into the large dressing table mirror, meeting Lara's stare in the glass. Lara held a hairbrush in one hand, and a bottle of hair spray in the other. With a huff, Olivia reached for her bottle of water and sipped from it before answering.

"Nothing, really. It just feels like this entire afternoon is dragging."

"You're not excited to return to the stage?" Lara asked as she combed Olivia's hair.

She shook her head. "To be honest, no. I enjoyed those few days off."

Lara smirked. "I bet you did."

Heat rose to Olivia's cheeks, so hot she was afraid it would melt off the heavy stage make-up. She dropped her gaze and looked down into her lap.

"You think he'll be here tonight?"

"He promised he would," Olivia answered. "And he hasn't broken a promise to me yet."

"You don't think he'll be busy with the suspect? Can you believe it's Mark Solomon? He was always so...quiet. Then again, I guess it's always the ones you don't suspect."

Olivia shrugged. "I suppose. It gives me the creeps to think he was so close by, all the time, with murder on his mind." She watched Lara in the mirror as the woman absently worked her hair into the 1940's coiffure for the performance. "I wonder what would set someone off like that?"

"Why do any of us do any of the things we do?"

She smiled. "That's very philosophical, Lara."

"Well, think about it. We all are where we are, and who we are, for different reasons. If just one or two things had been different in your past, you might not be an actor. What if your mother's parents hadn't pushed her to take dance lessons? And she didn't come to New York to meet your father...you might not even be here."

"And I wouldn't have met Donovan."

The words were past her lips before she had the chance to consider them. Before she let her better judgment prevail and keep the thoughts to herself. But since the night before, when he told her he loved her, most of her thoughts were muddled and jumbled—in the best of ways.

"Exactly," Lara said, not skipping a beat. "And if there wasn't someone killing off every actress who ever played Molly, he wouldn't have come to Manhattan."

"I don't like to think about that part. It seems terribly cold to think that women dying brought us together."

"But it's reality. Sometimes reality *is* cold."

They fell into a contemplative silence as Lara continued with Olivia's hair, and Olivia reminisced about the night before. The things Donovan had done to her, both physically and emotionally, and the liberating freedom she had felt when he told her he loved her.

Even now, the memory sent warmth into her limbs and pooled pleasantly in the center of her body.

"Did I ever tell you why I went into theater make-up?"

Lara's question brought her from her musings, and she looked into the mirror to meet Lara's gaze. "No, I don't think you ever did."

"My mother was an actress. On stage. When I was a little girl, I used to love sitting on the couch in her dressing room and watch her put on her make-up."

Olivia smiled. "I never knew your mother was an actress. What was her name?"

Lara shook her head. "You wouldn't know her. She never made it big. She died when I was seven."

Olivia drew in a breath. "I'm sorry, Lara. That must have been hard."

She winced when Lara yanked a little harder than usual with her comb, pulling several hairs at her crown.

"Not as hard as watching her torture herself over every little bit part that came along. She nearly killed herself, trying to be the best singer, the best dancer, the most beautiful."

A cold heaviness had drifted into Lara's voice as she spoke, and Olivia examined her features in mirror. Her features were flat, her eyes expressionless, and Olivia imagined the memories had to be intensely painful for the woman to recall.

"In the end, she did kill herself."

Olivia gasped, covering her mouth with her fingers. "Oh, God. Lara, I'm sorry."

"She just couldn't take it anymore," Lara said, continuing unabated. "She kept telling me 'this is the roll, Lara Sweetie. This is the one that's going to make your mama a star'. And I always believed her."

The teeth of the comb dug into Olivia's scalp. She pulled away, and Lara dropped the comb on the dressing table without a word. Olivia watched her as she dug around in one of the dressing table drawers. When Lara stood, and turned to face her, she caught her breath.

Never in her life had she seen anything so cold as Lara's eyes at that moment.

Just as quickly, her blood turned to ice.

"She tried out for a new play opening off Broadway. Do you know what play it was?"

Olivia shook her head, her throat suddenly so dry she couldn't speak.

"It was *Molly Make Believe*. She was so excited, until the producer called and turned her down for the roll. The next morning, I found her hanging from a pair of silk stockings in her bedroom."

Olivia kept her eyes on Lara and slowly slipped from her chair. Her heart pounded erratically behind her ribs, making it hard to steady her breath, and a chilled sweat broke out over her body.

"That was thirty-five years ago. Today."

She felt dizzy, but forced herself to focus on Lara. Lara. The woman who had been her friend and confidant for two years. Since right after she joined the cast of *Molly Make Believe*. Since the murders began.

Oh, God.

"Your lover left a nasty mark on your neck," Lara said, lifting from one of the bottom drawers a large make-up case. She dropped it on top of the dressing table, the top popping open and a container of pancake make-up rolled across the floor. Reddish-brown stains smeared the white bottle, mingled with the fleshy color of the substance inside. "It won't matter soon."

Chapter Sixteen

Donovan burst through the back stage door. Shocked and startled looks from the various workers nearby darted in his direction. He barely spared them a glance as he navigated the crowded, narrow halls leading to the dressing rooms.

Someone shouted his name, but it wasn't Liv, so he ignored it, mumbling an apology as he nearly knocked a waspy young worker over.

"Greer," shouted the voice again, and Donovan stopped short as Weston stepped in front of him.

"Where is Liv?" he asked, drawing in a quick breath. The sprint from his parking space a block over and up the alley had strained his lungs, but only slightly.

He shifted to move past Weston, but the man shoved his shoulder and stepped in front of him.

"My daughter's whereabouts are no longer your concern, Agent Greer. I've been informed you have been removed from the investigation. Either leave the theater now, or I'll contact your superiors."

Donovan glared down at Weston, his fists balled tight at his sides to keep from belting the man.

"Call whoever you want, I don't give a damn. But you'd sure as hell better get out of my way," he forced as a hiss through his clenched teeth.

"No. It's over. You caught your man. Olivia is free to return to her life."

"Get out of my way, Weston. Or I *will* physically remove you."

"Are you threatening me?" Weston squared his shoulders and puffed out his chest.

Donovan stared at the man, amazed at the arrogant superiority and utter stupidity. His pulse pounded at his temples and in his gums where he gritted his teeth together. Weston's eyes narrowed as he stared back. Donovan eased back onto his heels and saw the smug gleam of satisfaction in the man's eyes, thinking he had intimidated Donovan into backing down. Weston shifted and Donovan shot past him. Weston reached for him, grabbing his arm.

"Greer!"

Donovan turned on the balls of his feet, curling his fists as he swung, his knuckles making solid contact with Weston's chin. His skin tingled and pain shot up his arm as Weston grunted and stumbled back, landing unceremoniously on his ass. With a quick shake of his hand, Donovan left the stunned idiot behind and headed for Olivia's dressing room.

The sounds of the orchestra tuning up in the theater strained through the bustling back stage area. News of his arrival seemed to have traveled quickly, as many faces he recognized glanced at him and whispered behind their hands as he passed. He couldn't care less.

Adrenaline surged in his veins, making his nerves pulse with anxious electricity, as his heart pounded against his ribs. He had to get to her. Had to.

How could I have been so blind?

Finally, he reached her dressing room door and burst through without pausing to knock.

The room was empty.

Donovan glanced around quickly, then looked down at his watch. Curtain time was in less than an hour. She always spent the last hour before show time in her dressing room, preparing for the performance. Preparing with Lara.

Dread landed in his gut like a bucket of lead slugs, and acid rose in the back of his throat. He had hoped to come through the door and find Lara brushing her hair, just like he had seen dozens of times before. It would mean he still had time. He wasn't too late.

But she wasn't here.

Damn!

Weston came in behind him as Donovan reached the dressing table. He scanned the area with a cursory yet seeking eye, seeing nothing that would tell him anything—one way or another.

"Where the hell is she?" Weston demanded of the nearly empty room. "She knows better than to pull this kind of crap. The curtain goes up in less than an hour."

Damn idiot. You have no idea, you fool.

Donovan pressed his eyes closed, needing just a few short seconds to pull in his thoughts and decide what to do. Why wouldn't Weston just shut up?

"This is all your doing, Greer. She never missed a rehearsal *or* a performance. She was never late. Never slacked in her job. You did this. You're in it deep, Greer. Your superiors aren't going to take kindly to this! I'll see to it I have your badge."

"You already got it," Donovan mumbled as he pulled open drawers, glancing at the contents.

His foot hit something under the edge of the dressing table as he moved her chair out of the way. He looked down to see an unfamiliar black bag. Crouching down, Donovan pulled it from beneath the table's edge and yanked open the already unzipped opening.

His throat tightened, nearly cutting off oxygen to his lungs. The bag held several pairs of prophylactic gloves and half a dozen tubes and jars of heavy stage make-up. The containers were smeared with the inner contents, and brown-black substances Donovan guessed to be blood. He didn't dare remove any of the contents, fearing the evidence might become contaminated.

Swallowing hard against the lump in his throat, he shot to his feet.

"If you don't leave now, Greer, I'm calling the police."

Donovan chose not to acknowledge Weston, instead reached inside his jacket to remove his Glock from the shoulder holster beneath his right arm. He crossed the room and pushed past Weston into the hall, grabbing the nearest stagehand.

"Have you seen Lara or Liv come out of this room recently?"

The stunned man shook his head. He turned to another and asked the same question with the same answer. Frustrated and terrified, Donovan worked his way towards the stage, asking everyone he saw.

Finally, a young man whose name Donovan could not recall pointed towards the back of the stage area. "I think I saw them go that way."

"How long ago?"

He shrugged. "Ten, maybe fifteen minutes ago."

Donovan broke into a run, heading for the part of the theater some of the hands called The Dungeon. His blood surged hard and hot it bubbled and coursed just beneath the surface

of his skin. His fingers clenched around the warm metal of his weapon as he held his elbow cocked and his senses ready.

Weston moved tight on his heels, and Donovan spun around to face him, finding a momentary flash of pleasure at the man's look of fear as his eyes darted to Donovan's gun.

"Stay here. *Don't* follow me. Understand?"

"What the hell is going on here?" Weston asked.

"Just do what I'm telling you. I can't worry about you and her right now."

"Greer, this is your last warning. I'm calling the police," Weston said as he removed a cell phone from his belt.

"You do that. Call the police. Call the Bureau headquarters and ask for Bill Jackman. Call whoever the hell you want to call, just tell them to get here now."

Donovan moved into the darkness, hoping the back up he needed would be on time.

Olivia sucked in her breath as her knees slammed into the gritty wood floor. Dust and dirt from decades of being ignored dug into her skin. She barely caught her balance to keep herself from pitching forward. With her hands caught behind her back by several loops of nylon string that painfully dug into her wrists, she fought to keep herself upright.

She was cold, gooseflesh raising the tiny hairs on her arms. Yet a sheen of perspiration covered her. The fierce pounding of her heart tightened her chest, sending pain through her with each breath. No matter how she tried, she couldn't still the tremors that twisted her insides.

Lara moved around in front of her and knelt down, the knife in her hand catching what little light reached this far back into the Dungeon. Dust and mildew hung heavy in the air, stirred up from its resting place on the old and forgotten costumes and props around them. The Dungeon was behind the stage and up several levels. Once used as a launching area for aeronautic scenes, it was now nearly abandoned. Left only for discarded gowns and broken building facades. The distant strings and winds of the orchestra drifted up to them, providing no solace.

Olivia blinked, trying to bring Lara's face into focus. She was still stunned that the blank, cold eyes that looked back at her now had only this morning shined bright with friendship. Sitting at the kitchen table, her close friend had told her how good Donovan was for her.

Who deserved the Tony now?

"Two years I've waited for this," Lara said, any warm tone gone from her voice. "No, actually, I've waited thirty-five years for this."

Olivia swallowed against the bitter bile that hung in the back of her throat, choking her. An involuntary shiver spasmed painfully between her shoulders and up her neck.

Half a dozen questions flashed through her mind, but they all seemed so cliché, so stupid, she couldn't ask them. And what good would it do to know the answers? The why's and what for's didn't matter... Lara intended to kill her, and that was the plain truth of it. Whatever twisted mutilation of her psyche spurned her into killing made no difference now.

"Did your lover tell you about my other justifications? That's what I like to call them. Justification. Justice at last. Did he tell you?"

Olivia shook her head. "No." Her voice cracked as she tried to speak through the dry

desert in her throat. Despite her words, the gruesome pictures she had found at the cabin flashed in her mind. She swallowed against the rise of sickness in her thickening throat.

Lara tipped her head to the side. "Oh. Well, that's a shame. If he had, you'd know I saved the best performance for last. No dead-of-night slaying for you. No sneak attacks when you turn to pour the tea. No, Olivia—my precious Olivia." She laid the flat edge of the knife against Olivia's cheek, making her stomach roll. "I wanted you to look in my face, and ask forgiveness for your transgressions."

Olivia swallowed. "Just what is it I'm asking forgiveness for?"

"For taking the role my mother deserved. The one she dreamed of. And the one that she gave up her life for."

"Lara—"

"Did you know her name was Molly? My mother? It was serendipity. She was meant to play the roll." Lara's voice had changed, like someone throwing a switch. Now she sounded calm, as if relaying the story to a friend over brunch.

"Your mother died before I was even born."

Her psychotic smile morphed into an enraged frown. "Shut up! Don't try and talk your way out of this."

Olivia flinched away from Lara, the woman's harsh voice echoing back to them through the abandoned section of the theater. As she looked into Lara's cold eyes, she knew instinctively, that any argument she offered up would go unheard.

"All the others died where I found them. Where the moment was opportune for my needs. But you—you will die here. In the theater. Today. Very important it be today."

Olivia bowed her head, looking down at the dirty floor. A small drop of moisture landed in the dust, leaving a dark spot, and she realized she was crying. She blinked against the tears. Gentle, assuring words rang in her heart, and she clung to them with every ounce of hope she possessed.

"Liv, I swear to you, on my life, that he will not hurt you. He will not win."

She pressed her eyes closed, silently praying to God to help Donovan find her.

When the sounds of the orchestra and bustle of workers dimmed to a distant murmur, Donovan gentled his steps to allow no chance his approach would be heard. His Glock settled comfortably and familiarly within the curl of his hand, its butt firmly against the heel of his other hand. Slowly, he edged along the draped bundles of rope and rusted pulleys towards the mumbled voices he detected nearby.

He climbed four wooden steps, cringing when the third began to creak beneath his weight, immediately backing off and skipping the step all together. The voice was closer now, and Donovan crouched to look through the spaces between ancient scaffolding and dust-ridden velvet curtains.

His heart lodged in his throat.

Olivia knelt on the floor, her hands behind her back, with her head tipped forward. Waves of honey-blond hair fell forward, hiding her face from him.

Lara paced a tight circle around Olivia, a sinister knife in her hand that she wielded like a pointer as she spoke. Every muscle in Donovan's body tensed—preparing—waiting for the attack.

"I worried for awhile," Lara said in a singsong voice. "With your lover hanging around so much, I was afraid he might be around to mess up my plans. But I fixed that. Stupid FBI. Stupid police. All of them. Stupid. I fixed them. I fixed all of it. One little conversation with your father, telling him how concerned I was for you, and what I knew. One phone call to the Bureau, and *Special Agent Donovan Greer* is off the case and probably out of town."

Olivia lifted her head, looking at Lara with rounded eyes, her dusty cheeks streaked with tears.

"What?"

Lara hummed in satisfaction. "That's right. Off the case and out of your life. Left you for me, to do what I wanted. To make it right. To make it perfect."

Her voice danced through the air like a child talking about tea parties and dolly dress-ups. Olivia's eyes fluttered closed, and he saw the tremble of her chin before she dropped her head forward again. Donovan tore his eyes away to glance around and evaluate the setting. He didn't know if Weston followed through on the threat to call the police.

Hang on, baby. Hang on. I won't fail you.

Lara's fingers fisted in Olivia's hair, and pain laced over her scalp as her captor yanked her head back, forcing her throat into an exposed arch. Olivia cried out, trying to keep her precarious balance, as Lara knelt behind her. Hot breath burned her skin as Lara whispered near her ear.

"He won't save you. In the end, he won't have saved any of them."

The sharp edge of the blade stung against her skin, and she felt hot droplets of blood run down her throat. What to do? What to say? *Dear God...*

"You hurt her so deeply, caused her so much pain, not even I could make the tears go away."

The switch in Lara's voice almost made Olivia dizzy. She sounded so incredibly sad. Heartbroken. For just a moment, Olivia tried to imagine the pain of a seven-year-old child who suddenly finds herself alone in the world.

"B-but you tried. Didn't you?" Olivia said in a whisper, hoping to reach what small bit of humanity that might be left. "You loved her, and she loved you. It wasn't your fault."

"Of course it wasn't my fault!" The pressure at her throat increased, making it hard to swallow. "It was your fault. You were always prettier than her. Sang better than her. Danced better than her. You couldn't let her, just once, be the star. Be the headliner. You always took center stage."

Olivia closed her eyes. Just like Donovan said. Lara didn't see Olivia. She saw the woman who took the part, thirty-five years before. Faceless. Nameless. All objects of her rage and dementia.

She released a shaky breath as Lara's grip slipped and the woman sank to the floor behind her, as if someone had let the air out of a balloon. Lara drew her knees to her chest and rested her forehead on her folded arms, the knife curled tightly in her fingers. Muffled sobs shook her shoulders. Olivia looked over her shoulder at her one-time friend, and wished desperately she could get her wrists free from the digging nylon.

"Never enough," Lara cried against her folded body. "I was never enough. She wouldn't stay for me. You made her leave me."

Tears burned Olivia's eyes, her chest aching briefly for the lost child that still lived inside Lara's heart. But she wondered what inside her mind snapped to drive her to kill.

Just as quickly, Lara's head came up and any trace of the abandoned child was gone, replaced by murderously cold eyes. Lara came to her knees, her teeth barred.

"No more talking. It's time for you to die."

Behind them, there was a soft click. Tumblers engaging. Olivia sucked in her breath.

"Step away from her, Lara."

Lara's hand stilled with the knife's blade a hair's breath from her throat. Olivia didn't dare turn her head to look. She didn't need to. The calming hum of Donovan's voice over her skin was all she needed to know everything would be okay.

The lingering echo of multiple gunshots still reverberated back to Donovan as he fell to his knees. The smell of hot metal and singed flesh hung in the air. He couldn't wrap his mind around what had just happened. Lara turned. Voices. Shouting. Running footsteps. Shooting. He pulled the trigger. Once. Twice. But there were at least five shots. Police. The police. They ran into the darkness around him, shouting orders.

"Oh, Sweet Jesus. Liv. Liv. Olivia!"

Donovan cut the nylon string around her wrists, not sure when he pulled the switchblade from his pocket. He released her arms to roll her onto her back. His stomach twisted at the sticky, crimson stain that soaked the front of her blouse.

"Oh, God," he whispered, holding his hands over her body, almost afraid to touch her. "Dammit! Liv!"

Blood saturated the thin material, quickly spreading out in a crimson puddle on the dirty wood floor. Finally able to think with some coherency, Donovan pressed his fingers to her throat and leaned over to listen at her lips for some sign of breathing. A shallow, weak pulse whispered against his fingertips and her breath barely brushed his cheek.

She was still alive!

"I need help here!"

Did he shout it? Or was it someone else?

"Don't leave me, Liv," Donovan begged as he pulled back the collar of her blouse. "Damn it, don't leave me. Do you hear me?"

With trembling fingers, sticky with her blood, Donovan unbuttoned her blouse and shoved it back to reveal the gaping wound below her ribs, just off to her right side. Black-red blood ran from it, unabated, gruesome and stark against the paleness of her skin.

"Somebody help me!" he shouted, his voice echoing back to him in the dusty theater. "Somebody please help me."

One of the uniformed officers, who had burst on the scene just seconds before the shooting began, moved from Lara's side to step towards Donovan. He glanced past the officer to the Lara Whitmore's prone body. Soft groans of pain reached him, telling him she was still alive.

"There are two ambulances already on the way, Agent Greer."

Donovan yanked a handkerchief from his jacket pocket and bunched it in his fist, pressing the far too flimsy material against the wound in an attempt to staunch the blood flow. His finger searched again for her pulse, again reassuring himself her heart still beat.

"Liv," he whispered as he pressed the heel of his blood-smeared hand against her side. "Liv, please open your eyes. Please." His eyes burned and his throat was raw as he tried to swallow against the panic and emotion that choked him.

"Damn it! Where is the ambulance?"

Dear God, please don't take her away from me. I'll do anything. Just please, please, don't take her away from me.

He hadn't prayed in years. Not since the morning he put Janie and Sarah in the ground. But now, with Olivia's blood on his hands and her life slipping from his grip, Donovan could think to do nothing else.

In the blur of his perception, EMT's arrived with their gurneys and medical bags. One knelt at her head, checking her pulse and prying open her eyes to look at her pupils. Donovan held his spot, unwilling to lift his hand and release the flow of blood.

"You need to let us help her, sir."

The bright red fluid grew sticky on his skin, yet each beat of her heart send a new gush of heat against his palm.

Ba-boom. Ba-boom. Ba. Boom.

"Sir, please. We'll take her from here."

Donovan fell back off his knees, sitting in the dirt and dust near her feet. Unable to move, he watched as they ripped open her shirt and pressed bundles of white gauze against the bullet wound. Her white, lacy bra was soaked with red gore. Creamy skin now marred by the grotesque substance. He stared at his own hands, coated in the same sickening red fluid.

The scene blurred, and with detached awareness, Donovan realized that tears burned his eyes. The taste of salt sat heavy on his lips. He tilted his head to the ceiling and closed his eyes.

Please, God. Don't take her. Don't take her.

Chapter Seventeen

Donovan sat in the ER waiting area, hunched over with his elbows on his knees and his fingers linked behind his neck. The muscles in his body were bunched so tight, he wasn't sure he could move, didn't care if he did or not.

Two hours. She had been in surgery for two hours.

Don't take her, God. Don't take her.

His chest hurt, like someone had hit him with a sledgehammer right on the sternum. He released the grip behind his head and slid the heels of his hands against his eyes, pressing hard until spots floated in his vision.

We're sorry, Agent Greer. There was nothing we could do for your wife and daughter. The fire was too intense. There was really no hope."

His heart pounded against his ribs, so fierce he thought it would bust free and fall to the speckled linoleum floor. Every nerve sparked, urging him to jump and run... but he held it all in, tightly controlled.

Control. He had to have control.

"The bullet came very close to hitting a main artery. There may still be damage. We won't know to what extent until we're in surgery. I can't say much more than that right now. We'll find you when we know more."

Donovan shot to his feet, planting his hands at his waist, and paced the length of the room. A young mother sat in one corner, cradling a whimpering toddler in her lap. A teenage boy in a wheelchair, three cold packs bundled around one ankle, watched the baseball game on television while he waited to be seen. In the back of the room, an elderly man with three days growth on his face snored loudly with his head tilted to the ceiling. The smell of antiseptic and latex stung Donovan's nose, churning his empty stomach.

"Are you a police man?" asked a small voice beside him, momentarily pulling him from his dark thoughts.

Donovan looked down to see a little girl, maybe five or six years old, with fine blonde hair and round blue eyes. She held against her chest a mottled and well-loved teddy bear wrapped in a yellow baby blanket. He did his best to push down the raging emotions that threatened to choke him at any moment, and crouched down to be eye level with the girl.

"No, I'm not. Why do you think I'm a police man?" he asked, forcing his voice to be low.

She pointed at the gun holster beneath his right arm. Donovan smothered a curse beneath his breath. He didn't even remember taking his jacket off. But it had been stained with Olivia's blood, and he couldn't stand it being against his skin any more. It wasn't wise to strut around in public with a loaded Glock against your side.

"You're a very smart girl," he said. "I'm not a police officer. I'm an FBI agent. Do you know what that is?"

She nodded, her fair brow creased in thought, and then she shook her head. Donovan chuckled.

"That's okay. It's a lot like being a policeman. What's your name?"

"Ashley."

"Well, Ashley. That is a very pretty name. Where is your mom?"

"I don't know. My daddy was hurtstet in an accident, and Mama came here to check on 'im. I needed to go potty."

Donovan nodded. "Did you tell your mom you were going to the bathroom?"

"No." Her bright blue eyes welled up with tears.

"Now you can't find her?"

She shook her head, her lower lip trembling. "Mama told me if I ever get lost, I should find a police man."

The quiver in the little girl's voice pulled at Donovan's heart—in a spot that hadn't been touched in many years. He swallowed against the emotion in his throat.

"Your mama sounds like a very smart woman. You know what else is a smart thing to do when you get lost?" She shook her head. "Stay where you are. Because if you go trying to find your mama, and she's running around trying to find you, you could miss each other."

Ashley rubbed her teary eyes with a tiny fist. "Can I stay with you?"

Donovan held out his hand, and Ashley took it. Her tiny digits were lost in the comparatively huge expanse of his palm. Together they walked to a bank of chairs and Donovan sat down, assisting Ashley into the chair beside him.

"I bet it won't be long at all before she comes."

Ashley just nodded and looked up at him. Something about the way she just stared, like she could see past his face to the man beyond, reminded him of Olivia. Searching his soul. Seeing the good man who would help a little girl find her mama, and not the man who just shot the woman he loved. Proven otherwise or not, the guilt that tore at his gut could be no worse. His bullet or not. His shot or not.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Donovan."

Her eyebrows crinkled together. "Don'van?"

"Close enough."

"Are you sad, too, Don'van?"

Oh, the wisdom of children. Naïve eyes that see all.

"Yes, I am," he answered, forcing the words past his lips. "You're here because your daddy was hurt. I'm here because a woman I love was hurt."

Ashley moved up onto her knees, and when Donovan hunched forward just a little bit, they were eye-to-eye. He caught his breath when the little girl reached out her hand and laid it against his cheek. Hundreds of memories came back to him in one moment. A bittersweet combination of feelings raged in his chest.

"I'll pray for your friend if you pray for my Daddy."

Tears burned his eyes, but he blinked them back. "You have a deal, Ashley."

The automatic doors that opened into the ER opened, and a young woman burst through. "Ashley? Ashley?" she called.

"Mama!"

Donovan stood and helped Ashley down from the chair. He tried to release her, but the tenacious child held tight to his hand and urged him to follow her as she ran to her mother. They met half way, and the woman dropped to her knees to pull Ashley in a tight embrace.

"Oh, pumpkin, I was so worried about you. I couldn't find you anywhere."

"Donovan said the best thing to do when you're losted is to stay put," Ashley said, hugging her mother back. "So we stayed put together."

Her mother stood, warily eyeing Donovan, and for that he didn't begrudge her. She looked to his gun holster, and he immediately extended his hand.

"Special Agent Donovan Greer," he said. "I'm with the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

She took his hand. "Rachel Fishburne. I'm sorry if my daughter was a bother to you, Agent Greer."

"Not at all. I'm glad I could help."

Ashley nodded, and her mother thanked him again. As the two walked back through the sliding doors, Ashley waved to Donovan over her shoulder. Donovan raised his hand and waved back.

He stared at the door for a long time, watching people come and go, and hoped Mr. Fishburne was okay. For Ashley. She was too young to learn about death. Donovan watched the door, knowing in his gut that no one would come to tell him if she was alive. Phillip Weston was beyond the doors, and he would never give permission for the doctors to share her fate with him. But still, he had to wait.

When Bill Jackman came through the sliding glass panels, Donovan's body tensed. Every nerve came alive, every muscle jumped. Bill walked straight towards him, and without a word, the two men headed towards a more isolated area of the waiting room. Donovan stopped and faced his friend. Maybe his friend no longer.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked.

Bill nodded. "I don't know specifics, but I know she's in recovery now. Appears to be doing well."

Donovan released a breath that felt like he had been holding for days. "Thank God."

"Her father is standing guard over the room. Won't let anyone in but medical personnel. Especially after that stunt you pulled upstairs."

"I didn't throw the first punch. And I didn't hit back."

"I know that, and you know that. But Weston will have everyone believe you're the devil incarnate."

Donovan sank into one of the molded plastic chairs, his head in his hands. In one moment, the weight of the world was too much for him to bear up under. Bill sat down beside him.

"She's alive," Donovan whispered. "Thank you, God."

No matter how hard he pushed it down, tried to control it, the sob shook his shoulders and it was all he could do to keep it silent. He pressed his hands against his eyes, but the tears came anyway. Bill's hand came down on his shoulder, offering silent comfort.

Donovan choked down the tears and swiped viciously at his face. With a quick sniff, he sat up and cleared his throat. Ten years was a long time to deny emotion, then to have it all come crashing down in one moment.

Both men sat in silence. Bill took away his hand and clasped his fingers together in his lap. Nothing to say came to mind, as he let the realization sink in that Olivia was alive.

Bill cleared his throat. "Lara Whitman is also in recovery, under armed guard, though it probably isn't necessary. The surgeon suspects she'll be paralyzed from the waist down.

One of the bullets severed part of her spinal cord."

"How many times was she hit?"

"Twice."

Donovan closed his eyes. Three bullets accounted for. At least two strays. Who had hit their mark? Who had hit the wrong mark? Who had missed all together? Part of him hoped it would be his slugs the CSI folks would dig out of the woodwork somewhere.

"I'm going to need your gun," Bill said after several moments of quiet. "The forensics lab will need to compare striations, since you and the cops were firing the same kind of weapon."

Donovan nodded in concession. Without looking at his friend, he snapped the safety strap loose and slid the gun from its leather holster, handing it to Bill handle first. Bill produced a plastic evidence bag from his pocket and dropped the gun inside.

"For your sake, I hope the bullet in Olivia Weston doesn't match this gun."

He closed his eyes and leaned back until his head hit the wall behind him. The reasons didn't need to be said. Professionally, if it was proven that the bullet of a suspended agent had injured an innocent civilian, acting without permission and against orders, the agent could kiss his career good-bye. The suspension was bad enough. He might have fought his way back. But if he shot Liv, even in the process of saving her, he might never wear a badge again.

But for Donovan, his career was the last thing on his mind. If he shot Liv... Bill could keep the badge, the gun, all of it. He was done.

"You love her."

Donovan swallowed and nodded in answer, too weak to force the words from his throat.

"Like you loved Janie?"

He lifted his head from its resting place and looked to Bill. There was no reproach in Bill's eyes. No reprimand. Despite the events of the last few hours, Bill remained his friend.

"No. Not like Janie. Like Liv. Does that make sense? I don't love Olivia the way I loved Janie, but I never loved Janie the way I love Olivia."

Bill nodded. "I think I understand."

Donovan groaned and leaned forward, vigorously rubbing his face with his hands, and raked his hair with his fingers. "I need to see her, Bill."

"Weston said no visitors but family."

He looked to his friend. "I *need* to see her."

They stared at each other for several minutes. Then Bill nodded and sat forward. "Don't go anywhere."

At three in the morning, the surgical wing recovery rooms were eerily quiet. The lights in the halls were dimmed, save for the ones near the nurse's station. No one roamed the halls except for the occasional orderly or night shift nurse. Donovan, dressed now in a clean suit and clean-shaven, walked beside Bill. The rhythmic thumps of their shoes echoed back to them in the empty corridors.

No one stopped them at this hour of the night. Most of the nurses had seen Bill come and go throughout the day, so Donovan surmised they would let him pass without question. He only hoped they wouldn't think twice of him, being Bill's companion. The door to room

705 was slightly ajar, and they stopped outside.

"I'll wait here," Bill said in a hushed voice. "Don't take all night. I need you in and out of here before anyone is the wiser. Got it?"

Donovan extended his hand to his friend, who took it in a firm grasp. "I owe you."

"Yes, you do. Now, get your ass in and out."

Donovan pushed open the door and slowly walked into the private room, gentling his steps to keep from waking her unnecessarily. The soft beep of monitors filled the silence and moonlight streamed in through the open windows.

She looked so small in the hospital bed, her blonde hair almost white in the moonshine. For a moment, it reminded him of their first night as lovers. When he had entered the bedroom to see her standing near the window. The moon had lit her features and made her appear ethereal.

Tonight, it just made her look frail.

Donovan stopped at the end of the bed, his knuckles white as he gripped the footboard. An IV pole sat on her left, with two bags of clear liquid dripping into her veins. A weight, like three elephants, sat on his chest, making his lungs burn with each breath. This had to be what a heart attack felt like.

Glancing quickly at the closed room door, Donovan moved to the side of the bed where a chair sat empty. As carefully as possible, he edged the chair closer to the bed and sat down. Almost afraid to touch her, he leaned his elbow into the mattress beside her and wrapped his fingers around her hand.

Her skin was cold and unresponsive to his touch. He glanced around quickly until he spotted a folded blanket on another chair near the window. Rising again, he retrieved it and draped it over her body, covering her arms and shoulders. Once satisfied she would be warm enough, he sat again, slipping his hand beneath the blanket to touch her.

He watched her for several seconds, trying to imagine she was just asleep. But the constant beep of heart monitors stole the fantasy before it could form. Donovan cleared his throat and edged forward in the chair. With his arm draped over the top of her pillows, he softly caressed her hair.

"Hey, baby," he finally managed to say. Immediately, emotion choked him. His eyes burned, but he blinked against the moisture. "I'm sorry I didn't come sooner."

Olivia stared out the window in her hospital room, the head of her bed tilted up so she could sit up without effort. The sun outside was bright and everything still hung onto the final shades of green before autumn descended.

The door to her room opened, and she looked over her shoulder to see Deputy Director Jackman enter. She recognized him from his late night visit to Donovan's cabin. With careful movements, she shifted on the bed, cautious not to pull at the bandages wrapping her stomach and side.

"Good afternoon, Miss Weston."

"Hello, Mr. Jackman. Or should I call you Agent Jackman? Deputy Director Jackman?"

"How about just Bill. Much easier."

She dipped her chin in concession as he walked to the bed, stopped near the end. "Are the photographers still outside?" she asked.

He nodded. "They've been run off more than once, but keep coming back. Hoping for a glimpse."

"Has anyone told them I'm not being discharged until tomorrow?"

Mr. Jackman chuckled. "Yes, but they think it's a ploy. They figure you're leaving any minute, and we're just telling them tomorrow so they let their guard down."

"I wish I could give them what they wanted. Eight days here has been long enough for me."

"I think most of them have been here since you arrived."

Olivia shook her head and shifted again, trying to find a comfortable position. She was so sick of this bed, and this room, and the sterile silence that surrounded her. Moderately comfortable again, she sighed.

"Bill, I didn't ask you to come visit me so we could talk about the paparazzi."

"No, I didn't think you had."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

Olivia stared at the man, seeking some sign in his eyes that would let her know his words were truth or lies. But she saw nothing there. No hint. He was, after all, a trained professional. It would do no good if his expression gave away his true thoughts.

"You don't know? Or you won't tell me because he asked you not to?"

He dropped his head forward, shaking it slightly side to side. "Donovan told me you were good at reading people. He said that, the first time he met you, he thought you looked right into his soul."

A warm feeling moved over Olivia. The first warmth she had felt since waking up and being told Donovan was nowhere to be found. "He said that?" she asked, her own voice sounding small to her ears.

"He did. He hasn't told me very much, but he did tell me that."

"Where is he?" she asked again.

"Miss Weston, I really can't—"

"Where is he?"

"It was very difficult for him when he made the decision to leave. I won't belittle that—"

"Where is he?"

Mr. Jackman chuckled again. "He also said that, once you had your mind made up, truly made up, nothing and nobody would change it for you."

"Where is he?"

Then he looked at her, straight in the eyes, and she knew without a doubt the next words he spoke would be the truth. There was a glint in his expression, a sign that he believed in the same thing she did. Perhaps he couldn't come out and say the words, but deep down Deputy Director William Jackman knew the truth.

"He went in search of forgiveness."

The gentle wind blew through Whispering Pines Cemetery, tugging at the edges of Donovan's coat. It wasn't a cold day, but here, everything was cold.

He stared down at the double gravestone before him, carved in beautiful rose granite.

His girls had always liked pink, and this was the closest to pink he could get for them. Without needing to see the carvings, the words on the stone moved through his mind.

Janie Anne Greer. Beloved Wife to Donovan and Mother to Sarah. Sarah Elizabeth Greer. Two angels called home too soon.

Donovan closed his eyes. It had been years since he had forced himself to come here. Years since the pain in his chest had been bearable enough to see the names of his two girls carved in cold stone. Now, he had been drawn here like a magnet to True North.

He had been in Louisiana for over a week, knowing this was the place he had to come. Yet denying it all the same. For all the years of training to see the hard reality in everything, Donovan had become very good at denying reality. If he didn't see the single headstone, covering both the graves, with the angels lovingly etched over and around their names, it wasn't real. They weren't in the cold, unfeeling earth.

He stepped forward and knelt before the stone, like an altar to the pain he had harbored for a decade. Pulling the leather gloves from his hand, he traced each letter of their names with the tip of his fingers. The cold breeze chapped his damp cheeks, but he did nothing to dry them. It was like some dam had burst inside him, and he couldn't control his own emotions anymore. Barely strong enough to keep it all at bay when people were around, when he was alone it was useless.

"Hi, my girls," he said to the stones. "I know I've been gone a long time. I'm sorry I didn't come sooner."

Mama Sanders looked up from the pile of flour and eggs that would eventually be a pie crust as Donovan came through the back door into her kitchen. Her expressive eyes turned towards him, and immediately she came to him, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Oh, precious, come in here and sit down. How about a glass of sweet tea?"

Donovan nodded and sank down into a kitchen chair, resting his arm on the table. Mama Sanders made quick work of pouring the glass and setting it near his hand, sitting to face him. After several moments of silence, when he didn't look at her or reach for the tea, she took his hand and squeezed gently.

"You knew it wouldn't be easy."

"Nothing is easy anymore."

She made a cooing sound, meant to soothe, and patted his arm. "You can't do this. You can't go back into that hole you've been living in for so long."

Donovan looked at his mother-in-law, because despite the death of his wife, this wonderful woman had remained a mother to him in so many ways. Nothing would take that status from her. In her warm eyes and graying hair, Donovan saw the woman Janie would have become, and she was beautiful.

Leaning forward, Donovan enveloped Mama Sanders' hand in both his, holding on as he stared into her truthful eyes. Eyes that would be honest with him, even if it hurt, knowing it would be for the better good.

"Mama Sanders, how can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you? For what?"

"For their deaths."

"Oh, Donovan, I never blamed you. What is there to forgive? You didn't do it."

"They died because of me."

She shook her head. "No, Donovan. They *lived* because of you. They still live. In your heart, and mine. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have had the six wonderful years I did with my beautiful granddaughter. You lit up Janie's world. You put a spark in her eyes like nothing and no one else ever could. Oh, darlin'," she said, reaching her free hand to touch his cheek. "The only person that needs to do some forgiving is you."

Donovan turned into her hand and kissed the soft palm, still slightly dusted with flour and sugar. He sat back, and picked up the sweet tea, drinking three-quarters of it before setting the glass down. Mama Sanders folded her hands in her lap and relaxed in her chair.

"She doesn't blame you, either," she said after several minutes.

Donovan looked at her, and she must have seen the question in his eyes, because she smiled. "This young woman you left behind to come here. Oh, don't look so surprised. This may be the Bayou, but we do get the news round these parts. I know what happened in New York, or at least the parts the reporters are telling. I know your lady-friend was shot. I know they say you were pretending to be her beau to protect her. But I don't need any big city reporter feeding me gossip to know the truth."

"What truth is that?" he asked, not wanting to meet her gentle gaze, knowing she'd see it all in his eyes. His ability to hide, to put up facades, was temporarily shot to hell.

"That you love her."

He drained the last of the tea, and silently wished some Jack Daniels had made it into the glass before finishing it. But Mama Sanders kept the hard stuff locked in her pie safe, away from her husband and his penchant for overdoing it on Saturday night.

"You were protecting her."

"I might have shot her."

"You saved her life. I don't know the details, but I'd bet my blue ribbon rhubarb pie recipe that girl would be in much deeper trouble if you hadn't been there. Am I right? And don't lie to me."

Donovan smiled. Mama Sanders' way with words had always been a point of pleasure for him. He had loved listening to her and his father-in-law bicker over dinner, each word laced with a love that was almost tangible. It hung in the air around them like a soft mist.

"You're probably right," he said on a sigh.

"There ain't no probably about it. What I can't figure out is why you ran away. You've never been a runner, Donovan Ian Greer. Not since the day Janie brought you home and Papa Sanders took you on your first snipe hunt, just to test your mettle."

"I didn't run," he argued, smiling despite himself at the memory of the 'hunt'. No one told him until hours later there was no such thing as a snipe.

"What do you call it?"

"Letting go."

"Did she ask to be let go?"

He shook his head.

"So, suddenly you're the only decision-maker in the relationship?"

"She wasn't in a position to make the choice."

"Doesn't mean you have the right to make it for her. What makes you think she wanted you to leave?"

"She was shot," he snapped, then immediately pulled back the frustration that made him raise his voice, knowing Mama Sanders didn't deserve it. "She was shot, possibly by me."

"Possibly. Maybe. I'm hearing a lot of speculation here, precious, and no hard facts. The fact of the matter is that you love her. Does she love you?"

"She did."

"Did?"

"She might not anymore."

"And instead of waiting around to see, you tucked your tail between your legs and ran."

"It's not like that," he said, leaning his elbow on the table and pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers.

She sighed softly and slid her arm across the tabletop to touch his arm. "I know it's not. I'm just tryin' to get you to say the way it really is."

He lowered his hand to hold her fingers wrapped in his, and looked at her. "You are an amazing woman."

She smiled, a slow, all-knowing grin. "No changing the subject."

Donovan looked down at their joined hands, staring at her aging yet amazingly soft skin. The texture looked like fragile paper, draped over even more fragile bone, yet with an inherent strength.

"I lost Janie and Sarah because of my job," he finally managed to say. "I found Liv because of my job. And I nearly lost her because of my job. I won't put her life at risk again."

"But you'll break her heart?"

"It's not that simple."

"Love is simple, precious. The heart makes things easy. It's our foolish heads that make it complicated."

Tired in a way that transcended his body, Donovan crossed his arms on the table and lowered his head. With a thousand thoughts swirling through his exhausted mind, he closed his eyes and prayed for peace. Mama Sanders' fingers gently stroked his hair.

Chapter Eighteen

Olivia sat on the small patio off the breakfast nook, bundled in a fluffy comforter with a cup of peppermint tea wrapped in her hands. A chill still hung in the early-September morning air, making each breath she took feel crisp and reviving. Dozens of stories below, the bustle of the city's rush hour barely reached her. The only sound was her father's voice from inside, breaking her calm.

"I don't need to hear that, Doctor. She needs to get back to work. It's been a month. Are you telling me she isn't physically able to return to the stage?"

She closed her eyes and let her head fall back into the cushion created by the blanket.

"That's psychological crap. She's not going to be able to face what happened until she gets off her ass and gets back in the theater." Pause. "I have told her this. I want *you* to tell her."

Shut up. Just shut up.

"So, in your *professional* opinion, she could physically handle the return to acting?" Pause. "That's all I needed to hear."

She heard him set the phone back in its cradle, and mentally braced herself for the next ten minutes of harassment and lecturing. The patio doors opened, and he stepped outside, but Olivia didn't look at him.

"I'm assuming you heard the conversation."

She didn't say anything.

"According to the doctor —"

"No."

"Excuse me?"

Olivia turned then, looked up at her father. "I said no. I'm not going back. Not yet."

"Do you have any idea what this is doing to your career? When you were first released, box office sales skyrocketed. But no one is buying tickets because they can't see you."

"I don't care."

"Well, I do!"

"Sucks to be you."

His fist came down on the small patio table, her empty plates from breakfast jumping and clattering with the force. But Olivia didn't flinch, just stared at her father. He huffed loudly, each nostril flaring with the effort, and his face turned a dusky red.

"I don't know who you think you are, Olivia —"

Susan, one of the cook's assistants that Olivia had gotten to know over the last few weeks, now stood in the doorway. She cleared her throat and cut him off.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but there's a man here to see you, Olivia."

A fluttering sensation hit Olivia's insides, making her feel suddenly light. Every nerve woke with a jolt.

"Who is it?" both she and her father asked, simultaneously.

"Deputy Director Bill Jackman from the FBI."

"Tell him to get the hell out of here. I'm sick of their bullshit," her father answered.

"Show him in, Susan."

"I just said —"

"It's my house." Olivia cut off her father's argument.

Phillip Weston was near the boiling point, Olivia could see it in his face, when Bill Jackman stepped out onto the patio. Olivia moved to stand, but he motioned for her to stay where she was.

"No need, Miss Weston. You look comfortable. Stay right there."

"Thank you. What can I do for you, Bill?"

He pointed towards a chair near the bench she sat on, and Olivia nodded. She noticed then he had two large envelopes in his hand, which he set on the table.

"I didn't want to come too soon after your release, knowing you still needed some recovery time. But I have some questions I need to ask you."

"You people have asked her all the questions you need to about that damn day," her father snapped.

"It's not about the shooting at the theater."

"What is it about?" she asked.

Mr. Jackman opened one of the envelopes and took out a manila folder. Opening it, he took a pen from his inside jacket pocket. "It's in regards to the allegations made against Special Agent Donovan Greer. As his direct superior, I've taken it upon myself to clear up this matter to your satisfaction."

"What allegations?"

"Of sexual misconduct. The complaint was filed with my Director the morning of the attack, so I haven't had the opportunity to complete the paperwork."

Olivia stared at Bill Jackman, knowing her mouth probably hung open but too shocked to close it. Finally, she managed to find words.

"Wh-who made these allegations?"

Mr. Jackman made a show of looking down at his paperwork, reading over the first page. "It states here that a phone call was made to the office of Director Ackerly by Phillip Weston, on behalf of his daughter, Olivia Weston. The complaint states that Agent Greer sexually manipulated and coerced you, Miss Weston, into an inappropriate and self-destructive relationship."

Suddenly, the comforter was too hot to remain bundled in, and Olivia threw it off to lean onto the table. She held out her hand in a silent request, and Mr. Jackman handed her the file. Olivia tried to read it, but the words blurred in front of her eyes.

"Does Donovan know about this?"

"Of course. I had the unfortunate duty of informing him just an hour before the incident at the theater. He was first removed from your case, and upon refusal to end his investigation, was suspended from the Bureau."

A flash of memory came back to Olivia, just as they had been for the last month. Bits and pieces of a broken puzzle that needed to be put together again.

"I fixed all of it. One little conversation with your father, telling him how concerned I was for you, and what I knew. One phone call to the Bureau, and Special Agent Donovan Greer is off the case and probably out of town.... That's right. Off the case and out of your life. Left you for me, to do what I wanted."

She lifted a trembling hand to her mouth, fighting the wave of nausea that came with

each memory. "Oh, God. Donovan. He was suspended? From the Bureau?"

Mr. Jackman nodded.

"But he came to the theater. He..." Words were lost again.

"We know now, of course, that Agent Greer had surmised the identity of the killer, one Lara Whitmore, and went to the theater to stop her." Mr. Jackman took the folder from her again, and flipped to the back pages. "I do need to ask you some questions, Miss Weston, to complete the file. Then if you could just sign, attesting to the fact that the allegations are truthful and forthright, we will complete the disciplinary process."

Olivia shook her head. "No."

Mr. Jackman looked up from the folder. "Excuse me?"

"No. You can take the file and shred it, Mr. Jackman. I'll have no part of it."

"But without your signed statement, the allegation will be dropped. No further action will be taken against Agent Greer."

"Good. That's what I want."

"Olivia, where the hell is your head?" her father said, stepping forward. "Give me the damn pen. I'll sign it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Weston, but that would do nothing. Your daughter is not a minor, and the allegations were for sexual misconduct against *her*. If she is unwilling to sign the complaint, and prefers the investigation be dropped, then I am obliged to abide by her wishes."

"And those are my wishes."

Her father cursed beneath his breath, but loud enough to make it quite clear he was not at all happy. Right now, she didn't give a damn. Mr. Jackman closed the folder and put it back into the envelope.

"Well, Miss Weston, I can't say I'm disappointed in your decision. Agent Greer has maintained an impeccable record in the eighteen years he's been with the Bureau. Now, if I could only reach him I would have two bits of good news to share with him."

"Two?"

Mr. Jackman tapped the other envelope. "This is the forensics file from the incident at the theater. Our crime scene investigators determined that the bullet which caused your injury was not discharged from Agent Greer's gun."

"Bull..." her father mumbled.

"Was Donovan worried it had been?" Olivia asked, ignoring him.

"I'm not sure worried would adequately describe Agent Greer's state of mind," Mr. Jackman said, leveling a stare at Olivia that suddenly made her heart jump.

A realization flowed over her like a warm wave. Mr. Jackman's conversation, and its leading manner, was not accidental. He knew exactly what he was doing, what he was saying, and what information he provided to her. All within the parameters of his job.

Olivia dipped her chin in a Donovan-esque nod. "And you haven't been able to reach him?"

"No. Unfortunately, since his suspension, Agent Greer has been incommunicado. I am quite certain this is information that would greatly ease his concerns."

Her father could have been on the other side of the moon for the lack of effect his cursing and mumbling had on her conversation with Mr. Jackman.

"And you have no idea where he may be?"

Mr. Jackman shifted in his chair and cleared his throat. "Now, to be perfectly honest, Miss Weston, I am pretty sure I know where he is. But he has ignored my repeated phone calls and has not responded to my messages. I have been very busy, as you may well understand, and have not found the opportunity to drive to his suspected location. Course, I can't be sure. In the time he was here, did he perhaps share with you any personal information that might help shed some light on his whereabouts?"

"I'll have to put some thought into that, Mr. Jackman. If needed, can I get back to you?"

"Of course."

Mr. Jackman stood, and Olivia followed suit, leaving the comforter behind as she brushed past her stewing father to walk the man to the door. Her movements were still stiff, her subconscious mind wary to do too much and pull at the wound in her side. In the hall, with her father left behind, she extended her hand to the man she now understood to be much more to Donovan than just a boss. In Bill Jackman, Donovan had a true friend.

"Thank you very much for coming by."

She caught her breath when Mr. Jackman took her hand, and she felt the cool slide of leather against her skin. Olivia looked down to their joined hands to see a black badge wallet against her palm.

"I think you might see Donovan before I do. If you do, would you give him that for me?"

Tears blurred her vision, but she smiled at Mr. Jackman. "I will. Thank you so very much."

Moments later, she closed the door behind Mr. Jackman and took in a deep, fortifying breath. As she rounded the corner to the living room, her father immediately started on a huffed diatribe.

"That damn report had to be doctored. I'd bet my bank account that Greer was the one who shot you. Incompetent bastard. He didn't know what the hell he was doing, and put you right in the line of fire."

"Shut up," she said, still maintaining some level of calm.

"Excuse me?"

"I said shut up. I am so sick and tired of listening to you do nothing but put Donovan down. Do you have eyes? A brain? Donovan saved my life. Lara was about to slit my throat when he showed up in the theater. The bullet in my side had nothing to do with him."

"He screwed with your brain. Since he showed up, you've slacked off, talked back, and shown a blatant disregard for me—"

"I've begun to live my life. The way *I* want to live it."

"This is what you want? Sitting on your ass doing nothing? You don't make money that way, Olivia." Phillip Weston pointed a vicious finger at her as he spoke.

Olivia ignored it. "In case you haven't noticed, but I'm quite sure you have, I've been working my ass off since I was a toddler. I've decided it's about time I take a vacation."

"A vacation? You can't afford to take a vacation. You step out of the limelight for too long and people begin forgetting about you."

"So be it. I'd relish some peace and quiet."

"He did something to you. Did something to your head. I guess your body wasn't the

only thing he fu – “

His head snapped to the side with the force of her slap. Her palm stung, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of seeing her flinch. Phillip Weston turned a shocked glare at her, but she stood her ground, fists clenched at her side.

“This is my house. My life. My career. And I want you out of it.”

“I'm your father!”

“You haven't been a father to be since the day you knocked my mother up and pulled her off the stage. I was just the consolation prize. Something you could mold and manipulate into what you wanted. Well, no more!”

Fury burned hot just beneath the surface of her skin, bubbling and raging, threatening to burst out of her like an erupting volcano.

“Who the *hell* did you think you were? Filing a sexual misconduct complaint against Donovan. Did you honestly think I'd go along with it? Or were you just going to forge my signature, like I'm sure you've been doing for the last twenty years.”

“I made you who you are. You'd be nowhere without me.”

Olivia drew in a deep breath. “And now you're nowhere without me.”

“What?”

“I'm going to be out of town for a few days. When I get back, I want you out. There is to be no sign of you left in this penthouse, and in my career. I suggest you go home to Connecticut, with your wife.”

“You can't – “

“Yes, I can. You're fired.”

Without waiting for another objection from him, and unwilling to look at his face another second, Olivia turned on her heels and headed for her bedroom.

She had some packing to do. Just one small bag full. No more. No less.

Donovan stared out at the lake, watching bands of orange and pink dance across the rippled surface as the sun slowly disappeared behind the distant tree line. He raised the near empty bottle of beer to his lips and drained the final contents.

Autumn was coming quickly to Virginia. The once completely green landscape was now sprinkled with flashes of color. Banks of maples slashed by a sole birch in bright yellow, a sharp contrast to the cool green. Another time, years before, he would have appreciated the beauty of the changing season.

But not this year. His eyes barely saw it.

The phone at his waist chirped loudly, breaking the calm silence. He shifted to snap it free of his belt and glared at the number id on the small LCD screen.

Jackman, Bill.

Donovan set the phone down on the armrest of the chair and let it ring. After five or six rings, the annoying chirping stopped. He welcomed the silence again.

Just a few hours before he had managed to convince his mother to go home. A week after his arrival at the cabin, she had shown up, with four bags of groceries, and had refused to leave. As much as he loved his mother, and usually welcomed the company of his family, he didn't need one more person telling him what they thought was right for him. What would fix things. What he needed. Two weeks in Louisiana had been enough.

But like he had told Liv weeks before, what he wanted and what would be wasn't always the same thing.

The entire drive from Louisiana to Virginia, he wondered if he was doing the right thing. Going back to the cabin. But the moment he arrived, he knew it was the best place he could be. He lived with his memories every day. Sometimes they were memories of Janie and Sarah, and they came to him like whispers on the wind. Wraithlike. They wrapped around him, and unlike years past, offered a comforting warmth and peace.

And then, usually in the still of the night, Olivia came to him. Her memory was still hot and branding, waking him with painful awareness of her absence. They left him raw and hungry, and aggravated.

And more alone than he had felt in a long time.

He closed his eyes as the wind blew up off the lake, sending a chill over his skin. The scent of earth and the river drifted up to him. It reminded of the afternoon he had spent on the dock, making love to Liv in the sunshine, the sun warm on their naked skin.

Donovan's blood stirred, heating and rushing to his groin. He curled his fingers around the now-empty beer bottle, and tried to will away the intense need the thought of her always created.

The phone rang again. Donovan groaned and covered his face with his hands. "Why won't you leave me the hell alone?" he shouted to no one.

After several chirps, the ringing stopped. Only to begin again seconds later. He picked the phone up, fighting the nearly overpowering urge to chuck the small device as far out into the lake as he could, but glanced at the LCD screen first. His chest seized.

Weston, Olivia.

He stared at the phone, unable to move. Too late, he realized he had let it ring too long. The phone went silent.

"Damn," he mumbled.

Seconds later, it rang again. And again, the screen read her name. This time, he didn't hesitate but flipped the phone open. Donovan swallowed hard before putting the phone against his cheek.

"Hello," he said, his voice cracking.

"I wondered how many times I'd have to call before you'd pick up."

He jumped to his feet and spun around, staring open-mouthed at Liv where she stood, just feet away from him.

Chapter Nineteen

With graceful ease, Olivia snapped the phone closed and set it down on the railing beside her. Donovan stared at her, his heart thundering in his chest. She was beautiful, dressed in faded blue jeans and a v-neck red sweater at least one size too large. The edge of the neck dipped low enough to feed his Olivia-starved imagination without revealing too much.

She was there. Right in front of him. Near enough to touch.

Then he saw the hint of a white bandage peeking from beneath the sweater. Glossy medical tape adhered to her skin, holding the gauze in place. His gaze shifted from the glaring reminder to the fading pink lines at her throat. Lara's cuts hadn't been deep, but had been enough to blemish Olivia's flawless skin.

She shifted and put her hands in her pockets, but not before Donovan caught a slight tremble in her fingers.

"I thought of calling on the way," she finally said, her voice wavering slightly. "But I wasn't sure you'd answer, and if you didn't, I was afraid I'd lose my nerve and turn back."

His fingers itched to reach out, to touch the marks and assure himself she was indeed okay. She had been so pale and vulnerable when he had slipped into her hospital room in the dead of night. When he had sat in the darkness and told her all the reasons he had to leave, and begged her forgiveness.

And told her he loved her. For what he thought was the last time.

"Do you want me to go, Donovan?" she finally asked.

He realized he hadn't said a word since seeing her, and closed his eyes to try and collect his thoughts. "No," he managed to say, his throat not wanting to form the sounds.

Donovan felt her brush past him, even though their bodies didn't touch. A sensation of near-euphoria when her body drew near, then bereft loss as she moved past. Her scent hung in the air, and he drew in a long breath. Savoring the heady effect on his senses.

When he opened his eyes and turned, she stood at the railing, looking out over the lake. The breeze caught her hair, lifting it off her shoulders, exposing the long column of her neck. She turned her head sideways so he saw her profile against the quickly waning sun.

"I don't know why I didn't think of coming here sooner," she said. "But then again, I'm not sure I had the strength to come before now."

"I haven't been here since I left Manhattan. I've only been here about two weeks."

"Where were you before that?"

Donovan swallowed. He felt like so much more needed to be said, but couldn't form the thoughts in his head to put them into words. And perhaps Olivia felt the same way, or she wouldn't be making apparent small talk.

"Louisiana."

She turned to face him, her arms out from her side to rest on the railing. The stance pulled the sweater tighter across her chest, lifting it enough to reveal the slightest slash of creamy belly above the waistband of her jeans. And gauzy white bandages held in place with medical tape.

"Louisiana. Is that where Janie was from?"

He nodded. It was all he could do. Olivia nodded. Then, with the force of a one-ton magnet, she flicked her gaze to meet his. He couldn't look away, and the intensity of her blue eyes bore straight to his sole.

"It hurt me beyond words when I woke up in that hospital and you weren't there. The doctor said your name was the first word on my lips, but no one knew where you were."

As much as he wanted to look away, he couldn't. Her eyes demanded truth. From him. And she would take it whether he was willing to give it or not.

"I had no one to ask. My mother was so medicated for her anxiety she could barely speak. My father just kept saying 'good riddance', and wouldn't listen. And my best friend... oh, that's right. My best friend is the woman who tried to *kill* me. The only person I could count on, the person I needed the most, was gone." Her voice was low, and trembled slightly every few words, but beneath it hovered her strength. And her anger.

"It was better —"

"For who? Me? Obviously, that isn't the case. You? Are you better here, Donovan? Were you better in Louisiana?"

Words escaped him. He had no argument. No justification. Nothing beyond the knowledge that he had done what he thought was best. But that wasn't what she wanted to hear. Or what she needed to hear.

And he wanted to tell her what she needed to hear. He needed to say it. But it wouldn't make reality go away.

Risking the chaos it thrust on his body, Donovan took a step closer to her. "I didn't leave until I knew you were safely out of surgery. Until I knew you would be okay."

"I'm not okay," she said in an incredibly low voice.

He clenched his fists at his side. "Liv, I don't know what to do. What do you want me to do?"

Olivia closed the space between them, standing so close the yarn of her sweater brushed his flannel shirt. She tipped her chin up to look into his face.

"I want you to take me in your arms and hold me. I want to feel your skin against mine, because that's when I feel safest. I want you to look into my eyes and tell me you meant every word you've ever said to me. That you love me. I want you to make love to me."

A shudder moved through his body that he couldn't have fought, even if he had tried. His skin hummed for her. His blood rushed harder, hotter. When she lifted her arms, and laid her small hands on either side of his face, it was nearly his undoing. Her gentle fingers brushed his skin, her thumbs barely skimming his lower lip. Unable to deny it, Donovan grasped her wrists and turned his mouth into her palm, kissing the soft flesh.

Tension swept from his body, released like a bucket of water dumped on the shore.

This is right.

"Donovan, look at me."

The underlying anger was gone from her voice now, and the sweet calling of his name made it impossible not to do as she asked. Still holding her wrists, he turned his head and looked down at her. Tears glistened in her eyes, a single damp trail leading down her cheek.

"I know why you left. I know you want to take the blame for what happened. But understand this. I am not going to let you. You told your friend, Mr. Jackman that once I decide what I want I don't let go. I want you."

His hands moved to her waist, naturally finding their way to the curve of her body, slipping beneath the hem of her sweater. Instead of meeting warm flesh, his fingers brushed the bandages that wrapped her body.

The gauze was pure white. No sign indicating how bad the wound was beneath it. Looking up at him through her lashes, Olivia took his hand and walked around him to head for the cabin.

"Come with me."

He followed her, without question, through the door of the cabin into the warm heat inside. A small fire burned in the fireplace, one he had built earlier in the day, and the smell of hickory and birch permeated the air. Olivia walked to the sitting area and turned on the bear lamp, its light flooding the room that had fallen into darkness with the setting sun.

Releasing his hand, she turned to look at him, her expression soft.

"I think you need to see," she said as she eased the sweater off over her head.

Donovan noticed the movement was slow, a little hesitant, but fairly uninhibited. He drew in a breath as she draped the sweater on the back of the couch. She wore a sheer white bra beneath the sweater, the filmy material so delicate it did nothing to hide the beauty beneath. The bandages started at her bellybutton and wrapped nearly completely around her side, covering her from the bottom edge of the bra to just above the waistband of her jeans.

Olivia worked the edge of a strip of tape off her skin, and when he realized she meant to remove the bandage, he moved to stop her.

"Liv —"

"It's okay. I do this every day, *almost* completely by myself. I'll need some help to put them back on. You need to see."

His throat restricted, and turned to sandpaper, as she stripped away the bandages, revealing the scarred flesh beneath. Pink slashes, with the remaining marks from stitches that had once held the flesh together, puckered around a circular scar about two inches across, and the scar itself was still deep pink with some faded bruising.

He could only stare, his gut twisting and his head pounding.

I did this. I did this!

She stepped to him and took his hand, her gentle touch lifting it until his fingertips brushed the marred skin. He drew back, not wanting to cause her any more pain than he already had.

"It's all right," she said softly. "You won't hurt me. I trust you."

Donovan held his breath as he ran his fingers over the raised skin, feeling a slight warmth emanating from somewhere beneath the deep purple and pink bruises. She trembled, and he flicked his gaze to her face, but saw no sign of pain. Just an intensity, and yet a softness, that reached out to him like no touch.

"You didn't do it," she said, her voice barely more than a whisper.

He only stared at her, the features of her face somehow more beautiful than he remembered. A small smile tipped up the corners of her mouth.

"Did you hear me, Donovan? You *didn't* do this."

The words sank in, and Donovan shook his head. "You don't know if I did or didn't."

"Yes, I do. I do know. Deputy Director Jackman came to me earlier today. He told me. The bullet wasn't yours. And Donovan, hear this. It wouldn't matter to me if it had been from

your gun. It doesn't matter."

"You're right. It doesn't matter if it was my bullet, or not. If it weren't for me —"

"If it weren't for you, I would be dead. Forget the bullet. I would be dead. Another one of Lara Whitmore's victims. But because of you, I'm not dead. I'm alive."

Emotion choked him, and blurred her face. Donovan looked away, focusing on where his fingers still lingered on her stomach. He lifted his fingers to move them along the curve of her collarbone to the column of her throat, touching the nearly completely faded lines left by Lara's knife.

"I'm alive, Donovan," she said again. "I'm alive. And I'm here."

He leaned towards her, and gave in to the need to press his lips to the marks left behind by Lara's vengeance. Donovan just held his mouth against her skin, and her arms came up to wrap around him, pulling him close.

"I'm sorry," he cried against her skin, hating that he could be so weak.

She caressed his hair and his shoulders, shushing softly in his ear. "You are a good man, Donovan Greer," Olivia whispered.

He shifted, and their lips met. The kiss was hungry, and needy, but not for passion or sex, just for the contact. And the truth the kiss held. Donovan moved slowly over her mouth, reveling in her taste, her softness, and her heat. With gentle care, he wrapped her in his arms, and found peace in the feel of her skin beneath his palms.

Peace he hadn't felt in the four weeks without her. Peace he hadn't known in ten years of darkness and solitude. Peace.

And forgiveness.

When their lips finally parted, he pressed his face into the curve of her shoulder, inhaling the aroma of her hair as it brushed his cheek. They held each other, without a word or a movement, for several minutes. And in the silence, everything that went unsaid was understood.

"I love you," Olivia finally said.

Donovan pulled back to look into her face. "I don't know why you do, but I love you, too."

"I have something for you."

He smiled, realizing how good it felt. "Aren't you enough?"

Her face beamed. "But I have more." She reached into the back pocket of her jeans and removed a black leather wallet. One he recognized immediately. "Mr. Jackman asked me to give this to you, if I happened to see you before he did. That Mr. Jackman is a very intelligent man."

Donovan stared at the badge wallet. When he didn't take it, she held it against his chest until he did. He stepped back from her and flipped the wallet open, his own face staring back at him.

Special Agent Donovan Greer. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Donovan turned and took several steps towards the kitchen. The wallet felt strange in his hand, the familiarity lost.

"Your suspension has been lifted," Olivia said behind him. "That was another thing your boss told me. When I wouldn't sign the affidavit for the claim of sexual misconduct, the reason for your suspension was null and void. Donovan, I'm so sorry about that. You have to

know I had nothing to do with it."

He nodded absently. "I know, baby. I always knew."

"Then what are you thinking?"

Donovan turned around again to look at her. He held up the badge, the picture facing towards her. "This."

"What about it? You have your job back."

"I know. But I'm not sure I want it."

"Because of what happened?"

"Partially. Okay, I'll admit that it probably plays a big part. But, Liv, for the last ten years my job has been the only thing in my life. It's been my driving force. The only thing that got me out of bed in the morning." He looked into her face, saw the beautiful smile on her lips, and smiled himself. "I have more now. So much more."

She held her hands out to him. Donovan dropped the badge on the counter and went to her, folding her in his arms, careful not to hold too tight that he might hurt her.

"What do you want to do?" she asked, her breath whispering over his neck when she nuzzled against him.

Donovan lifted his chin to glance towards the bank of windows, looking out over the lake, now shrouded in darkness and moonlight.

"Remember that year on the lake I promised you?"

Olivia nodded, shifting enough to follow his gaze, turning in his arms. She looked up at him, the smile on her lips reaching all the way to her bright, blue eyes. "Yes?"

"Well, why don't we start with a month? And go from there?"

Her smile widened, a deep dimple forming in her right cheek that he had never noticed before. Donovan intended to use the next four weeks—and longer—to discover all the things about Olivia he hadn't noticed before.

"That sounds wonderful."

He kissed her, groaning as her lips parted for him. Without breaking the contact, Olivia moving with him, he hooked his arm beneath her knees and swept her against his chest. Her hand slipped inside the buttons to rest over his pounding heart.

"Baby, we're just getting started."