

Silent Scream
Extra Epilogue

*****SPOILER ALERT*****

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EPILOGUE

Minneapolis, Saturday, February 19, 9:00 p.m.

Some men were born to wear tuxedos, Olivia Sutherland thought as the conga line led by the happy bride wound its way past the edge of the dance floor where she stood. The man bringing up the rear of the line was definitely one of those men, but Olivia knew David Hunter's outer beauty paled when compared to the man he was within. *And that man is all mine, inside and out.*

He'd rocked her world the night they'd met at a wedding just like this one, three years before. Now, lucky woman that she was, he rocked her world nightly. Knowing he was her very own still made her want to pinch herself, just to make sure she wasn't dreaming. But it wasn't a dream. It was reality. *My life.*

Olivia blinked, startled when David suddenly leapt in the air, easily clearing four-year-old Grace Hunter, who'd stumbled and fallen in front of him. Kneeling beside her, David gave his little niece's knee a quick look, then turned her tears into squeals of laughter when he swung her up to sit on his shoulders as they caught up with the other dancers. He was a good man. *He'll make a good father.* Someday it would be their child riding on his shoulders and Olivia let herself daydream, just a little.

"Goddamn heels are gonna put me in traction."

The grumble had Olivia pulling her gaze from David to her sister Mia Mitchell. Like Olivia, today Mia had exchanged her detective shield and gun for a scarlet bridesmaid dress and ridiculously high heels – which at the moment dangled harmlessly from Mia's pinky by their skinny ankle straps.

"Then why did you buy them?" Olivia asked, exasperated. Mia had been complaining about her shoes all day, even before Eve and Noah Webster's wedding had commenced. Although Olivia was fairly certain that most of Mia's complaints were intended to distract attention from the happy tears that had brightened her sister's eyes throughout Eve's wedding day. Mia wanted everyone to believe she was tough – and she was. Bad guys better run. But with those she loved, Olivia's big sister was a complete marshmallow.

“I didn’t. Reed did.” Mia glared at her husband who just waved benignly from the middle of the conga line, an amused smile quirking his lips. “Of course *he* can dance all night. He’s not wearing these torture devices on his feet.”

“Your man’s got excellent taste in footwear.” Olivia slid her arm around Mia’s waist, her heart settling sweetly when Mia did the same. For most of her life Olivia hadn’t known Mia existed. Now she couldn’t imagine life without her. They were family. “And in women, too.”

Mia’s glare softened. “You just want my shoes.”

Olivia shrugged. “It’s not like you’re going to wear them again after tonight.”

“Sure I will.” Mia’s brows lifted meaningfully. “At your wedding.”

Frowning, Olivia looked around to make sure no one else had heard. “Sshh. You’re the only one I’ve told.” Which was technically true. Of course, she couldn’t help it that her closest friends had guessed. That major mojitos had been imbibed had given Paige and Brie a tremendous handicap.

“This is the perfect night to change that,” Mia said logically. “Everybody’s here.”

Olivia’s eyes swept the crowded reception hall, a wistful smile on her face. David’s family had flooded the place, along with just about everyone else Olivia knew. “I know, but David and I agreed we didn’t want to horn in on Eve and Noah’s night. We’ll announce it tomorrow at the breakfast.”

“Eve and Noah won’t be there. They’d want to be part of the announcement, too.”

“Tomorrow,” Olivia said firmly. “At the breakfast.”

“You’re so damn stubborn.”

“Runs in the family.”

“I suppose it does. So why are you standing here all alone? You should be dancing.”

“Grace cut in,” Olivia said with a grin, her gaze returning to David who still carried the little girl on his shoulders. “Besides, I like watching David dance, especially when he brings up the rear.” Her eyes narrowed in appreciation. “The man has an amazing rear.” As if he knew she spoke of him, David met her eyes across the dance floor and gave her a bawdy wink, full of promise for later.

“I saw that,” Mia said dryly.

Olivia grinned. “And I saw you pinching Reed’s ass in the buffet line.”

Mia's lips twitched. "What can I say? My husband has a damn fine rear, too." They stood in companionable silence for a few moments, then Mia sighed contentedly. "For a long time I thought I'd never see this day."

"It's been a beautiful day," Olivia said, her gaze drawn to the bride in frothy white lace who hadn't stopped smiling. "Eve's a beautiful bride."

"I keep seeing her as that smart-assed brat I pulled out of an alley eleven years ago."

"She told me the story," Olivia said. "She said you were walking a beat in Chicago."

Mia nodded. "Evie was a runaway, fourteen years old and living on the streets, running with a bad crowd. They had a pickpocket scam going until I came by and all the kids scattered. The other kids grabbed the cash."

"Leaving Eve holding the bag."

"Literally. I think it was a Prada knockoff, emptied by the kid in charge. Evie ducked into the wrong alley and ran smack into me. I should have hauled her butt in to Juvie."

"So why didn't you haul her butt in?"

"I don't know. There was just something about her. She was defiant, terrified and intelligent, all at once. I wanted to ... save her, I guess. So I took her to Dana and Caroline."

Dana, who'd run a shelter for battered women, and her best friend Caroline, who'd years before had escaped her spouse, an abusive monster. The two women who'd changed so many lives were in the conga line, their scarlet bridesmaid dresses hiked up to their knees, grinning like kids.

"You saved Eve," Olivia said softly, "then you raised her, the three of you."

"And we did a damn fine job, if I do say so myself."

Olivia hugged her. "That you did. And look at Eve now. She's so happy."

Mia's eyes glinted once again as the dance ended and the dancers applauded. "That's all we ever wanted for her. This guy, Noah Webster, he's okay, right?"

Olivia looked at Noah, who stood watching his new wife from across the room. The expression on his face shouted volumes. It was love, pure and strong. The music changed, going soft and slow and her heart squeezed hard as Noah swept Eve into his arms and back onto the floor.

"Yeah," Olivia said roughly. "He's a good man. I trust him with my life." And she did, every day. Her friend for years, Noah was also now her partner on the job. "David trusts him with my life, too."

“Then that’s good enough for me.” She cleared her throat and dabbed at the corners of her eyes. “Well, what have we here?”

Approaching was Mia’s son, Jeremy. At ten years old, he was an overly serious sort with a quick mind and a quicker wit. Olivia had fallen in love with her nephew at first sight. Today he was dressed in a suit like his father, his hair combed just like Reed’s.

Jeremy stopped in front of Mia, then nervously looked over his shoulder. From across the room, Reed nodded encouragingly and Jeremy looked back up at Mia, his expression resolute. “I would like this dance,” he said stiltedly. “Ma’am.”

Mia’s eyes flicked to Reed’s, then met her son’s determined gaze, her lips pursed to keep from smiling. “I would be honored, sir. But I need to put my shoes back on first.”

“So you think you can dance, kid?” Olivia asked him as Mia fought with her shoes, unsurprised when Jeremy nodded gravely. “Grave” should have been his middle name.

“I’ve been watching the dancing shows on TV. It doesn’t look that hard.”

“Because it’s not,” Mia said, grabbing her son’s hands. “Let’s show ’em how it’s done.”

And the two twirled away, leaving Olivia with a knot in her throat for the hundredth time that day. Then the knot turned to a slow, hard drumming of her heart, as David started walking to her, his eyes on hers. It was like that every time he looked at her, an almost tangible caress. His hand cradled the back of her head as his mouth covered hers, warm and firm and simply delightful. She murmured in protest when he pulled away, but he only chuckled, turning her so that she leaned back against him. “Later,” he promised in a rough whisper that made her shiver. “When I can finish what I start.”

“We could find a broom closet somewhere,” she whispered back and he laughed.

“Not nearly enough room for what I have planned.” Sliding his arms around her waist, he pressed close and she could feel exactly how much the kiss had aroused him. The broom closet seemed like a pretty damned good idea, but she’d have to control herself. She’d learned that controlling herself was a lot harder than it looked.

Olivia covered his arms with hers, swaying with him to the music. “Did Grace enjoy her dance?”

David chuckled. “She did. But she told me that her daddy was a better dancer.”

“I think she’s supposed to say that,” Olivia assured him.

“Oh, I know. Girls and their daddies and all that.”

His words brought an unexpected wave of pain, stiffening her shoulders. Behind her, she heard David's indrawn breath.

"I'm sorry, honey," he murmured. "I didn't mean ..." He sighed. "Hell. I didn't mean for you to think about your father today of all days."

She patted his arm. Growing up without a father had affected her life in so many ways, but it wasn't thoughts of Bobby Mitchell that had cut her so deeply. Not today. "It's okay. I wasn't thinking of him. I was thinking of Kane." Her former partner who'd died in the line of duty five months before. "He was an amazing dancer. He studied dance to help him play football in college." She closed her eyes and let herself picture Kane's face. "I thought of him today when Sal was walking Eve down the aisle."

Fatherless as long as she could remember, Eve had been unofficially adopted by her boss and his wife. The love and pride on Sal's face as he gave Eve away had brought tears to Olivia's eyes and she knew she hadn't been alone. She'd thought of Kane, who'd been the closest to a father she'd ever known, and felt grief spear deep and sharp.

"I thought you might have been."

"I always thought I'd ask him to walk me down the aisle when I got married."

"I know he would have been honored." David kissed her temple. "So who will you ask when you marry me?"

The thought of marrying David warmed her inside, dulling some of the pain of her loss. "I don't know. I haven't been able to think about it."

David pointed to the dance floor where his mother danced with his former tenant, Glenn Redman. In a move that had surprised them all, Glenn had uprooted from his native Minneapolis and moved to Chicago where he made no secret of the fact he was courting Phoebe Hunter. Olivia had to smile at the sight of them dancing together cheek to cheek, knowing it still left David unsettled to see his mother in a relationship after nearly twenty years of widowhood. But he loved his mother and seeing her happy went a long way toward soothing any lingering dismay.

"I think Glenn wants you to ask him," David said softly. "He saw the receipt for the ring in my car when I picked him and Ma up from the airport. I had to tell them both."

"Well, I guess that explains your mom getting all teary when she hugged me last night at the rehearsal dinner." She considered it. "I think it would be nice to ask Glenn."

"He'll bluster when you ask him, but you know that's his way."

Olivia smiled. "I know. Mia's the same way. I told her about us, by the way."

“I know,” he said dryly. “She threatened me with dire harm if I ever hurt you.”

“She’d do it, too. And as long as we’re confessing, Noah knows. I didn’t tell him, but he saw me fiddling with the ring when I had it on the chain around my neck. Noah never said anything, though.”

She’d worn her engagement ring on a gold chain, under her shirt and close to her heart, since David had popped the question the week before, on Valentine’s Day. Her bridesmaid dress plunged too low in front to make hiding the ring possible on this day, so David had slipped it in his pocket that morning as they left his loft apartment.

“That’s because Noah knows how to keep a secret, unlike the two of us. I’m surprised you didn’t tell Paige and Brie during one of your major mojito sessions.”

She hesitated. “I didn’t, but they figured it out. They said I was beaming so bright it hurt their eyes.” She hadn’t been able to hide her joy from her best friends. “They said I was either pregnant or engaged. Since I was drinking a mojito, they knew I wasn’t pregnant.”

David laughed. “I guess keeping it secret was never going to work. Where are your shadows, anyway?”

“Brie had to leave. She got called to a search and rescue scene. Little boy wandered away from his scout troop.”

“Did they find him?”

Olivia nodded and David relaxed. “Brie texted me that they did and the boy is fine, but something else came up and she couldn’t get back for the reception.” She scanned the crowd, then frowned when she spotted her oldest friend in the arms of a man she didn’t know. He was tall, dark, and had a dangerous edge that Olivia wasn’t certain she liked. “There’s Paige. Who’s that she’s dancing with?”

“That’s Clay Maynard. He is Ethan’s partner in their PI business. Clay lives in Maryland. He helped Ethan find his godson when Alec and Eve were kidnapped in Chicago. That’s Alec over there, dancing with Reed’s daughter. Hard to believe he’s a freshman in college already. The woman dancing with Ethan is Alec’s mom, Randi. They’ve been friends since Alec was just a baby.”

“I met her. She told me Eve saved Alec’s life.”

“Eve did. Then Ethan saved Dana and put the woman who’d hurt them all away for a very long time.”

David and Ethan had a tentative kind of friendship, Olivia knew. Ethan was the husband of Dana, the woman who had raised Eve in her shelter. And the woman David had loved ... *before me*. But that was okay, because Olivia understood that love bore many forms. David had

admired Dana's passion for saving others, but in Olivia he'd found a home. What they shared every day was both real and magic all at once and when he told her that he loved her, Olivia had no doubt that he meant every word.

Paige on the other hand ... Well, her best friend since high school went through men like water. Every time she met a new guy, she'd think he was the one, only to be disappointed. Paige's hope of ever finding Mr. Right had dwindled to nearly nothing.

Olivia sighed. "Is Clay okay? He won't hurt her?"

She felt David lift his shoulder in a shrug. "Clay's got his own code, but if he says he'll watch your back, you can take that to the bank. I don't think he'd hurt her. Not on purpose anyway."

Olivia nodded, troubled. "It's just that Paige hasn't had the best luck with men."

"Don't worry about it. Clay will be back on a plane to Maryland tomorrow morning and they'll never see each other again. You worry too much."

"I know," she said wistfully. "I just want her to be happy. Like us."

He nuzzled her neck, sending a pleasant shiver down her spine. "She will be. Don't worry." He pointed to the dance floor. "Look out there and tell me what you see."

Olivia obeyed and her mouth curved. Noah held Eve close to his heart. Phoebe was popping a morsel from the buffet into Glenn's open mouth. David's nephew Tom was dancing with his mother, Caroline, and little Grace was being twirled around by her father. That Max leaned heavily on his cane didn't seem to bother Grace one little bit. Mia and Jeremy had finished their dance and Jeremy's face beamed with pride. Mia's was filled with love. Everywhere she looked, there was joy. *As it should be.*

"Lots of smiles," she murmured.

"There's a helluva lot of happiness in this room." He hugged her closer to him. "And even more right here, right now." He dipped his head to whisper in her ear. "I love you."

She closed her eyes, trying to hold it all in, but her throat grew tight and her eyes stung. "I love you, too."

She opened her eyes abruptly at the clanging of a spoon against crystal. Noah held a champagne flute in one hand, Eve in the other, their faces beaming. A recovering alcoholic, Noah's glass was filled with the sparkling cider stocked at the bar alongside the champagne. Several of Noah's groomsmen were passing around glasses of both.

"Can we have your attention?" Noah called and the chattering gradually quieted. "We had our toasts earlier, but we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all again for coming out to celebrate with us today."

“We’ve loved every dance and every moment with you,” Eve added, then looked straight at David and Olivia. “We understand that there is another announcement that needs to be made. Another couple is as happy as we are, but they’re foolishly afraid that telling you all today will somehow diminish our thunder, which couldn’t be more wrong.” She raised her glass. “So I’ll tell you for them. David and Olivia are engaged! We love you both and wish you all the happiness in the world.”

Congratulations rippled through the crowd and within seconds they were surrounded by hugging arms and smiling faces and demands to see the ring. David produced the chain she’d worn for the past week from his pocket and freed the ring from the chain. He slid the ring on Olivia’s finger, then tipped her chin up and kissed her so soundly her toes curled, much to the delight of the crowd. When he finally let her go and she caught her breath, Eve and Noah were there, hugging them both. They were passed to Mia and Reed, then Caroline and Max, then Phoebe and Glenn, and everyone else.

Phoebe’s cheeks were wet as she clutched Olivia close. “Thank you,” she whispered fiercely. “You’ll take care of him.” She pulled back, her hands cupping Olivia’s face. “And you’ll call me Ma, like everyone else.”

“I will, on both things.”

Phoebe glared up at David. “It took you long enough,” she muttered, then pulled his head down for a hard kiss on his cheek.

The DJ started a sexy slow song and Eve gave them a shove toward the dance floor. “Go,” she said. “Dance. Be happy. That’s an order.”

David’s laugh was unsteady. “Yes, sir.” He gripped Olivia’s fingers hard as he pulled her out to the dance floor. “Be happy,” he whispered in her ear.

She met his eyes, unsurprised to see them shiny and bright. “I am.”
